**Review Essay**

**THE REFORMATION, THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH (1557-1582), SOME POPULAR PAMPHLETS, AND SOME POPULAR PLAYS OF JONSON AND SHAKESPEARE**

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All five of the books here under review deal with the Reformation. The three which I consider first deal with persons key to that era in the history of the Western Church: Martin Luther (1483-1546), William Tyndale (1494-1536), and King Edward VI of England (1537-1553; reigned 1547-1553). The two I consider later in this essay deal with English language and literature as related to religion: one with a focus on the Bible in English translation from the first Geneva Version (1557) to the Catholic New Testament (1582); and the other treating the popular
literature of post-Reformation England, mainly in the form of pamphlets and plays. Among the last, I have chosen to focus here on Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) and his *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614); and William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and his *Measure for Measure* (1604; first printed 1623).

Each of these five volumes has much to teach us about the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century, especially since recent research has shown that these historical events need to be restudied in order to understand as fully and as clearly as possible what really happened, what the probable causes were, and what the consequences are. The books described here contribute significantly to the ongoing debate about the events and persons related to the reforms of this period.

Further, these books and others like them help us analyze our contemporary reforms and struggles, which in many ways parallel those of the time of Luther and More. I am thinking about struggles within both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, among others, between worldwide Northern (European, North American) and worldwide Southern (African, Central and South American, Asian) Christian perspectives. In addition, one can note growth worldwide among Pentecostal Christians, and in some areas there is a struggle too between Christianity and Islam. To many observers, like Philip Jenkins in an insightful essay entitled “The Next Christianity,” we are about to experience or perhaps are experiencing reformations at least as powerful and influential as the original Reformation. And they have much to offer students of the relationship between religion, history, and English language and literature besides.

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Richard Marius’s *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* is a new biography by an author who states that his “approach to Luther is essentially nonreligious” (xii). Thus, we have here a biography akin to our current ecumenical mode, avoiding either a strictly Evangelical or Catholic perspective. The result is a presentation of the known facts as objectively as possible. Marius also has chosen to focus on Luther’s life and work through 1527, only sketching in the nineteen last years of his life. “I can say only that to me the later Luther is not as interesting as the man who broke away from the pope, expecting to be followed by true Christians, only to discover that the number of true Christians as he defined them was disappointingly small” (xii).