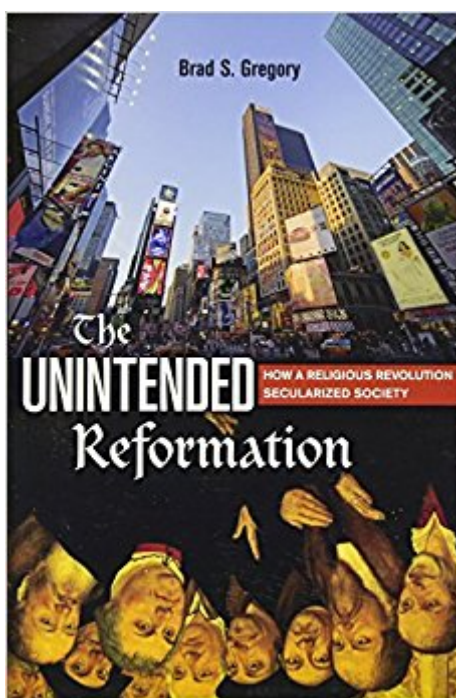


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The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society



Synopsis

In a work as much about the present as the past, Gregory identifies the unintended consequences of the Reformation for the modern condition: a hyperpluralism of beliefs, intellectual disagreements that splinter into fractals of specialized discourse, the absence of a substantive common good, and the triumph of capitalism's driver, consumerism.

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Customer Reviews

A strikingly brave and wide-ranging work, in which a distinguished historian of early modern Europe interprets the contemporary world. The precision and clarity with which Gregory lays out his evidence and the accuracy with which he handles materials in many different languages and of many different kinds give this original book extraordinary credibility. It's rare for a book to attain this level of scholarship nowadays. An astonishing achievement. (Anthony Grafton, author of *Worlds Made by Words*) A work of deep moral seriousness. Gregory's greatest contribution is his portrayal of the Reformation of Christianity as a central moment of disturbance and creativity in the modern Western world. In this endeavor, he has no equal among living authors. The *Unintended Reformation* is simply the most intelligent treatment of the subject by a contemporary author. It is also the most unconventional and most stirring engagement I know with the problem of how the West has dealt with its heritage of plural religions and concepts of values and happiness. (Thomas A. Brady, Jr., author of *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400-1650*) Gregory's

insightful and compelling narrative invites us to recognize the surprising extent to which we are still what the Protestant Reformation and its heirs made us, a society of conflicting and contested truth claims. As he spells out the consequences--and the interest is in the detail--we become more sharply aware of sometimes unrecognized aspects of our present condition. (Alasdair MacIntyre, author of *God, Philosophy, Universities*) A revisionist manifesto, sharp-edged and provocative, *The Unintended Reformation* analyzes the legacy of the Protestant Reformation with an eye firmly fixed on the present. Gregory challenges many revered assumptions and does so with verve and brilliance. Bound to stir debate for years to come, this magisterial history of the early modern era belongs on the shelf right next to Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. (Carlos Eire, author of *A Very Brief History of Eternity*) The Protestant Reformation is considered by many to be one of the pivotal events in the history of the Western world. No one can doubt the central role that Luther, Calvin, and other reformers have played in the lives of Christians through the years...[Gregory] approaches the continuing impact of the Reformation in what he terms a "genealogical" approach--one that sees the Reformation as the root of a tree whose branches reach into every aspect of modern life. Rejecting the "supersessionist" view, that contemporary Christendom constitutes a radically new understanding of God and of the world itself, Gregory insists that our views, even our presuppositions, must be reimagined and re-evaluated in ways that demonstrate how the Reformation continues to reach into our theologies, our laws, our lives...[A] rewarding look at the long reach of history, and how we are the poorer for ignoring it. (Publishers Weekly 2011-11-14)[An] extraordinary new book...But however brilliant is Gregory's historical presentation (and it is brilliant), what ultimately distinguishes *The Unintended Reformation* is the sheer forcefulness of the narrative, which he pursues by examining the shift in perspectives on six distinct but interrelated themes since the sixteenth century: God, truth, institution, ethics, consumption and knowledge. The effect of this approach is to give the book an uncommon clarity: by going over what is essentially the single narrative in six different ways, each slight turn of the story illuminates the whole, and each new element comes across as both surprising and yet strangely familiar. *The Unintended Reformation* is unquestionably the most important contribution to the way we understand our present condition since Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. But it is also as a stinging rebuke to all those well-nigh fictitious accounts of the emergence of the enlightened West out of the intellectual darkness and decrepitude of the Middle Ages that now distort our collective self-perception. Let's hope Gregory's book wreaks havoc on some of these myths that we persist in telling ourselves. (Scott Stephens Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Religion and Ethics blog 2012-02-10) There could not be a more propitious moment

for a book on greed and the historical roots of capitalism. Brad Gregory shows that historians have as much to contribute to contemporary debates about business and social ethics as most philosophers or economists...What is bold and unusual about *The Unintended Reformation* is that it comes from an explicitly Christian perspective and ends by arguing that only religion--properly understood as a doctrine of solidarity--can allow humanity to escape from the predicament of the modern, the material curse of poverty and the mental afflictions of prosperity. Gregory not only offers what is today a highly original combination of history and morality but also cogently explains why that combination is needed today. (Harold James *Financial Times* 2012-02-11) This book is truly breathtaking in its scope, erudition and sheer nerve. There is no faulting Gregory's grasp of Reformation history, but to his analysis of what has happened since there could be many objections raised. This is relatively unimportant, however. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was not completely right either, but it was brilliant nevertheless. Gregory's is a work not just of genuine scholarship but also of sincere moral purpose, which, even if it annoys, frustrates or fails to convince, has opened up an immensely important debate. There may yet be time to fix some of what went wrong in the Reformation. (Lucy Wooding *Times Higher Education* 2012-03-09) Restrained and erudite...Apart from furnishing an interesting and well written account of the Reformation, the book is perhaps most interesting when [Gregory] grapples with his opponents...[A] thought-provoking book. (Nick Carn *Financial World* 2012-06-01) A lucidly written and far-reaching analysis that shows how the contemporary Western world continues to be influenced by the complex transformations that occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. (J. Werner *Choice* 2012-07-01) Charts how the godly Reformation led inexorably to the secularization of western society. (Piers Paul Read *The Spectator* 2013-11-16) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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Gregory's book is a most ingenious take on the implications of the Reformation. It is extremely well researched and vigorously argued. Yet I am not sure that he makes his case and it is not at all clear by the end of the book what he thinks would have been a better, if counterfactual, outcome as the Middle Ages came to an end and the Reformation had not occurred. The implications of his argument are very clear: the reformation rejection of a teleological, virtue ethics based Medieval culture was replaced with a moral and theological free-for-all among competing and unreconcilable

intra-Protestant churches, and an endless conflict with Catholics on a myriad of theological issues (sola scriptura, et. al), and the major "Life Questions". The result, he argues, was a failure to carry forward into early modernity the best of Medieval religious culture which of course turns out to have been the substance of Roman Catholic belief. This conflict and radical rejection of continuity with the medieval past created an opening for modern liberalism (the bete noir in the argument), aligned with the late Medieval emerging capitalist/consumerist economy and the national state to insert itself in the development of European (and latterly, North American) history. This may well be right, but I suspect that Gregory begs the counterfactual question he implicitly raises by not really addressing in a serious manner what the alternative could (should) have been. It begs this question because much of his criticism of what did happen seems to be based on the idea that history did not have to have develop as it did, if only the Reformation had not happened, or given that it did happen, had not taken on such a devastating rejection of Medieval culture. It seems to me that this view was unnecessary for Gregory to taken up. Otherwise, the book is a great read, deeply informative and challenging.

I have to say upfront I've not read the entire book, primarily because I don't have several months to devote to the effort. The thesis here is not new, though Gregory certainly gets credit for the fullest development of it, but it is that very fullness I find problematic. This could have as easily been detailed in a volume 1/3 the size. There is so much detail here it well deserves the "tedious" and "esoteric" criticisms it has received. Clearly Gregory is writing to his academic peers, which is fine except that it takes a valuable theme and conclusion out of the hands of most, which is a shame. His writing style is pure academia, which I personally find off-putting, particularly when with a little bit of effort it might, instead, have been absorbing. I compare this to, for instance, Diamond McCullough, who manages to be deeply thorough, incredibly detailed and yet, still, engaging. This book just gives me no reason at all to want to plow through it. I'd actually like to read this idea if someone else does it - I think it's a sound concept, but I don't have months to get mired in its minutae.

I have an interest in the roots of modern secularism, so I picked this up purely on the basis of its title. I'm very glad I did. The writing style may seem, at times, complex for the non-specialist reader. But this is a minor flaw. Gregory's command and organization of the material, his fairness of tone, the thoroughness of his research and the explanatory power of his arguments make for a deeply satisfying experience of history. I've gone back to read particular chapters several times. It's really

that good.

The Unintended Reformation is both scholarly and readable (a rare combo). It does a great job of not only covering but also integrating the philosophical, theological, moral, political, economic, scientific and educational threads that lead from the Late Middle Ages through the Reformation to the world of today. This book should be on everyone's bookshelf if one is interested in the forces that dominate our world of today.

This book is written to see the unintended part of the Reformation that is clearly evident in the world today. And if one looks at the conclusion of this book one will see what came from the Reformation that was not intended. This is a good book to see the effects of the Reformation that not really intended, but came out of it anyways.

Great book on the reformation and where it has brought us. not light reading!!

Very interesting and in depth look into the historical and philosophical roots of our modern secular society.

You better love history. This is a long read. However, it clearly places our current age in perspective. The tough bit is that there are no clear answers or plans to move forward, and correct some of those consequences. Good luck.

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