The editors state that this collection of nineteen essays is intended “to honor Scott Hendrix on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and to give a forum for discussion of his views on the coherence and significance of the Reformation that found their fullest expression in his 2004 book, Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization” (v). The eclectic essays are grouped loosely into five sections: “Christendom and Christianization in the Middle Ages and the Reformation,” “Martin Luther’s Agenda,” “Re-christianizing Women, Men, and the Family,” “Reforming Religious Practice,” and “Theological Controversies and Christianization.” Echoing a phrase associated with Jean Delumeau from the 1970s, the editors refer to Hendrix’s “Christianization thesis” as the claim that “Lutheran, Reformed, Radical, and Catholic reformers all thought that the Christianity of their time was an inadequate form of Christian faith and life, and they sought to cultivate a more authentic Christianity in their communities and churches” (1). This claim is the stated stimulus for “a genuine debate in which the merits and deficits of the thesis are parsed and its usefulness tested” (3).

Space precludes even mentioning each of nineteen contributions, but judged with respect to the volume’s stated goal, the overall effect is disappointing. The articles by Elsie Anne McKee on Katharina Schütz Zell’s view of Martin Luther, and by Susan Karant-Nunn on Luther’s gendered view of his own sons and daughters, interesting as they are, do not even mention Hendrix’s thesis or cite Recultivating the Vineyard. Hendrix’s thesis is an argument about what Lutheran, Reformed Protestant, Radical Protestant, and Catholic reformers shared in common despite their differences. Its assessment thus logically requires engagement with and comparisons across all four traditions. Yet thirteen of the volume’s nineteen contributions focus entirely or predominantly on Luther and/or Reformation-era Lutheranism. Only one deals significantly with post-Reformation Catholicism (Robert Bireley), one with the Radical Reformation (James Stayer), and one with the Reformed tradition (Amy Nelson Burnett). Essays by Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin are among the most incisive in the collection; they are also the only two that seriously address the relationship between late medieval Christianity and the Reformation, which beginning with Luther Hendrix views as “the second act of the same drama” (quoted by Ron Rittgers, 322).

The disproportionate focus on Luther and Lutheranism means that most of the essays cannot in principle assess the central claim of Hendrix’s thesis.
Pre-existing scholarly disagreement about the extent to which Luther sought or expected “Christianization” therewith emerges as the analytical bone of contention in some essays. Carter Lindberg argues, for example, that clear-sightedness about the likely failure of his admonitions concerning greed meant that “Luther did not expect to Christianize the world” (77), and Timothy Wengert concludes his careful exploration of Melanchthon’s use of Christenheit by stating that “folks like Melanchthon insisted that things would not get any better and that the struggle over God’s mercy in Christ would continue until Christ came to reform the church” (100). But in the sense intended by Hendrix, it can hardly be denied that Luther was deeply concerned about idolatry (the focus of John Maxfield’s piece) or thought that a widespread acceptance and enactment of his theology would indeed constitute a more genuinely Christian way of believing, behaving, and living human life by comparison with those teachings and practices of the Roman church he excoriated, or the rival Protestant claims and practices he condemned. It is thus not surprising that numerous contributors whose articles focus on Luther or Lutheranism—such as Risto Saarinen on Luther’s notion of beneficia, Austra Reinis on Aegidius Hunnius’s Haustafel sermons, or Robert Kolb on later sixteenth-century Lutheran sermons and biblical commentaries—conclude that the respective, narrow subjects of their investigation fit within a notion of Lutheran “Christianization” as Hendrix understands it.

It is almost trivially true that all the respective Christian reformers of the sixteenth century thought they were trying to make society more genuinely Christian. Perhaps some historians insistent that all “religious” impulses are really efforts to exercise power and control would dispute this, but any scholar steeped in the sources and concerned to understand sixteenth-century Christians fairly can scarcely deny it. The question is whether it makes sense to say, in keeping with Hendrix’s thesis, that all the reformers “began with the common goal of Christianization and diverged in the specific agendas they employed to reach that goal” (2). Were they all really trying to “recultivate the vineyard” and just sought to go about it differently, or is it misleading in substantive terms even to characterize them as sharing a common goal? Did those who denounced the Pope as the Antichrist and those who defended him as the Vicar of Christ have the same objective? The scholars whose contributions in this collection engage most seriously with Hendrix’s thesis are also most critical of it. James Stayer notes that Hendrix’s tone “is invariably irenic and ecumenical,” whereas by contrast, in comparing the Christian antagonists of the Reformation era, “the one thing they all agreed upon was that they were not all authentically Christian” (101, 103; italics in original). Amy Nelson Burnett concludes, after analyzing the early Eucharistic dispute of the 1520s: “the fragmenting of