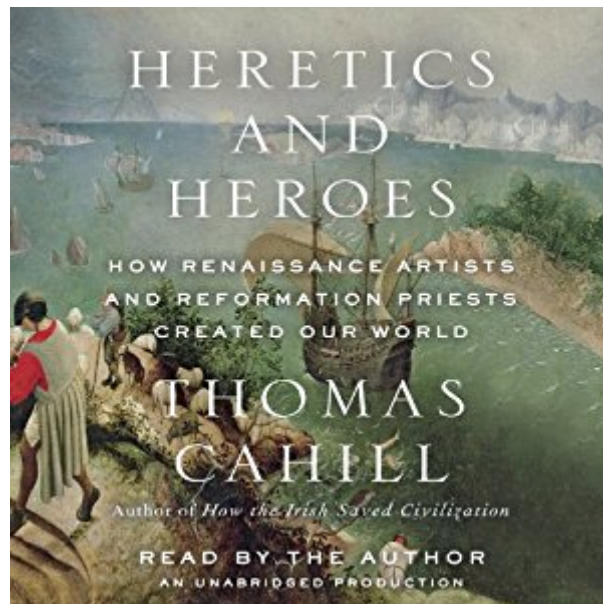


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Heretics And Heroes: How Renaissance Artists And Reformation Priests Created Our World



Synopsis

From the inimitable bestselling author Thomas Cahill, another popular history - this one focusing on how the innovations of the Renaissance and the Reformation changed the Western world. A truly revolutionary audiobook. In Volume VI of his acclaimed Hinges of History series, Thomas Cahill guides us through the thrilling period of the Renaissance and the Reformation (the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth century), so full of innovation and cultural change that the Western world would not experience its like again until the twentieth century. Beginning with the continent-wide disaster of the Black Death, Cahill traces the many developments in European thought and experience that served both the new humanism of the Renaissance and the seemingly abrupt religious alterations of the increasingly radical Reformation. This is an age of the most sublime artistic and scientific adventure, but also of newly powerful princes and armies and of newly found courage, as many thousands refuse to bow their heads to the religious pieties of the past. It is an era of just-discovered continents and previously unknown peoples. More than anything, it is a time of individuality in which a whole culture must achieve a new balance if the West is to continue.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First please let me say that this book is a beautiful physical object. The jacket and end papers are simply gorgeous. As is the design of the book--it is generously illustrated with full color art plates to help the reader better understand the periods that Mr. Cahill is writing about. Now on to the content. Mr. Cahill writes so engagingly about the distant past. That's why I eagerly await his books, even if I think I might not normally be interested in the topic. Take this book. If you asked me before reading

it if I would enjoy learning about Martin Luther and the Reformation I'd say "probably not." But Cahill makes it come so thrillingly alive and now I know WHY I should care about Martin Luther and most importantly I now do. From the Black Death to the Borgias to Michelangelo to yes, Martin Luther, *HERETICS AND HEROES* is full of riveting stories about the past. The NYT today had an excellent article about education and in it was a quote about the study of history: "The goal of teaching history has always been to make good citizens." This is from a professor at Yale named Thomas Thurston. Well, I think Mr. Cahill's books can go a long way towards making good citizens out of readers. And you'll enjoy the ride!

I've read all of Cahill's history books and this one continues where "*Mysteries of the Middle Ages*" left off. I find his writing to make for an interesting read while discussing sometimes complicated material. So if you're into history, philosophy or theology, I highly recommend this book.

I wish I could say that in the intervening seven years since the publication of *Mysteries of the Middle Ages*, the previous volume in this series, Mr. Cahill had been able to get back to the simple pleasures of history that made the first four volumes of *The Hinges of History* fun to read. Unfortunately, though he rights the ship somewhat in *Heretics and Heroes*, he struggles to find the voice of his earlier, better work. His biggest problem remains the digressions that have become so prominent in his recent work. Though he kept most of his comments in the extensive footnotes this time rather than (irritatingly) in the body of the text, his thoughts on modern controversial issues are distracting from his topic. At least he kept his tone more subdued and less offensive this time around, but his blatant editorializing really has no place here. Additionally, for the first time, Mr. Cahill's subject led him to no real through-line for his history. In the past we've learned (at least from Mr. Cahill's argument), how the Irish saved civilization, why the Greeks matter, how feminism rose during the Middle Ages, etc. This time, however, though we get some nice background on Renaissance art and the Protestant Reformation, there's nothing toward which we are pointed other than, vaguely, *our world*. This book lacks some of the punch of his earlier work. In many ways, this series has been one of diminishing returns, particularly in the last two volumes. But, out of respect for the enjoyment I had in the first four volumes, I keep sticking with Mr. Cahill. One volume left, we're told. I hope it's not too late for him to get back to the kind of book with which he started—fewer footnotes, clear argument, a focus on history, and, most importantly, and enjoyable ride.

This series is terrific! Cahill makes history come alive like one was reading a great novel--the story is great. I decided I had to have each of them in hardback, so has been a great help in acquiring the older ones, too.

I read more than half of this book, the Renaissance was my field of study in College, but this was a waste of time. I never expect exacting scholarship from 'popular' histories, but I do expect the author to refrain from speculating and pointless digressing (what does Michelangelo's homosexuality have to do with any of this?). And yes, the name dropping...so annoying and pretentious. When I came to the obnoxious and pointless end note about Jackie Onassis I was all through.

Reformation history and theology are my areas of study. I waded through quite a few of the broad generalities, tolerating the irrelevant tangents and the snide references to contemporary politics which have little to do with his supposed thesis as he discussed the Renaissance. His style was irksomely condescending, but I am not sufficiently knowledgeable to contradict or correct. But then I got to his discussion of Luther and the early Reformation. The more I read, the more I thought, "Always seeing, never perceiving; always hearing, never understanding." He grossly misunderstands the apostle Paul, and from that proceeds to misunderstand Luther's temperament, dismissing Luther's concerns in a most condescending tone, and thus fails to grasp the cultural and theological mindset of the Reformation. I am not surprised that Martin Luther in 1517 was not a 21st century New Yorker in outlook, politics, or religion. Judging by this book, it seems Cahill was. I found it very difficult to trust any of his other conclusions. The whole book seemed to me more designed to show off the author's superior wisdom and knowledge (apparently, in his mind, relative to both his subjects and his audience) rather than aid in understanding either the people or the time about which he was purportedly writing. I haven't read his other books. After this one, I'm not inclined to.

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