



PROJECT MUSE®

---

"Just as in the Time of the Apostles": Uses of History in  
the Radical Reformation (review)

D. Jonathan Grieser

Renaissance Quarterly, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 270-271  
(Review)

Published by Renaissance Society of America



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/212637>

Geoffrey Dipple. *"Just as in the Time of the Apostles": Uses of History in the Radical Reformation.*

Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2005. 324 pp. index. bibl. \$33.50. ISBN: 1-894710-58-4.

In an important new book, Geoffrey Dipple reevaluates the role history played in the Reform movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Protestants and Catholics, for humanists and Reformers, history was a battleground as competing understandings of the past played important roles in calls for reform. As Dipple demonstrates, history was a contentious matter, not only for mainstream groups, but also for those individuals and groups gathered by modern scholars under the rubric of the Radical Reformation. Dipple begins with a discussion of Erasmus's attitude toward the history of the Church, arguing that while Erasmus saw no period of the Church as a golden age, for him, as for other humanists, the era of scholasticism served as the low point of the Church's development. Dipple sees this attitude shared by the Protestant Reformers. Like Erasmus, Luther saw faults throughout Church history, but his early writings focused on scholasticism's evils. It was only later, as the conflict with Rome heated up, that Luther identified the fall of the Church with the rise of the papacy.

Dipple's analysis runs the spectrum of the Radical Reformation: from the Saxon radicals of Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, to the Anabaptists of Switzerland, Moravia, and the Netherlands, and finally to the Spiritualists, especially Sebastian Franck. Dipple's survey of the territory leads to some surprising and important conclusions. Conventional wisdom has long contended that what drove the Anabaptists was the idea of restitution — the hope of recreating the perfect Church of the New Testament. Dipple problematizes this notion by showing that the Anabaptists' model was much more biblicist than primitivist. They sought to reform the Church on the basis of the teachings and practices handed down by Jesus and followed by his disciples. There was little sense of an overarching historical vision that interpreted the whole of Church history, nor did the early Anabaptists develop a full-blown theory of a past golden age.

Dipple demonstrates this in his survey of the "evangelical Anabaptists." Among those he discusses are the Hutterites of Moravia, whose *Great Chronicle* told the story of the struggles of the "true Church" throughout history, identifying it with the faithful Israelites of the Old Testament, the early Church, and the faithful remnant suffering from the false persecuting Church that had gained power in Constantine's conversion and the rise of the papacy. Dipple shows how other Anabaptists, like Menno Simons, turned to history in their battles with their opponents, and developed a notion of the "fall of the Church." For Menno, the fall did not occur at a single moment, but rather took place over time — a declension and perversion of the original purity. Menno linked that decline with the rise of the practice of infant baptism.

One of the work's great strengths is the analysis of the Spiritualists, a group of individuals who in different ways rejected the externals of Christianity. While the usefulness of that typology, derived from Ernst Troeltsch, is debated, Dipple deftly sketches its continued relevance and analyzes the views of Schwenckfeld and

Sebastian Franck. He argues persuasively for the central role of Church history in the formation and articulation of the Spiritualist perspective. He also proves that many of the early Anabaptists came to care about Church history because of the role it played in the Spiritualist movement.

Dipple's work reminds us that almost every aspect of the Christian tradition played a role in the confessional conflicts of the sixteenth century. That the history of Christianity was a center of conflict is hardly surprising, but the innovators, whether Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, or the radicals, had to offer a vision of Church history that was compelling to would-be followers and provided a foundation for their reforming visions. It is not without irony that the vision of Church history that emerged among the Hutterites and Mennonites in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was largely derived from the work of one of their Spiritualist opponents, Sebastian Franck. This book is an important addition, not only to the narrow field of Anabaptist and Radical Reformation studies, but to the larger intellectual and religious history of the sixteenth century.

D. JONATHAN GRIESER  
Furman University

Pasi Ihalainen. *Protestant Nations Redefined: Changing Perceptions of National Identity in the Rhetoric of the English, Dutch and Swedish Public Churches, 1685–1772.*

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions: History, Culture, Religion, Ideas 109. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005. xviii + 664 pp. index. append. bibl. \$199. ISBN: 90-04-14485-4.

The author of this volume, Pasi Ihalainen, received his PhD in General History in 1999 from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and is a Research Fellow of the Academy of Finland. His work has also been funded by the Finnish-Swedish Cultural Fund and the Niilo Helander Foundation. This book discusses the rhetoric and redefinition of national communities by the clergy of the Protestant public churches in eighteenth-century England, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Public churches here include the Church of England, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, and the Lutheran state church of Sweden. The book reconstructs the various meanings attached to the concepts of nation and fatherland in political preaching. The author discusses sermons as a medium of national ideology and analyzes the decline of the Israelite prototype of the nation, the changing relationship between religious and national communities, international Protestantism, the weakening stereotype of anti-Catholicism, redefinitions of the Protestant monarch, and the diversification of national vocabulary. It also compares the rise of non-theological languages of classical patriotism, freedom, economy, and nature in the three outlined political cultures, revealing how the secular worship of nation arose even within the public presentation of religion. The book discusses the Enlightenment and nationalism in a postnationalist comparative history. The relationship between God and the nation became redefined not