

Reformation Thought: an Anthology of Sources by Margaret L. King
Reviewed by Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

The main contentions of *Reformation Thought: an Anthology of Sources* by Margret King is to show the reader how the understanding of the Reformation has changed in significant ways though the writings of those who were intimately involved with the events of the time. The book provides an anthology of primary sources from the late fourteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. For example, the sources include excerpts from Jan Hus, a Czech priest who criticized the practice of papal indulgences, and Thomas à Kempis, a relatively unknown monk who believed in reforming the Roman Catholic from within by practicing humility, prayer and goodness, innocence, purity and freedom from sin. King also includes *God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul* from *The Character of a Methodist* by John Wesley and excerpt from Jonathan Edwards' 1736 work titled *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*.

In all, the book contains fifty texts from authors of various categories. The authors of the texts have various backgrounds, religious orders and genders. Roman Catholics represent fifteen of the texts and Lutheran and reformed authors represent twenty-six of the texts. The texts span 400 years of thought that contributed to the Reformation movement. The book include lectures, pamphlets, devotional works, diaries and much more. In King's words, "This volume explores the array of disparate and often contradictory ideas by making audible the voices of their authors: voices of yearning, vision, and conviction."

Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* is one of text included by King and is probably the most famous pieces of literature produced in the sixteenth century. Erasmus, who wrote it in a short time during a visit to the home of Thomas Moore, considered it a little diversion from his serious works. While Margret King devotes entire chapters to both Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther, she has worked very hard to include texts written by ordinary men and women from the era. Eleven of the forty-one authors selected by King are women. Alongside Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ignatius Loyola, the book includes excerpts from professors, pastors, cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns, shoemakers and a physician. The manner in which she has arranged this material adheres to a rather traditional model.

Reformation Thought is divided into ten theme-based chapters in approximate chronological order. Chapter One is "In Search of Christ: Steps toward Reformation" beginning in the 1300s with John Wyclif, taking us through the 1500s and ending with writing by Benedetto da Mantova in 1543. Chapter Two is titled "Erasmus: The Egg That Luther Hatched." King dedicated the entire chapter to five writings by Desiderius Erasmus. The title of Chapter Three is "Luther the Rebel" and includes five of Luther's writings including excerpts from his 1517 *Ninety-Five Thesis*. In Chapter Four, "Luther's Lieutenants," we are treated with the writings of four of the people who were closest to Luther. Chapter Five, "The Swiss Response" offers a look at the Reformation in the Swiss Confederation by John Calvin and others. In Chapter Six, "The Radical Reformation," shows us the movement as it grew from the grassroots. The chapter includes writings by Michael Servetus and others that reflect the sentiment at the time. Chapter Seven, "The English Compromise," offers us a look at the Reformation that took place in England. In Chapter Eight, "Catholic Reform and Renewal," we see the Roman Catholic Church's response to the Reformation and changes that were proposed and implemented. Chapter Nine, "The Expanding Reformation," give us a look at the expansion of the Reformation during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and included writings by John Wesley and

Margaret Fell. “The Reformation Overseas,” the title of Chapter Ten, explores the global expansion of the Reformation and includes writings by Jonathan Edwards, Roger Williams and Francis Xavier among others. There is also a final section that includes helpful bibliographical references.

I was intrigued by passages from *On Errors of the Trinity* by Michael Servetus written in 1531. For me, it is one of the strongest essays in King’s book. Servetus was an active participant in the Protestant Reformation, and later developed a nontrinitarian Christology. Condemned by Catholics and Protestants alike, he was pronounced a heretic and burned at the stake. His suggestion that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a third separate being is no better than atheism is very interesting. Servetus wrote that can find no reference to the Trinity in scripture and says scholastic philosophy has introduced terms that are not understood and do not accord with Scripture. While Servetus died for his beliefs, Calvin and others found out that Servetus’ ideas survived him. Gasparo Contarini’s 1517 *The Duties of a Bishop* is interesting as it presents a reform program for the Catholic church that would be enacted by the decrees of the Council of Trent. Another reading that is intriguing is *The Way of Christ* by Jacob Boehme in 1622. It is reflective of the movement he inspired that called for avoiding discussion of doctrine and instead, the focus on personal regeneration as the only road to salvation.

The book is clearly organized and can provide a valuable resource for students of the Reformation or for someone looking for some more details about the Reformation era not found in traditional texts. The book’s offerings provide a recognition that the study of the Reformation encompasses more than a few theologians. The text in Margaret King’s book give us a good appreciation that the Reformation was about more than Luther’s problem with the indulgence system. We gain a real sense of the debate around one of the greatest religious movement in the early modern period. Through the writings of people with diverse backgrounds, we gain an understanding of the events around the Reformation that made this period in history a fascinating one to explore.