

James E. Kelly, Henning Laugerud and Salvador Ryan (eds), *Northern European Reformations: Transnational Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer: Cham, 2020. 437 pp, 13 colour illustrations, €124,79.

The three editors are to be congratulated on their thought-provoking, clearly structured and beautifully integrated anthology, especially since it addresses a fundamentally fluid, diverse, even fragmented topic. That is, the many reformations that took place in Ireland, Wales, England, Scotland, Orkney, Shetland, Iceland, Norway and Denmark during the early modern period and, crucially, how they all related to or diverged from one another through politics, trade, migration, the circulation of texts, patterns of devotion and so forth. As evinced in the editors' introduction, there were close links between the areas covered before the sixteenth century, 'so the natural question is to ask: what happened afterwards?' (p. 2). The answers are far from straightforward and drawing them together coherently is no mean feat.

The book comes with an epilogue by Carlos Eire, a cogent gathering of the main themes. As he states, by 'focusing on the process of change [...], the essays in this volume bring the evolution of local and universal rifts into high relief. Useful as they are for improving our understanding of the Northern Reformations and their uniqueness, it could be argued, and should be argued, that these essays also improve our understanding of all early modern Reformations...' (p. 412). I second this. Eire further argues that the anthology challenges us to shift 'the main focus of attention from the development of national and regional Reformations to the very process of change that took place in areas that share similar political and social characteristics' (p. 407). Absolutely! Scholarship of the early modern reformations has too often been trapped inside national histories. Although neither the editors nor the

contributors to the book make great fanfare of it, theirs is a timely corrective to the very structures of reformation studies.

As a supplement to Eire's insights, I shall draw out four points. The first is about geography. As Peter Marshall, Morten Fink-Jensen and other contributors note, there 'is an inherited historiographical tendency to think of the lines of early modern cultural influence as running principally south-north' (p. 23). Accordingly, the reformations in Denmark-Norway and Sweden are often studied as cultural imports from Germany while those of England and Scotland are closely linked to Switzerland and France. However, as several essays show, there were rich conduits of cultural and religious exchanges running east-west, criss-crossing the Baltic, the North Sea and the north Atlantic. The point is perhaps most clearly articulated in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin's impressively wide-ranging discussion of clerical and other migrations. Gina Dahl's study of books belonging to eighteenth-century Norwegian clergymen is also illuminating: most volumes were imports from Germany, the Netherlands and England and thus fell outside government censorship. As this implies, many were beyond the pale of Lutheran orthodoxy. After two hundred years of reformatory efforts, in Norway there was still space for dissent, if only in the privacy of the parsonage library.

The second point is about what constituted religious knowledge in the early modern world. One fascinating thread running through the anthology is the gulf that emerged during the early modern period between an increasingly educated clergy and their lay charges. In particular, inhabitants of rural or distant regions were often characterised by their pastors as sullen, ignorant, gullible and prone to recidivism and superstition. This is drawn out most clearly by Henrik von Aachen, Henning Laugerud and John Ødemark. That peasants, women, black or brown people might have richly complex understandings of their world – that they

might operate within sophisticated cosmologies – seems to have dawned only rarely on the university-educated and state-backed clergymen of the emergent Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican churches. Undoubtedly, many took their vocations seriously. Indeed, it may have been the combination of deep faith with advanced education that made many of them unable or unwilling to grasp the differences between being illiterate and being stupid.

The third point revolves around language, which, in the early modern period (as now), was often confused with ethnicity. In fact, bilingualism was and remains a common phenomenon in Europe, driven by the circulation of people, ideas, texts and other objects. Several of the essays are about places where the language of worship and state administration was not the local vernacular. However, the exact ramifications of this vary greatly. For example, in Ireland and, to a lesser extent, Wales, it was undoubtedly one factor that kept the old faith alive and, eventually, helped the conversion to post-Tridentine Catholicism, as demonstrated by James January-McCann and Raymond Gillespie. In Iceland, however, the situation was different. There, a group of Hanseatic merchants founded the first Lutheran church; they communicated with the locals in Low German, the sixteenth-century *lingua franca* of trade across the Baltic, North Sea and north Atlantic. As Jack P. Cunningham recounts, at first there was fierce resistance, but eventually Iceland did convert, a process driven by physical brutality, theological restraint and the quick translation, printing and distribution of Lutheran texts in Icelandic Norse. The case in Orkney and Shetland was different again, as Charlotte Methuen shows. Despite close trading and linguistic links with Norway – via Norn, a local dialect of Norse – there is no evidence for Lutheran activities in the two Atlantic archipelagos. Both were reformed by Scottish *fiat* and in the Scots language. From all this follows an intriguing idea, that of ‘a kind of cultural bilingualism’ (p. 38). As the anthology makes evident, many early modern Europeans outwardly conformed to whatever confession

their governments had authorised; yet, at the same time, they would happily cleave to older habits, or be receptive to unorthodox thinking, or both.

Finally, the fourth point is about what was lost in the reformations and about repurposing. John McCafferty analyses the profound impact of the dissolution of Observant Franciscan friaries in northern Europe on the Order as a whole. He tellingly observes that there is as yet no Europe-wide study of how monastic families reacted to such losses. In addition, Alec Ryrie persuasively argues that the initial Protestant failure to missionise beyond Europe was, in part, due to a lack of supra-national organizations with the discipline and intellectual and financial muscle of Orders like the Franciscans. Meanwhile, both Laura Katrine Skinnebach and Susan Royal offer engrossing accounts of Protestant strategies for recuperating pre-reformatory devotional habits, as pertaining to medieval prayerbooks and the legend of St. Edmund of East Anglia respectively. So, another important thread of the entire volume is the delicate balancing of existing and reformed devotional cultures.

The anthology is not structured as set out here. That one can trace such alternative threads through it testifies to the high level of integration across the various essays. Inevitably, a collaborative volume self-consciously proposing new scholarly approaches will come with certain *lacunae*. Most of the authors operate within the bounds of the textual, although the editors' introduction, von Aachen and Skinnebach present important artefactual evidence. More attention to material culture might have been useful. Likewise, significant sonic changes are hinted at by McCafferty and Gillespie but, again, they surely demand deeper investigation given the importance of choral music within the Lutheran and Anglican reformations and of communal hymn-singing for virtually all Protestants. Gender is another issue addressed only in passing, most notably by Skinnebach, Laugerud and Ødemark. But

here more work is certainly needed, for example on the repurposing of nunneries as Lutheran 'Damenstifte'.

Of course, it is not possible to cover everything and the previous paragraph is merely meant to suggest further vectors of research. That the volume under review can trigger such reflections is, in itself, testimonial to its scholarly qualities. Eire's points stand. As a whole, the book greatly improves our understanding of the reformations of the early modern period and I commend it wholeheartedly to all interested readers.