

Lee Palmer Wandel. *The Reformation: Towards a New History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ix + 281 pp. \$26.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-521-71797-7.



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Those who teach the Reformation at the college level face a quandary every time they have to compile a course reading list for their students. Finding useful collections of primary sources on the Reformation has become easier of late, thanks in large part to the proliferation of scholarly editions of early modern works in their original languages and in English translation, both in print and online. In contrast, selecting secondary-source readings, especially works that provide a synthesis of the Reformation as a whole, remains a perennial challenge. Comprehensive works, such as Diarmaid MacCulloch's monumental *The Reformation: A History* (2004), provide a wealth of information and perceptive analysis, but are often ruled out for teaching purposes because of their length. Other more streamlined works are manageable but sacrifice coverage in return for brevity (Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* [2006]), or are the products of previous generations of scholarship, where the focus was more on the theology of Reformation leaders and less on the Reformation's socioeconomic impact

and popular responses to the movements for religious change (Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* [1990]). At times, it seems that the best solution is to select a number of shorter studies, each focusing on a different aspect of the complex movement known as the Reformation, thus illustrating vividly just how fractured and dislocated Western Christendom became beginning in the sixteenth century.

Yet some Reformation scholars continue to take up the challenge to produce a readable, accessible, and student-friendly shorter overview of the Reformation, oriented around a few key themes. Lee Palmer Wandel's work fits neatly into this category. Her synthesis brings together current research on the Reformation and on early modern global contacts, especially between Western Europeans and people and communities in the Caribbean and the Americas. Her main thesis is that the Reformation's fragmentation of Christendom intersected powerfully with the European discovery of groups of people that did not fit easily into any preexisting parameters. According to

Wandel, the resulting intellectual dislocation led to a radical shake-up of Western European notions of sacred time; space; worship versus idolatry; and, fundamentally, what it meant to be a Christian. In the historiographical debate over the relative weight of change and continuity in the Reformation, Wandel's work falls clearly into the "Reformation as change" camp.

Wandel's survey begins with an overview of European Christendom in 1500 and provides a helpful summary of the key worship practices of late medieval Catholics. Her second chapter explores in detail the Europeans' discovery of new lands and new people to the west and its significant repercussions on Europeans' mind-sets and worldviews. In many ways, this second chapter offers the most intriguing material in the volume, including Wandel's extensive analysis of the shifting categories of "cannibalism" and "barbarity" as labels adopted by Europeans to apply to their religious opponents during the Reformation.

Wandel's next two chapters deal with the spread of the Bible in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe thanks to the use of the printing press. Wandel highlights the challenges Reformers faced in establishing guidelines for the interpretation of scripture, since each individual or group could and did come up with competing understandings of the key messages of the text. She provides an overview of the Anabaptist, Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic responses to the twin issues of authority and tradition.

In the remainder of the work, Wandel addresses a range of themes touching on the lived experience of Europeans in the Reformation era. These include marriage and family relations; political authority and religious violence; the role and status of clergy; competing understandings of sacred space and images; and divergences over the sacraments, especially Communion.

Because this work's aim is to provide a thematic overview of the Reformation's impact on the dislocation of Western Christendom, readers

who prefer a more chronological or geographically based approach are advised to look elsewhere. Indeed, the thematic approach taken by Wandel may well challenge students with an insufficient grasp of the major milestones of Reformation history. Some mistakes have crept into the text. Wandel asserts, for example, "In 1556, Geneva instituted the first evangelical Academy, divided into two schools, one for boys, the other for ministers" (p. 178). Unfortunately, the date is wrong (Geneva's academy was founded in 1559), and in any event, the neighboring Reformed stronghold of Lausanne has the distinction of establishing the first such academy in 1537, over twenty years earlier. Sometimes, more clarification is needed to avoid confusion. Discussing the French practice of having suspected heretics appear before secular rather than ecclesiastical judges, Wandel states, "evangelicals were tried and executed by Parlement" without clarifying that these parlements (in the plural, not singular) were law courts present in major French cities and charged with registering and applying the king's laws (p. 161). They were not a French equivalent of the English Parliament. The use of the singular and the lack of explanations can only lead to misapprehensions in readers' minds. Finally, on a couple of occasions, lengthy primary-source quotations appear twice, in two different chapters, with no acknowledgement or analytic explanation offered as to why the entire quotation is appearing for the second time. For instance, Jean de Lery's quotation about French barbarity during the Wars of Religion appears on page 61 and again on page 139. A quotation from the 1539 Jesuit rules also appears twice, first on page 180 and again on page 193. One possible explanation is that each of the chapters of the book is an independent unit, but that would suggest a lack of overall review of the whole manuscript to catch these repetitions.

These issues apart, Wandel's work offers a perceptive analysis of the effects and consequences of the Reformation's breakup of western European Christendom. The use of images and

primary source quotations enhance the book's use as a teaching tool. For students with a solid grasp of Reformation history, this book may well provide a helpful vantage point from which to assess the Reformation's impact on the worldview of early modern Europeans.

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