

study of its subject. As both editors notes in their introduction, and as Bertil Nilsson states in his concluding remarks, the findings also open up opportunities for further research.

Petri Karonen, *University of Jyväskylä*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.321

*Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650.* Carlos M. N. Eire.  
New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. xx + 894 pp. \$40.

---

Now that the long march of quincentenary publications has passed and the dust is beginning to settle on the Reformation once again, it is becoming easier to step back and take stock of the results of so much historiographic industry. For at least two years, in the buildup to early 2017, and for a year thereafter as well, books on Luther and various aspects of the Reformation became staples in publishers' catalogues. Time, no doubt, will winnow the wheat from the chaff, but there were some books whose scope and significance were apparent as soon as they appeared. Carlos Eire's *Reformations: The Early Modern World* (2016) was one such book. In its ambition, range, and the quality of its prose and perspective, Eire's work belongs to the category of instant classics.

*Reformations* is written as a series of narratives, unapologetic in their depth and density, pitched at "beginners and non-specialists" aiming "to make the past come alive" and the reader "thirst for more" (xii). Despite this appeal to narrative and general readers, however, *Reformations* has a sophisticated historiographic argument at its core. Basing his work on "the latest findings of those who study this segment of the past, with an eye firmly fixed on present-day concerns," Eire sets out to pitch his own approach against the "traditional histories" by treating the movement as a series of "interlocking reformations" played out over a period reaching from 1450 to 1650. This span of two centuries, Eire suggests, was held together by an "intrinsic unity," which was in essence the role of religion as an axis of change (viii–xvi). *Reformations* is thus based on the related notions that, first, "there were multiple Reformations and that none of them can be fully understood in isolation" (xvii), and second, that these multiple reformations reached from the late medieval period to the age of the early Enlightenment and gave rise to no less than a "metaphysical and epistemic revolution," which in its different facets "changed the world more profoundly and irreversibly than any other paradigm shift brought about by scientists at that time" (746–47). This is what the pluralized title implies and the subtitle subsequently confirms: the Reformation in its many forms has to be understood as the prime mover of the early modern universe, and this necessarily requires a narrative that treats both origins and outcomes as an intrinsic whole.

The narrative range is breathtaking. The book begins with the perfect storm of conditions that set the stage for the Reformations, from the broader patterns of politics, trade, and commerce to the more transparent impact of medieval dissent, the hermetic revolution of the Italian humanists, and the forerunners of Catholic reform. Revolution occurs with Luther and the Protestant Reformation as the reverence for the church is overthrown and the working order of salvation is reconceived (or reconsidered). Eire treats Luther as the founder of the Reformation: it was “set in motion by one monk’s spiritual odyssey” (134). Yet the narrative does an excellent job of treating each strand of evangelical reform (Swiss, Calvinist, Anglican, Radical) on its own terms and balancing the historically unique against the universal. Midway through the text the narrative shifts to the rise of Catholic reform, once again with a careful eye on the relationship between the local and the universal (this “ancient dialectic” [399]), beginning with the reforms of Trent, the rise of the Jesuits, and the missions to the West and the East.

The final section of the book deals with the consequences of these developments. Following a survey of the confessional politics in France, the Netherlands, and the empire of the Thirty Years’ War, Eire embarks on discussion of the age of orthodoxy and confessionalization, witchcraft and demonology, and shifting notions of superstition and popular belief. All of this is subsequently synthesized in a series of concluding chapters on the outcome of the Reformations, with Christianity pitched against the oncoming forces of tolerance, rationalism, scientific empiricism, and secularization. It was not a straightforward outcome, nothing like a clear victory of the state and reason over the church and faith. But 1650 does mark a new phase in European history, with religion playing “an increasingly diminishing role in shaping ‘the world’ it had so intensely hoped to transform” (718).

Any work of this scale and ambition will necessarily fall prey to the criticism of specialists. With reference to the German Reformation, for instance (my own field), Eire’s exclusive emphasis on Luther and Wittenberg, in marked contrast to his treatment of the “multiple narratives” (219) of the Swiss Reformation or the “sui generis—truly unique” (339) Reformation in England, is no longer sustainable against the backdrop of the complexity and variety of the many German Reformations, both territorial and urban, revealed in detail by the research on confessionalization. But such criticisms of the parts do not detract from an appreciation of the whole. *Reformations* is a magnificent narrative account of the confessional age, without doubt one of the crowning achievements of the English-language contribution to the quincentenary.

C. Scott Dixon, *Queen’s University Belfast*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.322