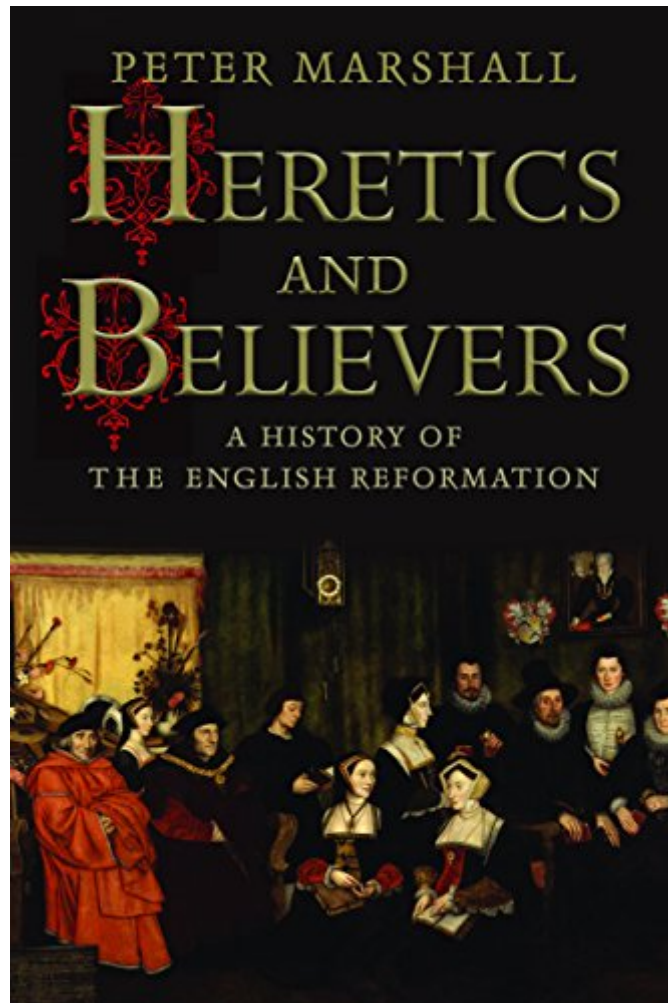




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Heretics And Believers: A History Of The English Reformation



Synopsis

A sumptuously written people's history and a major retelling and reinterpretation of the story of the English Reformation Centuries on, what the Reformation was and what it accomplished remain deeply contentious. Peter Marshall's sweeping new history "the first major overview for general readers in a generation" argues that sixteenth-century England was a society neither desperate for nor allergic to change, but one open to ideas of "reformation" in various competing guises. King Henry VIII wanted an orderly, uniform Reformation, but his actions opened a Pandora's Box from which pluralism and diversity flowed and rooted themselves in English life. With sensitivity to individual experience as well as masterfully synthesizing historical and institutional developments, Marshall frames the perceptions and actions of people great and small, from monarchs and bishops to ordinary families and ecclesiastics, against a backdrop of profound change that altered the meanings of "religion" itself. This engaging history reveals what was really at stake in the overthrow of Catholic culture and the reshaping of the English Church.

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Customer Reviews

What with the challenge of bringing together primary source material that spans centuries of European religious thought, exegesis, and history, this is most impressive volume by a gifted writer and thoughtful scholar. The Reformation has been the subject of many works but Prof. Marshall's style, insight, and use of detailed sources provides the reader with a new look at how the Anglican Church evolved and how English society underwent profound change during the sixteenth century. With a command of the topic that is first-rate, the reader is provided with facts and thematic analysis that make for a great read and show the role religion played in the lives of the commoners, the priesthood, and the crown. Prof. Marshall's knowledge of Latin, Greek, and German text shows through. The book is a fine contribution to the area for any historian.

This is a big book on the reformation of the Church in England. It is fascinating to read about this period of history from the perspective of the 21st century in a book that has been carefully researched, and is so well written. The main characters pushing for reform were ahead of their time. I am not an historian, but I am interested in church history, and the 16th and 17th centuries. I suppose that the book will come out in paperback (if it has not already) but, because this is such a long book, I'm not sure how well that format will work. Anyway, the hardback is not expensive. The print size is good for me.

I approached this book assuming that I knew the history of the period fairly well and that I might gain a few tidbits of new information. Well, I do know the period fairly well, but what I gained was a whole new perspective on the complex dynamics of the English Reformation. Marshall is a historian who understands that history is messy because people are messy. There are no blacks and whites in his narrative, just complicated people coming to grips with an unfamiliar evolving world. He shows with impressive detail how the English Reformation cannot be understood simply as a triumph of Protestantism over Catholicism. It was rather the beginning of a struggle that started with Catholic uniformity and ended in the pluralist society that England has today, a struggle that took centuries and that in some ways is still incomplete. He handles in a masterful way the tensions between the shifting visions of politico-religious leaders and the attempts of ordinary people to accommodate those shifts in their daily lives. That messy process ended by placing ever more true power in the hands of the people and of those who could command their loyalty. Although the book closes at the end of the 16th century, the last chapter makes it clear that the upheavals of the Reformation did not really settle down until the Glorious (?) Revolution of 1688, and that the slower period of adaptation continued even after that. Although this is a massive book, it is exceptionally well written and very

cleanly edited. It will take some time and concentration for the reader to get through it, but it will more than repay the effort.

Very well researched. A thorough, in-depth and excellent read of a fascinating period of English history.

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