Catholics and vindicated to Reformist Protestants, who had as much learning and even more passion than the establishment men. The illuminating illustration of the debates between exponents of differing Protestant convictions is the achievement of Prior’s book. He captures the vigour of the antagonists, and we acquire a vivid understanding of the scale, complexity, intensity and duration of these debates. Prior makes us listen to many new and unfamiliar voices, such as those of Thomas Bell, William Bradshaw, Samuel Hieron, William Covell, John Gordon—though it would be helpful to have more information about the background of these men, their education and affiliations—and we come to realise that many of the debates that destabilised the Church in the reign of King Charles had been running for decades. There was a large audience and no shortage of participants—and no acceptable solutions, apart from the separation of the discontented from the state Church.

In his last chapter, Prior enlarges his scope to consider how King James attempted to exert control over the Presbyterian Kirk of his native Scotland. We have heard much in recent years about King Charles’s disastrous efforts to impose uniformity of governance and worship on Scotland, so Prior’s account of James’s tentative moves in this direction, and the furious reactions in print they aroused, is an especially helpful preview to the even more violent dissensions of the 1630s which finally pushed religious conflict into war.


This collection of thirteen essays—which sprang out of a conference organized by the Center of Early Modern History at the University of Minnesota—brings together views of American, British, and Dutch historians on early modern religious reforms and dissent across the European and Asian continents. The selection of essays represents several new approaches to the Protestant Reformation in modern-day historiography: namely, that it was not a rapid process carried out by the state, but rather a gradual process shaped to a large extent by common people; that religious beliefs and tensions contributed greatly to the formation of early modern group identities, par-
particularly those of grassroots and minorities; and that more stress should be put on the role of religious communities in these processes, rather than on religious individualism, which had been emphasized (and much overrated) by the earlier historiography. These new notions are applied not only to English, French, Dutch, and German Protestantisms, but also to seventeenth-century religious dissent in several non-western countries, such as China, Ukraine, and Russia.

The essays in the first part of the volume, Lived Religion and Official Religion, closely study the relations between the governments and clerical authorities, on the one hand, and the common people, on the other, in religious conflicts of China, Russia, Holland, and England. Caroline Litzenberger's essay examines this relationship by tracing the reformation of communal ritual in early modern England. The author concludes that “the enforcement of religious change was a multilayered, multidimensional process involving people at all levels in church, state, and society” and that “layers of response to religious change … included disclosure and concealment, as well as nuanced responses” (118). While the change was initiated from above, local ritual manifestations frequently resulted from a collaborative struggle between the powerful and the powerless. Robert Crummy's essay, “Ecclesiastical Elites and Popular Belief and Practice in Seventeenth-Century Russia,” reflects “on the most important phases of the interaction between the leaders of Russian Orthodoxy and ordinary parishioners between the late 1630s and the beginning of the eighteenth century in light of recent studies of Christian communities elsewhere in early modern Europe” (52).

The essays in the second part, Forms of Religious Identity, explore the impact of shared beliefs and practices on group identities in early modern China, Russia, France, and England. Frank Sysyn's essay, “Orthodoxy and Revolt: The Role of Religion in the Seventeenth-Century Ukrainian Uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” shows the ideological role of the Orthodox faith in the Khmelnytskyi uprising of 1648. In the face of increasing conversion of Ukrainian nobles to Polish Catholicism, the Orthodox Church legitimized the revolt of its staunch supporters, Ukrainian (Zaporozhian) Cossacks, who were largely represented by peasants and lower classes (177). Sysyn believes that the Orthodox issue also played a major role in the Ukrainian Cossacks' swearing of allegiance to the Muscovy tsar in the aftermath of the revolt and in the subsequent redefining of the Ukrainian (or
Ruthenian) identity as part of an Orthodox East Slavic people. Raymond Mentzer's essay, "The Huguenot Minority in early Modern France," demonstrates how the new Protestant spirituality set the Huguenot community apart from the mainstream Catholic community in seventeenth-century France, and how it shaped their struggles in a hostile environment. The Huguenot experience confirms the strong impact of religious belief on a group, since there was no ethnic or cultural difference between them and the French Catholics.

The third part, The Social Articulation of Belief, analyzes the ways religious beliefs were shaped by specific contexts. For instance, Eve Levin's essay, "False Miracles and Unattested Dead Bodies: Investigations into Popular Cults in early Modern Russia," examines the persistence of superstitious practices of falsified sainthoods in local parishes of post-Petrine Russia against the Synod's (i.e., the Ecclesiastical College's) ardent attempts to stop them. To some extent, argues the author, such popular cults were perpetuated by the Synod's ineffective measures and their ignorance of local traditions and circumstances. Susan Karant-Nunn's essay on liturgical rites in German-speaking lands before, during, and after the Reformation makes a similar observation about the survival of some pre-Reformation ritualistic practices (such as baptismal feasts or post-churching ales) among the populace well into the nineteenth century.

Some of the essays do not so much report new findings or sources, as they analyze, synthesize, and re-conceptualize existing material by putting it in the wide political and religious context. These essays draw interesting parallels and analogies with religious processes in other cultures and discern common patterns between them. "This moving "beyond the denominationally oriented historiography of an earlier era" (5) comprises the particular value of this collection, as it allows religious historians to "gain perspective from the findings of colleagues working on what seem to be analogous problems in different parts of the globe" (5). Several common patterns come out in this regard, as the editors point out in their introduction (8-9). Among such patterns is the tendency of common believers in various cultures to attach more significance than did their religious authorities, to ritualistic and apotropaic aspects of religious worship, which explains the perseverance of popular superstitions and pagan rites within various Christian communities—a persistent problem that religious reformers from many countries had to deal with.
The authors boldly apply and compare the findings of other historians to their own, and quite often such juxtaposition yields insightful results. As Crummy points out, “recent writing on the development of religious communities elsewhere in Europe provides a stimulating conceptual vehicle on which to revisit the Russian scene” (53). Crummy draws useful parallels between Russian Old Believers and western Puritans, as well as between seventeenth-century Russian ecclesiastic elites and leaders of the sixteenth-century Catholic Counter-Reformation, demonstrating how Russian church leaders borrowed their ideas of reform from the West. Crummy also points to international influences in explaining the division within the Reform camp itself. Russian royalty and church hierarchy styled their view of the Russian Orthodoxy after the World Orthodoxy, in particular after the Greek model (due to the presence of numerous Greek theologians at the Russian royal court and at the highest church circles), while parish priests drew more on local traditions and were therefore able to criticize the inflexibility and intransigence of the church hierarchy in conducting Reform with terrible cruelty. In a similar vein, Frank Sysyn finds similarities between the Ukrainian revolt of 1648 and the Dutch war of independence in that “Both conflicts encouraged the development of a national culture and consciousness that was associated with the new political order” (156). This comparison allows him to notice a significant difference: “In the Ukrainian case, both the political entity and the culture disintegrated in the eighteenth century and were submerged into the Russian Empire and Russian imperial culture, only to reemerge in the modern Ukrainian national awakening” (156). Other international parallels include “new precision in defining the structure of an ‘Orthodox Church’ and its dogmas … in response to new confessionalism of the Western Christians” (that is, Protestantism and the redefined Catholicism after the Council of Trent). The West’s new confessionalism, argues Sysyn, “forced the Kyiv metropolitanate and the Ruthenians to formulate more clearly their confessional allegiance” (173) and “to express new views on church, state, and people” (174).

Even if such parallels and connections were not explicitly stated in all of the selected essays, the mere putting together of a variety of views on early modern religious conflicts in such different cultures provides the readers with much food for thought. Overall, Religion and the Early Modern State: Views From China, Russia, and the West is an innovative and engaging scholarly collection that
will be of much interest for students of early modern history, anthropology, and religion.


The Synod of Dort laid bare one of the great fault-lines in early-modern Protestantism. The Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (who died nine years before the Synod began) had launched a frontal assault on orthodox Calvinist predestinarianism, by emphasising the role of free will in the salvific economy. New passions and enmities entered perennial debates about the nature of divine grace, the routes towards avoiding eternal perdition, and the extent of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (did he die for all, or just for the Elect?). Into the bargain, this theological confrontation merged with stark political divisions in the Low Countries, with the supporters of Arminius (the so-called Remonstrants) strongest in Holland and their counter-Remonstrant opponents centred on Zeeland and the other provinces. The Synod of Dort—"one of the most remarkable gatherings of Protestant divines ever assembled" (i)—did not witness a sophisticated debate between these two camps. The battle had already been won by the orthodox Calvinists, and Dort was primarily conceived as an opportunity to condemn and silence the Arminians. This was a hugely important moment in Dutch political and religious history, but it also captivated the rest of Protestant Europe and delegations arrived from across the continent. It is also an event that has suffered from reductive accounts in which the divisions and shifting strategies of the various parties have been treated with a distinct lack of nuance.

Anthony Milton’s book, a collection of almost 120 key documents, analyses the role of the British delegation during those momentous six months during the winter and spring of 1618 and 1619. He adopts a refreshingly straightforward approach to organising his material. Successive sections focus on the religious and political background of the synod, the early stages during which rules and procedures were fleshed out, the central issue of condemning the Arminian position, the process of drawing up the synod’s final canons, and