

there are a couple of ‘sins of omission’, again understandable in such a colossal account (there is no reference to Dante, for example). Furthermore, as has already been alluded to, MacCulloch feels very keenly his own situation with respect to British Anglicanism, and there is a slight tendency in his writing to side with the underdog on issues of orthodoxy, something that makes the reader wonder if he almost projects his own experiences onto these disagreements. Additionally, MacCulloch’s account of Christian history operates out of a background of Protestantism, and a reader from a different context might pick up on this slight weighting in his version.

That said, the work is, quite simply extraordinary. There is little doubt that the book will become a standard point of reference both within contemporary society and within the academy. Having used the book as a basic textbook in an undergraduate module, I have seen the ease with which MacCulloch’s book makes itself both interesting and functional for the non-specialist. However, lest it be relegated to the status of ‘introductory text’, the book provides a view onto a multi-faceted vista, in which even the most experienced of church historians may take in some detail not previously seen, and marvel at the intricacy of the history of Christianity.

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Reformation: The Dangerous Birth of the Modern World,
Harry Reid, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2010
(Hardback 2009), pp. xlviii, 399, ISBN 9780715209370.
£9.99

Harry Reid announces that he has written a ‘personal interpretative survey of aspects of a momentous century of religious and political tumult in Western Europe’ (p. 371). He sweeps through the Empire, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and England, landing breathlessly on Scotland before another broad tour of the ‘context’. Reid writes out

of vivid engagement with the characters of Reformation history, and a passion to convey his excitement and enjoyment of the subject.

Reid's approach is predominantly biographical. He can bring characters to life with pen-portraits that lure the reader into his personal judgements. Whilst he starts with balanced and nuanced appreciations of, for example, Savonarola, Luther and Tyndale, as the story progresses Reid becomes much sharper and more extravagant: 'Every bit as contemptible as Darnley, if less of a wimp' (of Bothwell, p. 259); 'For Calvinists, he reserved a special, obsessive loathing which almost suggests madness' (of Cardinal Caraffa, p. 272). However, Reid's judgements are even-handed between personalities in England and in Scotland, Catholic and Protestant. The ones he admires are those who direct events and drive history forward; condemnation comes for the self-indulgent and weak.

The book's thesis is that the Reformation was a major revolution that brought about a democratic approach to religion, based on education of the people. In Scotland, it was nearly derailed by inadequate Scottish monarchs and a rapacious nobility, but was ultimately guaranteed by England. The establishment of Protestant Scotland brought about a friendship between the nations that would lead to the union of the crowns in 1603 and of the parliaments in 1707. Almost all of these statements could be challenged by historians. Part of the problem is that Reid's scope is so large that he does not have the space to explain his ideas properly. For example, he claims that it is debatable how far 'the people of Western Christendom had been genuinely Christianised in the medieval era', arguing that it was Reformation education that ensured they were 'authentically Christian' (p. 268). This is perhaps the core of what he understands as the 'revolution' of the Reformation, but to imply that only literate religious practice from the early modern era onwards constitutes 'authentic Christian faith' is highly tendentious.

There is also much imprecise use of the term 'democratic'. Reid is good at conveying the Protestant urgency of a personal encounter with God, but doing away with priestly power and encouraging Bible reading is not the same as democracy. Knox's resistance theory was not simply about 'ordinary people rising up against their oppressive rulers' (p. 367) but about the 'inferior magistracy' (nobility) leading

a covenanted people against idolatrous monarchs. In that sense, it was far more religious and far less popular than, for example, Buchanan's theory. For Knox, resistance was much more a duty than a right. Reid also struggles with the question of whether the legacy of Calvinism in Scotland was to create an individualistic society or an egalitarian, collective one. He likes the idea of being in charge of your own destiny – spiritual or otherwise – but suspects that there is a lingering Calvinistic tendency to feel self-abasement in the face of God's greatness.

With regard to the Reformation's impact on English-Scottish relations, Reid is right to point to the political rapprochement that took place under Elizabeth I, and the political and military support that defended Scotland against France. But his strong antipathy to the Scottish nobility of the time leads him to underestimate the local leadership of religious reform in Scotland. The Reformation in Scotland was simply different from that in England, and produced a different Kirk. Reid focuses so much on England that he leaves out much of the detail and character of Scottish Protestantism. There is much more about sexual adventures at the royal court than about the Books of Discipline.

What Reid offers is a tale of personalities caught up in a maelstrom of political intrigue and war. The underlying assumption is that history is propelled by people at the top, by kings and courtiers, by money and armies, by advantage and cunning. So where do ideas fit in? Reid engages a little with Calvinist theology towards the end, but for the most part, he sees the Reformation as the negative fruit of anti-clericalism: the remedy for a corrupt medieval church was education, moral discipline and better welfare. It was to do with strategy rather than a theological imperative. Protestant spirituality, biblical hermeneutics, Eucharistic theology are left largely unexplored, and while this keeps the narrative pace going, it means that the reader is left with little sense of the content of Reid's 'authentic' (Reformation) Christianity. Furthermore, ideas themselves – discussed and debated endlessly and widely as they were in the sixteenth century – can direct the events of history as much as personalities do.

However, this begs the question about our understanding of history. At first sight, Reid is writing about history that moves forward, that

progresses from corruption to reform, from enmity to alliance, from ignorance to knowledge. It looks curiously old-fashioned. But in other ways, it is very post-modern: from a disarmingly personal perspective, he gives us stories about celebrities, events that have random twists and turns to them, and no final and definitive conclusion about the meaning of the Reformation. While surveying a distant religious and political culture, he has been subtly conditioned by his own.

Reid has crafted a sparkling account of human drama and historical change. He has read and travelled widely and shared the fruits of his experience and insights in a fluent and readable way. His enthusiasm is infectious, and his controversial statements and judgements will stimulate debate. He is proud of what Scotland has become, and traces much of it to the momentous events of the sixteenth century.

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***Literature and the Scottish Reformation*, Crawford Gribben and David George Mullan (eds), Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 260, ISBN 9780754667155. £55**

For a long time, the Reformation has been regarded as having had a deeply negative effect on literary endeavour in Scotland. The verdict of writers such as Edwin Muir on the Reformation's attempt to 'crush the poet with an iron text' ("Scotland 1941") has been accepted almost without question by later commentators, and exists still. Typically, in his book to accompany the 2004 TV series *Writing Scotland: How Scotland's Writers Shaped the Nation*, Carl Macdougall writes, '[i]n early times our writers' imaginations soared with divine inspiration. But since the Reformation, literary flights of fancy have been darkened by Calvinism' (p. 130).

However, there is a new consensus emerging in historical and literary studies which questions such certainties, and regards the Reformation rather more positively than before. Rather than having a purely destructive and crushing effect on Scottish literature, it is