

civil authorities (the position with which his name is more often associated today) than to protect the diversity of approaches that characterized Reformed views of church discipline in the early generations of the Reformation. Indeed, Gunnoe has done us a great service by rendering this progenitor of a historiographical “-ism” into a more developed and nuanced context.

Gunnoe’s epilogue, which traces Erastus’ discernible influence through later generations and in areas such as the Netherlands and England, also foreshadows important areas of future research. Gunnoe has admirably accomplished the goal of presenting the historical Erastus, “a leading figure within the second Reformation in Germany, the most important opponent of the Paracelsian revival, and a significant natural philosopher in his own right” (412). This book must be a primary point of reference for any serious explorations into the various areas of intellectual history that Erastus influenced in the course of his significant career.

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Book Review Editor’s Note: The significant book that is covered in the following reviews has elicited sharply divergent opinions among those who have assessed its merits. Given this divergence and considering the ecumenical nature of this journal, it was deemed appropriate to solicit two reviews of the book.

The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society

Brad S. Gregory

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap/Harvard University Press,
2012 (574 pages)

This book is a tour-de-force by a scholar of truly exceptional ability. The work’s significance deserves a ranking in historiography such as Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) or Keith Thomas’s *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), but unfortunately such recognition will not come because Gregory critiques and does not reinforce the predominant thought and prejudices of the early twenty-first century. This is no ordinary historical monograph. Gregory, a historian of sixteenth-century Europe, poses the question, “How did we get from there to here?” He answers with a grand theory about how a few, relatively simple ideas, which have little to do with race, class, gender, sex, or semiotics, transformed the cultural landscape of the West over the past five centuries. The premise of the book is based on an almost undeniable historical counter-factual: If Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and all the religious Reformers of the sixteenth century were here to observe what has become of the churches they founded and of Western Christian

culture in general, particularly its materialism, consumerism, and hyperpluralism, they would be dumbfounded and appalled. None of them intended the current outcome.

Gregory's central argument begins with a theory stemming from the late thirteenth century, dubbed "metaphysical univocity," which claims that God, while transcendent, shares an aspect of his supreme being with all of creation, namely in the mere fact of his existence. This idea allowed philosophers, theologians, and scientists to conceive of God as a being to some extent like any other, and therefore, in later centuries, potentially dispensable if one cannot demonstrate his activity, intervention, or direct participation in worldly affairs. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, while not usually very concerned with metaphysics, unwittingly gave new life to this theory in their rejection of a number of Catholic sacraments and the notion of sacramentality in general. Some Reformers argued that the eucharistic host was just what it looked like, a piece of bread, with no God in sight. Eventually Latin Christendom that, despite its many rifts and conflicts, had always had at least a shared Christian creed and sacramental system fell into separate confessional pieces. Because disunity was never the reformers' intention, they sought to build a new consensus, first on the idea of *sola scriptura*, that the Bible is the source of all authority, but, finding more controversies than agreements in reading that text, some turned to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which obviously led to more individual revelations than ever. The privatization of religion blossomed. The vast majority of people then still believed that God existed, but they utterly failed to achieve the peace, unity, and mutual love that Christ called for in his ministry.

The book has six chapters along thematic lines, but this review attempts to summarize Gregory's argument by following basic chronology. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the thinkers of the so-called scientific revolution and the Enlightenment who failed to observe any deity in their research projects concerning the paths of heavenly bodies, physics, chemistry, and other branches of science and who were genuinely frustrated with the endless antagonism among Christian confessions pushed God out of their concepts of earth and the heavens altogether. Many still believed and stated that he existed but that they found no empirical evidence for his participation in the workings of the solar system, the barometer, the human circulatory system, and so forth. In state and society, leaders in the Dutch Republic, Britain, and the fledgling United States increasingly embraced toleration for private worship, and, at the same time, eagerly developed markets to satisfy consumers' growing range of tastes and desires.

The nineteenth century, riding on the shock waves of the French Revolution, ushered in a group of thinkers who not only had no use for God but avidly recommended eradicating any serious interest in him from all realms of science and from institutions of higher learning. Reason should be the source of all authority and the only avenue to truth, but human reason also produced no lasting consensus in philosophy or any attempt to answer life's great question: How *ought* we to be? Empires grew and acquisitiveness increased at the same time. The twentieth century, of course, saw the most horrible wars in human history, followed by an explosion in consumerist consumption, mainstream

materialism, and, in many parts of the West, thorough and rapid de-Christianization. In the twenty-first century, Westerners generally embrace uncritical relativism (the gospel of “whatever”) and “hyperpluralism.” Most people regard the path of history as one of progress, leading from religious darkness of the past into the light of modernity, as well as a “supersessionist” view where one age completely replaces another, rejecting the idiosyncrasies of the past and moving into a newer, brighter future. Truth claims of religions have no place in postmodern universities, and all market activity is morally neutral or at least defensible as long as it is profitable.

With wit and verve, Gregory shows the hypocrisy of such views and how they came to be. As said, the story he tells of the past five hundred years is fairly simple, but the genius of the book lies in the connections, in his explanations of how things got to be the way they are now. His synthesis is expansive and bracing. His critics will hate the book. They will attack him personally for letting his Catholic faith cloud and corrupt his understanding of history. They will claim that he yearns for the sweet bygone days of the fifteenth century when all in the Latin West were consensus Catholics—days that never were, by the way. They will say that the book is superficial and leaves out too many individual examples. A few will even say that the book has a political agenda, but all this is off the mark. Nowhere does Gregory claim or even insinuate that Catholicism is correct while all departures thereof are wrong. His conclusion is entitled, “Against Nostalgia.” The text comprises 387 pages plus another 245 pages of endnotes rich in sources and further explanation. The book has more than enough illustrative examples to make its argument; adding more would have bloated it. Finally, there is no political agenda anywhere in the book although critique abounds, particularly concerning recent wars and those governments that prize growth in consumption at any cost and all others, especially the environmental, notwithstanding.

This brilliant book deserves a Pulitzer or an award of equal prestige, but those prizes go more readily to books that celebrate a supersessionist approach to history and all that is postmodern over all that has come before (i.e., *The Swerve*, by Stephen Greenblatt). Gregory’s book pulls out a rapier. It challenges academics who fundamentally deny the possibility of any religious truth. It challenges all who believe that empiricism is the only means to establishing truth about everything. It challenges the uncritical scientism of our age, especially with regard to the questions about how we *ought* to be. It challenges relativists who insist on the existence and inviolability of universal human rights, while denying them any moral grounds. *The Unintended Reformation* shows quite clearly how the West moved away from an established, institutionalized Christian identity to the current postmodern ascendancy. People will discuss this work for years, perhaps decades, to come.

—Brennan C. Pursell
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