

Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005, ISBN 9780521841757

As a student of the print trade and an admirer of Andrew Pettegree's *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, I looked forward to reading *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*. In the last few years, it has proven an informative read for its analysis that combines the Lutheran, Calvinist and English reform movements and its challenge to traditional assumptions about the Reformation. Though not entirely innovative, Pettegree's study of the various Reformation media and their interactions with the culture and one another is influential in its well-written format.

In eight chapters, *Persuasion* succinctly examines the ways in which the complex beliefs surrounding religious conversion in the Reformation were disseminated and challenges the idea that the printing trade was the primary agent of this conversion. The argument against a mono-causal regimen of reform based around print is well constructed, following on recent work contesting Elizabeth Eisenstein's theory of a printing revolution. The book suggests that not only print but also music, drama and the visual arts were 'particular elements of a complex programme' (p. 2) of religious conversion. Further, it suggests that the historical perception of a largely passive popular culture (merely accepting the imposed religion) is erroneous, explaining that the idea of conversion was both intensely personal and public. The people needed to be active participants for it to function properly, and *Persuasion* sets out to identify the possible means of participation. This argument, so far as it goes, is insightful and highly evocative for further studies.

However, it is here that *Persuasion* may begin to lose itself. The book's brevity and concise style, something very accessible to the undergraduate, seem to undermine the complex argument at times. Unarguably, it is packed with immense detail, an excellent body of historical examples and suggestions for fresh avenues of Reformation scholarship (e.g. church music). In this, the study sweeps across Europe and England with such breadth that there is little room to thoroughly discuss the important nuances that distinguished the various centres of reform. Organised as it is around forms of communication rather than time periods or confessional groups, *Persuasion* struggles to focus its attention on any one Protestant group. This generalising nature would be fine in a textbook, but I do not believe this is what *Persuasion* was intended to be. This is clearly an articulated critique

against many mainline assumptions about Reformation media. As such, it seems to suffer from a lack of space, inhibiting any deep exploration of the book's larger assertions.

It is perhaps in chapter five where *Persuasion* hits its apex. Here, the late Robert Scribner's study of Lutheran woodcuts is thoroughly critiqued.¹ *Persuasion* is right to challenge Scribner's assertion that 'woodcuts form a vital link' (p. 104) in the mass movement of the German Reformation. We still cannot say with certainty how illiterate people would have encountered and seen many images. However, I think a more even-handed assessment would have been better placed. First, the chapter overlooks recent work in the area of Protestant visual piety, such as Joseph Koerner's *The Reformation of the Image*.² Second, the chapter sets up what can only be described as a straw-man argument of objections. Among the points raised are the poor eyesight of people (and thus their inability to see the images) and what *Persuasion* terms the 'freight of interpretation' (p. 112) in the images. So, even if people could see the images clearly enough, most people would not have understood what they were seeing. *Persuasion* concludes, 'only if these conditions could be met could visual images function as a bridge between the message and the masses' (p. 107). This harsh 'only' resounds too heavily with a brusque tone uncommon in much of Pettegree's work. It dismisses any place for the various degrees of understanding and levels of knowledge people brought to the reading act. In *Persuasion*, the early modern reader must have understood images either thoroughly (and even completely) or not at all.

The following chapters are divided into an analysis of the printing trade and a synthesis of Protestant identity formation through the media programme. Here, the reader receives the full force of Pettegree's knowledge as director of the Universal Short Title Catalogue Project. The hoards of *Flugschriften* (pamphlets) in France and Germany are grouped into burst-like flurries of printing, or what *Persuasion* terms the 'pamphlet moment'. Also, with close studies of the print shops in Wittenberg and Geneva (pp. 134-146), *Persuasion* is instructive about the often understudied socio-economic factors and interrelations between printers, authors and artisans that were involved in the print trade. Though this book stresses the importance of other media in the conversion

¹ Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

² Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion, 2003).

process, it also demonstrates the overwhelming thrust for printed works, particularly as the Protestant polemic took shape.

As a whole, *Persuasion* deserves more credit than criticism. Pettegree has taken a mountain of data and condensed it into a highly readable and useful book. It is both broad in scope and detailed in historical examples. Its argument, though undeveloped at times, is challenging, and it raises several questions that Reformation scholars should pursue about the transmission of Reformation beliefs and their popular reception.

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