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The Reformation

Towards a New History

This book recasts the story of the Reformation by bringing together two histories: the encounter between Europe and the western hemisphere beginning in 1492 and the fragmentation of European Christendom in the sixteenth century. In so doing, it restores resonances to “idolatry,” “cannibal,” and “barbarian,” even as it moves past such polemics to trace multiple understandings of divinity, matter, and human nature. So many aspects of human life, from marriage and family through politics to ways of thinking about space and time, were called into question. Debates on human nature and conversion forged new understandings of religious identity. Debates on the relationship of humanity to the material world forged new understandings of image and ritual and of physics. By the end of the century, there was not one “Christian religion” but many, and many understandings of the Christian in the world.

Lee Palmer Wandel is Professor of History, Religious Studies, and Visual Culture at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She is the author of *Always Among Us: Images of the Poor in Zwingli’s Zurich* (1990); *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (1994); and *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (2006), all with Cambridge University Press. She also co-authored (with Robin Winks) *Europe in a Wider World, 1350–1650* (2003) and co-edited (with Walter Melion) *Early Modern Eyes* (2009).

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Preface

I grew up in California, in a landscape dotted with the missions established by Junipero Serra, eighteenth-century Franciscan settlements that did not figure in my elementary school's textbooks, with their narratives of the westward expansion of a Protestant nation. Those material presences of a different Christianity on the west coast of North America invite us to consider how the history of the Reformation has been told, how the histories of the western hemisphere and of Christianity have been cast, and the implications of those histories for how we see ourselves today. Histories of Protestant triumph or the "westward expansion" of Anglophone churches speak from only one of many understandings of Christianity, one that was forged in the sixteenth century and itself claimed the triumph that now shapes so many of the histories we tell.

This book began with one invitation. In 2004, Bethel College invited me to give the Menno Simons Lectures. I am especially grateful to my host, Mark Jantzen, to Keith Sprunger and the other members of the Lecture Committee, and to the students of Bethel, who offered me a gentle and generous environment in which to begin rethinking how we have told the story of the Reformation. And it was realized in another. In 2008, Cambridge University Press invited me to write a short history of the Reformation. I am grateful to Beatrice Rehl, my editor, for the opportunity to think through what we have learned and to recast the narrative.

The Bibliography is at once an invitation to further reading and an introduction to some of the work that informs these pages. Steve Cantley, Erin Lambert, Robert D. Sack, Domenico Sella, and Lindsay Starkey have been the best of readers. My conversation with tms is older than this book and informs every page. Even more than for his willingness to read infinite drafts, I am grateful for his thinking and his acute listening.

This book, the history it seeks to tell, is for my students.