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Foundations

In his search for true Christianity, Martin Luther began with the soul, with his own soul, and the question at the forefront of his mind was as old as the church. How can humankind, so deeply and indelibly stained by sin, stand in a right relationship with God? In coming to terms this question, Luther laid the foundations of a theology that broke with medieval Roman Catholicism – with its emphasis on good works, earned grace, and a hierarchical church mediating between the sacred and the profane – and proposed in its place a form of Christianity that privileged the personal relationship between the believer and God and made salvation the unconditional consequence of faith in Christ as revealed through the Word of God. This breakthrough was held in place by a range of associated theological principles, primarily the so-called *sola* formulas, which later Protestant theologians would bring together in general syntheses and confessions. In addition to the central principle of justification through faith alone (*sola fide*), which was the foundation principle of all mainstream Protestant thought, there was grace alone (*sola gratia*), which taught that God is the source of all grace and salvation independent of earthly intermediaries, and Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), which emphasized the exclusive authority of the Word of God in the Protestant interpretation of Christianity. If not in substance then certainly in emphasis, each of these principles, as well as the articles of belief subsequently derived from these principles, represented a break with the thought and praxis of medieval Catholicism.[1] In its origins, the Reformation was a radical recasting of traditional Christian ideas, a theological revolution.

Yet this theological revolution will not explain the rise of Protestants as a historical phenomenon or the variety of forms they assumed in the early modern world. To do this, we have to place the Reformation movement in its historical setting and examine how it was that the reformers were able to muster so much support for their ideas among the public at large. How was it, for instance, that Luther, a relatively obscure professor of theology at a marginal university in Saxony, was able to turn his personal concerns about medieval religion into an issue that gripped the entire German nation? And similar questions can be asked of the other leading reformers of the mainstream Protestant traditions. How was it that Huldrych Zwingli, the founding father of the

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Swiss Reformation, was able to gather so much support for the new faith in Zurich and other parts of the Swiss Confederation that it ultimately led to open war? And how was it that John Calvin, the refugee reformer of Geneva, was not only able to transform the city in the image of his version of evangelical Christianity but contribute to the reform of whole territories and nations of Europe? The answer lies in the issue of order, though not in the sense of the order that grew out of the thought and energy of the Reformation, which will be the theme of subsequent chapters, but rather the social, cultural, and political order that initially embraced it. Within the geographical framework of the early Reformation – that is, the German and Swiss lands of central and southern Europe – the movement was successful because it was able to accommodate its theological principles within the traditional forms and notions of community and order. And indeed, during the early phase of the Reformation, when it appeared that these very principles might lead to an inversion of traditional relations, the reformers were quick to lend their support to the standard-bearers of the status quo. The first Protestant communities emerged remarkably quickly, and that was because in social, cultural, and political terms, the foundations were already in place.

Wittenberg and Rome

Leucorea

In the frontispiece of his massive anthology of the work of Thomas Aquinas, the *Conflatum ex Sancto Thoma* (1519), there is a portrait of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio (1456–1527), the first papal theologian to write against Martin Luther. Prierias (as he was known) appears in two different poses: on the left he kneels before an image of Christ, on the right he sits praying at his desk. And at the center of the frontispiece, suspended above Prierias, is a medallion with the likeness of Aquinas.

Given the course of Prierias's career, the image is uniquely appropriate. Born in the village of Priero in Piedmont, Prierias spent his youth and early adulthood in the Dominican order studying Aquinas. Later in life, he published a compendium of Catholic theology and dedicated it to the Medici pope Leo X. In return for his years of service, and in recognition of his academic achievement, Leo appointed Prierias to a chair of theology in Rome and elevated him to the status of Master of the Sacred Palace, an office which in effect made him the pope's personal theological counselor and head inquisitor of Rome. It was then that Prierias turned to the *Conflatum*, the work he had been planning since his student days in Bologna. Just at this stage, however, another matter was brought to his attention, the furor caused by a set of theses written by a German monk in the Saxon town of Wittenberg. Working through the final stages of the *Conflatum*, Prierias was not about to be distracted by the criticisms of an unknown monk. As a consequence, the first papal reaction to Luther, Prierias's *Dialogue Concerning Papal Power against the Presumptuous Positions of Martin Luther* (1518), was a cursory dismissal of the theses against indulgences shored up by an unyielding endorsement of papal infallibility – all of which, as Prierias himself boasted, took no more than three days to write.[2]

In fairness, Prierias can be forgiven for underestimating the importance of Martin Luther. There was no reason to assume that anyone from Wittenberg could possibly

prove a threat to the unity of the Roman Catholic Church. Wittenberg, a small town in east-central Germany, built atop a hill of white sand near the banks of the river Elbe, did not even appear on the Vatican maps. It was, to cite the Nuremberg jurist Christoph Scheurl, "on the very borderlands of civilisation," with no more than 2,500 inhabitants, most of whom were pressed together in small cottages of wood, wattle, and daub. Friedrich Myconius (1491–1546), local historian and sympathetic eye, described it as "a poor unattractive town, with small, old, ugly, low wooden houses, more like an old village than a town." The Catholic controversialist Johannes Cochlaeus (1479–1552) was even less complimentary, speaking of its "unhealthy, disagreeable climate," its "dirty homes and unclean alleys," and the "barbarous people" who made their livings from breweries and taverns.[3]

Despite the apparent poverty of the old town, however, considerable improvements had been made. Wittenberg had become the residence of the electors of Saxony, and Friedrich the Wise (1463–1525), Luther's prince and patron, had initiated a building program in the town. University colleges had been built, as had a range of stone houses, a Renaissance town hall, and even a few large patrician residences, such as the quarters bought by the artist and apothecary Lucas Cranach, newly renovated for his move from Vienna. Scattered throughout the town were churches, ornate apothecaries, bath houses, a large market, as well as a Franciscan and an Augustinian monastery. Of particular interest was the castle church, adjacent to the Ernestine residence at the western edge of the town, recently rebuilt in a gothic style to house the elector's relics. When Luther posted his theses against indulgences, it was on the door of this church, behind which lay one of the most valuable relic collections in Germany, framed by works of art by Lucas Cranach, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Vischer.

But the jewel of Wittenberg was its university, a foundation approved in 1502 by Emperor Maximilian and occasionally referred to by its Greek designation of Leucorea. According to the foundation charter, the university was established in order to honor God and bring benefit to the land and people of Electoral Saxony. These were noble sentiments, yet there was a degree of dynastic intrigue thrown in as well, for the elector had long been jealous of the fact that the neighboring duchy of Albertine Saxony (the other half of the twofold division of Saxony) had the renowned University of Leipzig while his lands had none. Friedrich set his stamp on the university from the very beginning, drawing on Tübingen for the particulars and the Italian universities for inspiration. Four faculties made up the pathways of study: the faculty of arts, and the higher faculties of law, theology, and medicine. Most interested in the study of the arts, this best reflecting his profile as the Saxon Maecenas, Friedrich made considerable efforts to recruit the leading humanist scholars. There was even a work written with this aim in mind, the *Dialogus* (1507) of Andreas Meinhardi, which portrayed the new university as a sort of classical wonderland and the town as the ideal setting for a Renaissance prince, a place where even the peasants spoke Latin.[4] Most of the original humanists came from Leipzig or Erfurt, unhappy, as was Martin Pollich von Mellerstadt, with the influence of the scholastic theologians in the ancient institutions. Others came because they considered it an opportunity to work in a less hidebound environment. Nicolaus Marschalk moved from Erfurt to Wittenberg for this reason, with a retinue of students and his own personal printing press in tow. Others may have had similar thoughts.

Whatever the reason, all of the faculty members would soon have noticed that Wittenberg was unique. No other university of the day was so institutionally adaptable, partly because of its size, and partly because of the influence of the prince, who had established a council specifically for the purpose of overseeing regular reform. It was more flexible, easier to modify, more open to change, and small enough to make it possible for ambitious individuals to dominate the faculties. It may not have occurred to Prierias, but in fact Wittenberg was the perfect setting for the rise of a reform movement, and the ideal environment for a charismatic scholar to make his mark.

Our theology

The origins of the German Reformation are located within a geometry of the theological vision of Martin Luther, the creative actions of the interpretative community that ordered and enacted his ideas, and the dialogue generated in the meeting between the perceived principles of the faith and the contexts of its realization. To speak of foundations thus evokes a complex picture, and one that requires different methods and angles of analysis. At this stage, the best place to start is with narrative, and the most appropriate setting is Wittenberg.[5]

In the late summer of 1511, Martin Luther (1483–1546) was transferred from the black cloister of the Order of the Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt to the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. The following year he was appointed to the faculty of theology, replacing the overworked vicar of his order Johannes von Staupitz (1460–1524). Aside from a few famous exceptions, such as his journeys to Augsburg and Worms or his enforced residence at the Wartburg, Wittenberg remained the backdrop of his life. As a professor of biblical theology, Luther was responsible for lecturing on the books of Scripture, something he did with great care, often having the pages of the Psalter printed on order and filling the empty spaces with interlinear glosses and cribbed marginalia. In addition to his university duties, Luther was a reader in the monastery and a preacher in the town church, where he held regular sermons from a pulpit surrounded by a frieze of the evangelists Matthew and John. Within the monastery he was director of general education, subprior, and ultimately district vicar of Meissen and Thuringia. It was a busy schedule, as Luther detailed it in a letter to his friend Johannes Lang, adding at the close, "Besides all that, I have to contend against the temptations of the world, flesh, and the devil. You can see how much leisure I have."[6]

Soon after his arrival in Wittenberg, Luther began to reflect on the traditional teachings of the Catholic church, not only from the perspective of a clergyman and theologian, but more dramatically from the viewpoint of an anxious and uncertain Christian conscience. As he later confessed,

> I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.[7]

Eventually Luther arrived at an insight that released him from his torment and led him to a new formulation of the relationship between the human and the divine:

> At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.[8]

Later known as the theological concept of justification by faith alone, this idea of passive salvation was the working hypothesis of the Reformation.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider this breakthrough, for even though this book will not be exploring theology in any depth, there were some ideas that anchored Protestant development throughout the early modern period, and *sola fide* was fundamentally important in this regard. Not only was it the first point of departure in the evangelical turn away from Roman Catholicism; it was one of the few principles held in common (with some subtle distinctions) by the entire mainstream tradition. All of the first rank of founding reformers accepted some wording of the idea that the acceptance of God, and thus the bestowal of divine grace on sinful man, was not subject to causes or conditions but purely thanks to the grace of God through faith. This insight represented a radical break with the Catholic tradition, for it spoke of an outright promise of unconditional salvation. No reasons or provisions had to be met; there was no system of worship, no cycle of redemption by means of which God's grace was acquired. Justification, in Luther's famous words, was through faith alone, for the sinner had been given the promise of unconditional salvation through the redemptive work of Christ. As a consequence, there was no longer a process of renewal or an infusion of God's grace as was taught in medieval Catholicism. Righteousness was perceived as a state beyond ourselves (*extra nos*), essentially a new relationship with God, who sees mankind in light of Christ's righteousness, rather than a new quality inherent in man. That is why faith was so important for the Reformation doctrine of justification, "for faith is the means whereby man is led from his moral subjective existence into the final validity of the righteousness of Christ, in which he is preserved for salvation – outside himself, where God looks graciously on him."[9]

This had profound and immediate consequences for the meanings and the forms of Western Christianity, for the evangelical principle of justification left no place for the gradual climb towards salvation implied by medieval religion. God became the active element in the quest for salvation, the sinner passive; Scripture became the sole standard of religious truth and the only route to salvation; faith alone, not works, was now

necessary for justification, for it led man beyond himself to the righteousness of Christ; and religion became a concern of the worshipping community, no longer the preserve of a sacerdotal elite.

Luther recalled his breakthrough on the idea of justification late in life in a preface to the Latin edition of his works (1545), claiming that his insight came to him during the time of the indulgence controversy and the subsequent conflict with Rome. As it was retrospective, colored by decades of dramatic events, historians have treated his recollection with caution.[10] Some have proposed a more gradual unfolding, beginning with his lecture exegeses (1515–17) as the more likely account, especially in view of the fact that many of the core features of his mature thought were already evident before his disputes with the Catholic authorities. Well before the posting of the theses, Luther had developed a pronounced sense of sin and a belief in the inability of fallen man to contribute anything to salvation without the grace of God; he had grown convinced that God was beyond human comprehension, and borrowed from the language of German mysticism to stress the necessity of total resignation before the majesty of the divine through faith, suffering, and the renunciation of earthly man; and he had developed a loathing for scholasticism, the theology of the schools, and the philosophy of Aristotle in particular. In contrast to the teaching of Aristotelian scholasticism, Luther had grown to believe that man could not earn grace without the participation of God. Humankind, he was convinced, did not have a natural love for the divine, and was ineluctably disposed to sin.[11]

Even as a young professor, Luther had an uncanny ability to draw people into the orbit of his ideas. He never preached to the birds in the manner of a medieval ascetic; he always sought out an audience, and he was a master at making the most of the means at hand. While in Wittenberg, he preached, lectured, circulated open letters, drew up theses for debate, spoke in confidence to colleagues, and defended his theological insights in public disputations – and to great effect. Within a few years, his ideas had become the subject of considerable interest at the university, and there was already a group of Wittenberg scholars who shared a similar approach to the faith.

First of the university intellectuals to join Luther was Johannes Lang (1487–1548). A former student from Erfurt, like Luther, Lang too had immersed himself in the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers and had grown critical of traditional authorities. One of the first traces of the reforming spirit can be found in Lang's work on the letters of Jerome, where he made the critical distinction between the language of scholastic theology and the purity of Scripture. Other sympathetic minds followed: Nikolaus von Amsdorf (1483–1565), a lecturer in Wittenberg before Luther arrived, who confessed to the sense of freedom he felt as he cast off his reliance on scholasticism and turned to the works of Paul and Augustine; Johannes Dölsch (d.1523), whose work *Defensio* (1520) charted his gradual drift away from scholastic teaching towards "the truth of Christ," and who also recounted how Luther had worked for years to break down his trust in scholasticism and bring him closer to the new teaching; and Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), perhaps the foremost theologian in Electoral Saxony before Luther's rise to fame, who, though at first resistant to the new teaching, was won over by his younger colleague and went on to become one of the most vocal and productive of the Wittenberg reformers, publishing a steady stream of diatribes and counterblasts against the scholastic controversialists.[12]

Others came from outside of Saxony, either to work at the university or to be near Luther. Philipp Melanchthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, Caspar Cruciger the Elder, Justus Jonas, and Georg Rörer, to name a few, became part of what Luther termed the "school of Wittenberg" (*schola Witebergensis*), and all became instrumental in the rise of the Reformation movement. Luther's celebrity has eclipsed the renown of those who worked beside him, but without the practical support of colleagues like Cruciger and Bugenhagen (the editors, the translators, the popularizers) or the emotional support from friends like Amsdorf and Jonas (the drinking companions, the extended families), or the intellectual guidance from men like Staupitz and Melanchthon (the mentors, the systematizers), Luther would not have become the reformer of the German Nation.[13]

Understanding the origins of the German Reformation requires a sense of the close-quartered community where Luther and the reformers lived and worked.[14] Despite a fairly sizeable student body, Wittenberg remained a small town. A local inhabitant could have walked through the entire intramural close from the Elster gate to the Coswiger gate in 10 minutes. There was little space separating the buildings or the inhabitants, and most locals would have been familiar with the workings of the municipal landscape. There must have been a strong sense of closeness and contingency in a setting on this scale. Certainly the early reformers thought in these terms, even if they moved at different levels in different spheres. Throughout his career, for instance, Luther maintained close relations with the Wittenberg authorities, and not just with advisors of the elector such as Georg Spalatin, but with lesser urban officials as well, some of whom stood as godparents to his children and wrote deeply sympathetic letters of consolation when they died. Men such as these became the technocrats of the Reformation. But even more important were the close relationships among the Wittenberg reformers themselves, with Luther remaining the dominant figure until his death. All manner of strategies and ties kept the constellations in place – emotional bonds, intellectual empathy, powers of patronage, force of will.[15] Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), who was the youngest of the first generation of reformers, had a deep emotional and psychological dependence on Luther. He never stopped believing that Luther was divinely inspired, that he was a prophet who had been sent to Wittenberg, the "New Jerusalem," to free the Word from its Babylonian captivity.

The Reformation thus owes its origins to a group of university men, joined in some measure by religious sensitivity, philosophical conviction, and hermeneutical acumen, who developed a vision of spiritual renewal while working together in Wittenberg. "In every age it must be remembered," remarked the humanist Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530) in 1520, "that the learned of Wittenberg were the first who, after so many centuries, began to open their eyes, to know the true from the false, and to distinguish the depraved way of philosophy from Christian theology."[16] Even in the beginning – indeed, especially in the beginning – the Wittenberg movement was monumental in its province, nothing less than rethinking the relationship between humankind and the divine. The main objective was to read Scripture in its proper light. Indeed, for many reformers, this was their central sin in the eyes of the Catholic authorities. "The Wittenberg theologians have begun to discover the truth by way of Holy Writ itself" was how Karlstadt put it in his *Apologeticae Conclusiones* (1518), "that is why they have

been labelled heretics by those who, with Aristotle's help, interpret the Bible at their own discretion."[17]

It was this hermeneutical shift, this move away from a reliance on glossaries to a direct encounter with Scripture, that served as the foundation for the making of the *schola Witebergensis*. As the interpretative community began to expand beyond the walls of Wittenberg, however, the reform initiative no longer remained a type of contained experiment within a marginal university. Once Luther and the Wittenberg theologians began to engage the Catholic authorities outside of the town walls it took on the form and dynamics of a popular movement and turned into a sociopolitical event. But not before the theologians had the final word.

Theses, dialogue, and debate

When the conflict between Wittenberg and Rome began it was brought about by a longstanding and relatively trivial issue – the sale of indulgences. In October 1517 the Dominican preacher Johannes Tetzel (1465–1519) was traveling through the dioceses of Magdeburg and Brandenburg preaching the plenary indulgence proclaimed in 1515 by Pope Leo X. According to the instructions drafted for Tetzel by the archbishop of Mainz, the indulgence had the power to effect a complete remission of sins, including a diminution of their sentence for those loved ones languishing in purgatory. The indulgence worked as a kind of promissory note of divine grace: there was no sin too grave, as Tetzel reminded his audience, that might not be wiped clean by its salvific powers. "The claims of this shameful monk [Tetzel] were unbelievable," wrote the historian Myconius in his *Historia Reformationis*; "thus he said that if someone had slept with Christ's dear mother, the pope had power . . . to forgive as long as money was put into the indulgence coffer . . . He claimed that in the very moment the coin rang in the coffer, the soul rose up to heaven."[18]

As both a pastor and a theologian, Luther found the claims of indulgence peddlers like Tetzel shameful and misleading. For over three years he had been developing a theology based on the premise that sin was an indelible condition of humankind; it could not be wiped clean by the rites and rituals of the church. Any promise of automatic salvation (Tetzel's coin in the coffer), even if it had the imprimatur of the papacy, was a delusion and a betrayal of Christ. Fearing for the salvation of his parishioners, that they might place too much trust in indulgences and lose sight of faith, Luther forwarded 95 theses to the archbishop of Mainz on October 31, 1517 along with his critical thoughts on indulgences and his advice for reform. No longer just addressing local students or university colleagues, and no longer just confiding to members of his order, Luther spoke as a theologian to the congregation of the Christian faithful.[19]

In Wittenberg, despite the fact that Luther had (allegedly) posted a copy of the theses on the door of the castle church in the hope they would provoke debate, the theses fell flat. Outside of Wittenberg, however, interest was stirred. In this instance, a rarity in his career, Luther had had nothing to do with the dissemination of his work, as the theses had been taken without his knowledge, translated into German, and handed over to a printer. Reactions were mixed. Predictably, many humanists, Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1466–1536) among them, welcomed another critique of the notorious practice of

indulgence peddling. The papal theologians, in contrast, recognized the dangers lurking in the depths of Luther's theses and condemned them as heretical and a direct challenge to the authority of Rome. Tetzel went so far as to prepare his own set of theses in defense of indulgences and promised he would have Luther in a bathing cap – the traditional garb of a heretic chained to a pyre – within three weeks.[20] The papal theologians were less dramatic, but they too considered it a serious matter and issued a summons for Luther to appear in Rome.

After the posting of the theses the Wittenberg movement became the Luther Affair (*causa Lutheri*), a public event. Although Luther still spoke of "our theology," even after his meeting in Augsburg in 1518 with the papal legate Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534), the first attempt at reconciliation with the Catholic authorities, by this stage he was clearly seen as the inspirational leader. And he had done much to fashion his fame. Within the university he had used every means available to get his ideas across – lectures, sermons, disputations, and a flood of German and Latin writings. Following the spread of his theses against Scholasticism and indulgences in 1517 he began to tailor his works for a wider public, writing both the *Resolutiones* and *A Sermon on Indulgences and Grace* (1518) in order to ensure that there be no misunderstanding about his position in the indulgence debate. He also emerged as a public figure, spreading his theological insights in lectures and disputations and impressing many onlookers with his powerful presence and his skills as a debater. Years after Luther's death the evangelical clergyman Martin Frecht would remember the Heidelberg disputation (April 1518) as the birthplace of the Reformation, for that is where Luther, speaking in front of Frecht and a host of other future reformers, first presented his theology to the world beyond Wittenberg.[21]

But it was Luther's appearance at the debate in Leipzig in 1519, where he came face to face with Johannes Eck (1486–1543), the premier scholastic theologian of the Holy Roman Empire, that made the greatest impression on the growing community of supporters. The debate had been called into being during a war of words between Karlstadt and Eck, the former thinking it necessary to meet the champion of the papal curia in Germany in order to defend the Wittenberg theology. "I have decided to endure war and tyrannical siege," wrote Karlstadt, "rather than a perverse peace at the price of disparaging the divine writings."[22] Staged by Duke Georg of Albertine Saxony (1471–1539), who would soon be revealed as Luther's most active opponent in northern Germany, the debate was viewed by papal controversialists as an opportunity to discredit the fledgling movement and pull it up by its roots. In the end, however, it was Luther and the Wittenberg party that emerged with the better hand. Once engaged in debate, Luther used every means at his disposal to sway public opinion, from the works he published before and after Leipzig to his hand and facial gestures in the lecture hall. And it had an effect. By the end of the debate Eck had no doubt that it was Luther alone who was responsible for the rise of the new teaching (*nova doctrina*) and called for his condemnation. Melanchthon, in contrast, expressed his wonder at Luther's performance ("his pure and Christian spirit"), thus anticipating the general cast of mind that turned Luther into a celebrity and his reform initiative into a religious movement.[23]

The public confrontation between Luther and Eck in Leipzig was the turning point of the early Reformation, both in terms of ideas and perception. Once the two

protagonists met, each representing the opposite poles of the emerging divide, the points of disagreement came clearly into focus. For Eck the heart of the matter was papal authority. Either Luther recognized the divine foundation of the papacy and its primacy over the church or he did not. If he did not, then he was a heretic in the mold of the Bohemian Jan Hus (c.1372–1415), who had been burned at the stake in Constance for his teachings, and his sole aim was to undermine the faith and turn the church into an abomination, a *monstrum*. Luther defended himself by asserting that Christ alone was the head of the church. He agreed that the papacy had been founded according to the will of God, but disputed the claim that it enjoyed primacy over all Christians, Greeks included, and he expressed doubts over whether belief in the supremacy of the Roman church was necessary for salvation. To make his point, Luther even went so far as to defend views of the church associated with Hus, an utterance which shocked the onlookers, delighted Eck, and lifted Duke Georg of Saxony out of his seat. "A plague on it!" were his purported words.[24]

Questioning papal primacy was a dangerous theme, as Eck realized, but there was a deeper issue at stake. Luther held that Scripture was the ultimate arbiter of Christian truth. Other sources might offer insight, but no other source of knowledge or body of writing stood on the same level. For Luther, all other authorities were measured according to their proximity, historically and theologically, to Scripture. Eck, however, without disputing the primacy of Scripture, believed that recourse to other authorities (church fathers, canon law, conciliar decrees) was necessary in order to obtain certain knowledge. Proof was established through the accumulation of citations and witnesses in support of an idea. This was a traditional, and orthodox, approach to the faith. Luther thought that it failed to get to the heart of religion. He likened Eck to a spider on the water, just sitting on the surface of things.[25]

Leipzig was important in a more general historical sense as well, for it worked as a catalyst for public perception. Despite the fact that a record of the meeting had been carefully transcribed by notaries and sent to Paris and Erfurt, no swift judgment followed. Consequently, it was left to the intellectuals of Germany to carry on the debate.[26] This was the moment when the concerns at the heart of the reform movement in Wittenberg spilled over into the public realm. In this sense, Luther and Karlstadt had been the victors, for they had insisted at the outset that the themes of the disputation should be made available to everyone, not just professors and clergymen but equally to Christians with no claims to expertise in theology. The search for religious truth was no longer preserved for the papacy and the councils alone: it had become a debate, a dialogue, an exchange of ideas rooted in the higher concerns of Scripture in which laymen as well as clergymen had the right to take part.[27] Leipzig was also instrumental in drawing the lines of division. It pushed Luther out of the Catholic fold, confirmed Eck and the papal theologians in their suspicions of heresy, forced the theologians and the humanists to think in terms of contrasting and incompatible truths, and called on the secular authorities to act, either in support of Wittenberg or in support of Rome.

In 1520, partly in response to the findings of Eck, the papacy issued a bull of excommunication. Entitled *Exsurge Domine*, and like all papal bulls taking its title from its preliminary clause ("Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause"), it expressed deep sadness that errors so "heretical, false, scandalous, or offensive to pious ears" should

have arisen in the German nation, for the pope had always "held this nation in the bosom of our affection" and the Germans had "always been the bitterest opponents of heresies." It then went on to list the errors found in Luther's works, 41 in all.[28] The pope gave Luther 60 days to recant and submit to the judgment of Rome. Eck, along with Girolamo Aleander (1480–1542), one of the two nuncios commissioned by the papacy to disseminate the bull throughout the lands of Germany, managed to deliver it to the bishoprics of Meissen, Merseburg, and Brandenburg without difficulty, but in the cities the people proved more defiant. In Erfurt the students dubbed it a "bulloon" and threw copies into the river to see if it would float. In Torgau printed copies of the bull were torn up and scattered in the streets. In Ernestine Saxony the district officials were instructed to resist the bull and to rip it down should the parish priest post a copy on the church.[29]

In 1521 the circle of censure was brought to a close when Luther was condemned by the highest secular authority in the realm. On April 17, 1521, the reformer appeared before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–58) and the imperial estates in Worms to answer the charges of heresy. The following day, in a larger hall where the hearing had been moved owing to the press of the crowds, Luther gave a defense of his writings. In reply to the demand that he stop dissimulating and give a clear answer ("without horns"), he offered a closing statement of his convictions:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason – for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves – I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.[30]

Emperor Charles V read out his answer to the Estates the following day. It was a summary rejection of Luther's reformist program and an unequivocal confirmation of his Catholic faith and the orthodoxy of his dynastic heritage. On May 26, 1521, the emperor issued the Edict of Worms, a decree which endorsed the papal bull of excommunication and placed Luther under the ban of the empire. Luther's life was no longer protected by the law, his theology was condemned, and his books were to be eradicated from the memory of man.

Despite the efforts of both the Catholic and the imperial authorities, however, the Wittenberg theology spread. From 1522 onward clergymen began to preach in an evangelical manner, which generally meant speaking critically of the Catholic church and its more obvious failings or emphasizing the need for faith and Scripture alone. Johannes Sylvius Egranus lectured in this fashion in Zwickau, as did Wolfgang Fuß in Borna and Nikolaus Hausmann in Schneeberg. Hundreds of other names could be added to the list. For their troubles these men were termed Martinians, evangelicals, or heretics and cited before the authorities, though they did not always think of themselves as representing a school of thought so much as preaching the Word of God. Egranus, for instance, who also railed against indulgences, the wealth of the papacy, and traditional rites and ceremonies, avoided direct association with Wittenberg. "We should not be divided into sects," he wrote,

> so that we say "I am a Martinian, I am an Eckite, I am an Emserite, I am a Philippist, I am a Karlstadter, I am a Leipziger, I am a papist" and whatever more sects there may be. I will follow Saint Paul and say that I am of Jesus Christ. I preach the gospel . . . In sum, I am a follower of the Gospel and a Christian.[31]

In the majority of cases, however, the local reform movements sought direction from Wittenberg and consciously emulated events in the electoral town. Altenburg, for example, secured an evangelical preacher by seeking Luther's intervention, while the difficulties facing the commune of Leisnig not only prompted the local authorities to write to the reformer but inspired Luther to publish a general tract in defense of local initiatives. Luther remained a tireless missionary in his Saxon homeland, embarking on a series of preaching tours in the early years, notably in Zwickau, Torgau, Erfurt, and Weimar, and dispatching letters of advice to sympathetic communities. And where Luther and his university colleagues were unable to intervene directly there quickly emerged a generation of clergymen who had studied at the feet of the reformers in Wittenberg and then taken the new theology back to their parishes and towns. As it would be tedious to relate too many examples, the following short histories will make the point: Gottschalk Kruse, a Benedictine monk from Braunschweig who journeyed to Wittenberg to get a grounding in the new faith and was awarded, through Luther's recommendation, with a preaching post in Celle; Johannes Briesmann, a Franciscan from Cottbus who sought out Luther in Wittenberg and stayed long enough to get a doctorate in theology, thereafter becoming an important figure in the spread of the teaching in Prussia; and the Basel Dominican Jakob Strauß who was forced to leave his native soil of Switzerland because of his evangelical preaching and made his way to Wittenberg to study, later planting the faith in Wertheim, Eisenach, and Baden-Baden.[32]

It was in this fashion, through this piecemeal crusade of committed evangelicals, that the early Reformation movement spread throughout northern and central Germany. And it soon threatened the very sovereignty of the Catholic church. Luther claimed that this early success was owed to the Word of God. Cochlaeus, his Catholic opponent, put the matter down to the devil. But surely both men must have been surprised by both the sheer speed at which the movement spread as well as the seeming ease with which it was aligned with the other concerns of the early sixteenth-century empire. It was almost as if the German nation had seen it coming.

Martin Luther and the German nation

With the publication of *Exsurge Domine*, the movement associated with Luther and Wittenberg was placed in opposition to Rome. And yet it was not this juxtaposition of extremes that gave Protestantism its early momentum or its initial shape. It was rather the seeming familiarity of the message that struck the crucial chords. In academic circles, the Reformation evolved as part of a "constructive misunderstanding," a misreading made by many humanists in Germany who viewed Luther as a fellow crusader against scholasticism and the Luther Affair as one in a series of conflicts between the forerunners of the new learning and the aged custodians of the old.[33] And there were good reasons for this association. Since its foundation, Wittenberg had been

one of the leading centers of humanism in Germany. Its reform program was the most progressive of its kind in the empire, setting out to reduce the influence of scholastic theology and increase the profile of the *studia humanitatis*. Little wonder the German humanists at first considered Luther one of their own: he shared the same interest in language, the same *ad fontes* approach (which was the deep need to turn to the original sources in the search for truth), the same low opinion of scholasticism, and the same desire to preserve the distance between philosophy and theology.[34] He also touched on the same nerves: the nascent sense of nationalism, the mood of anxious presentiment, the prevalent anticlericalism, and the apocalypticism common to the late medieval age. Luther was lumped together with the champions of secular reform, his persecution at the hands of the papal theologians viewed as part of the same battle for the liberties of the German nation that had been waged by the humanists for over a century.

What this suggests is that the success of the evangelical movement was due in large part to the propitious intersection of common concerns. To borrow a metaphor that has been used to explain the rise of the new scientific paradigms of the age, Luther stepped into an already existing cultural and linguistic space. His ideas were close enough in kind to fill the void. The issue of national identity will make the point. When the Luther Affair first surfaced, two notions of German identity were in transition. On the one hand there was the concept of the *Imperium Romanum*, the sacral empire bequeathed to the German kings bound up with the superintendence of Christendom, and on the other the idea of the German nation, a secular community defined primarily by language, custom, history, and political pragmatism.[35] By the late fifteenth century, the two traditions were beginning to overlap and a vague sense of national identity was emerging. Early efforts were religiously inspired and antipapal in tone. From the work of Nicholas of Cusa and Gregor Heimburg to the Grievances of the German Nation (*Gravamina nationis Germanicae*), the underlying thread was the desire to invest the German church with its own legitimacy and remove Rome from national affairs. Typical of the type of antipapal invective was the sentiment expressed in the works of Conrad Celtis (1459–1508): "Resume, O men of Germany, that spirit of older time wherewith you so often confounded and terrified the Romans. Behold the frontiers of Germany: gather together her torn and shattered lands!"[36] In a similar vein, humanists such as Celtis, Sebastian Brant, Jacob Wimpfeling, and above all Ulrich von Hutten set out to rewrite the history of the German nation and return to its vernacular origins. Little wonder the *Germania* of Tacitus proved such a central text during this period. It was the ideal foundation text for the emerging notion of identity and its encapsulation of the supposed primal virtues of the Germanic tribes: virtue, honesty, a love of liberty, and an honest and untainted piety.

With the appearance of Martin Luther and the early Reformation, this dormant sense of community and expectation assumed both an immediacy and a point of focus. The Luther Affair worked as a catalyst for public perception, convincing people to believe that the time to act had finally arrived. In large part, this was down to Luther's own skills as a publicist. In his reforming tract *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther wrote directly to the ruling elite of the German nation and outlined a program of reform that was little less than a manifesto for a national movement. Luther did not just list the grievances and hope for better days as did the authors of medieval tracts; he targeted the cause of Germany's misery (the papacy) and called for immediate action. The *Address*

was a calculated step taken by Luther in order to transform his religious concerns into political action. And it was skillfully done. Source analysis has revealed that Luther drew on an unprecedentedly wide range of materials in order to equate his cause with the cause of the German nation. Borrowing from the traditional themes in the grievances and various conciliar tracts, he also seems to have made use of more radical medieval reforming works such as the *Reformatio Sigismundi* (1439). The final effect was to consolidate and crystallize the emerging sense of national or ethnic community and conflate its concerns with the agenda of Wittenberg.[37]

But the sense of expectancy and congruity ran deeper than a single text. Luther's words had resonance, not only because he was a writer of genius, but because they spoke directly to the long-forecast idea of a "great change" in circulation during the late medieval period. For those familiar with the prophetic traditions, it was not difficult to cast Luther as the long-promised *reformator* come to unite the German peoples or to see him as the fulfillment of the medieval prophecies. When Luther first appeared, many of his followers referred to him as the White Rider of Revelation, the herald of the last days; others spoke in terms of a prophet, a holy man, an apostle reborn or an angel sent by God. Necessarily, Luther as the figure or symbol of apocalyptical expectation had a powerful historical dimension. His appearance was both the confirmation and the final realization of a long tradition of medieval prophecies.[38]

Working within this framework of forecast and presentiment, Luther built on the sense of community by identifying the papacy as the Antichrist and insisting that the Germans represented, and had always represented, the opposite. In doing this he introduced two insights that broke with the past. First, he ignored the corpus of medieval apocalyptical speculation and located the proofs in Scripture – it was solely a theological or exegetical claim; and second, he made the Antichrist a collective rather than an individual threat. As he wrote in the *Babylonian Captivity*, the final antagonist was not a person but an institution located in place and time.[39] This had the effect of situating and pluralizing the enemy, creating a foil or a mirror for the fabrication of identity and making it possible to establish boundaries and frontiers.

The first attempt at visualizing the contrasts appeared in a series of woodcuts by the Wittenberg artist Lukas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) entitled *Passional Christi et Antichristi* (1521). The images worked as a set of antitheses, pitching the evils of the papacy against the virtues of Christ. The following year, with the publication of Luther's New Testament translation, the eschatological dimensions of this division were further emphasized in the illustrations prepared for the Book of Revelation. The notorious papal tiara atop the Beast of the Apocalypse was perhaps the most shocking image, and the most direct proof that Luther was working behind the scenes.[40] This use of imagery was taken one step further with the appearance of Luther's Bible translation of 1534, which came with a series of woodcuts projecting this cosmic battle in nationalistic terms. Kneeling before the Babylonian whore were the figures of Emperor Charles, Archduke Ferdinand, Duke Georg of Saxony, and Johann Tetzel, all of whom were associated with Catholic resistance, while the cityscape of Babylon, based on the image of Rome taken from Schedel's *Weltchronik* (1493), was swallowed up by the earth. In contrast to this, Luther's patron, Elector Friedrich the Wise, appeared in the guise of pious kings of the Old Testament, while Luther himself played the role of a most sacred high priest.[41] Later editions of the Bible would develop these types of

images, with woodcuts of Worms or Augsburg serving as biblical cityscapes and Germanic tribesmen standing in for Old Testament figures, thus further biblicizing German history and stressing the contrasts at the root of the conflict. Many readers must have reacted like Georg von Anhalt (1507–53), Lutheran bishop of Merseburg, who remarked how glad he was to be alive in an age when "the most holy David and the holy prophets speak to us so clearly in both words and meaning, as if they had been born and raised in our own mother tongue."[42]

Indeed, the German language in its written form is the most obvious "national" trait that evolved in a close dialogue with the Reformation, the most famous tribute being Jakob Grimm's later reference to High German as the "Protestant dialect." More than any other author of the age, Luther invested the vernacular with both the facility and the authority to serve as the language for a new sense of imagined community and bound the rise of early Protestantism with evolving ideas of culture and identity. He did this in two ways.

First, Luther used the vernacular much more effectively than ever before as a means of defining the boundaries of the community. Philologists no longer speak of Luther as the founder of modern German, but there is little doubt that he was the force behind the evolution of the language forged out of the various dialects in and around the lands of Saxony and middle Germany. From the very outset, especially after the appearance of the New Testament translation, Luther's use of German emerged as a model of proper style. The reformer even charged some of his Catholic opponents with having stolen "my language." It was soon enshrined in a wide range of publications – mandates, ordinances, tomes and pamphlets, poems and prose, and books of grammar.[43] Luther's vast literary output and his unprecedented ability to reduce and refine the vernacular to a level of general readability laid the foundations for a community empowered by a common printed language, much more aware of where the center and the peripheries lay. The Basel edition of Luther's New Testament (1523), for instance, came with a glossary of unknown Thuringian terms rendered into Swiss-German in order to enable the reader to follow the translation. It was a minor technical innovation, but the very attempt to connect the two vernaculars in the southern empire and elsewhere generated a sense of linguistic self-consciousness without precedent in German history.[44]

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Luther elevated the status of the language. Not only did he demonstrate that German could bear the burden of theological discourse, but his translation of the Bible entrusted the vernacular with the weight of God's Word. "I thank God," wrote Luther, "that I may find and hear my Lord in the German tongue in a manner which I have not experienced before, neither in Latin, nor in Greek, nor in Hebrew."[45] From this point forward, the way to God was through the vernacular, for with the appearance of the New Testament and its massive success, few people could now seriously doubt that a written language capable of speaking for the divine might not also mediate between the dialects of upper and lower Germany. Luther's Bible conveyed this idea to the German public, and ultimately it helped to create a sense of linguistic community. For centuries children learned the basics of grammar by pouring over this text – its style, rhythm, syntax, images, allusions, metaphors, and treasury of words. Some scholars consider the Luther Bible not just the crucible for the making of the language, but the early-modern German imagination *tout court*.[46]

In a less precise manner as well, Luther helped to create a common cultural language for the German nation. He was the ideal subject for the myths prepared by previous generations, and within a few years the Wittenberg reformer had become a symbol at play in the minds of the German people. A flood of publications followed the close of the Worms diet, compact narratives describing the reformer's journey from Wittenberg to Worms and his famous speech before Charles V. One pamphlet went so far as to depict the hearing as a repeat of the passion of Christ, with all of the participants taking on biblical roles. In the short period between the disputation in Leipzig and events in Worms, the iconography of Luther had been appropriated and reshaped under the weight of public expectation. He was portrayed as an Augustinian monk, a doctor and man of the Bible, and the saintly prophet of God shadowed by the Holy Spirit. Nor did it end there. After Worms, images of Luther entered the bloodstream of the body politic, the most striking being a woodcut designed by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543) entitled *Hercules Germanicus* (1523), which has a tonsured Luther in his monastic habit wrapped in a lion's pelt and wielding a club against the enemies of truth. Vanquished at his feet are the scholastic figures of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, while he grapples with his most recent victim (and real-life adversary) the Dominican inquisitor Jakob Hochstraten.[47] Here was the perfect composite image of the new German hero: a man wrapped in history and prophecy doing battle with the champions of Catholic Rome.

Emperor Charles V had issued the Edict of Worms with a view to preventing the spread of the Wittenberg movement beyond the walls of the university town. The mandate had not only been directed at the theological dangers posed by Luther's teaching but at its perceived threat to the social and political fabric as well. Once issued, however, as we have seen, the edict made little impact. Moreover, with the emperor absent from the German lands and the regency council pulled in different directions by the variety of ruling opinion, there was no effective political opposition to the spread of the early Reformation. Some princes moved to contain the movement, in particular Duke Georg of Saxony; but many if not most of the estates were rather noncommittal, preferring to wait until the emperor negotiated a settlement while allowing for the spread of the Word in their principalities. But those waiting for a swift political solution were waiting in vain. In the end, the problems raised by the evangelical movement were not really addressed until the publication of the recess of the Diet of Speyer on August 27, 1526. Even then the solution was ambiguous and provisional, but it granted just enough latitude to release reforming energies. The recess ordered the estates to pursue a policy in religious affairs mindful that they should "hope and trust to answer to God and his Imperial Majesty"[48] Although intended as a stop-gap interdict against further innovation, those princes and estates sympathetic to the movement interpreted the wording in a positive sense and viewed it as the political endorsement of their right to reform the territorial church. Against the actual intentions of the emperor and his imperial officials, the recess provided the German princes with legal and political legitimation for the spread of the faith.

Landgrave Philipp of Hesse was the first to act in a positive way to the Speyer decree, but it was the electors of Saxony, guided by the reformers Luther and Melanchthon, who provided the blueprint for the princely Reformation in Germany in the 1520s. The process and the timetable varied from territory to territory, but in

general all of the Lutheran rulers took similar steps in order to fashion a Reformation church, beginning with the toleration of the preaching of the Word clear and pure, the appointment of evangelical clergymen, the change of the religious service, the publication of confessional statements (church orders, visitation orders, catechisms), and the construction of the territorial church. In the Lutheran variant this meant, as well as the establishment of regular visitations, marriage courts, and consistories, a range of new officials, starting at the level of the parish with the Protestant clergyman and reaching to the superintendents at the upper echelons of government. The first Lutheran Reformations of this kind occurred in the lands of Saxony (1522–28), Hesse (1526–32), Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach (1528–33), Braunschweig-Lüneburg (1526–27), Anhalt (1526), and Mansfeld (1525–26), and others would follow in Württemberg (1534), Brandenburg (1540), and Albertine Saxony (1539).[49] Later in the century territorial Reformations of Reformed (or Calvinist) Protestantism – sometimes known under the rubric "Second Reformation" – would intensify the process, as the German lands experienced the onset of religious division and the rise of the confessional dynamic.

Thus, when Charles V did return to Germany in 1529 following his coronation in Italy, his hair newly styled in the antiquated fashion of a Roman emperor, he was confronted by an alliance of princes and cities that thought of themselves as evangelicals (and later as Protestants), opponents of Rome, and supporters of the teachings of Wittenberg. Indeed, when Charles appeared at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, the Lutheran alliance was consolidated enough to submit a joint confession of the faith prepared by Philipp Melanchthon that referred to the Catholic estates in German as the "other party" and detailed the principles of their own faith "and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories."[50]

Swiss Protestants

The gospel of Christian freedom

By the time Luther appeared before the imperial estates at Worms in 1521, preachers of the evangelical message had emerged throughout the German-speaking lands, and that included the region at the southern edge of the empire, the Swiss Confederation. The Swiss Reformation was guided by its own reformers and shaped by its own historical dynamic, yet the general formula was similar to that of Saxony. Here too we can see the centrality of the direct witness of Scripture against the assumed errors and inventions of Catholic tradition, the coming-into-being of religious awareness by way of dialogue and debate, and the strength of purpose that resulted when the early evangelical movement joined forces with the ideals of an imagined community. But there were significant differences as well, significant enough for historians to treat the Protestantism of the Swiss tradition as an independent phenomenon.

The Reformation in Switzerland traces its origins to the city-state of Zurich under the leadership of the stipendiary preacher of the Great Minster in the city, Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). Unlike Luther, Zwingli was not a university professor embroiled in a controversy with Rome, nor was he part of a community of like-minded

scholars along the lines of the *schola Witebergensis*. Zwingli was rather closer to the type of disaffected parish clergyman that made up the first generation of evangelical preachers, driven by a private sense of religious mission. Born into a family of farmers in Wildhaus in the Toggenburg valley, Zwingli completed his primary and secondary education in Basel and Bern before attending university in Vienna and finishing a masters degree in Basel. With a relatively basic theological background, Zwingli was ordained into the priesthood in 1506 and took up his first post in the rural canton of Glarus, where he remained for ten years before moving on to the parish of Einsiedeln in 1516. His path to reform was more of a private journey than that of Luther. By way of letters and personal contacts, Zwingli was able discourse with "learned and excellent men" in Zurich and beyond, but his Reformation was never conceived in the same manner as Luther's. And indeed this holds true for the Zurich Reformation in general. Zwingli's success in Zurich was not so much due to his ability to see through an abstract theory of religious truth as his ability to provide biblical solutions to the religious problems revealed (and largely created) by the evangelical movement.

Much of Zwingli's early theological development occurred years before his arrival in Zurich while he was serving as a parish priest in Glarus and Einsiedeln. It was during the tail end of this period that he began to turn against the scholasticism he had learned as a student and embark on an intensive study of Erasmus's recent edition of the New Testament. Eventually, close study of Scripture led him to emphasize the same key principles that defined the German reform movement, including justification through faith and Scripture alone, both of which, in slightly altered form, emerged as core principles of Swiss Reformation thought. Zwingli always claimed that he came upon his insights independently of Luther, that he was a preacher of the gospel as early as 1516. By 1520, he conceded, he had become aware of the Luther Affair, but Zwingli never thought of himself as a disciple or a follower of Wittenberg, and he certainly did not think that the religion he preached owed its origins to a Saxon monk. "I will not bear Luther's name," he wrote, "for I have read little of his teaching and have intentionally refrained from reading his books . . . I will have no name but that of my Captain, Christ, whose soldier I am . . . yet I value Luther as highly as anyone alive."[51] Whatever the degree of influence, it is clear that by 1519, once Zwingli had taken up his post in Zurich, he was publicly preaching directly from Scripture and touching on the foundational themes of the early Reformation. In addition to his powerful anticlerical, or anti-papal, message (he once compared the pope to a sea serpent), he also emphasized the need for faith in place of a reliance on works and the absolute centrality of Scripture to the Christian life.

The Swiss Reformation began with an event.[52] In Zurich, on Ash Wednesday in April 1522, a group of evangelical sympathizers met in the house of the printer Christoph Froschauer and ate sausages, thus deliberately breaking the Lenten fast. Zwingli himself did not partake, but he published a sermon soon afterward that made it clear he did not think that Catholic laws such as those pertaining to fasts were crucial to salvation. The sermon was a turning point in the Swiss Reformation, for not only did it place the issue of evangelical reform atop the political agenda and thereby necessitate the intervention of the magistracy, it also spelled out the two central themes of Zwinglian theology: first, the nature of Christian freedom and its relationship to unnecessary laws; and second, the role of Scripture as the

standard of religious truth. But the sermon was not the first time Zwingli had defended these ideas. Since 1520, he had been preaching against what he termed the "invented, external worship" of Catholicism, and that included devotion of saints, religious festivals, some forms of tithes, monastic orders, and clerical celibacy (indeed, he married a widow in 1522). In the *Apologeticus Archeteles* (1522), his first major statement of faith, Zwingli opened with an appeal to his countrymen to defend the freedom of the gospel against human doctrines and false prophets, whether they be bishops, popes, or general councils. The only certain guide was Scripture. Nor was Zwingli the lone voice of evangelical reform in Zurich. Leo Jud (1482–1542), who had been Zwingli's colleague in Einsiedeln and had translated some of Luther's Latin works into German, was also preaching against false laws and superfluous images, and in 1522 he performed a vernacular baptism in the Great Minster.

Both men were able to preach in this manner because Zwingli had the support of the city magistracy. The reasons for the close cooperation between the reformers and the council will be the subject of a subsequent chapter, but even at this early stage the point must be made that the Zurich Reformation was an archetypical magisterial Reformation, guided and enacted by the political elite. For its part, the council protected Zwingli from the declarations of the Swiss Diet, which demanded the suppression of Luther's books and associated teaching, and the commissions of the bishop of Constance, who as the ruling prelate of Zurich was responsible for religious affairs in the city. For his part, Zwingli promised to preach "the holy gospel and pure holy Scriptures" in line with the council's mandate and avoid issues that gave rise to unrest. As early as his fast sermon of 1522, Zwingli counseled restraint, advising his readers that since the practice was not bad or dishonorable, "one should peacefully follow it, as long and as much as the greater portion of men might be offended at its violation."[53]

By way of this incremental and closely managed process of reform, the Reformation took shape in the city. By April 1525, at which stage the Mass according to the Roman rite was abolished, the Zurich council, working together with Zwingli, had overseen the removal of religious images and statues from the city churches, secularized the monasteries and rechanneled the income, reduced the number of religious holidays and put an end to a number of traditional processions, suspended the jurisdiction of the bishop of Constance, established an independent marriage court, and instituted yearly synods for the regulation of the Zurich church and its dependent clergy. Zurich was the first fully reformed Protestant commune.[54]

In the manner of Luther and Karlstadt at Leipzig, Zwingli used a public disputation as a forum for the defense of his ideas. And the same convictions were at the core. Like the Wittenberg theologians, Zwingli preached that all Christians had the right, and to a certain extent the ability, to judge whether an idea or a practice was in line with the teachings of Scripture. He also believed that the best way to gather support for the movement was to address the laity directly, to make reform a public concern rather than a private quarrel. What was unique about the first disputation in Zurich (January 29, 1523), however, was that it was not instigated by the reformer but the city council. It was a judicial hearing, its main purpose being the preservation of civic order, and the reason it had been called into being was to deal with the charges brought against Zwingli by the bishop of Constance.[55] And yet it was not the bishop who would pass

judgment on Zwingli but the council itself, empowered by the evangelical premise that a decision could be made by a lay tribunal if Scripture remained the final judge in all things, a point made with some symbolic force at the start of the disputation when three folio texts were placed before the assembly: a Greek New testament, a Hebrew Old Testament, and the Latin Vulgate.

In truth, the first Zurich disputation was something of a kangaroo court, for the Catholic clergy were little more than observers and the council had essentially decided before the event that unless it could be proved that Zwingli was spreading heresy it would allow him to preach the gospel "clearly and purely" as he claimed to have done to that point. For Zwingli, however, the disputation was a coup, for he was able to set the agenda with 67 articles outlining his vision of reform. With these articles the foundation ideas of Swiss Protestantism were put on full display, including the role of faith in justification, the primacy of the Word of God, the futility of good works in the search for salvation, and the church as a community of the faithful. The first disputation did not result in the introduction of the Reformation; many issues, such as those relating to the mass and religious images, were not dealt with until after a second disputation in October 1523. But the basic framework for the Reformation had been put in place, and the underlying rationale behind the initiative – with the council claiming it was acting "in the name of God in aid of peace and Christian unity" – never wavered.[56]

If there was one theological precept of the early Swiss Reformation that set it apart it from the movement in Saxony, where Luther's theory of justification was systematically dismantling late medieval Catholicism, it was the principle of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). Though fundamental to all Reformation thought, and the first string in Wittenberg's bow at Leipzig, no reformer of the first order made such consummate *use* of the principle as Zwingli in Zurich. By the time of the Froschauer incident in 1522 he had already gone beyond his early humanist disposition to search for a greater clarity and truth in primary texts. Ancient authorities such as the church fathers might be drawn upon to confirm a point of theology, but the source of the faith must be Holy Writ, which was revealed to all men under the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit.

On the basis of this profoundly enabling idea, Zwingli was able to convince the Zurich council to intervene on the side of reform and provide the political support required for the preaching of the Word. Consequently, at a very early stage of reform in Zurich, the principle of *sola Scriptura* took on the function of civil law, thus making it a relatively straightforward matter for Zwingli and the magistrates to draw on traditional notions of order while placing limits on interpretation.[57] More difficult to control, however, was the meaning of the principle once it had been embraced by the parishioners, for many had taken to heart Zwingli's early declaration that "every diligent reader, in so far as he approaches with humble heart, will decide by means of the Scriptures, taught by the Spirit of God, until he attains the truth."[58] As Zwingli quickly discovered, the notion of religious truth meant different things to different people, particularly once the more radically minded evangelicals started to reassess traditional teachings on baptism, religious imagery, and the payment of tithes.

One reason why Zwingli attracted so many followers in so short a time was the broad appeal of his message. He was not just peddling theological concepts but the promise of freedom, by which he meant freedom of the gospel, or the gospel of Christian freedom (*evangelica libertas*). The basic point he was trying to get across was

that the Christian is situated between two extremes: between those things that enslave him and ultimately damn the soul and those that liberate him and join him with Christ. Zwingli preached the latter, and at its most direct, it was fairly easy to grasp. The worship of God, as proclaimed by the evangelicals, liberates; the worship of the world, as practiced by the Catholic church, enslaves. This was a formula that could be appropriated in different ways. Freedom could be understood in a political sense as the freedom from tyranny and oppression, which was readily applied to Rome and its laws. Freedom could be understood in a spiritual sense as the emancipation of the individual soul by the preaching of the gospel. Or freedom could be understood in an anthropological sense, as in the ability to break free of the human tendency to worship false gods or observe false laws. Whatever the reading, the main message was the same: that the essential source of all freedom was Christ as the Spirit reveals him through the gospel.[59]

For Zwingli, even the law was a source of Christian freedom, though by this he meant the divine law, not civil law or ceremonial law. Unlike Luther, who drew a sharp contrast between law and gospel, Zwingli spoke of them as one and the same thing, which was nothing less than the eternal will of God. Indeed law, like the gospel, revealed the nature of the divine, which was why it was beyond the ability of fallen man to meet its demands. Only the saving intervention of Christ made it possible for men and women to honor (however imperfectly) the law. This is what Zwingli meant by freedom in this context. The Christian is liberated through faith in Christ to meet the requirements of the law and practice his "office and work."[60] From the viewpoint of the reforming party this was a profoundly enabling use of the notion of freedom as well, for it implied that the pursuit of godly order was in some form an act of liberation.

The revolutionary potential of these two pillars of the Swiss Reformation – namely the principle of Scripture alone and the appeal to Christian liberty – was revealed in the Swiss countryside. Numerous towns and villages had experienced considerable political and economic development in the late medieval period, to the extent that on the eve of the Reformation some local communities went about their business as if they were autonomous polities. Regional elites, like Zwingli's own father, managed local political, economic, and legal affairs, and in many instances this control extended to the church and its clergy. In these rural parishes, one of the few areas in Europe where the peasantry had the right to bear arms, the preaching of the reformers found a receptive audience, but not always for the reasons intended. Here, the appeal to Scripture and the promise of evangelical freedom tended to exacerbate deep-rooted resentments and play out in displays of anticlericalism and iconoclasm. Parishioners even vented their rage on the church itself, ripping down images and hacking up statues in an effort to free themselves from their recently revealed enslavement to the false idols of a false faith. But the message had a powerful positive impact as well. Feeding into the existing drift towards local autonomy, the early Reformation message made it possible for the rural parishioners to reorder the Christian world within the framework of the commune. According to Zwingli, or so the parishioners thought, the local congregations had the right to free themselves from the tyranny of the Catholic church without waiting on the authorities. They had the right to appoint a clergyman to preach the Word of God and have him put an end to previous religious abuses. They would judge this man and

pay his salary, and in return they would act as good Christians, which meant in effect they would "hear the gospel and live accordingly."[61]

None of this was based on faulty logic. As the first in a long line of Reformed theologians, Zwingli had indeed preached the need to bring the world into conformity with the Word of God, and this necessarily implied transforming the local religious community under "the instruction and guidance of the Spirit" (to use his words). But in truth the parishioners' idea of freedom had little in common with Zwingli's theology of Christian freedom, and he was quick to take the side of the council and write against those who were taking reform into their own hands and causing unrest. As we will see, this was just the first phase of a turn towards radicalism that threatened to undermine Zwingli's vision of reform. He would face much more dangerous opponents in Zurich itself. But it was a significant example of the Protestant tendency to drag religion down to the level of the parish, and it was a very early glimpse of the variety of opinion that could arise on the basis on the principle of Scripture alone.

Zwingli's empowerment of the commune explains why historians often trace the roots of congregational Protestantism to the hinterlands of Zurich, but in fact his idea of evangelical freedom was much more ambitious in scale. Ultimately his intention was to unite all of Switzerland under the banner of evangelical liberty. Such thinking was natural for a Swiss intellectual, for the confederation itself owed its existence to the ongoing quest for freedom and autonomy. Its origins were located in the thirteenth century, when the first alliance between the rural territories of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden came into being. Over the course of the next century these founding members were joined by urban powers such as Bern, Zurich, and Lucerne as well the rural cantons of Glarus and Zug. On the eve of the Reformation, there were 13 core states, in addition to associated territories such as Graubünden, Valais, and St Gall. In social and political terms, it was an incongruous mix, for it was not a single polity with a single head but a loose alliance of rural cantons and city-states ruled by urban patricians, old nobility, craft guilds, and wealthy peasants.[62] It had the rudiments of a constitution that provided the framework for a common defense, a federal diet (*Tagsatzung*), and the rule of law, which preserved the autonomy of the individual member states, but there was very little common purpose or mutual political interest. The only "national" agenda in any meaningful sense was the preservation of freedom from the tyranny of the monarchical states, a goal that had been successfully realized in the late fifteenth century in the wars against Burgundy and Austria. Thus when Zwingli, the humanistically educated son of a politically enfranchised peasant farmer of the Toggenburg valley, preached freedom, it was natural for him to extend it to the Swiss peoples in general – that is, as the humanists would define it, to the entire province of Helvetia in the land of Germania. No less than the hard-won political liberty wrested by the Swiss from the medieval tyrant-princes of Burgundy and Austria, the liberty to preach God's Word had to be won by the federated members in a battle with the foreign tyrant-pope. They were one and the same to Zwingli – *evangelica et publica libertas* – though the war that he was preaching from the pulpit was a matter of eternal salvation rather than worldly success.[63]

Outside of Zurich, the first areas to adopt the faith were Appenzell, St Gall, and the lower valley of Graubünden. St Gall had its own reformer of note in the renowned

humanist Joachim von Watt or Vadianus (1484–1551), who had been preaching the faith and counseling others in small Bible groups as early as 1522. Vadianus soon secured the support of the guilds; in 1523 the council mandated the preaching of the gospel, and the first steps of evangelical reform followed, including the revamping of the welfare system, the removal of medieval images, the introduction of a new church order, and eventually an evangelical service. In Appenzell the council also legislated for the preaching of the Word in 1523, then held a disputation the following year to decide the fate of the church. Unlike in Zurich or St Gall, however, the authorities left it to each commune to vote on whether they would adopt the faith, a strategy that was also adopted by the council of Glarus. Next to Zurich, the two biggest gains for the movement were the cities of Bern and Basel, though both moved at a very cautious pace. Evangelical preachers were active in Bern in the early 1520s, and the council allowed for the preaching of the Word in 1523; but because Bern was so closely bound to French affairs to the east the magistracy had to act with care. Not until the disputation of January 1528, which had effectively been forced on the council by the strength of lay support, did the process of reform begin – images were removed from the churches, the diocesan jurisdiction was suspended, and a new service with a new liturgy was introduced. The history of events in Basel, the crossroads of ideas in Switzerland, was similar, though the city had its own reformer of European distinction, the humanist scholar and biblical exegete Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), who left his distinctive stamp on the movement. Even beyond the boundaries of Switzerland proper the theology of Zwingli and his followers played its part in the early Reformation. In Strasbourg, Constance, and Augsburg, three of the most powerful cities in the south of the empire, reformers openly preached Zwingli's theology from the pulpit and printers published his tracts.[64]

Despite this early success, Zwingli's vision of a Switzerland united under the banner of evangelical freedom never became a reality. On the contrary, with the reform movement came a new type of confessionalized politics that tore the confederation apart. True to their medieval instincts, many of the states were wary of Zurich's recent conversion, their thinking being that the faith was little more than a pious cloak for imperialism. And this suspicion was even stronger among those member-states that remained Catholic. The result was a situation of constant tension that eventually erupted into open war. A early as 1524, the five inner states of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, and Lucerne came together in a Catholic alliance. At a later stage they would be joined by Fribourg and Solothurn, and at the end of the decade they would ally with Habsburg Austria against Zurich. In 1526 a religious disputation in Baden further weakened the evangelical front when the Catholic party, whose speakers included Wittenberg's nemesis, Johannes Eck, prevailed and the subsequent diet condemned Zwingli and declared him banned. The results of Baden placed a further wedge between the evangelical and Catholic territories, even between the Catholics and the moderates such as Bern and Basel, for this was a clear judgment against the Reformation and a declaration of the Catholic states' desire to root out the faith from the land.

While the Catholics rallied, Zwingli and the magistrates of Zurich sought out allies. By 1528 the city had joined forces with Bern, St Gall, and Constance, and in 1529 it could count Biel, Mülhausen, Basel, Schaffhausen, and Strasbourg among its allies,

later to be joined by Hesse. This was more than saber rattling; this was the build-up for war, a prospect Zwingli had entertained since 1525. The First Kappel War occurred in 1529, and the provocation was the preaching of the gospel in the mandated territories, those areas or common lordships that were ruled jointly by Protestant and Catholic states. In 1529 the canton of Schywz ordered the execution of the evangelical preacher Jakob Kaiser in just such a region, prompting Zwingli and Zurich to mobilize for war. The build-up ended in the First Kappel Peace (1529), brokered by Bern, a negotiated settlement that left it to the communes to determine their faith. The problems remained, however, and two years later Zurich once again went to war with the Catholic states, although this time it did come to a pitched battle ending in the defeat of Zurich and the death of Zwingli on the field of battle. The result was the Second Peace of Kappel (November 1531), which was a major setback for the Zwinglian movement. Not only was Zwingli killed and along with him the vision of a united Confederation fighting for the cause of the gospel, but the evangelical party within Zurich was pressed back. The peace imposed harsh conditions on the city, and from this point forward, in Zurich and elsewhere, the reformers and their supporters had to take a back seat to the moderates and the realists. After 1531, the idea of Christian freedom was not so much about liberation as it was paying heed to law and order. The point was brought home in a series of grievances submitted to the Zurich magistracy at Meilen after the defeat at Kappel, where it was made clear that Zwingli's close fit of law and gospel was not welcomed by all Christians. In the words of the fourth article,

> Gracious lords, it is our friendly entreaty and desire that preachers no longer be accepted in our city save those who are peaceable and generally orientated towards peace and quiet . . . Eventually, let the preachers in the countryside say only that which is God's Word expressed in both Testaments. Let the clergy, as already notified, not undertake or meddle in any secular matters either in the city or in the countryside, the council or elsewhere, which they should rather allow you, our lords, to manage.[65]

The Second War of Kappel put an end to Zurich's evangelical imperialism. The city had to renounce its alliances with foreign powers, it was forced to pay indemnities, and it was no longer able to influence the religious status of the mandated territories. In fact after Kappel, the Zwinglian Reformation in general lost much of its momentum, as powerful cities such as Bern, Augsburg, and Strasbourg moved towards Lutheranism and the Peace created a state of stalemate within the confederation. Switzerland had become, and would remain, a bi-confessional state, with some areas, such as Glarus, Graubünden, Thurgau, and Rheintal, holding both Catholic and Protestant services in the same churches. There were still substantial gains for the Reformation, especially in the west, where in the 1530s Bern began to expand into the Pays de Vaud and other French-speaking lands. But the vision once shared by Zwingli and his hard-core Zurich supporters of the expansion of the Reformation into all areas of the Swiss lands was no more. Indeed, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, the Aargau clergyman Heinrich Bullinger, once raised the possibility of dissolving the confederation altogether. The only sort of expansion Bullinger entertained was of the epistolary kind, the forward march of a network of Protestants joined together by thousands of letters.

These reverses were not only the result of events within Switzerland. By the late 1520s, the tide of reform had begun to turn in favor of the Lutherans of the north, a state of affairs confirmed by historical events, as when the evangelical princes and cities submitted their joint protestation to the estates at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 (hence the name Protestants) and then followed this up the next year with the first Protestant statement of common beliefs, the Confession of Augsburg (1530), which they presented to Emperor Charles V during a session of the diet in Augsburg. Realizing that the two early forms of magisterial Protestantism – Lutheranism and Zwinglianism – were starting down their own historical paths, Philipp of Hesse (1504–67), who was sympathetic to both variants, brought Luther, Zwingli and a host of other leading reformers together at his residence at Marburg (October 1529). His goal was to create a united Protestant front, strong enough to squeeze concessions out of the emperor. But it came to nothing. Ultimately the reformers were unable to agree and the colloquy ended without unity or resolution.

The central point of division in Marburg had been over the question of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, striking evidence of the extent to which abstract theological themes could impact historical developments.[66] While both Luther and Zwingli agreed, as all early Protestants agreed, that both the Catholic understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice and the scholastic theory behind the miraculous transformation of bread and wine into blood and body (which was termed "transubstantiation") were false, they could not agree about the meaning of Christ's words in Matthew 26:26: *hoc est corpus meum* – "this is my body." Luther understood it in a more literal sense than Zwingli. Without endorsing the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, he did maintain, however, that the body of Christ was "truly and substantially" present in the sacrament. Zwingli, in contrast, thought of the phrase "this is my body" as a figure of speech and rejected the suggestion (Lutheran and Catholic alike) that Christ was actually present in the elements. For Zwingli, the Communion was an act of remembrance, an attempt to "render present" Christ's act of sacrifice. As he described it, "the Lord's Supper, if it is not a sacrifice for the soul, is a remembrance and a renewal of that which once happened, which is valid for all eternity, and which is dear enough to render satisfaction to God's justice for our sins."[67]

This Protestant debate over the real presence would last the century and beyond. It was the main theological reason why Lutheranism and Zwinglianism went their separate ways, and it would play an important role in the marking out of Calvinism (or Reformed Protestantism) as well. However, we should not imagine by this that the early Protestants of Germany and Switzerland lined up neatly behind distinctive theologies of the Eucharist. Until the detailed confessional statements of the mid-century, evangelical teaching on the Eucharist, Communion, or the Lord's Supper (which was the preferred term) was open-ended. Local preachers, who were exposed to a variety of different opinions, mixed and mingled different teachings and preached fairly indiscriminately from the pulpit. A case in point is the city of Augsburg in the 1520s, one of the main meeting points of the different early strains of evangelical thought. During this period parishioners, were they so inclined, could hear sermons by reformers such as Oecolampadius, who spoke of Christ's body as both symbolic and present, or Urbanus Rhegius, whose shifting views on the theme eventually placed him in the Lutheran camp. Moreover, if they were literate, they could read through the

range of opinions published by local printers, from Karlstadt's symbolic readings of the Eucharist and the writings of Lutherans such as Johannes Bugenhagen and Jakob Strauß to Catholic apologies and the works of Zwingli himself.[68]

Augsburg was fairly exceptional in the sheer variety of theological views making the rounds, yet there was in general a fairly rich and varied field of opinion in the 1520s as the movement gathered momentum. But it did not last long. In both the German and the Swiss lands, once Protestants had maneuvered themselves into positions of political and ecclesiastical power, they started to put their worlds in order.

Reformations

Order

The full effect of the Reformation on social and political relations first became apparent in the rural parishes of Switzerland and southern Germany. During the early 1520s, local clergymen and itinerant preachers began to take the ideas of Wittenberg and Zurich into the countryside. Naturally, a degree of accommodation was required; but if the run of printed sermons is any indication, central themes of the early movement such as anticlericalism (or anti-papalism), justification through faith and rejection of good works, the primacy of Scripture, and the recasting of relations between clergy, church, and congregation – including the empowerment of the laity in religious affairs – seem to have reached the ears of the local populace.[69] To the surprise of the reformers, however, evangelical theology was not always perceived in the same way that it was preached. Many parishioners were quick to embrace the movement, but in doing so they translated its message into familiar terms.[70] To use the language of the theologians, the parishioners read the message tropologically, that is, they applied its message to the social and political contingencies of communal life. Among the inferences drawn were the following: that Christianity was primarily about the preaching of the Word in the vernacular; that the commune had the right to appoint and dismiss the pastor, as well as the right to supervise his income and judge his teachings once he was in office; and that the gospel should serve as a guide for worldly relations.[71] The mainstream reformers were quick to distance themselves from this approach. Luther termed it a distortion of the Word and a deliberate perversion of law and gospel. In response, the parishioners (or, rather, their spokesmen) quite rightly pointed out that not only was their idea of Reformation in accordance with Scripture, it had been derived from the many evangelical sermons flooding the bookstalls.

In late 1524 and early 1525, as the wave of preaching and publishing reached its peak and visions of reform became increasingly radical, this communal movement passed over into revolution. The subject population took to the field in a series of extended sieges and regional battles historians have termed the Peasants' War of 1525, a period of unrest that swept through most of the German lands, including Alsace, Franconia, Thuringia, Upper Swabia, Switzerland, and Tyrol. In articulating their demands, the rebels used the same approach as the exponents of the communal Reformation: the same recourse to the Word, the same private and pragmatic readings, the same tropological cast of mind, though now with reference to "godly justice" as horizons

broadened. Given voice in peasant manifestos, these new demands for "godly law" and "godly justice" worked as a type of rough-hewn ideology, and they were soon taken to extremes by militant reformers such as Thomas Müntzer and Hans Hut, who developed models of Christian society deeply rooted in subversive ideas of social and political justice. They even spoke of an end to feudal relations, imagining in its place a commonwealth based on the principles of communalism and egalitarianism.[72]

Despite their efforts, no new Christian society was called into being. Once the princes had mobilized, the rebellion was quickly defeated, and those parishioners who survived returned to a social and political system that was essentially the same as the one in place before the War. Worried about further unrest, the authorities granted some concessions. Some taxes were discontinued or commuted, in some instances marriage rights and inheritance laws were reformed, and in some territories the standing of the rural communes improved. Ultimately, however, it was a triumph of the princely state; and in fact the Peasants' War, because of its association with the evangelical movement, served to justify later attempts by the ruling elite to strengthen their control over the Reformation in the parishes. The end result was that "with help from the theologians, the rulers tried to restore their own legitimacy by turning the gospel squarely against the common man."[73]

Nevertheless, although short-lived and largely inconsequential, both the communal Reformation of the early 1520s and the Peasants' War of 1525 belong to the early history of Protestantism. For even though both Luther and Zwingli were quick to reject proto-congregationalism and peasant unrest, both reformers had popularized ideas that fed directly into the two movements. Before they were domesticated by the process of magisterial reform, numerous evangelical concepts could be drawn upon in defense of a program of reform undertaken by the laity at the level of the commune. The priesthood of all believers, appeals to New Testament ecclesiology, and Scripture-based vernacular religion readily endorsed libertarian interpretations that were never intended. Even the principle of justification through faith alone, when preached in the epigrammatic style of the evangelical sermon, could be interpreted as an argument in favor of freedom from the moral law on the basis of grace.[74]

In the beginning, even the most conservative of reformers used these ideas as theological battering rams to bring down the ramparts of Catholicism. Luther, for instance, called upon the priesthood of all believers in his repeated attacks on the Catholic clergy. In the early 1520s, he proposed that the congregation was no less empowered in religious affairs than a gathering of ordained priests. And soon after publishing his *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520) he was encouraging the parishioners of Altenburg, Eilenburg, Magdeburg, Hamburg, Leisnig, Erfurt, and Leutenberg to initiate reform without waiting for the approval of the church. In his open letter to the community of Leisnig, Luther not only argued that, in light of the urgency of the times, the parishioners must act according to Scripture and call from among themselves an enlightened parishioner, but he added that it was their duty, on pain of damnation, to turn their backs on the Catholic authorities and take up reform.[75] With advice of this kind, it should not have surprised him when a year later the parishioners in the Franconian village of Wendelstein drew up a church order claiming that the local congregation had the right to install the preacher, assess his teaching, and dismiss him from post if he fell short of their expectations. Should he fail to meet their

demands, they advised him that "we shall not only brand you as an unfaithful servant but shall also drive you as a ravenous wolf into the net and shall under no circumstances tolerate you in our midst."[76] Other congregational movements of this stamp emerged in the south-German and Swiss lands, from Zurich and its environs, where the villagers surfaced very early on as supporters of the movement, to Upper Swabia, where parishioners repeatedly demanded the right to appoint pastors to preach the Word of God, to the rural parishes of Salzburg, the Tyrol, and Alsace.[77]

The relationship between the Reformation and the Peasants' War of 1525 is more complex, not least because later generations went to such lengths to write it out of Protestant history. Yet here too we can see clear affinities. A brief survey of the main articles and manifestos published in the name of the peasant bands will make the point. Above all things the rebels demanded the preaching of the Word. As *The Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants* (1525) made clear, the basis of all of their demands was "directed toward hearing the gospel and living according to it."[78] They wanted to be taught the true meaning of Scripture, free of the annotations of the Catholic theologians, convinced that this was not only their birthright as Christians but something that fell within their own powers of comprehension. Nothing separated the clergy from the laity in this regard, neither their standing nor their wit. Closely associated with this were the demands for the congregation to appoint and dismiss the pastor, for the church to be located and governed at the level of the parish, and for the clergy to be subject to the local authorities, a proposal partly derived from the long-term concern with clerical abuses such as absenteeism or the selling of offices. *The Merano Articles* (1525) made reference to these "evil abuses" and called for a new territorial ordinance to remedy the state of the church, while other regional manifestos projected a congregational solution to the general crisis. As the war gathered momentum, Scripture was called into service to justify and rearticulate ancient grievances about dues, fees, and feudal obligations. Indeed, some of the manifestos, such as *To the Assembly of the Common Peasantry* (1525), went so far as to challenge the entire fabric of the social and political order. By drawing on the so-called principles of godly law, many of which had close affinities to the first principles of evangelical thought, radical preachers began to reinterpret the world in revolutionary ways.[79] But this was a step beyond any sort of logical dialogue with the thought of Luther or Zwingli.

Neither the communal movement nor the Peasants' War shaped the theology of the reformers in any substantial way. Their importance was historical, in that they brought an end to the free rein and spontaneity of the early Reformation and turned it into a crusade for order. Of course, there were still episodes of localized and spontaneous reform, especially in the communes of northern Germany, but nothing that could be compared to the intensity or the profundity of the early phase, and certainly nothing that threatened to overturn the relations of power on the same scale.[80] Despite the encouragement he had given (and continued to give) to parishes to appoint evangelical preachers in the face of Catholic resistance, Luther never seriously thought of reform as something that could be left in the hands of the "common man." This conviction was confirmed in 1524 by events in Orlamünde, where, despite the opposition of the electoral officials and the threat it posed to the Wittenberg movement, the parishioners had come out in support of the liturgical innovations of his former colleague Andreas Karlstadt. These events, together with the disaster of the Peasants' War, convinced

Luther that the German parishioners (whom he now termed a *Pöbel*, "a mob") were still too "wild and crude" for independent religious enlightenment and would only come to an understanding of the faith through the traditional modalities of the secular and spiritual order. As he wrote,

> where God tells the community to do something and speaks to the people, he does not want it done by the masses without the authorities, but through the authorities with the people. Moreover, he requires this so that the dog does not learn to eat leather on the leash, that is, lest accustomed to rebellion in connection with the images, the people also rebel against the authorities.[81]

Zwingli too, though he always retained a strong communal element in his ideas of the visible church, moved away from the stress on the congregation to a stress on the magistrate and projected a vision of Reformation that was an act of corporate renewal, conceived by the clergy, enacted by the urban magistrates, and guided by a fixed corpus of belief. As he wrote, "we teach that authority [*magistratum*] is necessary to the completeness of the body of the church."[82]

This turn away from the communal dimension and the subsequent commitment to traditional forms of religious order meant that the German and Swiss Reformations, viewed in historical rather than in theological terms, were conservative movements. Luther in particular, while leaving it to systematizers such as Melanchthon and Bugenhagen to work out the details, was quick to stress the objective and institutional aspects of the new church, and he was generally willing to embrace the forms of the secular sphere as long as the essential role of the church – the preaching of the Word and dispensing the sacraments – was not obstructed. The end result was a church that was objective in its functions, in the sense that it served as a repository of salvation for all the baptized regardless of their own spiritual states; absolute in its religious claims, in the sense that it embodied the only forms of theological truth; and indispensable in its role, in the sense that it facilitated, through the ministry, the mediation of the Word and the sacraments and thus had a universal and all-embracing mission catering to the salvation of mankind. There were fewer sacraments, fewer clergy, and a closer fit with positive law, but otherwise it was a familiar idea. "It is the Catholic theory of the church, only purified and renewed."[83]

The characteristics of this mainstream or "magisterial" Protestantism were quickly revealed in Saxony, where Luther and Melanchthon presided over the making of the public church. Pressed by the need for more control over the parishes, Luther turned to the elector of Saxony and christened him an emergency bishop (*Notbischof*), thus investing the prince with the religious authority once exercised by the prelates. With this, a single vision of reform could be imposed on the principality. Electoral officials appointed evangelical clergymen, while troublesome Catholics were dismissed and dissenters expelled. Church teachings were standardized – theologically with Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* (1521), liturgically with Luther's *German Mass* in 1526, and then comprehensively with the church orders and visitation mandates issued under electors Johann (1468–1532) and Johann Friedrich (1503–54), all of which were to be followed as closely as possible by the local pastors in the parishes. Meanwhile the monasteries were gradually emptied and placed under the supervision of the state, the wealth being channeled into the common chests, which collected dues and alms, the

buildings used for schools, churches, hospitals, or assimilated into the infrastructure of secular rule.[84]

But the main catalyst for reform was the visitation process undertaken in 1528. Claiming that the bishops of Freisingen and Naumburg had neglected this apostolic practice, the Saxon reformers revitalized the idea of a visitation, the literal parish-by-parish inspection of the state of religious culture by the higher church authorities, and turned it into one of the central modalities of ongoing reform. Its main purpose was to establish proper order: the visitors ensured that suitable clergy were in office, that the right ideas were being preached (to which end Luther's postils were introduced in 1525), and that the right conditions were in place to uphold the visible church. From this point forward, and at regular intervals for the rest of the century, visitations occurred in Saxony and other Protestant lands, with the reach of the Protestant church and the demands of the faith increasing from year to year in step with the relentless quest for unity and orthodoxy.[85]

Other princes followed the Saxon lead. Philipp of Hesse, for instance, borrowed from the Saxon model for his own Reformation, as did Ernst of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and Margrave Georg of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, all instigators of princely reformations. Indeed, the first wave of reform in the margravate of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach was spent defining precisely what was meant by the idea of evangelical order. After the defeat of the Peasants' War of 1525, which the two ruling princes Casimir (1481–1527) and Georg (1484–1543) claimed was the outcome of a false understanding of Christian freedom, the margraves published a preaching mandate that quickly put an end to the initial phase of ungoverned theological discourse by targeting the clergy: "Where one or more is encountered (who has publicly preached, or can be shown to have preached, rebellion contrary to the holy Gospel and clear, pure Word of God), these should be arrested immediately and punished earnestly and remorselessly . . . or exiled from the land."[86] Leaving no room for further interpretation, Margrave Georg then issued resolutions that detailed exactly what was meant by a faith built on the "clear, pure Word of God." Any clergyman who refused to honor this understanding of the faith was dismissed from post. In order to enforce the religious changes in the parishes, the margrave and his higher clergy, working together with the imperial city of Nuremberg, saw through a visitation in 1528 and, once a few theological niceties had been ironed out, drew up the Brandenburg-Nuremberg Church Order (1533), one of the earliest syntheses of Lutheranism in Europe.[87] In all of this, as had been the case in Saxony, the new faith was simply poured into the existing ecclesio-political molds: there was one orthodox religion, inviolate and absolute, overseen by a trained ministry; there was one public church, held in place by a chain of command and superintended by a fixed hierarchy, though now with a different range of officers and institutions, and with the prince as *summus episcopus* instead of a bishop; and there was one route to salvation by way of the institutional church, a route mediated by the clergyman, and effected through the Word and the two remaining sacraments, baptism and Communion.

In an effort to restore what the reformers considered to be the practices of early Christianity the churches were cleansed of the unwanted remnants of Catholic religiosity, beginning with the erroneous ritual and ceremony that had grown up around the sacraments and extending to the physical surroundings of the church. In a

Lutheran environment the unacceptable attributes of Roman theology may have included candles, a few suspect altar paintings, the liturgical vestments, and the equipage of the Mass. In the Reformed setting, where Zwingli's thought held sway, a much more drastic process of purification may have entailed the removal of everything from cassocks and Communion napkins to statues and images and the overnight disappearance of Latin songs along with the traditional words of service and institution. In their place the evangelical authorities provided standardized orders of service largely devoid of ritual interplay with the congregation. The parishioners became the passive subjects of a Word-based offering of institutional sacramentality, with closely regulated sermons, hymns, prayers, admonitions, and commentaries on the catechism replacing the play of kinship and community and solemnized incarnations of the holy that characterized a late medieval Catholic service.[88] This reform of ritual provided an early example of the effect a typographical faith such as Protestantism would ultimately have on the anatomy of late medieval Catholicism. For while the latter was characterized by "God's extensive affinity" with both the social world and the sacral imagination of the local communities of worship, the former wanted to distance God from the vagaries of parish religion and, by capturing the essence of religion in words and turning it into something universal rather than personal or communal, closely regulate what the parishioners might believe and how they might come into contact with the divine.[89]

Where then was the common man in all of this, the peasants and townsmen who had been so receptive to the early movement? With the rise of the mainstream Lutheran and Zwinglian Protestant paradigm of order, the parishioners returned to their roles as passive members of a universal church and the lay initiative came to an end. In its place there emerged a religious culture built upon the twin foundations of confessionalism and clericalism, both of which were aimed at restraining precisely the type of religious enthusiasm that had proved so crucial for the reception of the early Reformation.

To get a sense of the shifting center of gravity we need look no further than the fate of the emblematical Bible-reading ploughman of the early years. With medieval scholasticism dismantled by the precept of *sola Scriptura* and with the Word of God now available in the vernacular it seemed only logical that the parishioners would have a greater say in what they believed. But in fact the opposite was the case. Once the various church orders started to emerge, it soon became clear that there was no room for deviation from the central teachings of the official church, whether derived from the thought of Wittenberg or Zurich. No less than the Catholicism it sought to replace, Protestantism kept its parishioners in close check, synthesizing, summarizing, and spelling out exactly what was meant by the Word of God and how it should be understood, while regulating both the timetables and the modalities of worship. On the main points, those that did not fall within the category of adiaphora (that is, things of no direct consequence for salvation), there was no room for negotiation. All parishioners were expected to acknowledge the same central beliefs and observe the same central rites.

Thus, while the reformers may have opened up Scripture to a greater number of individual *readers*, they did nothing to encourage a greater number of individual *readings*. The justification for this was partly political but primarily theological. Too great a Babel of opinions, it was thought, would lead to confusion and unrest – as the

Peasants' War had proved – and would disturb the equilibrium needed to maintain a Christian commonwealth. But more importantly, Scripture itself, while it could now be read by the many, could only be understood by the few, and in particular those few who had the training and the calling to take on the task of exegesis. Individual acts of interpretation, especially those that led to idiosyncratic readings of Scripture, were not encouraged by the reformers, nor was a homespun familiarity with the Bible considered a prerequisite for saving faith. It is worth noting that the authorities considered it a sign of subversive activity during the Peasants' War when people took to reading the Old and the New Testament within the privacy of their own homes.[90]

Having emerged as the liberators of the Christian conscience, the reformers were quick to stress that they would not coerce people into believing anything against their wills. Nor, in their pursuit of unity, would they confuse law and gospel and force the parishioners to believe in superfluous things. Luther made this point on a number of occasions in his disputes with the radicals, when he feared that the anxiety about order and uniformity might result in the distortion of the faith.[91] But this was written in the context of a discussion about ceremonies, external rites, and other matters considered peripheral to saving faith. When it came to questions of doctrine Luther was much less flexible, and while still touting the evangelical reluctance to force the Christian conscience, as he did in the *Large Catechism* of 1529, he made it clear that "if anyone refuses to hear and heed the warning of our preaching, we shall have nothing to do with him, nor may he have any share in the Gospel."[92] In this context, the "gospel" was equivalent to the Word as interpreted and taught by Luther and the Wittenberg reformers. None who wandered from this path had a place in the church.

This was not a distinctly Lutheran approach. The conviction that there was a single, orthodox corpus of religious thought and an established path of exegesis that made up a "true" reading of Scripture was one of the core principles of mainstream Protestantism. Substitute the name Luther with Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger or any of the other leading reformers and the principle applies equally well. Protestants had a magisterium no less than the Catholics, the only difference being the fact that it was diffused throughout the confessional culture as a whole rather than seated in an office such as an episcopacy or a sacerdotal figure such as the pope. Despite its early association with the Bible-reading ploughman, once it became a social and political reality, the Protestant religion placed the same restrictions on lay interpretations of the faith as the Roman Catholicism it had supplanted. Much of its later history is a chronicle of the attempts made to resolve this inner contradiction.

The other casuality to emerge from the years of unrest was the parishioner as an active agent in the shaping of religious culture. The early leveling of the secular and the spiritual estates left many parishioners thinking, quite legitimately, that they were the partners rather than the subjects of the clergy, and that the open dialogue that had marked the early movement might be one of the constituent features of the new church. But the priesthood of all believers remained a spiritual rather than a social distinction: it was only valid *coram Deo*, that is, in the eyes of God. On earth, in the visible churches where the Protestants gathered, the clergy were still set apart from the parishioners and they still served as mediators between the congregation and the divine. Although no longer distinguished by the sacerdotal status of the medieval clergy, the Protestant pastor was still placed above his parishioners as the interpreter of Holy Writ and the

minister of the remaining sacraments. Moreover, now that the church had formed such a close alliance with the state, new types of social distinctions began to elevate the Protestant pastor, not the least of which was the quality of education required in order to take up an office in the church. Unlike the vast majority of his parishioners, the Protestant pastor had been educated at a Latin school and a seminary or university; he had been trained at the highest levels in disciplines such as theology and philology, and thus thought and spoke in completely different terms; and he had gone through a collective process of self-development and self-fashioning in his formative years that left him with a unique sense of identity. He belonged to a caste of higher functionaries distinguished by background, status, and quite often family ties.[93] In some cities, certain families dominated church offices for generations – Fabricius in Nuremberg, Reuchlin in Strasbourg, Carpov in Leipzig. In many instances, the Protestant clergyman had less in common with the congregation that his Catholic predecessor. He was just as distant, and just as doctrinaire and disciplinarian, as the medieval bishops and priests had been.

We should not conclude from this that the Protestant pastor was a uniformly oppressive presence or that the parishioners were completely excluded from religion affairs. In most parishes, urban and rural alike, the religious culture practiced at the local level was the product of dialogue and negotiation. Engaged laymen influenced the quality of faith, just as determined pastors shaped the secular world.[94] But in general it is true to say that in those lands of Germany and Switzerland where the magisterial idea of religious reform first took root, the laity remained subordinate to the clergy and the faith as practiced was the product of the theological and sacramental authority of the church rather than the faith or conduct of the parishioners. Any attempts to invert this relationship raised the specter of the radicals, and this was an entirely different idea of Protestant order.

Disorder

Order and disorder, of course, were relative concepts, for what Luther and the Wittenberg theologians considered out of synch with Christian teaching was not necessarily held in common by the Swiss reformers or the evangelical preachers in southern Germany. Nor did later Protestants necessarily agree with the notions of order and disorder established by Luther and Zwingli. John Calvin, for instance, associated the idea of disorder with things that were mixed up, polluted, or unpure, and this drew in a different range of considerations. But the emphasis on the ideal of order was common to all of the magisterial reformers, as was the stress on the dangers of its opposite, disorder, which they claimed was a defining feature of the emerging radical communities.

The first of the early reformers to move beyond the Wittenberg paradigm was Andreas Karlstadt. Soon after his abortive reform attempts in Wittenberg, he settled in Orlamünde, where he worked to resurrect the customs and forms of the apostolic church. Karlstadt became a man of the people; he went by the name of "brother Andreas," threw off his deacon's cope for the dress of a Saxon peasant, and discoursed on Acts from the pulpit. Indeed, in his conviction that interpretation was a collective endeavor, he became the first practical advocate of the later Puritan insistence that, read

in the proper light, the meaning of Scripture was accessible to all Christians. This became a hallmark of the dissenter, though paradoxical in a way: the idea that God might speak to all men at all times. Another hallmark was the note of impatience and the associated readiness to sweep away old structures to make way for change. Karlstadt criticized Luther's reliance on tradition and authority and preached instead of how the true congregation "be it great or small shall make up its own mind what is right and shall do it without tarrying for any."[95] In pursuit of this idea, and not long after Luther counseled patience in his *Invocavit* sermons, Karlstadt published a work that argued for the reform of God's church without waiting on the weaker conscience. Reformation, in his view, could not be constrained by the timetables of man. God's churches must be returned to their original purity immediately, which meant (in the first instance) cleansing the interiors of all images and idols, eliminating pedobaptism, and driving out all remnants of the Catholic Mass.[96]

Two aspects of Karlstadt's thought are worth noting at this stage. First, from the very outset of his career as a reformer, beginning with his attempts to reform the church order in Wittenberg, and then in the following years when he served as pastor in Orlamünde, Karlstadt invested the congregation with the authority to see through the building up of the evangelical church. With the elimination of the Catholic Mass, the institution of the Lord's Supper in two kinds, and the end of aural confession, Karlstadt reduced the role and the authority of the clergy and instead turned to the parishioners themselves, those believers who had been seized by the power of faith. In such laymen, Karlstadt argued, lay the future of the church, and it was through their roles as readers and interpreters of the Bible, joined together in a congregation of equal members, that Christianity would renew itself. This version of the priesthood of all believers went beyond the teachings of Wittenberg, and it became a hallmark of the radical tradition. Second, while Karlstadt, like Luther, taught the centrality of faith and justification, he tended to place stress on the process of renewal. The main motif in Karlstadt's theology was Christ as an image or exemplar for the believer. A Christian life was spent in imitation of Christ, made possible by the indwelling Spirit. Here again we see Karlstadt moving away from Luther's stress on justification as a one-time act to an emphasis on justification as a lifelong process of sanctification.[97]

While Karlstadt was preaching to the Orlamünde parishioners, the clergyman Thomas Müntzer (1488–1525) was developing a similar vision in a crescent of Saxon towns to the southwest of the university town. Müntzer was also moving beyond the idea of reform as conceived by Luther, in both theory and practice. He devised the first evangelical liturgy for his parishioners of Allstedt, all the while advocating the need to return to the proper order of God. As with Karlstadt, Müntzer looked to Scripture for guidance; unlike Karlstadt, however, Müntzer privileged the inner resources, looking to the Spirit rather than the Word. "If a man had neither seen nor heard the Bible all his life," he wrote, "yet through the teaching of the Spirit he could have an undeceivable Christian faith, like all those who without books wrote the Holy Scripture."[98]

The other feature of Müntzer's theology that took it beyond that of Luther was the growing tone of apocalypticism, the conviction that the resurrection of the apostolic church would mark the beginning of the end time. In his mind, reform was not just a human impulse to modify the existing church, it was providentially and theologically scripted. Müntzer thus called on the elect friends of God, those "united in the poverty

of the spirit," to withdraw from the existing churches and prepare the ground for the coming of Christ. More than just separation, this was vindication, the revenge of the elect for the betrayal of Christ. Müntzer saw himself as a prophet come to deliver the godly from the godless, and he began to speak openly of the need for violence in defense of this idea.[99] The high note was sounded in his *Sermon to the Princes* (1524), preached in the presence of both Duke Johann and the crown prince Johann Friedrich of Saxony. Evoking dreams from the second chapter of Daniel, Müntzer conjured an image of the German church that confirmed his apocalyptical forewarnings and emphasized the distance between the religion of his own day and the religion of Christ. Once it became clear that he would find no support among the ruling elite of Saxony, however, he turned to the parishioners and called on his fellow elect in Christ – the poor, oppressed, persecuted, powerless, and marginalized – to help him realize his vision. This was an idea of Christian Communion so far removed from traditional assumptions that Luther likened him to Satan.[100]

But the devil did not just reside in Saxony. Zwingli faced the same kind of opposition as he worked to see through the Reformation in Zurich. And like the situation in Saxony, the dissenting voices first emerged from within the ranks of his closest supporters, the main protagonist in the first instance being the recent convert Conrad Grebel (c.1498–1526), who began to preach reform in 1522. Even the initial grounds for separation were similar: Grebel came to disagree with Zwingli over his readiness to compromise the gospel in order to secure the cooperation of the magistracy, and he went so far as to suggest that Zwingli was willing to sacrifice the promises of the gospel on the altar of the law. "Zwingli," he wrote, "the herald of the Word, has cast down the Word, has trodden it underfoot, and has brought it into captivity."[101]

In contrast to Zwingli, Grebel and the other radicals held that Scripture could be understood by all men and women with faith. Bible exegesis was a collective endeavor – communal, dialogic, vernacular – and it was the responsibility of all Christians to seek constantly in the belief that the church could be restored with "the help of Christ's rule." As Zwingli charged them with literalist reading of Scripture and a stark legalism that lay behind the delusion in "supposing they would gather a church that was without sin," Grebel and his followers, speaking in similar terms, condemned the Zurich reformer for his betrayal of Christ.[102] Like Luther and Karlstadt before them, Zwingli and Grebel parted ways over the implications of their respective readings of Scripture for the actual process of reform. For Grebel, there could be no tarrying for weaker conscience; reform must be faithful to the Word, uncompromised and untarnished, and it must begin immediately. And he was not alone in his thoughts. In short order a number of like-minded reformers made their voices heard, among them Simon Stumpf, Balthasar Hubmaier, Wilhelm Reublin, and Ludwig Hätzer, who also began to challenge Zwingli's model of reform and call for a more thorough cleansing of the church.

Wherever dissenting or marginalized figures emerged, exclusion was as much imposed as it was voluntary. This was certainly true of Karlstadt and Müntzer, who were pushed out of the fold by Luther and the Wittenberg reformers. And it was true of Grebel and the later Swiss Anabaptists as well. But we should not let subsequent events obscure points of origin or deeper reasons for divergence. All of the evangelicals began with a common agenda; all were filled with the same desire to go beyond established

practice and recover authentic apostolic religion.[103] What was different was the scale of renewal they had in mind.

The first Protestant dissenters, later termed "radicals" by historians, pursued an idea of Christianity that threatened to sweep away traditional order. It was not revolution for revolution's sake; the central issue was the working of the Holy Spirit, and to be precise, how the faithful might come under its affective influence. But unlike the magisterial reformers, the radicals did not hold that the Spirit *necessarily* had to be mediated by external forms or that it was bound to institutions or media. With the full revelation of the Spirit, as the Nuremberg prophet Augustin Bader put it, "all outer sacraments [would] be rooted out, and there would be no baptism but affliction, no altar but Christ, no church but the community of believing men."[104] This indifference to forms was not the same thing as an indifference to Christian history. No less than the mainstream reformers, the radicals understood their movement as part of the historic revelation. But when the radicals spoke about returning to the "pure church" and rediscovering the Spirit of apostolic Christianity they spoke in different terms to those used by Luther or Zwingli. What was required was a fundamental overturning of the old order. The church was to be resurrected in the image of the Spirit-filled gatherings of the first Christians, free of the proof texts and ceremonies that had since been heaped on the faith. For the radicals, there could be no checks on the Spirit, neither traditional convictions nor dogmatic restraints, nor indeed Scripture itself. What this means in historical terms is that any attempt to categorize the radicals has to remain an approximate science. The only constant was the desire to overturn the social and ecclesial status quo and put in its place a vision of godly order that did not cater (as they saw it) to the weaknesses of fallen man.

Fundamental to the dissident or nonconformist impulse was thus a readiness to seek a religious order that paid no heed to traditional forms. Even in their search for apostolic origins, there was no a priori paradigm of a church that guided the radicals on their reforming mission.[105] Nor was there a hierarchy of church leaders (even if certain charismatic preachers did amass followers over time), or confessions of the faith along the lines of the Lutheran or Reformed variants – a few gathered thoughts, but nothing as comprehensive as the later magisterial syntheses. It was this lack of fixed order, this seeming Babel of opinion, that first prompted Luther to refer to the radicalism of the Saxons as *Schwärmerei*, a word that evoked medical theories relating to "fluttering thoughts" that swarmed and stung the mind as well as divination, or more specifically the ancient opinion that the activity of bees, as Calvin put it, "had some portion of the divine spirit and have drawn some virtue from the sky."[106] Luther believed that the radical rejection of the externals of the faith, along with their presumed reliance on the Spirit, had led them away from the teachings of Christ. Similarly, he added, their aversion to traditional religious forms, whether sacraments, rituals, images, or ceremonies, had just pushed them in the direction of servility to a new set of external laws, though these were purely of their own making. The consequence, Luther believed, was a religion based on blatant subjectivity and willful invention, the only possible outcome being a denial of all earthly and spiritual realities.

There is exaggeration here, with a note of panic mixed in, for the radicals did not reject externals if they fell in with first principles; and in any event Luther was speaking about the Saxon movement, for the Swiss Brethren regularly referred to fundamentals "which are laid out in the Letter of Scripture and sealed with the blood of Christ and

that of many witnesses to Jesus"[107] But Luther was right to emphasize their desire to resurrect perceived patterns of early Christianity that, if implemented, would have turned the world upside down. For the most part, they acknowledged Luther's "truths" only in order to see beyond them.

Ultimately, Luther's model of reform would dominate in northern and western Germany, but its rise was not as inevitable as later narratives might suggest. For every hard-line Wittenberg Lutheran there were men such as the patrician Gerhard Westerburg or the theologian Johannes Klopreiß, both of whom were sympathetic to the movement but saw no necessary contradiction in drawing together the thought of Zwingli, Erasmus, or Karlstadt and placing it alongside that of Luther. In numerous cities in the west and the north, from Dorpat and Reval, to the Hanseatic ports of Wismar, Stralsund, and Rostock, to large territorial towns such as Braunschweig, Goslar, and Celle, the early Reformation was inspired by a mix of influences, including Sacramentarianism, Zwinglianism, and the so-called enthusiasm of Karlstadt and Müntzer.[108] Thus it is misleading to speak of Lutheran uniformity during this period. Most reform-friendly clergymen would not have been preaching a distinct "brand" of the faith, but rather a syncretic grab-bag of evangelical ideas. Inspirited, emboldened, and often a bit punch-drunk from the sudden easy familiarity with Scripture, the early evangelicals of northern and western Germany were easy prey to the vagaries of interpretation. Different emphases might send the exegete in different directions. Too much Scripture might end in a bibliocratic church, for instance, while too much Spirit might remove the need for an institution altogether.

Historically speaking, the most profound diversity occurred in the villages near Zurich, where the men who had fallen out with Zwingli began to oversee local reformations. In the parishes of Höngg, Witikon, Zollikon, Tablat, and Teuffen, evangelical parishioners, often guided by wandering hedge preachers and former monks, gathered together in practicing congregations. The first step was active resistance to the Zurich paradigm, as when Stumpf, Reublin, and Grebel encouraged parishioners to stand firm against the collection of tithes, and this was soon followed by deeper criticism of the Zwinglian settlement, with the same men calling for a discrete church of believers, not yet fully separate but comprised only of "upright, Christian people." The religiosity of the radical Reformation will be discussed in a later chapter, but brief mention must be made here of some of the more profound changes that this entailed. Innovations included the abolition of the Catholic Mass and institution of a vernacular alternative; the purification of the church (which meant in essence the destruction of images and "idols"); the laicization of the office of pastor and the extension of the hermeneutic community; the introduction of adult baptism and communal discipline; and, following from this, the foundation of a voluntary church, a self-regulating, self-fashioning congregation of Christians. There may have been a practicing congregation of this type in the parish of Zollikon, where between January and June 1525 many of the essential traits of the radical tradition were put into practice, including communal readings of the Bible, commemorative celebrations of the Lord's Supper, adult baptisms, congregational discipline, and community of goods.[109]

Recognizing the threat to the status quo posed by such autochthonous reformations, the magisterial theologians were quick to react. Already by 1524 Luther had decided that no degree of charity would lead Müntzer back to the fold, and so he advised the

elector to act against the reformer and his followers. He feared that the radical preachers were leading the parishioners to their own destruction, proof that the devil "intends through these emissaries to create rebellion and murder (even if for a while he carries on peacefully), and to overthrow both spiritual and temporal government against the will of God."[110] Rather than stigmatizing the Wittenberg church with the blood of so many "pious, holy, and blameless men" (as they were popularly perceived), Luther delivered the radicals to the secular authorities. With the destruction wrought by the Peasants' War of 1525 still fresh in mind, Luther began to draw a distinction between matters of conscience and instances of blasphemy, the latter being a public concern as it affected the entire electorate. After the publication of the *Instructions for the Visitors of Saxony* (1528), blasphemy or unrest (*Aufruhr*) was defined as anything that deviated from the faith as stipulated in the *Instructions*. As a consequence, the activities of the radical reformers, whom Luther considered to be preachers of blasphemy, fell subject to the secular arm as disturbers of the public peace. All religion that was not fully in accordance with the teaching of Wittenberg and its approved preachers became blasphemy and destructive of civil order. Melanchthon spelled out the crux of their concerns in a brief to Elector Johannes Friedrich, encouraging the elector be merciless in his use of the sword against Anabaptists, for their vocal condemnations of the ministry and conviction that salvation was possible without sermons or church service was no less destructive of public order than open rebellion.[111]

Faced with the same threat of disorder, Zwingli and the Zurich council reacted in a similar fashion. The first execution of an Anabaptist occurred in Zurich in 1526, with the victim being drowned in the river Limmat. Others followed in train. But this campaign against the radicals was not specifically Lutheran or Zwinglian. Throughout both Protestant and Catholic Europe, the authorities, encouraged and legitimated by the theologians, outlawed and persecuted the radicals, pushing them back to the dark corners of the land and uprooting them wherever they could be found. The death knell for the movement in its initial phase came in 1529, when the estates at the Diet of Speyer voted unanimously in favor of the law, rooted in the Justinian code, that rebaptism was a capital crime. Degrees of persecution varied, but most of the imperial estates were vigorous in the application of the law, with the result that those communities that were not disbanded or eliminated outright were forced into hiding. As we will see in a subsequent discussion, radical Protestants would look back on this period as an age of persecution and martyrdom, the crucible for the myths of origins cultivated by later generations. The martyrs hymn *How Costly is the Death of the Saints* (1526) relates something of the collective memory:

> To the forests depths we creep.
> With hounds they hunt us down.
> We're herded onward like dumb sheep,
> All tightly chained and bound.
> By everyone we're scorned and shunned,
> As would-be agitators;
> Given no quarter,
> Like lambs to the slaughter,
> As heretics and traitors.[112]

For moderate Protestants, the lingering memory was one of unease and anxiety, brought on by the fear that the radicals would rise again and turn the world upside-down. And indeed it did happen once. In 1534 Anabaptists took over the Westphalian city of Münster. The community was an outgrowth of the radical millenarianism fostered in parts of northern Germany and the Netherlands in the years following the defeat of the rebels in 1525. Foremost among its architects was the Swabian radical Melchior Hoffman (1495–1543), who had been preaching the coming apocalypse in the Baltic lands. Inspired by Hoffman's vision, and moved by the prophecy that Münster would be the site of the New Jerusalem, hundreds of Anabaptists made their way to the city and ultimately wrested control from the Lutheran council. By February 1534, the radical faction was in power. Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, and all residents who would not accept baptism into the community were driven out of the city. Led first by the prophet Jan Matthijs and then by the self-proclaimed messianic king Jan Beukelsz, the Anabaptists worked to turn Münster into a theocracy. Inspired by the Spirit, a strict model of biblical rule was imposed on the commune, including government through 12 elders, an extreme form of community of goods, a harsh disciplinary code that punished without appeal transgressions of the Ten Commandments and, once the reign of Beukelsz had reached its final phase, the reinstitution of polygamy as practiced by the patriarchs. In that year coins were minted in Münster heralding the arrival of the millennial kingdom with a verse that effectively summarized the ontology of the radical utopia: "The Word has become Flesh and dwells in us, One king over all. One God, one Faith, one Baptism."[113] In June, 1535 the kingdom came to an end when the town fell to the armies camped outside of its walls. In January, 1536 Beukelsz and his followers were tortured, executed, and their bodies were placed in steel cages and hung from the steeple of St Lambert's Church.

In the Swiss and German lands, the rise and fall of Münster was a turning point in Protestant history. Events in the city shocked the authorities into action, and there was a marked increase in persecutions after the defeat. For centuries, the memory of the radical utopia played on the Protestant mind, not only placing limits on the extremes to which the interpreters were willing to go in their search for the godly community, but also reminding them that the only thing separating their religion from the chaos of Münster was a reading of Scripture. Hence the rapid response of the Wittenberg reformers to the fall of the Westphalian city. Urbanus Rhegius wrote a work (prefaced by Luther) condemning the Anabaptists for their literal reading of the Old Testament and failure to understand it in light of the gospel. For Rhegius, the consequence of such an extreme misreading was clear to see: lust for power and worldly gain, all bound together in an earthly vision of the kingdom of Christ (*Reich Christi*).[114] Nikolaus von Amsdorf, Melanchthon, and a host of Hessian reformers wrote in a similar vein, as did other strains of Protestant commentators, from the Spiritualist Sebastian Franck, the authors of the *Chronicle of the Hutterites* (who referred to Münster as a "new religion"), to the later Lutheran Pietist Gottfried Arnold, who was willing to countenance Thomas Müntzer and a host of other radicals in his crusade against orthodoxy, yet dismissed Münster as an aberration.[115]

The ghost of Münster would long haunt the thoughts of the moderate Protestants in the German and Swiss lands. Whenever parishioners needed to be reminded of the dangers of religious enthusiasm the authorities would conjure the history of the

kingdom of the Anabaptists. And the real fear was not so much the return of Münster as a specific historical episode as the realization that the ideas and the communities were still active in the world. They remained ever-present and very near, surfacing whenever the magisterial systems suffered a crisis or a period of disorder. Yet radicalism of this stamp was impossible to eradicate, for the threat of extremes was part of the Protestant condition, and to a large extent it was this "inner" anxiety, rather than the "outer" recoil from Catholicism, that would shape the magisterial tradition in the sixteenth century. Over the longer term, the radicals started to take on the role played by the papacy at the start of the Reformation: that of nemesis.

Geneva and Europe

The honor of Christ

A few months after the reign of the Münster Anabaptists reached its violent conclusion, a French scholar working in the Swiss city of Basel put the finishing touches on a work that came to be known as the *Institutes*, the most comprehensive and profound articulation of the idea of Protestant order to emerge out the Reformation. The author of the work was John Calvin (1509–64), traditionally viewed as the last of the first-generation triumvirate of Reformation founding fathers (along with Luther and Zwingli) and the consolidator of the Reformed tradition.

Born in Noyon in the French province of Picardy, Calvin was sent as a boy to study in Paris, where he read for an arts degree at the Collège de Montaigu. Details of his early life are in short supply, but it is likely that he was exposed to the same intellectual influences as any student in Paris at the time, which at the Collège de Montaigu would have been a mix of late-scholastic Aristotelianism, the Augustinianism of the "modern" school, along with the witches brew of theories that made up the *viae*, or ways, of philosophical thought. In 1525 or 1526, on the intervention of his father, Calvin transferred to Orléans to take up the study of law, a change of discipline that would prove invaluable for his later career as a reformer. It was equally important for his development as a thinker, for in Orléans Calvin was able to immerse himself in French humanism and its critical approach to medieval thought. It is not until 1533, however, in Paris once again, that we catch early signs of Calvin the evangelical reformer. Years later, much like Luther, he would speak in terms of a "sudden conversion" to the new faith. More likely, in the eyes of historians (again, as was the case with Luther), was a more gradual transition from a philosophy of Christian humanism in the mold of Erasmus and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples to an active anti-Catholicism, a private pilgrimage helped on its way by the clampdown on the early Reformation movement in France after 1533 and the persecution of so-called Lutherans and evangelicals that began in earnest after the Affair of the Placards in 1534. Like many of his reform-minded colleagues in Paris, Calvin was forced to leave France. In late 1534 he settled in the Swiss city of Basel, where he took on a pseudonym and prepared the *Institutes* for publication.[116]

No Protestant reformer of the first rank was as occupied with the issue of godly order as John Calvin. Everywhere Calvin looked, from the proverbial hairs on his head to the Alpine peaks that encircled Geneva, he saw the evidence of God's ordering hand at

work. And yet it did not lead to a sense of equilibrium or security. On the contrary, it inflamed his state of anxiety, for it reminded Calvin of the essential contingency and ultimate incomprehensibility of the world. Everything had been created by God and was dependent on the divine will. The only thing that stopped the natural order from descending into chaos, he believed, was the grace of God. Without this grace, the waters, the lightest of elements, would flood the earth and the sun and the moon would crash into the earth. "God shows us as in a mirror," he wrote, "the frequent and sudden changes in the world which ought to awaken us from our torpor so that none of us will dare to promise himself another day, or even another hour, or another moment."[117] Humankind was perched on a precipice, perpetually, and the only thing that prevented the descent into chaos was the controlling hand of the divine.

Calvin often made the point with examples taken from the natural world, but his real concern was with religious order, or, more precisely, how Christian society could best serve the divine will on earth. As he wrote, "It is only when we live in accordance with the rule of God that our life is set in order; apart from this ordering, there is nothing in human life but confusion."[118] In working out this order, it has been remarked, Calvin tended to move between two related extremes: on the one hand he spoke of the dangers of the abyss, by which he meant the absence of order, forms, and boundaries; and on the other, he spoke of the labyrinth, a claustrophobic idea that played on the inability of Christians to free themselves from suffocating and alienating constraints.[119] This is a similar thematic to the law and gospel dialectic favored by Luther, and once translated into social and political terms it was concerned with the same dilemma of how much freedom and how much constraint made up the godly order. Calvin had no doubt that the answer to this question was in Scripture, which he spoke of as a type of "carpenter's rule" that clearly revealed the will of God. Unlike Luther, Calvin did not think that God tied up his thoughts in paradox.

Following the 1534 Affair of the Placards in France, which had been an attempt by the evangelical underground to win the sympathy of the French people by posting a series of notices against the "horrible, great and insufferable papal Mass" throughout the kingdom (including, it was alleged, on the door of the king's bedroom in Amboise), the Reformation movement was branded a threat to the sovereignty of the Crown and evangelicals became rebels. Converts were faced with two choices: either to remain in the land and risk persecution or to go into exile. Many chose the latter option and left for the French-speaking regions on the eastern borders of the kingdom, and in particular those areas drawn into the orbit of the Swiss Reformation, such as the county of Neuchâtel and the Pays de Vaud, which had fallen under the influence of the Protestant city of Bern. During the course of its expansion in the 1530s, Bern had also contributed to the spread of the Reformation in the neighboring cities of Lausanne, Solothurn, Fribourg, and Geneva. This proved fateful for the broader history of Protestants, of course, for Geneva was the place where the firebrand evangelical preacher Guillaume Farel (1489–1565) convinced Calvin that God had marked him out for the task of reforming the church, by which he meant the Genevan church. Calvin had intended to pursue a quiet life immersed in scholarship, but his sharp sense of providentialism impelled him to remain. In his own words, after he had explained to Farel his plans to devote himself to private study, "he [Farel] proceeded to utter a threat that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought,

if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent."[120] Later Reformed Protestantism would look to this union of the refugee French evangelical and the recently liberated episcopal city on the borders of the Swiss Confederacy as the historical point of origin of their religion as a providential coming together of prophet and place – much as Lutherans have often treated Luther's early history in Wittenberg.

In truth, for all of his theological and organizational genius, Calvin had a fair share of Protestant luck on his side. Politically speaking, Geneva, like most of the cities and territories where the Reformation first took hold, was predisposed to find certain aspects of the evangelical message appealing. Long under the dominion of the dukes of Savoy and the Genevan bishops, Geneva was in the midst of a struggle for independence when the first reformers arrived. Consequently, the sharp tone of anti-Catholicism and the evangelical message of Christian freedom, both of which were quickly appropriated by the preachers of political freedom, provided welcome support for the party of independence. Moreover, in order to defend itself against Savoyard aggression, Geneva had entered into an alliance with the Swiss cities of Fribourg and Bern. This enabled the Protestant magistracy of Bern to foster the rise of the Reformation in Geneva, especially after the alliance with Catholic Fribourg came to an end. Farel, for instance, had first come to the city under Bernese safe-conduct. Thus when Calvin arrived in 1536, there was no resident bishop to contend with, no powerful Catholic clerical presence, and an extant group of local patriots who readily associated the early Reformation with the struggle for local autonomy.

Once established in Geneva, Calvin was able to develop a system of church rule that adapted New Testament essentials to local circumstances. Not only did it empower the clergy to a greater degree than any other Catholic or Lutheran ecclesiology of the time, but with its emphasis on discipline, its fourfold offices of ministry, and its new institutions such as the Consistory and the Company of Pastors, it turned the church into a more effective means of binding the parishioners to the faith, both as the agents of church rule and as its subjects. Yet none of this was done at the expense of civil sovereignty. At no stage in Calvin's career did the church work independently of the state, and indeed it was never the intention to free the church from secular control, but rather to effect the appropriate balance (what Calvin termed *aequitas*) between the secular and the sacral.[121] No less than Luther, Calvin thought it essential – a matter of salvation – to get the balance right.

Calvin devoted his career in Geneva to this end, and it often brought him into conflict with the Genevan populace. His first stint in the city, from 1536 to 1538, was cut short after he, Farel, and other pastors fell out with the magistracy over the new church order. The sticking-point was the issue of excommunication and whether it should be placed in the hands of the magistrates or the clergy. Refusing to bend to the will of the council, Calvin was forced to leave the city and took up residence in Strasbourg, only to be approached in 1541 with the request for his return, sweetened with assurances that he could develop his model of church governance. Yet even after 1541, anti-Calvin and anticlerical factions were prominent in the city, often led by citizens of high standing. Until 1555, when the pro-Calvin party finally got the upper hand, the idea of *aequitas* seemed a very unlikely prospect. A threatening note directed against Calvin and posted in one of the churches gives something of the mood:

> Gross hypocrite, you and your companions will gain little by your pains. If you do not save yourselves by flight, nobody will prevent your overthrow and you will curse the hour when you left your monkery. Warning has been already given that the devil and his renegade priests were come hither to ruin every thing. But after people have suffered long they avenge themselves ... We will not have so many masters. Mark well what I say.[122]

Over the course of his career in Geneva, Calvin had to face continuing resistance of this kind. And not all vented their wrath in anonymous notes. Among Calvin's more famous opponents the following usually have a place of prominence in his biography: Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec, the former Carmelite theologian and physician who challenged Calvin's teaching on predestination and was arrested and banished for his efforts; Ami Perrin, the Genevan nobleman and city magistrate who led the struggle against the power of Calvin and his pastors over issues of discipline and excommunication – he too was expelled; and, most famously, Michael Servetus, the Spanish theologian, whose views on the Trinity eventually led to his imprisonment by the Genevan magistrates and death by burning at the stake.[123]

Calvin was greatly influenced by Luther, and he held the Wittenberg reformer in esteem, but in his full-blooded theology he was a clear proponent of the southern German/Swiss variant of early Protestant thought. And he was more than just a latter-day synthesizer. Calvin's thought on predestination, the nature of the church, and the importance of discipline were no less significant for the shaping of Protestant history than Luther's theory of justification or Zwingli's appeal to Christian freedom. On many of the issues that divided Zurich and Wittenberg he took up a position that placed him outside both camps. Like all mainstream Reformation theologians, he taught justification through faith alone, and he rejected any suggestion that grace might be earned or mediated by a priest. But he was more inclined to speak of a "path" to justification than Luther was, thus stressing sanctification as well as justification, and he emphasized how the believer might participate in the grace of Christ and share in his benefits. Similarly, he adopted something of a middle way in the debate over the Eucharist. Calvin rejected Catholic teaching, yet he did not embrace Luther's notion of ubiquity, nor did he side with Zwingli and his symbolic interpretation of the sacrament. Instead, he taught that the bread and wine, though having no power in and of themselves as signs, raised up the heart and spirit of the faithful and thus, through the Word, brought them closer to the presence of God. Finally, again like all mainstream reformers, Calvin emphasized the importance of Scripture for knowledge of the faith and the pursuit of a Christian life. According to Calvin, the entire world was a "mirror of divinity" that could be perceived through the "spectacles" of Scripture. But he was quick to place restrictions on the liberties that the parishioners might assume with the sacred text. The final judge in matters of belief remained the clergy, those marked out by education and authority for the task (*doctores*). The laity might look to the Bible to clarify or confirm a point of teaching, but they were not to stray beyond Genevan orthodoxy.[124]

Calvin detailed his understanding of the faith in a huge outpouring of works over the course of his career, most of which were published by the Genevan printers Henri Estienne and Jean Crespin. Like Luther, he wrote in both Latin and the vernacular, and while his style was generally much more structured and formal than Luther's, he too showed great invention in the use of his mother tongue, sometimes creating new words

in order to capture the meaning of complex Latin (such as the French verb *édifier* to relate the notion of building up, *aedificatio*). His most influential publication was the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), a text that was carefully crafted and re-crafted in multiple editions in order to capture the changing dimensions and emphases of his evolving thought. In the first edition, the *Institutes* was a fairly manageable compendium, just six chapters long, and written in the manner of a catechism (he had used Luther's 1529 catechisms as a guide). From the 1539 edition onward, the structure and the purpose of the work changed. It went from being a teaching tool for the inculcation of piety and doctrine to a compendium intended for a learned readership. By 1559, the Latin edition numbered 82 chapters in four books, the most comprehensive statement of Protestant theology of the sixteenth century, and the best guide to Calvin's thought on the nature of the Christian religion.[125]

The final edition of the *Institutes* (1559) was structured according to the following themes: the doctrine of divine creation and providence; the doctrine of redemption and sin; the application of this redemption to the faithful (faith, regeneration, justification, predestination); and the nature of the godly community – by which was meant the church, the ministry, and the sacraments. No single theological principle united the work, but it was clearly rooted in the idea that Christ, in both his divine and human aspects, was the key to salvation. In the final book, Calvin took up the matter of the church and consequently the issue of Christian order on earth. His views on this subject represent perhaps his most famous legacy, for here was the blueprint – in its general structural outline – for the most widespread form of ecclesiastical order in the Protestant world. In essence, Calvin's notion of the true church was the same as that of the other Protestant reformers: the church is where the Word is preached and the sacraments are properly administered. But in addition to this essentialist view, Calvin drew on Scripture to develop a practical guide for the ordering of the church in Geneva, all of which he spelled out in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541). From that point forward, four offices comprised the body of ecclesiastical officials in Geneva: pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. Paramount was the office of pastor, for these were the men charged with the preaching of the Word and the administering of the sacraments. Calvin never wavered in his belief that the office of pastor was the lynch-pin of the Christian commonwealth. "Neither the light and heat of the sun," he wrote, "nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth."[126]

With a view to the history of Protestant order, however, the most significant office was that of elder, for these were the agents of the disciplinary process, the men charged to uphold what Calvin termed "the honor of Christ" by ensuring that the commune of Geneva became, and remained, Christian. That is why the issue of discipline was so important for Calvin and the churches that followed the Genevan paradigm, for proper faith did not just embrace understanding, it embraced conduct as well. Calvin was not the first of the reformers to stress the importance of discipline for the church. The Strasbourg theologian Martin Bucer, Calvin's patron during his period of exile, went so far as to consider discipline one of the marks of the true church. But Calvin was the first of the reformers to turn the pursuit of Christian conduct into a social and political dynamic.

The image of Calvin as the bearded puritan killjoy and Geneva as the laboratory for his experiment in godly discipline has had a long life in Reformation historiography. It first emerged during the lifetime of the reformer, and indeed the sheer wealth of firsthand testimony, popularized by Protestants and Jesuits alike, would suggest that there was truth in the idea: namely, that Geneva was a commune under the yoke of Scripture. The Lutheran Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), for instance, who visited the city, claimed that the discipline of morals in Geneva was without parallel in Europe. "As a result," he wrote, "all cursing, gambling, luxury, quarreling, hatred, conceit, deceit, extravagance, and the like, to say nothing of the greater sins, are prevented. What a glorious adornment – such purity of morals – for the Christian religion!"[127] True or not (and Andreae would go on to write a utopia), the image, and the ideal, captured the Protestant imagination.

What turned the ideal into practice was the Genevan model of church rule, the prototype of the presbyterial–synodal system. With the introduction of the *Ordinances* of 1541, which was in effect the mandate of reform in Geneva, not only was the liturgy reworked, the number of holy days reduced, the sacraments pared down to baptism and Communion, the walls of the churches whitewashed and the pulpits repositioned, but a new form of church rule emerged to hold everything in place. Superseding the former episcopal hierarchy was the Company of Pastors, a body made up of the urban and rural clergy responsible for doctrine and clerical discipline. But even more important was the consistory. Comprised of 24 officials – 12 urban pastors and 12 lay elders, the latter representing the main councils of the city – the consistory was created in order to watch over Christian discipline. It did not mete out high justice, but as a method of overseeing the parishioners and elevating the importance of godly conduct it was extremely effective. Fundamental to its workings were the lay elders, whose remit was "to keep watch over every man's life, to admonish amiably those whom they see leading a disorderly life, and where necessary to report to the assembly [consistory] which will be deputized to make fraternal correction."[128] Research on the consistory records would suggest that the main concern was with crimes that threatened the family or sexual norms, such as adultery, prostitution, premarital intercourse, and rape. But it swept a wide range of sins up in its net, from drinking, dancing, and public violence, to superstition (which included Catholicism) and blasphemy. It was, in the words of its historians, "a remarkably intrusive institution."[129]

For the issue of Protestant order, Calvin's emphasis on discipline was a particularly important aspect of the Genevan Reformation, as this was a clear instance of the conflation of evangelical theology with social and political reality, a demonstration of how the religious ideals of the Reformation impacted upon the age. The concern with discipline was not new, of course; the late medieval church had been no less concerned with the moral order. But there was now a more explicit association between what a Christian should believe and how he or she should behave. This union of faith and morality runs throughout Calvin's theology. It is apparent in the stress he placed on the relationship between justification and sanctification, on the continuity between the laws of the Old Testament and the gospel of Christ, and on his insistence that faith would effect a moral regeneration. True believers would necessarily live in accordance with God's Word. Moreover, discipline was viewed as an earthly means of preserving the purity of the eucharistic community, a way to reunite sinners with God while preventing

the "putrid members" from infecting the church. For Calvin, Holy Communion was the "primary order," a point he made as early as 1537 in the articles he drew up for Geneva:

> The primary order which is required and for which one should have the greatest solicitude is that holy Communion, ordained and instituted to join the followers of our lord Jesus Christ with their chief and among themselves in body and spirit, must not be defiled and contaminated by the communication of those who declare and make manifest by their wicked and iniquitous lives that they do not at all belong to Jesus; for in this profaning of His sacrament our Lord is greatly dishonored.[130]

As we will see, in Geneva and elsewhere in Europe, the extent to which the clergy watched over this order independent of the state was a matter for ongoing debate, particularly when it came to the question of excommunication. But, whatever the relationship between the secular and the spiritual, all of the later Reformed communities followed Calvin in emphasizing the necessity of discipline. The institutions that were established varied: there were consistories in France, for instance, but kirk sessions in Scotland and *Chorgerichte* in the Swiss lands. The nature of the officials varied as well: while elders were fairly ubiquitous, there were also "censors and captors" in Aberdeen and anonymous informers in Montauban. And the intensity of the disciplinary process changed with time and place. Few communities could match the godly ethos of Geneva during Calvin's ministry – perhaps St Andrews while Andrew Melville was preaching or Utrecht under Gisbertus Voetius – but at some level and in some form the moral imperative marked out all the Reformed churches of the sixteenth century.[131]

And yet, as important as the moral dimension of Christianity was to Calvin, his concern with discipline was the corollary of a more prominent theme: the sovereignty of God. On this subject, Calvin revealed his thoughts most dramatically in his discussions of providence and predestination, the latter being God's plan as it concerned the election and damnation of fallen man. Despite the importance of these two themes in later Reformed thought, they never had pride of place in the run of Calvin's published works. In the *Institutes*, for instance, the two concepts, so indelibly bound, were treated as separate subjects, partly because Calvin was reluctant to probe too deeply into mysteries he considered beyond human comprehension. Yet they were fundamentals of his theology, and both concepts were explicit illustrations of Calvin's teaching that God is the all-powerful primary cause, that he superintends the universe according to a "secret plan" beyond the comprehension of humankind, and that it is the duty of the faithful, in so far as it is possible, to devote their lives to living in accordance with this plan. For even though much remains hidden behind mysteries and secondary causes, all believers must do their best to "inquire and learn from Scripture what is pleasing to God so that they may strive toward this under the Spirit's guidance."[132]

Taken together, the twinned concepts of providence and predestination exercised a powerful influence on the history of early modern Reformed Protestants. Of course, both concepts were as old as Christianity, and in the essentials Calvin borrowed most things from the Thomist tradition. But no previous theologian had spoken about these mysteries in such unsparing terms before, and few theologians had used them to such effect in the body of their thought. Calvin's teaching on providence, for instance,

proved a very effective ordering device, for it could encompass all other aspects of the faith within the folds of its logic. The question of sanctification could be illustrated with reference to God's secret plan, for just as God was assuredly "constructing, redeeming, and restoring" his kingdom on earth, so too was he sanctifying the souls of the elect. Similarly, Calvin's theology of the social and political order, which was essentially a conservative scheme, could be justified with reference to providentialism, for God worked his will *through* history, which meant that the rulers and the institutions of the day were part of the divine order and, unless they were explicitly violating God's Word, must be honored and obeyed. And, of course, the idea of predestination itself, which Calvin defined as "God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man," not only helped to explain the place of the believer within the economy of salvation, it made it possible for the clergy to relate the essentials of evangelical theology to the spiritual and psychological dimensions of human experience. Election, it was claimed, was something that might be revealed in daily life, through an increase in charity, for instance, or a steady stream of brotherly love. God's hand was everywhere. "When we see that there is *some* order in the world," wrote Calvin, "we can see as in a mirror that God has not so let loose the reins to all confusion that he does not still show us some sign and token of his justice."[133]

For many parishioners, the justice of Calvin's theory of double predestination was difficult to grasp. The idea that some were born to salvation and others to damnation was not easy to reconcile with common sense. And it is doubtful there was much consolation in Calvin's insistence that God's willingness to save any souls from a stock of pure sinners was proof enough of his love, particularly for those who were more concerned about the damned than the saved. But just as a hanging, as Samuel Johnson once put it, will wonderfully concentrate the mind of a condemned criminal, so too did providence and predestination focus the minds of early modern Protestants. As a historian of providentialism in England has put it: "It was a set of ideological spectacles through which individuals of all social levels and from all positions on the confessional spectrum were apt to view their universe, an invisible prism which helped them to focus the refractory meanings of both petty and perplexing events."[134]

Speaking in general terms, two types of reaction might follow from the "terrible decree" of predestination. At one extreme, it could easily cripple the faithful and push them to the edge of despair. Damnation, after all, was the predestined lot of the majority, and for any soul already inclined to suffer doubt and anxiety in the face of the law this would have just stoked the (pending) flames. Later Protestants, as we will see, were inclined to dwell on the negative aspects of predestination, and indeed one of the underlying motives of the later revivalist movements was to break free from this decree. But there was another response to the doctrine, and it tended to have the opposite effect. For many Protestants, the doctrine of predestination was liberating. From a personal viewpoint, the idea that one might be among the elect was a very powerful conceit, for it marked out the believer (in his or her mind) as one of the predestined saints, one of God's chosen few. "I honour and glorifie my God," proclaimed a Puritan of the following century, "who hath passed by so many thousands as he hath done, and left them in their sins, and yet hath chosen me freely before the foundation of the world was laid."[135] But at a more general level as well, the notion that God had a secret plan, eternal and ineluctable in its course, and that there was a group of elect Christians who

were in a special bond of fraternity with God, did much to contribute to the rise of Protestant identity. For it meant that men and women of pure faith (the elect) might think of themselves as advancing God's purpose, and that all laws and constraints that opposed or undermined this purpose were ungodly and had to be overcome.[136] What were customs and traditions compared to the divine decree? This sense of providential purpose, and this community of self-conscious saints and self-righteous actors, were important legacies of Calvin's Reformation in Geneva, and one of the main reasons why it was the Reformed Protestants, rather than the Lutherans, who became the first missionaries of the faith.

The Reformed matrix

Even before Calvin emerged triumphant in 1555, the different strands of Reformed Protestantism had started to gather together. The process dates back to the long tutelage of Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), Zwingli's successor in Zurich, which eventually led to a rapprochement with Geneva and a joint theological statement, the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549. By way of an extensive network of correspondence, a prolific and successful career as an author, and an active community of like-minded scholars, Bullinger had been able to preserve and indeed expand the Zwinglian legacy. Calvin followed Bullinger's lead. In close cooperation with neighboring reformers such as Pierre Viret in Lausanne and Guillaume Farel in Neuchâtel, Calvin first built up a matrix of Reformed communes, then he turned his attention to international affairs. Like Bullinger, he corresponded with contacts throughout Europe and produced a steady stream of publications for an international readership, often directing his works at Europe's ruling elite in the hope that they might emerge as patrons of the movement.

But this Reformed matrix was not just reliant on Bullinger and Calvin. Other prominent reformers within the Swiss tradition also contributed to the creation of an international Reformed community, perhaps the best known being the clergyman John a Lasco (1499–1560), a Polish nobleman who had been trained for a career in the Catholic church before converting to Protestantism in the early 1540s. While serving as principal pastor of the city of Emden and superintendent of the church in East Friesland, a Lasco encouraged the planting of the faith in northern Germany close to the borders of the Dutch Republic and within the trade corridors of southern England. Emden became the "Geneva of the north," not only in the sense that it experienced a (slightly altered) Reformation in the Genevan mold, but also to the extent that it became an important nodal point on the growing network of Reformed communities and a place of refuge for the persecuted brethren in the north.[137]

By mid-century, Reformed Protestantism had surpassed Lutheranism as the most dynamic form of Reformation Christianity. Followers continued to congregate in urban sanctuaries such Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Aachen, and Wesel. Moreover, as we will see, the faith emerged as the public religion of a number of nations and territories, including the Palatinate, England, Scotland, the Dutch Republic, and parts of Poland-Lithuania and Hungary. Historians have come up with a long list of reasons why this may have occurred, ranging from the deep motives of religious psychology to the pragmatics of rule. Opinions vary, but what seems common to all

of them is the emphasis placed on the transient nature of the faith. It traveled well. Although there were a few "perfect schools of Christ" like Calvin's Geneva, the majority of first-generation of Reformed Protestants did not belong to a public church but rather acquired their sense of community by way of the traffic of ideas, personal contacts, and shared experience. For an early convert such as the English churchman John Bale (1495–1563), for instance, who was forced to flee persecution in Ireland and find shelter among the refugees in Wesel in Germany, the mark of a Reformed Protestant was the experience of persecution and exile and the associated sense that the true church was not hedged in by any specific polity or place. The sheer experience of so much uprooted humanity in Geneva prompted to Bale to ask "is it not wonderful that Spaniards, Italians, Scots, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, disagreeing in manners, speech and apparel, sheep and wolves, bulls and bears, being coupled only with the yoke of Christ, should live so lovingly and friendly ... like a spiritual and Christian congregation."[138] Born in part by this type of experience, the Reformed Protestants, more so than the Lutherans (though not as much as the radicals), were able to look beyond the distinctions of traditional Christian society and imagine themselves as members of a church united by the higher ties of faith. Moreover, in their search for religious purity, the followers of the Helvetic tradition were more prepared to reject or abandon society, community, or the state in order to pursue their ideal. The final goal was a sacral community fashioned and regulated by Scripture alone, and this necessarily meant that many of the Reformed Protestants were rootless and mobile, ready to displace themselves in the search for their own perfect school of Christ.[139]

These tendencies made Reformed Protestantism an extremely tractile and resilient tradition, as was borne out by the theological agreements of the sixteenth century, which were made possible by a mix of dogma and calculated ambiguity. Throughout Europe, believers could think of themselves as belonging to a universal Reformed community while teaching and worshipping in terms that were specific to a particular area or church. Different national groupings had different theological emphases, while the church structures, though similar to the Genevan system in their essentials, could vary from place to place, often using different names to describe institutions that were essentially the same. Even the experience of worship varied. In England, for instance, a parishioner was most likely to kneel to receive Communion from a clergyman in a surplice; in France, he or she would file past a minister who was dressed in a basic black gown; in Scotland or the Dutch Republic, the parishioners might be seated at a table and receive the bread and wine from the local elders.[140] It was this mix, part principle and part pragmatics, that made the faith take so readily in different environments. This point can be demonstrated with reference to two brief examples separated by circumstance and place: the spread of the faith in France to the west and Hungary to the east.

It was inevitable that Calvin, Noyon's own prodigal son, would turn his attention to France once his position in Geneva was secure. Despite the major setbacks of the 1530s – when the French king Francis I (1494–1547) began to persecute evangelicals and over-zealous humanists – the early Reformation movement had made some progress. By mid-century there was an active underground network, more Swiss than Saxon in its essentials, and numerous small Reformed communities throughout the kingdom, both

in the countryside and in large cities, where the faithful would gather in homes, barns, sheds, and fields for clandestine services and Bible readings, often meeting with drawn swords and armed scouts just to be on their guard.

After 1555, Geneva became the main hub of a Reformed support system providing the French communities with a steady stream of preachers and publications for the spread and upholding of the faith. As a result of this initiative, most of the Reformed churches in France adopted the Genevan forms of the service and Calvin's interpretation of the faith. A particularly valuable export was the Genevan model of church rule, which in the typical Reformed manner was adapted to fit French circumstances. Since the state would not be the framework for reform in the manner of the Lutheran Reformation an ecclesiology had to be developed that could work independently of the secular arm. French Protestants achieved this by tweaking the Genevan model and devising the presbyterial-synodal system, a form of church governance that made all of the congregations (in theory) equal parts of a hierarchical scheme based on consistories, colloquies, and synods designed to oversee church affairs at the national and provincial level while pastors and elders administered to local congregations. On the basis of these foundations Reformed communities were able to emerge throughout the kingdom, and in particular in the crescent to the south of the kingdom linking the provinces of Dauphiné, Languedoc, Gascony, and Poitou. Reformed Protestantism attracted a considerable portion of the population – up to 10 percent by some estimates – ranging from artisans and merchants in major cities such as Nîmes, Montauban, and La Rochelle to members of the ruling family in Paris.[141]

The history of the Reformed community in La Rochelle, the French Atlantic port that became the "theatre of the French religious wars," offers some insight into the local dynamics.[142] Although a "bonne ville" marked out by special privileges granted by the Crown, the relations between La Rochelle and the royal officials were tense during the sixteenth century. Like all urban communes in this period, the magistracy sought greater autonomy, which in this case could only occur at the expense of the bishop of Saintes and the Crown. The ideas of the early Reformation, with the stress on liberty and communal forms of religion, had a natural appeal for a people attuned to the ideal of civic independence, and the movement soon found a ready audience. By the 1540s, the Parisian magistrates at Angers considered La Rochelle the foremost city of the new heresy in France. And with some justice. Throughout the 1540s and early 1550s Reformed clergy had been preaching the message and gathering supporters. After 1555, once Geneva intervened, the Protestants were substantial enough to establish a system of church rule, appoint Reformed preachers, and set up a consistory. Additional clergy arrived in the 1560s – there were four Geneva-trained pastors in the city in 1563 – and in short order a substantial community emerged. According to one estimate, up to 30 people per day were recruited to the faith. And while the membership increased, the clergy continued to preach, teach, and spread the message. In this they were given crucial aid in the 1560s when the Calvinist printer Barthélemy Berton set up shop in the town and published a steady stream of psalters, vernacular copies of the New Testament, catechisms, pamphlets, and works by Calvin and his successor Theodore Beza (1519–1605). By the 1560s, most of the ruling elite had converted to the faith, and that included a mayor and a royal governor, and La Rochelle was well on its way to becoming the bastion of the French Protestant cause during the Wars of Religion.

Indeed, it marked itself out for this role, establishing ties with the Huguenot grandee Louis, prince de Condé, in 1568 and quickly putting its defenses in order – which meant, among other things, building new fortifications, an undertaking that was partly facilitated by forced loans on Catholics and the use of their family tombstones in the stonework of the new defenses.

In Hungary, on the eastern edge of Europe, a similar process was at work. Close cultural and commercial relations with the German nation coupled with a fairly lax state of rule allowed for the spread of the evangelical movement into these multiethnic, multilingual lands in the early 1520s. Moreover, after the battle of Mohács in 1526, the kingdom suffered an additional breakdown of order and the consolidation of a tripartite division of rule that further opened up the land to innovation. The northwestern portion, termed "Royal Hungary," was in the hands of the Habsburgs and the central Danube plain fell under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Turks, while the eastern portion, largely comprising the eight provinces of the Partium and the principality of Transylvania, was ruled by the local magnates together with an elected prince. Protestants settled in all three areas, though the most developed communities emerged in the east.

Given the state of religious plurality in the land, Protestants of all stamps had settled, and yet it was the followers of the Swiss tradition that proved the most successful at adapting to the local conditions. By the 1570s, the Reformed Protestants of Transylvania had established an ecclesiological system based on the presbyterial-synodal model of France. There were synods, 7 provinces, about 450 congregations, articles of belief, and superintendents presiding over the church. Moreover, despite the barriers created by distance, history, and language, the Transylvanian communities were able to think of themselves as part of the broader European Reformed family of belief. This mindset had been cultivated from the very beginning through close connections with reformers such as Bullinger and Beza, and it continued into the early seventeenth century. And the same methods and modalities were used that joined the communities in France – shared statements of belief, an ongoing correspondence, the local printing and spread of texts, the exchange of pastors, the utilization of transregional systems of rule, and the general movement of people and ideas.

For the Transylvanians, one particularly important aspect of the broader Reformed community was the network of institutions of higher learning. It was not unusual for parents or patrons to send aspirant clergymen to study in France, Germany, the Dutch Republic, or England. This so-called *peregrinatio academica* not only prepared them for the church: it also cultivated the personal ties that kept Transylvania joined to the international matrix. The educational experience of the Reformed theologian and wandering scholar Albert Szenczi Molnár (1574–1634) will make the point. During his time as a student in the 1590s, Molnár studied at Wittenberg, Heidelberg, and Strasbourg. Along the way he met Theodore Beza, whom he termed his "father in Christ." With his education complete, he returned to Germany in 1600 and spent time at the universities in Heidelberg, Herborn, Altdorf, and Marburg. While there he corresponded with Johann Heinrich Alsted and Bartholomäus Keckermann, numerous Huguenot scholars, and a number of French and Flemish congregations, some of which he mentioned in his 1624 translation of Calvin's *Institutes*, thanking them for the assistance they had given along the way.[143]

These brief histories of the Reformed communities in France and Hungary shed some light on the sociological dimensions of early Protestantism, and in particular on how individuals and groups, although faced with social, cultural, and geographical barriers, could join together in communities that were inspired and maintained by the combination of an idealistic vision of what the true church actually was and a very practical and pragmatic approach to religious affairs. With reference to the making of early Protestants, it was a fundamentally important process. Yet it was not the experience of the majority of Protestants during the first century of Reformation. For the majority, it was not necessary to create a sense of order out of a matrix of sympathetic souls. Order was imposed from above, realized within the framework of early modern systems of rule.