

**The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society by Brad S. Gregory.**  
**Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.**

In his book Brad S. Gregory effectively proposes that the Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and other Protestant Reformers started society on a path to secularism and to unintended consequences we see in current society. Gregory states that “a central argument of this book is that ideological and institutional shifts that occurred five or more centuries ago remain substantively necessary to an explanation of why the Western world today is as it is.” The book looks at some theological behavior, style, and usage of Protestantism that spread from person to person within Western culture.

Gregory contends that the problems we face today have their origins in thought and religion, not in political ideologies, social movements or economics. In his six narratives: Excluding God, Relativizing Doctrines, Controlling the Churches, Subjectivizing Morality, Manufacturing of Goods Life, and Secularizing Knowledge, Gregory explains how the events that happened centuries ago caused the problems of today. He describes how the world before the Protestant Reformation was a place where there were hopes of eternal salvation for people and the stability for the institutions prevailed.

The book first challenges the contention that religion and science are not compatible. He argues that the Reformation caused the modern ideas of the relationship between religion and science, as universities do not provide guidance on the concepts of what one should live for, what one should believe, or how one should act.

Gregory proposes that the “persecution of religious dissenters and the destructive wars of religion” were largely mitigated by separating church from state and allowing people to practice their faith as they wished. He also takes on capitalism and consumerism suggesting that we “create ourselves through things” This, suggests Gregory, created a state of hyper-pluralism in the West. Gregory supports Max Weber’s argument in *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the development of Western capitalism can be traced to what Weber called ‘Reformed Protestantism.’ The Reformed Protestant was self-conscious, hardworking, diligent, self-disciplined and frugal. These attributes produced behaviors that created an ethic resulting in the generation of wealth and profits.

Gregory also looks at morality and how it has transformed since the Reformation, suggesting that the abandonment of the Aristotelian idea that politics and ethics are inseparable lead us to modern political liberalism which views that individuals are free to hold whatever beliefs they have. He claims that Protestant rejection of the Roman Catholic Churches’ authority created a numerous interpretations about what the Bible actually meant. It also created questions about what it meant to be a good Christian and how a good Christian should live in society.

The book adds to the historiography by offering a thought-provoking analysis of how over time the religious fabric of medieval Christianity was replaced through rejections and changes. Gregory proposes that the religious fabric was the glue that bound together Western society. He concludes that the West was propelled into a trajectory of polarization and pluralism and the causes of this transformation can be found in the events of medieval Christianity, namely the Protestant Reformation.