

Patrick Collinson

Reformacija: Kratka povijest (The Reformation: A Brief History)

Zagreb, Alfa, 2008, 281 pages.

Recently, a new book about the Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries emerged on the Croatian market. It is always interesting to see which authors and books Croatian publishers choose to offer to Croatian readers. In Croatia, where people are not very familiar with the subject of the Reformation (and unfortunately there are also many unsupported negative prejudices), every book can substantially influence the perception of the readers. This is especially true of books that are aimed toward a wider circle of potential readers, as is the one referred to in this short book review as seen by its (sub)title (“A Brief History”), by its attractive modern design, its small-size format and affordable price. What kind of book is this, therefore, and by whose pen was it written?

The author of this brief review of the history of the Reformation is Patrick Collinson, surely an unknown name to the broader Croatian readership considering the fact that this is his first book translated into the Croatian language. Collinson is an 81 year old Brit (born in 1929), and a retired professor of modern history at Cambridge University, as well as a member of the British and Australian Academies. He began his higher education by studying history at the King's School Ely and Pembroke College, Cambridge (1949-1952). After that, he signed on at the University of London for a postgraduate study of Elizabethan history which he completed in 1957 by defending his doctoral thesis about Puritanism in the Elizabethan era. In 1961, he began to teach church history at King's College, London. After that, (starting in 1969) he taught at the University of Sidney, and then (starting in 1975) he taught history at Kent and Sheffield Universities; the last period of his teaching career was spent at Cambridge University, also teaching history (from 1988 until his retirement in 1996). He wrote a number of noted works, among which are included *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967), *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (1982) and *Elizabethans* (2003). For his lengthy career, he was rewarded with a membership in said Academies, and he was awarded with seven honorary doctorates (from the universities in Essex, Kent, Oxford, Sheffield, Warwick, York, and from Trinity College, Dublin) along with many other awards and recognitions. Even a glimpse at this impressive scientific biography (which is only partially presented on the cover pages of the Croatian publication of the book) inspires awe in the reader who has decided to read the content of one of the last written works of this great expert.

Collinson's *The Reformation: A Brief History* has become a significantly popu-

lar work. It passed through six editions in the English language, out of which two are on audio tracks. First it was published by the British publishing house Weidenfeld & Nicolson. After that, in 2004, the book was published by the American publishing house Modern Library. The most important year for the book was 2005 when the British publishing house Phoenix published it as an illustrated issue, and that same year the work passed through its two editions on audio tracks – on both cassette and CD (by the British publisher Recorded Books). The book came out in its latest edition in 2006 (a repeated edition by the publishers Modern Library). This author is uninformed as to whether or not the book has been translated into another language besides Croatian.

As mentioned in the preface, in this book the author wants to “commemorate” the Reformation as “the great historic theme” (p. 10). Moreover, he writes that he was inspired to write it by a “sense of obligation toward the reader who perhaps does not know much about the Reformation” (p. 11).

“No revolution, regardless of how drastic it might be has ever implied a complete denial of what preceded it” (p. 37). This is a sentence that best reflects the thesis of the book. Throughout the book, Collinson repeatedly emphasizes the causal connection of the historic events, epochs and personalities, and he also perceives the Reformation as a “continuum of the history” (p. 29).

The book is comprised of twelve chapters preceded by a preface and a short chronology (of the Reformation in the wider sense). At the end of the book, recommendations are included for further reading (which simultaneously acts as end notes for citations within the chapters), and there is an index.

In the preface, the author writes about his experience of teaching on the subject of the history of the Reformation (between 1961 and 1975; first of all in London, and then in Sidney), about the colleagues and experts that influenced him in a broader sense, and also in the writing of the book. In this section, he also writes of his personal motivation and his approach to the writing of the book. The chronology he brings after the preface is a chronology of the Reformation in a significantly broad way since it encompasses a period from the beginning of the western schism (1378) to the “glorious revolution” in England when the Catholic King James II was dethroned and the position of Protestantism was lawfully warranted on the British Isles (1688-1689). In the first chapter (*Reformation? What Reformation?*), Collinson brings the perception of the Reformation as an extraordinary moment in history under question, and he announces the main argument of his thesis (which will be covered throughout the book), that the Reformation was a part of a historical continuum and development. Here it is best to quote the author himself: “Luther did not come out of nowhere, but out of the ample sources of the late medieval theology” (p. 29). Today it is considered useful to talk about the medieval Church and *its* Reformation. Martin Luther, who was a

medieval rather than a modern person, offered new answers to old questions. He did not ask any new questions (p. 32). In the second chapter, the author elaborates his thought initiated at the beginning, but at the same time he also admits that "... while an entire century of talking about a reform was nothing more than words on paper, Luther's focused concentration on the Word led to a real and revolutionary change" (p. 51). In the third chapter, he discusses the importance of language, sermons and the written word for the emergence, development and spread of the Reformation, as well as of the merits of particular reformers in the emergence of it with respect to the standardization of particular European literary works (Luther for the German language, Tyndale for English, Calvin for French). The fourth chapter includes a short biography of Luther and a psychological profile, as well as a concise description of the events preceding the immediate beginning of "his" reformation, or those that followed shortly after. In the fifth chapter, Collinson calls particular non-Lutheran types of religious reformations (Zwinglianism, Anabaptism, etc.) to mind, as well as other reformers (Zwingli, Butzer, etc.), which were active at the same time as Luther, and which altogether contributed to the Reformation becoming what it became. The sixth chapter deals in a special way with Calvin and "his" type of reformation; it includes a short biography of Calvin, a psychological profile, and shortly presents his capital work *Institutes*, the theocratic governing of Geneva, and it points to the far-reaching consequences of his reforming work. In the seventh chapter, the relationship between the Reformation and the counter-Reformation is discussed, as well as the Council of Trent, the genesis and the activity of the Jesuits, etc., along with many interesting examples. The eighth chapter deals with the specific causes and forms of the development of the Reformation on the British Isles. The ninth, the tenth and the eleventh chapters reveal the author's understanding of the influence of the Reformation (the theoretical and practical implications) in the political arena, in the lives of common people, and in artistic creations. Instead of bringing a kind of a conclusion to the book, the last, twelfth chapter opens some new questions and leaves the reader with the impression that a second part of the book certainly exists (when actually it does not exist), where all the thoughts that are spread throughout the book will finally be gathered and take the form (and quality) of a rounded whole.

Let us briefly consider the value and the scientific quality of the book. Most of the positive elements are already listed in the introductory part of this review (a promising title, an attractive and modern cover design, a practical, small format, an acceptable price, and a competent author). To the aforementioned, we can also add a considerable number of interesting facts and comparisons offered by the author in order to more clearly illustrate his theme. However, the general impression of the book is not so positive. The positions of the international readership and critics are divided and have a really broad range of comments, from a torrent

of commendations to regrets for having spent money to purchase the book. This author is inclined to agree with those who believe that the book does not live up to the honor of its author. Moreover, how much can be expected of a book for which its own author says in the preface, "In this book I have relaxed and I have probably made so many mistakes that it is impossible to count them... It is better to be wrong, then to be boring..." (pp. 10, 11). The book that is intended for the "average reader who might not know much about the Reformation" (p. 11) actually implies a substantial foreknowledge of the subject without which it is impossible to follow and understand. The work is almost void of organization (apart, perhaps from chapter titles). The absence of notes in particular places can really cause frustration because some of the significant historical persons are discussed almost like a quiz where one must guess about whom the author is speaking (for example, the sentence begins, "In the words of a Scotsman from that time..." (p. 163). While on some issues he offers unnecessary details (for example, telling about the place where Luther picked strawberries as a young boy), Collinson leaves some major themes of the Reformation vague (if mentioned at all!), and he often even trivializes them (at least it seems so) with "humorous" jokes and comparisons. In addition to all that was mentioned and not mentioned, it must be said that even the translation is not the most advanced.

Therefore, this book has no one to whom it can be recommended (it is rather demanding, unsystematic, etc., for beginners, and rather frivolous and shallow for students and experts). However, the publishers of the Croatian translation should be recognized for the desire to enrich the Croatian readership with yet another book representing the almost unfamiliar subject of Protestantism. May this book and this honest review serve as a warning to all who wish to engage in the responsible editorial task of choosing books for translation in the future, as well as an encouragement to "examine" the quality of the books beforehand. It is obvious that a great name does not guarantee quality at the same time. Or, is it about an exception that proves the rule?

Tomislav Vidaković

Translated by Ljubinka Jambreč

Gianni Vattimo,

Vjerovati da vjeruješ (To Believe that You Believe)

Fedon, Beograd, 2009, 138 pages.

This interesting publication which was translated by Mario Kopic, was originally printed in Milan in 1996 with the title, "Credere di credere". Gianni Vattimo (born in 1936) is one of the leading Italian philosophers of the second half of