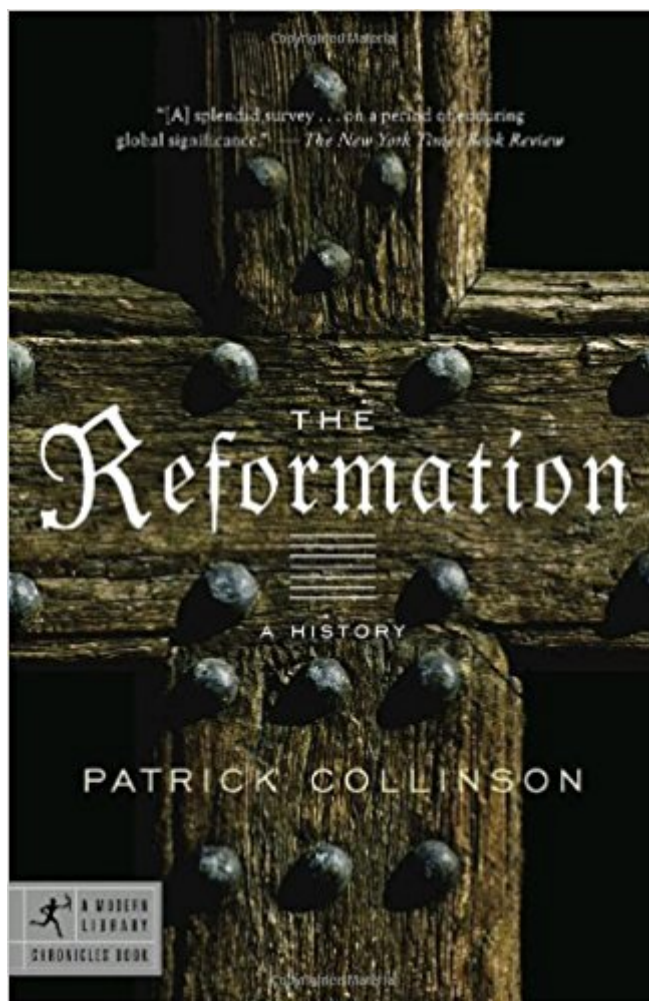


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The Reformation: A History (Modern Library Chronicles)



Synopsis

“No revolution however drastic has ever involved a total repudiation of what came before it.” The religious reformations of the sixteenth century were the crucible of modern Western civilization, profoundly reshaping the identity of Europe’s emerging nation-states. In *The Reformation*, one of the preeminent historians of the period, Patrick Collinson, offers a concise yet thorough overview of the drastic ecumenical revolution of the late medieval and Renaissance eras. In looking at the sum effect of such disparate elements as the humanist philosophy of Desiderius Erasmus and the impact on civilization of movable-type printing and “vulgate” scriptures, or in defining the differences between the evangelical (Lutheran) and reformed (Calvinist) churches, Collinson makes clear how the battles for men’s lives were often hatched in the battles for men’s souls. Collinson also examines the interplay of spiritual and temporal matters in the spread of religious reform to all corners of Europe, and at how the Catholic Counter-Reformation used both coercion and institutional reform to retain its ecclesiastical control of Christendom. Powerful and remarkably well written, *The Reformation* is possibly the finest available introduction to this hugely important chapter in religious and political history. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

"The Reformation was awash with words," begins the third chapter of this book. "The historian who

tries to catch its essence finds his net breaking under the weight of words." Although referring specifically to the truly jaw-dropping literary output of Martin Luther himself, given the primacy granted the Word in Lutheran doctrine, and the key role the printing press played in amplifying Protestantism, Collinson could well have been referring to the ocean of secondary literature on the turbulent religiosity of Europe's long sixteenth century. Yet Cambridge professor Collinson's brief and pithy history navigates smoothly through messy, if fashionable, debates (What is essential Protestantism? Reformation or Reformations? Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation? Capital R or not? and so on), and, in almost 300 pages, eloquently argues that the Reformation was indeed the watershed moment it has been mythologized to be--in many ways the inauguration of the modern world. In keeping with the other titles in his publisher's Modern Library Chronicles series, Collinson's elegant introduction is both erudite and highly accessible. Brendan Driscoll Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"No revolution however drastic has ever involved a total repudiation of what came before it."The religious reformations of the sixteenth century were the crucible of modern Western civilization, profoundly reshaping the identity of Europe's emerging nation-states. In *The Reformation*, one of the preeminent historians of the period, Patrick Collinson, offers a concise yet thorough overview of the drastic ecumenical revolution of the late medieval and Renaissance eras. In looking at the sum effect of such disparate elements as the humanist philosophy of Desiderius Erasmus and the impact on civilization of movable-type printing and "vulgate" scriptures, or in defining the differences between the evangelical (Lutheran) and reformed (Calvinist) churches, Collinson makes clear how the battles for men's lives were often hatched in the battles for men's souls. Collinson also examines the interplay of spiritual and temporal matters in the spread of religious reform to all corners of Europe, and at how the Catholic Counter-Reformation used both coercion and institutional reform to retain its ecclesiastical control of Christendom. Powerful and remarkably well written, *The Reformation* is possibly the finest available introduction to this hugely important chapter in religious and political history. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you know nothing of the Reformation or the basis of the religious conflict involved this book is a fine place to start. But it is a very small book about a very big subject so one should not expect too much of it as some reviewers appear to have done. The author's humility in the preface defines the scope of the book, and while that scope is rather narrow, it is well focused. Professor Collinson is a

Fellow in the Department of History at Trinity College, Cambridge. He has taught history and the Reformation for nearly fifty years so I don't really know why this particular work is so brief and so unrefined. It could have been Professor Collinson's magnum opus. Instead it is a highly distilled and simplified work for a popular audience. Perhaps the subject was just too daunting or perhaps the author was just too humble. The book starts with a brief historiography of the Reformation that is refreshing if for no other reason than its rejection of deconstructionism. This sets the stage for the rest of the book which turns out to be remarkably conservative, at places downright Whig, in its view point. This is astounding considering the strongly left leaning politics of Professor Collinson and most of the rest of his generation of English academics. The book is almost completely devoid of Marxist nonsense. How did that happen? Next the book attempts to preface the Reformation with a description of the failings of the Catholic Church in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The author is almost apologetic for this but I found it the best part of the book and wanted more detail. Then follows an all too brief description of Erasmus and the influence of the printing press where Professor Collinson justly gives credit for the crystallization of the English language to Tyndale instead of Shakespeare. The book hits its stride in its account of Luther and Calvin as one would hope. The explanation of the theological conflicts of the age shows a considerable understanding and depth of knowledge, too bad more of this was not shared. The description of the Counter Reformation meanders a bit, suggesting a bit of personal contempt on the author's part, but the book perks back up in its telling of the Reformation in England and Scotland. The writing style is what you would expect of an English student of the fifties - informal, chatty, unrefined, and full of sometimes irritating modern metaphor. This is not the rigorous academic work of folks like Sirs Herbert Butterfield or David Keir. But it is a jolly good and quick read and you will come away with a better understanding of the religious evolution that was the Reformation.

This is a solid introductory summary of a complex and difficult subject in Church history. The author treats the different phases of the Reformation, in all its geographic and sectarian incarnations, with scholarly precision and an admirable even-handedness typical of a master at his craft. There is a slight tendency to get bogged down in some of the minutiae of the time period, which is essentially the only thing keeping this rating from being 5 stars.

Well written without the normal lumbering rhetoric for which many history books have become associated. Patrick Collinson writes with a clear and approachable style that keeps the reader engaged. This is a good overview of the roles which Luther, Zwingli and Melanchthon, among

others played in this defining period of western history. I recommend it for anyone interested in learning more about what this 500th anniversary is all about particularly with the current Catholic/Lutheran dialogs ongoing.

A clearly written, wonderfully readable history for the non-specialist. The author clearly knows not only his material but is a valuable resource for all the other major writing on the subject and generously points the reader in other directions when relevant. Adding to the pleasure of reading this concise summary of vast amounts of historical information is a witty style that entertains as it instructs. The only complaints I have refer to frequent Latin phrases that are infrequently decoded and an occasional presumption of theological concepts that are foreign to the non-Christian (i.e. myself). Also sometimes the brevity leave gaping questions (e.g. when Calvin was made unwanted in Geneva, why was he called back?). Nonetheless, this is a fascinating, engaging work.

I am not a specialist in the area, just interested. It was just the right length for me and the prose flows well. I am ready to read another in the series--in my case Goodwin's on the Ottoman Empire. Anyone interested in the socio-political beginnings of Protestantism should enjoy this.

Good book for the history of the Reformation. I little biased at times, but good nonetheless.

Only a master can write a book like this -- a witty, learned summary, doing the impossible by compressing a vast subject into a slim volume. Though Collinson is scrupulously fair, the account, perhaps necessarily, given its subject matter, tilts slightly toward the Reformers as occupying the high ground -- but high by only inches. Collinson alternately communicates both a wry detachment from the protagonists and also an empathetic understanding for the passions of an age far more sincerely religious than ours. While presupposing a familiarity with the outlines of history of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, this book would satisfy both the beginner as a guide and the historically informed for its learned perspective.

Book was very well written.

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