

INTRODUCTION

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What did the protestant reformations look like in the very north of Europe? How did the cultural, political and economic consequences of the religious change influence the relationship between Scandinavia, the British Isles and continental Europe? Various questions related to these main themes were the topics for discussions at the conference “Northern Reformations” in Tromsø, Norway, September 21–22, 2017. This *Nordlit* volume contains papers based on most of the conference contributions.

It is well known, but still highly interesting for further research, how England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland came out in the seventeenth century as different results of the turbulent sixteenth century. Looking at international reformation research today, however, it is less known and discussed how different the trajectories of the Reformation turned out for the areas that today constitute the five Nordic countries. These differences are not merely due to chronology; the Nordic reformations are not simply later stages of the German reformations. The various northern reformations took their own, independent courses.

Within these northern European areas, within today’s nation states, there were also some highly interesting regional variations. In the sixteenth century, the state borders of Northern Fennoscandia were not yet drawn and Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, Russians – and the indigenous Sámi people – all inhabited a vast region. The Russians were Orthodox Christians and a large amount of the various Sámi groups were still considered pagan, and considered themselves as non-Christians, or at least not exclusively Christians. These factors were further challenges to the ruling kings and Protestant theologians who set out to reform their national subjects of the north. This borderless area, with a distinct ethnic dimension, has been the main area of interest for the organizers of the conference, the research project “The Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway” (PRiNN).¹

A point of departure for the conference was to examine knowledge and the notions of “the North” and how these notions have contributed to the understanding of the Reformation processes and Post-Reformation Europe. One of the conference’s keynote speakers, **prof. Peter Marshall**, addressed this in his paper “The Reformation and the Idea of the North”. He challenges what seems to have been something of a “scholarly article of faith”; that the Reformation was the main reason for the cultural division of Europe between a north and a south, and states that to “regard the Reformation as a kind of straightforward contest between south and north, resulting inevitably in the triumph or ascendancy of the latter, is to paint the complex landscape of the past in the crudest of shapes and colours.” Through evidence from the British Isles, Germany and Scandinavia,

¹ The three main publications from the project are: *The Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway: Introductory studies* (eds. L.I. Hansen, R.H. Bergesen and I. Hage), Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk, 2014; *The Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway: vol. 2: Towards a Protestant North* (eds. S.H. Berg, R.H. Bergesen and R.E. Kristiansen), Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2016; *The Protracted Reformation in Northern Norway: vol 3: The Protracted Reformation in the North* (eds. S.H. Berg, R.H. Bergesen and R.E. Kristiansen), in print. See also: uit.no/protractedreformation

Marshall investigates how “the concept of ‘The North’ functioned as a rich and varied storehouse of ideas and motifs” in the Post-Reformation period.

The other keynote speaker of the conference, **prof. Charlotte Methuen**, asked “How Scottish was the Reformation in the Northern Isles?” In her article, titled “Orkney, Shetland and the networks of the Northern Reformation”, she “explores the possible implications of the relationship between Orkney and Shetland and Norway for understanding the spread of the Reformation.” Her text does not aim to revise the current understandings of the respective relationships between these areas; rather, she attempts to explore “what insights emerge for our understanding of processes of (proto-)Reformation” when looking at the debates about religion in Orkney, Shetland and Norway – and specifically Bergen – alongside each other.

Another side of the Reformation in Scotland was followed up by **dr. Gordon Raeburn** in his paper “The Reformation of Death and Grief in Northern Scotland”. He demonstrates how the traditions and cultural expressions of the north and west of Scotland differed greatly from those of the south and east. In his article, he investigates two of the northern practices of grief related to death and burial; the *coronach* (the ritualised shrieking and wailing of older woman at certain times during a funeral) and *late-wake* or *lyke-wake*, in light of the Reformation.

Following up Methuen’s investigation of possible Scandinavian Reformation relations to the islands in the West, **prof. Sabine Hiebsch** looked at Scandinavian Reformation relations to the South. She asked “Are the Netherlands a Nordic country?”, and reflects on the understanding of the Lutheran tradition in the Netherlands. Even though the Netherlands did not belong to the same cultural, geographical or political region as Scandinavia, she argues that the Nordic countries “had a decisive influence on the development of Dutch Lutheranism”. According to Hiebsch, this influence has barely been considered in the historiography, and she argues that this aspect needs to be included as a part of the framework of the interpretation of Dutch Lutheranism.

A separate session at the conference was dedicated to the Reformation’s impact on the development of the languages of the north. **Prof. Kaisa Häkkinen**, **prof. Kirsi Salonen** and **dr. Tanja Toropainen** bring forward new knowledge about the Finnish Lutheran reformer Mikael Agricola and not least his helpers in the work with codifying the Finnish language through the Bible translations, in their article “Reformation, Mikael Agricola, and the Birth of the Finnish Literary Language.” The linguistic situation in Iceland, on the other hand, was completely different from the one in Finland. Iceland and Icelandic had a strong written tradition already in the High Middle Ages, and **prof. Veturliði Oskarsson** discusses in what way the Reformation influenced the language, in his article “The Icelandic Language at the Time of the Reformation”. Traditionally, scholars have claimed that the Reformation contributed to “freeze” the development of the Old Norse-rooted language and that the Reformation has been a main contributor to the language purism of modern-day Icelandic. Oskarsson does not question so much the influence of the Reformation, but he points clearly to the fact that the Icelandic language had undergone changes already prior to the new Bible translations from 1540–1584, and that it was by no means unaffected by the Late Middle Ages.

In Norway, which also became subject to Denmark politically during the Reformation, the linguistic situation was different yet. The Old Norse language had been strongly influenced by Low German for centuries, and along with Danes replacing Norwegians in

many central positions in Norway, Danish had replaced Norwegian in many areas already prior to the political take-over in the Reformation years of 1536–37. The Bible was not translated into Norwegian, and **prof. Endre Mørck** argues that the Reformation itself had little influence on the Norwegian language in his article “The Reformation and the linguistic situation in Norway”. **Prof. Anders Aschim** follows this situation through the centuries of Danish rule and Danish language – and Danish Bible – in Norway, when he in his article examines “Luther and Norwegian Nation-Building” in the nineteenth century. Aschim offers an analysis of a three-phased development of the role Luther played for the main actors in this nation-building process, with a specific focus on ecclesiastical language and the hymnology of the nineteenth century.

Prof. Liv Helene Willumsen in her article highlights the extraordinary religious situation of the High North: the presence of an indigenous population that still in the eighteenth century was not necessarily Christian – in the sense that the Sámi were not fully integrated in the Christian Church. She looks at the missionary activity pre-dating Thomas von Westen (1682–1727), commonly known as the driving force in the Sámi mission, and poses the question: “Isaac Olsen – the first Missionary among the Sámi People in Finnmark?”

The various papers at the conference – and the articles in this volume – illustrate how the concept of ‘the North’ is manifold and represents different geographical and mental viewpoints and perspectives. So does the concept of ‘the Reformation’, and we hope this volume will contribute to broaden the understanding of the conditions for and the consequences of the protracted Reformation in Northern Europe.

