Northern European Reformations

Transnational Perspectives

Edited by
James E. Kelly · Henning Laugerud · Salvador Ryan

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are grateful for their involvement in the volume. Their willingness to work with us as a team has meant that we, the three editors, are (just about…) still talking to each other! In other words, we thank them for proving that that much talked-about, but not always evident, goal can exist: academic collegiality. We hope this volume is a fitting tribute to that.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

James E. Kelly, Henning Laugerud, and Salvador Ryan

Lost Connections?

A trip to the University Museum of Bergen offers ample evidence of religious exchange between Britain, Ireland and the countries of Scandinavia before the reformations of the sixteenth century.[1] For example, there is a model of the Cistercian abbey of Lyse, located some 25 kilometres south of Bergen, which was founded by Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, in the north of England.[2]

Nearby is a Norwegian altar frontal with, in its centre, a depiction of St Botolph, the seventh-century English abbot and saint, to whom many churches were dedicated in his homeland (Fig. 1.1).[3]

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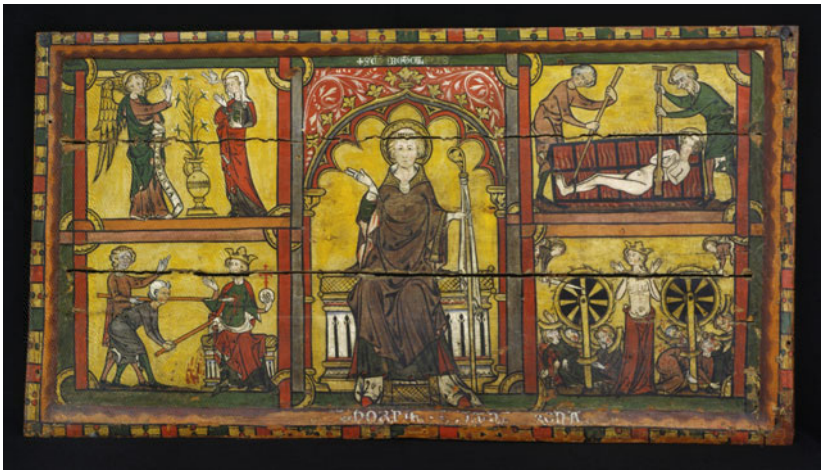

Fig. 1.1 Norwegian altar frontal from Årdal, *c.* 1325, featuring St. Botolph. Courtesy of Bergen University Museum (Photo Svein Skare, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen)

A fifteenth-century altarpiece from Lurøy includes a statue of St. Magnus, the twelfth-century Earl of Orkney who so embodied the contact between those islands, Norway and Scotland, in addition to two important English saints, St. Thomas Becket and St. Edmund the Martyr. Between the two English saints stands the martyred Norwegian king St. Olaf, a telling example of the close religious, cultural and politico-economic ties in the North-Sea area (Fig. 1.2).

The Austevoll altarpiece of *c.*1520 depicts the tenth-century Irish St Sunniva, who fled to Norway to escape a pagan marriage (Fig. 1.3).[4] Yet for all that contact, both physical and intellectual, limited consideration has been given to the religious experience in this specific geographical bloc during and after the reformations. There were links before the Reformation, so the natural question is to ask: what happened afterwards? Were the experiences of Christians in these countries similar or were the reformations parallel events, not just confessionally but also geographically? Were similar patterns of development at play or did the reformation create different experiences, fracturing any shared methods or paths of reform? It is with the intention of engaging with such questions that this book

Fig. 1.2 Fifteenth-century Lurøy altarpiece featuring (from left to right) St. Thomas Becket, St. Olaf, St. Edmund the Martyr and St. Magnus. Courtesy of Bergen University Museum (Photo Svein Skare, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen)

had been brought together, to explore the experience of these northern European countries during the period of reformations in one volume.

However, this is not about doing comparative history for the sake of it. As argued above, these nations had historic links that affected each other's religious culture, belief and practice before the sixteenth century. Yet what happened to these shared religious heritages through the period of reformations has been generally neglected by scholars of the early modern period. As such, this collection represents an attempt to track what happened across these countries. It is not intended to offer a definitive account of the processes of reformation, but instead to highlight several thematic strands that the editors believe can be identified

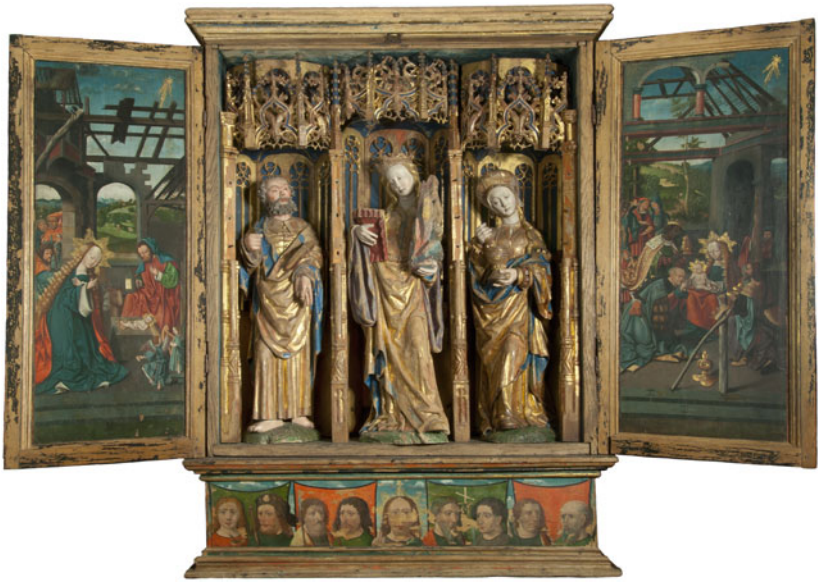

Fig. 1.3 Austevoll triptych, *c.* 1520 with St. Sunniva in the middle. Courtesy of Bergen University Museum (Photo Svein Skare, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen)

running through the various chapters. It is hoped that these connections may in turn offer a possible thematic template for scholars to look at the Northern European reformations in the future. Most importantly for the volume at hand, it is these themes, the editors venture, that offer the points of comparison and are common to all of the bloc under consideration, running through the differences and similarities between the reformation processes at play. As mentioned, in no way do we suggest that these themes are definitive; rather, we propose them as one possible way for scholars of the topic and the geographical area to approach the subject, a suggested attempt at commonality.

In this light, we suggest six overarching themes that are evident throughout the contributions to this collection. The first of these is the notion that the reformations in Northern Europe were influenced by wider European philosophical and religious movements from outside their locality. Equally, the Northern European reformations in turn influenced developments outside of our geographical remit, underlining a

two-way process. At this point, we have deliberately shied-away from discussing this in terms of centre and peripheries.[5] The first issue with this terminology is that it is applied differently to Catholic and Protestant reformations. Perhaps even more pertinently, the question arises of what is a periphery within this area, particularly when considering Protestant reform movements. As an island, is Orkney a periphery? Are towns within central Norway—away from the trading points on its coasts, so more cut-off from potential cultural exchanges—peripheries?[6] Rather than be sidetracked by such quandaries, the editors wish, at this stage, to limit this theme to the observations about influences from outside Northern Europe.

The second theme very much links to the first: this as a zone of circulation. This idea breaks down into several parts. Perhaps the most obvious is the movement of people, whether as traders or to locations of exile, though this should never be understood as a permanent movement but, once again, as potentially circular. Equally, the place of (temporary) exile also had a huge influence on the type of religio-political outlook imbibed by the individual. Of course, these movements of people could be to areas outside of the region, again stressing our first thematic point above, but they were also between the nations upon which this volume focuses. Perhaps even more commonplace was the transfer of ideas, whether through news, books or oral traditions.[7] All the countries considered in this book witnessed these phenomena. The methods, intentions and results may have differed, but it is a key thematic thread that can be seen running through this volume.

Adaptation is another core theme that is evident across the Northern European Reformations. Although we have identified it as adaptation, we could just as easily have used the terms inculturation or accommodation. To some extent, these terms are more usually applied by scholars researching the Catholic Reformation and particularly those focussing on Jesuit Studies,[8] yet this volume makes clear that the same thing was happening, to different degrees, in the attempts at Protestant reform across Northern Europe. Reformers of whatever religious hue were intent on finding the best way to bring about their vision of religious change and, from the evidence of the chapters in this collection, some form of adaptation to the specific national situation appears to have been the norm.

That links to our next identified theme: the importance of language. In terms of how this related to religious change, it is evident that, as highlighted above, different strategies were adopted in specific areas based on what was believed most appropriate for a particular country. In some places the issue of language was dictated by what was felt best for a specific audience, whether popular or learned, national or international, but in, for example, Wales, language was a central issue, requiring as it did native Welsh-speakers for the Catholic missionary enterprise there. Nor should it be neglected that these considerations affected the literary culture of the reformations across Northern Europe, the intended audience and the medium employed being explicitly entwined. In short, there was a relationship between religious change and language beyond—and more complicated than—just the shifts from Latin to the vernacular.

From language it is easy to link to our penultimate thematic lens through which to analyse the Northern European reformations: namely, the question of identity. It is abundantly clear from the essays in this volume that the people of Northern Europe were dealing with fluctuating national, religious and supranational identities. This balancing act, one could argue, is something not quite so common in the modern world, but it is evident that in the early modern period those experiencing the reformations had to face these challenges and, indeed, expected to do so and frequently proved adept at doing just that. Of course, one could also add regional identity to the mix, which itself links to issues of memory, or continuities and discontinuities, such as the ongoing draw of holy wells or sacred spaces after their official rubbishing by reformers. The situation becomes further complicated by details of ethnicity, such as in Ireland between the Old English Catholics and Gaelic Irish Catholics, or even the differences within an ethnic culture, such as urban and rural Gaelic-speaking Catholics. Equally evident is that religious identity was not fixed, both in terms of how people defined themselves in relation to a belief structure, but also by what was actually understood to be a vital component of a particular faith group. There were clearly different ways of understanding, for example, what it meant to be Lutheran or Catholic in different geographical areas.[9]

Our final suggested theme encompasses a broad area around the tied issues of religion and politics. Immediately evident throughout this volume is how reform was intrinsically linked with state affairs, in some ways affirming the theory of confessionalisation.[10] Political structures were vitally important. This relationship could decide whether it was a

slow or hard reformation, whether it was enforced by stringent rules surrounding conformity or seeking a gradual religious shift in a nation's people. It played a fundamental role in deciding how reform should progress, whether through the eradication of uncomfortable reminders, such as the official disappearance of any mention of St. Thomas Becket from the scene in England, or attempts at accommodation and appropriation, as discussed earlier. Was it enough to abolish some devotional practices or must new ones be imposed? Within that, scholars should not lose sight of the deliberate strategies employed by both Protestant and Catholic reformers. There was not a reliable tactic upon which to fall back or an accidental process to chance upon, but plans set in place. Frequently, across the regions, these attempts were also shaped by wider cultural changes, such as internal migrations, literacy levels or, more pointedly, the professionalisation of the clergy.

The Project

This project grew out of a recognition that there are a number of noteworthy parallels (and also key differences) between the experience of the reformations in Denmark–Norway and Britain and Ireland, and that, to the editors' knowledge, no comparative study covering both Catholic and Protestant aspects existed in the English language which might address this lacuna. While Danish and Norwegian historians, whose English-language proficiency is customarily very high, have no difficulty in accessing countless sources on, for example, the English Reformation, the same is not true for English historians who may wish to do some serious research on the Reformation in the Nordic countries, but for reasons of language, soon become hampered.

English-language works certainly exist to provide historians with a useful entry point to the Northern European reformations, but nothing approaching what a serious reformations scholar may desire. Part I of *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Vol. II, 1520–1870*, edited by E. I. Kouri and Jens E. Olesen, deals with 'Reformation and Reorganisation, 1520–1600'.[11] In many respects, this may be regarded as an updated version of Ole P. Grell (ed.), *The Scandinavian Reformation: From Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform* (1995), with many of the same contributors participating.[12] In 2010 there appeared James L. Larson, *Reforming the North: The Kingdoms and Churches of Scandinavia, 1520–1545*.[13] Larson, however, is not a reformation historian

by training, but a professor of Scandinavian languages. His substantial tome of some 500 pages was recognised by one reviewer as a valuable contribution to wider scholarship, given his decision to publish in English.[14] Nonetheless, Larson's focus was much more on political than religious developments during this period. More substantially, the Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway project, based at the Arctic University of Norway (2013–2017) was established to 'gain new insights into the progress and effects of the long-term processes of transition which were triggered off by the Reformation in Northern Norway and the adjoining parts of northern Fennoscandia'.[15] It adopted a multidisciplinary approach, encompassing the fields of history, art history, religious studies, literary studies and cultural geography. It also adopted a long chronological range, from the late Middle Ages to the 1700s. This project has produced three volumes of essays.[16] On 21–22 September 2017, the project organised an international conference in Tromsø which addressed the theme of 'Northern Reformations' and, on that occasion, broadened its scope to ask how the cultural, political and economic consequences of the religious change influenced the relationship between Scandinavia, the British Isles and continental Europe. Its papers, focussing on the experience of Protestant reformation, were published online in *Nordlit* 43 (2019).[17]

We believe that this book is timely. While, as noted above, there is a dearth of substantial English-language works on reform in sixteenth-century Scandinavia, there have been no attempts thus far to compare the reformations, both Catholic and Protestant, in Denmark–Norway and Britain and Ireland in a volume of essays such as this one. It is our hope that what we have attempted here will encourage others to open up new fields of comparative reformation research, in Britain and Ireland, as well as in the Nordic countries.

Structure

While we have suggested six overarching themes that are interwoven into the various contributions to this volume, it would seem forced to attempt to disentangle them for the purposes of a clear structure. Besides, when it comes to the unfolding of the sixteenth-century reformations, one searches in vain for neat lines. For the sake of convenience, we have divided the collection into five sections but, likewise, these are not meant to be understood as mutually exclusive; indeed, many wholly different

arrangements of chapters might have been chosen under a number of alternate headings.

Slow Reformations

In the opening chapter of the volume, Peter Marshall shows how the Orkney Islands, absorbed fitfully in the governing structures of the kingdom of Scotland between 1468 and 1611, stood at the geographical and cultural intersection of the British and Scandinavian worlds. Their Reformation (initiated by the last Catholic bishop, Adam Bothwell) may seem to have been quiet and conformist, but it involved a number of particularities of wider comparative interest: the practical challenges of pastoral provision in an archipelagic island community; the declining presence of the Norn language, and potential for cultural as well as vernacular 'bi-lingualism'; the role of the clergy as both reformers and recorders of a society to which they came in the main as outsiders. The Reformation in Orkney was not 'resisted', in the sense of much conscious ideological resistance to the mandates of Protestantism, but a combination of environmental, ethnic, linguistic and cultural factors facilitated an evolutionary survival within Orkney parishes of a range of unorthodox practices and beliefs.

In 1550 the last Catholic bishop in Iceland was executed by Icelandic Lutherans and their Danish governors. After this event the country on the outer fringes of the Danish kingdom yielded to a Reformation that had already been established in the other territories of Denmark and Norway. Jack P. Cunningham's chapter examines contemporary sources and modern scholarship in order to demonstrate that the success of the new movement was based on two principal factors. First, this was a Reformation that was deliberately light on theology, a *sidaskipti* or 'changing of fashions' as it came to be known in Icelandic. Secondly, it was an inevitable consequence of the growing national strength of the state of Denmark that was keener to establish a tighter grip on its territories than it had ever had before.

The provost in Lista in Southern Norway, archdeacon Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614), described the state of affairs in Norway some seventy-five years after the Reformation as 'regrettable, and by no means praiseworthy', for, 'in the beginning, the promotors of evangelical doctrine did not only remove gold and silver from churches and monasteries, together

with vestments and other treasures used in Catholic times, but also ill-naturedly destroyed what one could not use'. He went on: 'Needlessly, they demolished beautiful buildings, burned useful books and documents, destroyed the decorations in the churches, and left the house of God empty. It would have been better if this had not been so, and it did them little good'. While assuring his readers that the Catholic Church certainly represented idolatry and severe error, blasphemy and the corruption of faith, it seems that the humanist in Friis still regretted the vandalism. The history of sixteenth-century Northern Europe has been subject to various ideologically charged narratives. Yet, while one may treat it in light of continuity or discontinuity, of suppression or emancipation, of faith or façade, there can be no denying that a profound and irreversible change of the religious culture in the countries around the North Sea took place during first generations after the Reformation. From a slow transition during the first generation, the reform was driven by a new sense of urgency during the second. Henrik von Achen's contribution offers a comparative history of the Reformation as process and reality, by describing the radicalisation around 1570, when the patience of the first Lutheran generation was abandoned. Therefore, what Friis reacted to was not so much the situation 'in the beginning', but more precisely events unfolding in this second and radicalised phase.

Migration, Exile and Interconnections

Close contacts between Denmark, England and Scotland since the Middle Ages facilitated the spread of reformation ideas and the travels of migrants and refugees across the North Sea in the first part of the sixteenth century. The North Sea route offers a corrective or supplement to dominant narratives in Reformation history on at least three counts. In his chapter, Morten Fink-Jensen argues that the Lutheran Reformation in Denmark–Norway did not almost solely come out of Wittenberg, moving from the south to the Nordic countries, but also continually received intellectual input from the British Isles. Secondly, he contends that Reformation initiatives in England and Scotland also took inspiration from contact with Denmark, and that Denmark served as an intermediary for Protestant connections between Germany, England and Scotland. Thirdly, he points out that these connections were to a large degree based on or generated a general Protestant outlook, which sought to minimise or

sooth confessional or doctrinal strife between Protestants and Protestant nations.

Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin examines the role of migrants and exiles in shaping the process of confessional change in Britain and Ireland and in Denmark/Norway. He suggests that neither region was particularly influenced by general population movements arising from direct religiously motivated persecution. However, his chapter does highlight the key role played by migrants on a number of different levels. Clerical education in centres outside these regions was of crucial importance in the development of particular confessional groupings throughout Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia, not least in the development of seminal leadership cadres. In addition, the migrant experience is very evident in the lives of a great number of the authors who produced the key identity texts of the nascent post-Reformation confessions across Northern Europe. He also draws attention to the manner in which religion affected migratory decisions in far more ways than the creation of 'refugees' from explicit religious persecution. Rather, particularly evident in Ireland, religion proved an important component in a complex web of motivations influencing both immigration and emigration during the Early Modern period.

James January-McCann takes a comparative view of efforts made to keep Wales and Norway Catholic during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He discusses the role of the seminaries in preparing clergy and books in exile for the mission, and places particular emphasis on the use of the Welsh language as a missionary medium. In doing so, he seeks to explain the relative success of the Welsh Counter-Reformation with reference to Norwegian parallels, and to add to the relatively sparse English-language historiography in this field.

Zones of Circulation: Transfer of Ideas and People

Charlotte Methuen explores the relationships between the Norwegian city of Bergen and the Shetland and Orkney islands from the 1520s, when Lutheran ideas began to arrive in Bergen, to the 1560s, when Scotland's Reformed Reformation was introduced and implemented in the Diocese of Orkney (which included Shetland). She identifies some contacts between Shetlanders and Orcadians and leading proponents of the Reformation in Bergen, both lay citizens and clergy, and some concerns about heresy in the Diocese of Orkney, but concludes that

there is no evidence for a Lutheran impact in the Diocese of Orkney. Her chapter highlights the importance of language, but suggests that the particular form of trade that existed between Bergen, Shetland and Orkney was not conducive to supporting the spread of the Reformation.

In his contribution, John McCafferty turns to the dissolution of religious houses during the period of the reformations. Franciscan Observant houses in Oldenburg Denmark–Norway and Tudor–Stuart Britain and Ireland were early and particular targets of dissolution. His chapter argues that a comparative approach to the ending of conventual religious life in the northern realms, based on a number of contemporary chronicles written by friars and ex-friars, offers not only the opportunity to see common trends, but also communicates a good deal about how Observant reform in the period leading up to the Lutheran changes fed into early Protestant thinking. Influential Franciscan voices of the late sixteenth century grouped England, Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia together as a quarter of provinces which had been affected by 'heretical' depredations. Their unity of voice is striking, and it allows readers to think of the process of dissolution in terms of trajectory rather than from inside the confines of national historiographies.

Appropriations and Adaptations

During the reformations in England and Denmark the circulation of books was an important issue. The leaders of the two realms, and the church authorities appointed to conceptualise and disseminate reforms, were concerned about the content of religious books; not only liturgical ones, but also private devotional books. Both states issued warnings against books with erroneous teachings, and in both there are several extant medieval prayer books that show signs of reuse after the reformation. The owners made attempts to appropriate them according to the new practices of devotion. In her chapter, Laura Katrine Skinnebach examines the practice of appropriation, that is, what changes were made, and in particular how they were made, in order to shed further light on how people internalised the reformation ideals of their respective homelands.

St. Edmund was king of the East Anglians in 869 when he was killed at the hands of Danish invaders. He was revered as a saint only a generation after his death and, by the sixteenth century, Bury St. Edmunds had become one of the most important monastic houses and pilgrimage

sites in England. In her chapter, Susan Royal assesses the legacy of St. Edmund's martyrdom as it came into the hands of church reformers, elucidating the process of adaptation and negotiation which consumed Protestant prayer book editors and historians. The chapter pays special attention to its treatment in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563), the most influential historical work of early modern England. Returning to the idea of 'slow reformations', it argues that the Protestant inculturation in England, like in other parts of Northern Europe, was a protracted process.

Raymond Gillespie's chapter attempts to measure the effects of 'peripherality' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by comparing two so-called peripheral regions, Ireland and Norway, using the strategies for religious change in both areas as a point of comparison. The diffusion and use of print provides a measurable approach to this problem. While there are similarities in the approach between the two regions, there are also significant differences. Though print was important in some regions, oral literacy was an equally important strategy for religious reform in, for instance, Gaelic Scotland, sixteenth-century Norway and Ireland. Those continuities allowed the absorption of new ideas, but often left pre-reform religious customs untouched. In regions where continuity was less marked, for example in colonised areas of Ireland, new ideas could be introduced, but were usually not adopted, leading ultimately to a failure of religious change.

Northern European Reformations Over the *Longue Durée*

As the volume opens with the idea of 'slow reformations', it closes with three contributions which explore the outworking of this idea over the *longue durée*.

In her chapter, Gina Dahl focuses on the reception of religious ideas among eighteenth-century Norwegian Lutheran clergy. During the early modern period, the clergy had a significant role in terms of instilling Lutheran tenets into the general population. The clergy themselves were also susceptible to measures taken by the government to ensure conformity, such as the official control of the printing presses. However, given the scarcity of printing houses in Norway, learned books had to be imported from abroad, which meant that the transfer of early modern religious ideas, by and large, took place through an international exchange

of books. In fact, the books of the eighteenth-century Norwegian clergy came from three main areas, namely Protestant parts of Germany, the Netherlands and the British Isles, and books from the latter areas in particular promulgated a significant amount of both Puritan as well as Presbyterian religious thought amongst the Norwegian clergy. Here, too, are to be found themes already explored in previous sections, including appropriations and adaptations within the broader context of zones of circulation and the continuing transferal of ideas beyond the reformation period.

In their chapter Henning Laugerud and John Ødemark relate Danish–Norwegian material to the historiography of the reform and acculturation of 'popular cultures' in a British, and broader European context. In particular, the authors are concerned with how the notion of *superstitio* was deployed to construct religious otherness in reformation polemics, and how reformation polemics contributed to the construction of the intellectual categories and objects of the emerging studies of folklore and popular religion. Alexandra Walsham has shown that the British reformation discourse on superstition foreshadowed the study of folklore in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, not least because it was centred on 'the realm of speech' seen as 'the natural habitat' of superstition. Similarly, this chapter discusses the historical discourses about Catholicism as superstition, and examines the genealogy of one of the constitutive analytical categories of folklore, *superstitio*, in Denmark–Norway.

In the closing chapter, Alec Ryrie considers the northern European reformations *ad extra*, as it were, and asks why, despite rhetorical commitment to the enterprise, British and Scandinavian Protestants were so slow to engage in cross-cultural mission. After surveying the lacklustre efforts made, he briefly considers the theological obstacles to early Protestant mission, before examining the 'missions' to the 'barbaric' peoples within these kingdoms' European territories: the Celtic peoples of Britain and Ireland, and the Sámi of northern Scandinavia. The chapter argues that conformity, civility and state-building were the keynotes of those efforts; that figures like Bishop William Bedell in Ireland who bucked that trend were swimming against the tide; and that that model was exported to the New World. After a brief consideration of missions to slaves in the English Caribbean, the chapter concludes by observing the change of tone in the early eighteenth century and by comparing structural, institutional explanations of this history with theological, conceptual ones.

In his epilogue, Carlos Eire problematises the use of colour-coded maps to denote religious affiliations in the age of the Reformations, which was replete with constantly changing religious boundaries. Indeed, he argues that the rapid pace of religious change was one of the period's most salient characteristics, especially in Northern Europe. What the essays in this volume prove, he proposes, are that all maps of the religious landscape of early modern Europe are caricatures at best, for issues of belief and unbelief remain, for the most part, unquantifiable. The process of religious change in Northern Europe was complex and the essays gathered here invite us to shift our attention from the development of national or regional reformations to the broader canvas of areas sharing similar political and social characteristics. He concludes that the approaches adopted here shed light not just on the process of the Reformations themselves, but on significant characteristics of the early modern age as a whole.

Notes

1. The museum was established in 1825, making it one of the oldest public museums in Europe. The museum was later to become the nucleus of the establishment of the University of Bergen. On the museum and its collection see Justin Kroesen, "Encounter: The Kirkekunstsamling at the University Museum of Bergen". *Gesta* 57 (2018): 1–4.
2. The Abbey was founded in 1146 when Henry Murdac was abbot at Fountains Abbey.
3. The frontal is from the church of Årdal in Sogn, see: Henrik von Achen, *Norwegian Medieval Altar Frontals in Bergen Museum* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 1996), 80–3.
4. St. Sunniva was the patron saint of Bergen and the western part of Norway, and the second most important Norwegian saint after St. Olaf in medieval Norway. See Alexander O'Hara, "Constructing a Saint: The Legend of St. Sunniva in Twelfth-Century Norway". *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009): 105–21. Of course, the exchange of saints' cults also travelled in the other direction, as is evidenced by the fact that Christ Church cathedral, Dublin, founded by the Norse king Sitruic around the year 1030, possessed the vestments of St. Olaf. See Marie-Therese Flanagan, *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 222.
5. For examples of discussion framed in such terms, see Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation: Papacy and Peoples in the Early