



Schilling, Heinz y Seidel Menchi, Silvana (eds.), *The Protestant Reformation in a Context of Global History. Religious Reforms and World Civilizations*, Bolonia / Berlín, Il Mulino / Duncker & Humblot, 2017 (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Contributi 33), 225 pág., ISBN: 9783428153220.

This volume of papers resulted from a conference organized by the Italian-German Historical Institute to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and included among its contributors, the founder of the Trento Institute (Prodi) and a former director (Seidel Menchi). The idea of the conference, as the co-editors announce in the Preface, is really to make the events of 1517 relevant to 2017 by giving the German Protestant Reformation a global perspective. To that end, the group of ten include five Reformation historians or at least scholars who focus on European history in the 16th and 17th centuries, four scholars representing the non-west European fields (on Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism), and a specialist on religious studies and legal rights. Since the Holy Roman Empire was not in the forefront of voyages of exploration in early modern Europe, and the Reformation represented in many ways a return to an idealized past rather than a modern future, it is to be expected that the editors would invoke Max Weber as a link between religious reformation and modernity. That call was taken up in a way by the first paper, Wolfgang Reinhard's "Globalization of Religion?" The fact that Reinhard poses it as a question underlines his skepticism whether "religion" is a useful concept that can be applied to global civilizations. In his reflections on Weber, modernity, and on the quick survey of India, China, and the Islamic world, this essay reads more like an extended bibliographical note rather than a paper with a clear conclusion. The second paper by Prodi addresses the contemporary relevance of the Reformation. The title of his paper, "Europe in the Age of Reformations. The Modern State and Confessionalization", seems to echo a central concept argued by Reinhard and Schilling, but in fact, Prodi's paper, previously published, is altogether something else. "And as with all civilizations handing over the baton, it is not outside agencies that are killing the West, but the West killing itself." Such is one of the first sentences in Prodi's *cri de coeur*. For Prodi, the year 1517 created the modern state and religious confessions; and between discipline and sin, the *homo europaeus* struggled to find his liberty and create his modernity. With the collapse of these pillars supporting European society, the *homo europaeus* is in an existential crisis. While reminiscing about his own intellectual trajectory and on the history of the Italian-German Institute, Prodi issues remarkable statements: "I feel that Islam stemmed from a heresy that germinated within Christianity..." (p. 65), "the whole edifice of the West is collapsing" (p. 67), "multiculturalism has proved itself impotent and it remains to be seen if, and with what, we can replace the dialectic and distinction of powers which gave the West its identity during the confessional era" (p. 67). Even the editors must have been surprised; they described Prodi's paper as "characterized by an apocalyptic tone" (p. 10).

Here is certainly one answer to the concerns of the conference organizers: how is the year 1517 relevant to today's world? The answer: it is not. As far as I know, the fifth centenary of the Reformation was only officially commemorated in Germany. That year saw fresh biographies of Luther and studies of the Reformation from the German presses, including works by Schilling and Reinhard, but the best biography was written by an Australian woman, Lyndal Roper, Regius Professor of History at Oxford University, whose nuanced psychological portrait and gender sensitivities speak more to contemporary tastes than large, abstract theories of religious globalization and modernization.

After the explosion of despair by Prodi, the next two papers seem an anticlimax. In diligent and sober prose, Thomas Kaufmann writes on politics, theology, and religion in the Reformation, while Pierre-Antoine Fabre surveys Catholic devotion and institutions in the age of the reformations. Both of these are solid contributions, but they do not address either the global or the contemporary concerns of the conference themes. These four papers by Reinhard, Prodi, Kaufmann, and Fabre comprise the section "Balances and Perspectives" and, with the exception of Reinhard, only address European material. In contrast, the next section, "Distant comparisons, close comparisons" include four papers that go beyond Latin Christendom.

The first paper by Martin Tamcke gives a succinct summary of reform movements in Russian Orthodoxy from the Strigolniki movement of the 14th century to the dissent of the Old Believers in the 17th and 18th centuries, ending with a brief glance at the modern age. Roni Weinstein reflects on Jewish culture in early modernity. Labeling the Jewish diaspora "the global turn" might be his way to echo the buzz word of the conference, but it adds nothing conceptual to his otherwise interesting summary. Religious currents within Judaism in the early modern period were more intimately connected with Islam than with Christianity. The importance of mysticism in general and the Kabbalah in particular, and the wide echo of the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zvi, owed more to sufism and reform currents within Sunni Islam than any contact with the Reformation. The third paper by Gudrun Krämer, "Renewal and Reform in Sunni Islam", is an excellent contribution in that it addresses one of the concerns of the conference: whether religious reform played an equally important role in other world religions? Addressing the scriptural, spiritual, and social dimensions of reform in Sunni Islam, Krämer gives the reader a very useful synthesis in understanding a large part of the developments in the Sunni Islamic world. A similar effect is achieved in the fourth paper in this section, the contribution by Brian K. Pennington to "Reform and Revival, Innovation and Enterprise. A Tale of Modern Hinduism." Analyzing the prejudicial perspective of British colonial elites, who applied the concept of "reform" to Hindu beliefs and practices, Pennington skillfully describes how different generations of Indian intellectuals and reformers used the idea of reform for a multiple of goals: to struggle against colonialism, to create a modern Indian identity, to eradicate social ills, and, not in the least, to consolidate their own positions in a society that yearned for a post-colonial future.

The last section of the book, "Events of 1517, accents of 2017", tries to address the contemporary relevance of the Protestant Reformation. The first paper by Silvana Seidel Menchi, however, does not really discuss relevance. Instead, she offers an original reflection of comparative martyrdoms, based on her own research on the theology of Christian martyrdom (here, the interesting ideas of 'white martyrdom', of survival as testimony), and on readings in the scholarship of Jewish and Shi'ite

martyrdoms. In discussing Nicodemism, there is a missed opportunity to compare it to the Islamic concept of *taqiya*; the dissimulation of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution, the preference of life over death, seem to be equally strong in both Christianity and Islam. The penultimate piece of Marco Ventura studies the Protestant factor in contemporary European freedom of religion. Ventura states his thesis in the title: “faith versus identity.” Should the freedom of religious belief and practices be based on individual conscience—the model of the Reformation—or should it be based on ethnic identity, as Muslim communities in contemporary Europe have argued about dress, gestures, and ritual slaughter. This last trend, toward an ethnic identity for religious expression, seems to be on the rise among some Protestant communities as well, as Ventura notes the dilemma faced by contemporary European societies. The last paper, “Reform, Reformation, Confessionalization. The Latin Experience”, by Heinz Schilling, formulates a series of negative theses: “there is no reason to privilege the Protestant Reformation as the key impulse for fundamental, modernizing change in world affairs”; other events in 1517 were of greater impact for global history; both the Lutheran and the Tridentine reforms represented modern Christianity; the path to modernity in Europe was not paved by the Reformation itself; secular Roman Law overcame confessional fundamentalism in a dialogue; the end of the latter in western Europe was not achieved by eliminating religion out of public life but by a change within the religious ideas of the confessions themselves; religious toleration in Christian Europe might have a lesson for Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Europe; and, finally, to quote Schilling, “it is evident, that the slogan “Islam needs a Luther or a Reformation” does not hit the historical reality” (p. 223).

This is indeed a remarkable sentence to conclude a conference volume. The essays are remarkable not so much in making an original contribution to scholarship, but in reflecting the *Zeitgeist* of an older generation. “[T]he mandarins of the German academic world have gone and with them their big picture of a Europe-based world history as well” (p. 212) states Schilling. It is refreshing that he writes this without a tone of nostalgia or resentment, unlike the bitter denunciation of multiculturalism by Prodi. The papers may have answered negatively the question of the world historical significance of the Reformation, but they raise new questions more useful for future historical research in our task of the study of comparable world civilizations.

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