The Two Reformations

The Journey from the Last Days to the New World

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PREFACE
Burn after Reading

Among the thousands of letters I have read in the course of my Reformation researches, many contain a simple three-word postscript: "Burn after reading." The injunction conveys the need of sixteenth-century authors to conceal their identity and keep their ideas from falling into unfriendly hands. For similar reasons authors and printers commonly falsified or omitted names, places, and dates of publication in the thousands of pamphlets and tracts that circulated in Germany between 1500 and 1520. Those were dangerous times: dissent was a well-understood risk and public opinion a contested area, anxiously monitored by those who considered themselves the guardians of the public good. The tradition of evasion still pervades and influences Reformation studies. The entire field owes its rise and current renown to the art of concealment. The Reformation was understood as a German event, as indeed it was, in part, and German scholars have long been preeminent in it. So have German politics. The shifting fortunes of the Empire, Prussian rivalry with Vienna, Paris, and London, the split between the parties of Rome and Moscow, and above all, a German nationalism marginalized and rendered uncertain by the pan-European aspirations of the Hapsburgs, all these have inevitably influenced its German interpreters. These same scholars, however, have failed to consider how the historical, political, and social factors of German history have shaped their views, proudly offering their programmed and visionary findings as reliable results of scholarship. Whereas historians have generally become more sensitive to the distorting effects of confessional blinders, the influence of those wider cultural and national presuppositions on German Reformation scholarship remains buried and largely undetected.

More than anyone, Martin Luther, the key figure of the early Reformation, has suffered distortion from such practices of concealment. A combination of religious loyalty and national aspirations turned him into the first Protestant and a German prophet of global stature. How the kernel of truth has been stifled by myth in so much of Reformation history is demonstrated in the following reminiscence of a Holocaust survivor, who, as a little girl in February 1943 was on a train with her father, bound for Auschwitz. As the train passed Wittenberg, her father lifted her up so that she could see "the city of the greatest spokesman for freedom of all time." Our route back into the remote territory of the sixteenth century is therefore hindered by this founding myth of international Protestantism: the notion that Luther's call for liberation from the Babylonian captivity of the church led to a wondrous escape from Roman papal tyranny and a passage out of the dark Middle Ages. To be sure, Luther's destruction of the "three walls of the Romanists"—namely, papal claims to lordship over Scripture, synod, and state—inspired subversive movements all over Europe. Yet, although such struggles may inspire sympathy among modern constitutional democrats, they do not serve the project of a well-balanced reconstruction; Reformation liberation movements could not have been inspired by dreams of social and political emancipation that came into being only with the great revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Equally misleading is the perspective of Catholic apologetics. If the Protestant founding myth misguides us toward Protestant triumphalism, Catholic revisionism would turn the quest for origins back on itself. Revisionists have made salutary efforts to discern the hesitant beginnings of modernization amid the chaos of the papal exile from Avignon and the resulting Great Schism of the West; they have shed light on the humanistic resources of the early Jesuits who geared up in 1540 to extirpate heresy; they have dealt objectively with the horrors of the Roman Inquisition and explored the irenic efforts of the Council of Trent, especially those of its third session between 1561 and 1563. Perhaps their finest achievement was to recognize that the same *cri de coeur,* "Salvation at stake!" was to be heard from *all* the martyrs to sixteenth-century religious intolerance, whether Lutheran, Anabaptist, or Huguenot, *and* recusant Catholic. However, when we fail to find an entry for Counter

Reformation in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Reformation* (1998), we realize that the typically Protestant anti-Catholic paradigm—Inquisition, Jesuits, Trent—has been replaced by a bland and equally distorting revisionism. Those open-minded scholars who are "with it" have discovered an "it" that is not the historical past, but the ecumenical present. The brute facts of the Counter Reformation, best personified by the Carafa pope, Paul IV (1555–1559), who combined all the characteristics by which Protestants identified the Antichrist—suppression of lay Bibles, the Inquisition, the Index, and militant territorial expansionism—should not be glossed over, having played an important role in preparing the way for the Tridentine Reformation. The time has come for a transconfessional coalition of scholars who will avoid the smokescreens on both sides as they make their way back to the cultural and social milieu in which Reformation ideas and movements struggled for life.

Since I complain of Reformation scholars who have failed to examine their own presuppositions, I can do no less than try to lay bare the personal experiences that have influenced my own historical agenda. Human beings are not born just once, they are reborn in other times and seasons too. I am well aware that my first "birth" was privileged in many respects, above all because its circumstances identified an enemy who came from outside. When my father woke me at 5:14 A.M. on May 10, 1940, he pointed to a burning Junker airplane falling out of the sky after it had been shot down on its way back to Germany after fire-bombing Rotterdam. Of the preceding ten years I have no moving pictures, only a few stills; my historically conscious life began at that moment.

Scarcely two years later, in August 1942, I was born once more when my father was "lifted from his bed," as the persecutors euphemistically phrased it, in Utrecht, where as a Protestant minister he had set up a network for the redocumentation and flight of Jewish compatriots. My mother fared better that night because she was taken into "protective custody" in the same peaceful room in Holten where this book was conceived and where I am now writing. A loyal and courageous sheriff had directed four agents of the German SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) to take a circuitous route to our house in the woods, then jumped on his bike and arrived there just in time to warn four fugitives sleeping downstairs. They escaped in the dark, but it was too late to alert the fifth man upstairs who

was sharing my small bedroom. The command to show our papers awakened us. Fumbling to insert his glass eye (he had been blinded by the malfunction of one of the primitive Sten guns the Royal Air Force parachuted to our Resistance forces), the man produced his false documents—to no avail. Together with my mother, he was trucked off to prison. The experience colored for life my response to those two terms, *Sicherheit* (security) and *Dienst* (service), joined to such malevolent effect in the Nazi vocabulary.

In 1966, believing that the critical give-and-take of the international scholarly communities of Oxford and Harvard had rubbed out my wartime stereotypes, I dared to take up residence in Tübingen, already Europe's unrivaled center for Luther research. There I learned to distinguish war propaganda from postwar reality. For eighteen years I explored German history from the privileged observation post of a German academic civil servant and as director of the Institute for Late Medieval and Reformation History. If I had not lived in the land of the enemy, I could not have written this book, not only because its library holdings were so rich, but more important, because the Reformation tradition that survived there so remarkably intact fostered my own process of reformation. There I saw the day-to-day vitality and relevance of Luther's heritage, stimulated by the constant rivalry of a restored Catholicism and functioning as a beacon for a nation in a valiant search for identity after centuries of borderless ambiguity in middle Europe. Equally important was my slow, painful process of reexamining my entrenched generalizations about "Hitler's willing executioners." My stereotype of the typical German did not withstand the continued hammering of countless life stories, forcing me to distinguish between the weak and the courageous, the idealists and the opportunists. Just as I found unconverted Nazis and people who stuttered with a genuine sense of guilt, I found Bismarckians and democrats, anticapitalists and anticommunists.

My personal perspective may seem in some respects obtuse, but I think it has sensitized me to certain ignored or neglected aspects of the history I will be discussing. Perhaps living in Tübingen did not force me to revise all my wartime stereotypes, but it certainly made me see how the Reformation continued to echo during the Second and Third Reich and how it helped form the civic religion of the new Germany. Although in

my own field I profited immensely from exchanges and debates with scholars, I was disappointed by the dearth of free collegial exchanges in German academe. By affiliating with a school of interpretation or by practicing loyalty to an academic faction, German academics seemed to find a measure of security against the divisive, unsettling past; but that same past was ever-present, and it turned lecterns into political platforms and scholarly essays into vehicles for shaping public opinion. What is specifically German about this is not the existence of scholarly dogmas and factions but the tendency to attribute the authority of prophecy to certain heroes of Germany's history. Martin Luther is a case in point. And, by extension, prophetic authority was subsumed by that too easily caricatured figure, the German university professor. Uncrowned king in his own domain, bulwark of hard and fast systems of philosophy, history, politics, and theology, he remains a major obstacle to that Erasmian critical vision that feeds on dissent.

Times are changing, however. The appeal to Luther as a national hero is losing its force and the so-called Luther Renaissance dominated by the patriot Karl Holl (d. 1926), the nationalist Werner Elert (d. 1954), and the Nazi Emanuel Hirsch (d. 1972) is finally on the wane. A new cohort of German scholars, refreshingly objective and undogmatic, has been using the methods of comparative and social history to reposition the Reformation in the context of early modern Europe. With a continuing high level of philological expertise and mastery of the sources, the new generation has succeeded in maintaining Luther's pivotal rule while ensuring that this crucial chapter in German history is understood as a part of the European-wide pursuit of holiness and reform that began in the fourteenth century and ended only with the eighteenth. Nonetheless, the icon of Luther-the-first-Protestant had dislocated Brother-Martin-the-historical-reformer so drastically that modern scholarship still has a considerable way to go—and to grow—before it recovers him. One aim of this book is to contribute to that growth; the other is to suggest where and to whom we should look to find the beginnings of modern Protestantism, and it is then that John Calvin will make his entrance.

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I

THE GATHERING STORM

THE LONG FIFTEENTH CENTURY

From one perspective the fifteenth century appears as the calm before the storm of reformation, revolution, and the wars of religion—the lady gravid, awaiting the fullness of time. In this view, Martin Luther and the Reformation will open a new era in European history, initiating a world destined to become *totaliter aliter*. Often referred to as Protestant triumphalism, it is a perspective deeply rooted in nineteenth-century German scholarship, personified by the works of Leopold von Ranke and reflected in Bernd Moeller's characterization of Luther as "Person der Weltgeschichte," a prime mover of global history.[1] When I took up the theme of the forerunners of the Reformation and insisted on the vitality of late medieval reform in all segments of life, I suggested that Luther's radical reorientation invested him with the high office of Counter Reformer. At the time I was in Cambridge,

Massachusetts, as yet unaware that I would pass the next eighteen years in Tübingen, Germany. There, Reformation scholarship was still solidly in the hands of the students of Karl Holl, revered as an impeccable and infallible Luther interpreter.[2] Holl's favorite disciples, strategically appointed to such major chairs as Tübingen, Heidelberg, and Münster, had all evolved, as it too slowly dawned on me, into uncritical supporters of the Third Reich. In their ranks the German nationalist component in Hitler's message found fertile soil and fervent support (often in articles I found hard to trace because they had been ripped from journals dating from the 1930s and 1940s). The face-saving, apologetic cleansing and attempted rehabilitation of such unconverted Nazi Luther specialists as Emanuel Hirsch in Göttingen and Werner Elert in Munich should not be regarded as marginal, academic dramas.[3] They are part of a concerted effort to reestablish a nineteenth-century Luther-centered worldview. Erlangen's Berndt Hamm has courageously raised his voice, not by coincidence making a new exploration of the fifteenth century a priority in his investigation of the creative vitality of the later Middle Ages.[4] On the Catholic side, Nazi-oriented scholars included Joseph Lortz, who in 1939 made his name with a two-volume assault, to this day undocumented, on the church of the fifteenth century.[5] The Protestants who responded to Lortz romanticized his critique as an effort at "ecumenism," and in its place they set a benign rewriting of the pre-Reformation era. In this wide-reaching view it was an age of flowering piety without oppression, martyrs, or inquisition—a structural foreground for the Luther event.

A second, competing perspective on the fifteenth century derives from the new social history of early modern Europe, the most important and visible new direction of our field, with major representatives in the English-speaking world. By moving from established political history to cultural and mentality studies, historians reestablished the crucial importance of religion, although they frequently marginalized it under the misleading category of popular religion.[6] The latter concept, with its corollary of a two-tiered world upside down, could not stand up under the probing investigation of the past decade. Whereas Bismarckian Protestantism was dedicated to the Reformation miracle, with its perception of discontinuity, the best of our social historians have been working toward a paradigm of continuity that treats the Middle Ages and early modern times as one

epoch, challenged but not disrupted by Luther and the Reformation. One of its finest spokesmen, Thomas A. Brady, Jr., is turning increasingly to the study of the resourcefulness and flexibility of the Holy Roman Empire, able to cope with the short-lived tragedy—as he is inclined to believe—of the Reformation. With his assumption that the rural Peasants' War was the most significant feature of the Reformation betrayed by Luther, Brady early on grasped the untenability of Bernd Moeller's romantic City Reformation thesis: a thin distillation of sixteenth-century religious propaganda and polemical sermons, it was unsubstantiated by archival reconstruction of social support among the citizenry.[7] In this second master narrative, the Reformation appears as an interlude, soon losing its potential, caught between the interests of lords and serfs, while weakened inside its own ranks by fighting between the two factions of zealots and *politiques.*[8]

A third grand perspective, whose most prominent spokesman is Heinz Schilling, would have been much easier for me to reject had not Schilling just published a comprehensive study of Europe from 1250 to 1750, which complicated matters.[9] Elsewhere I have expressed my considerable reservations concerning Schilling's structuralist view of history as an inevitable process, often attended by the connotation of progress. This appears to me to marginalize cultural history and *mentalité* and does not allow a place for religion other than as a subservient factor to state formation. In his new, broader vision of *Die neue Zeit,* however, Schilling succeeds in putting his process approach in better perspective. It is a comprehensive interpretation that deserves immediate translation into English.

In the meantime, however, a formidable number of German and American historians have followed the call of the earlier Schilling and continued to work within the confines of confessionalization and state formation, with such vigor and yield that this school should be addressed as a separate approach. It has the great advantage of bypassing the whole debate about continuity and discontinuity by taking Luther and the Reformation seriously as one of the confessions that will put an indelible stamp on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany. Unfortunately, however, its very preoccupation with modernity feeds into a presentism that I regard as one of the major weaknesses of recent historiography.[10] A

case in point is Richard Marius's book *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death.*[11] Instead of attempting to understand the time or thought of Martin Luther, Marius presents a series of revealingly modern reactions to Luther, basically casting him as a fanatical twentieth-century fundamentalist.

Although such presentism may entertain, it cannot sustain. As to the alluring notion of process, however, it has strongly influenced our understanding of the fifteenth century. When the so-called process is derailed or contradicted by the actual course of events, either a crisis or a failure is stipulated, depending on the metahistorical position of the author considering it. In spite of promising avenues of research as well as the sober reconstruction of gradual change, which other scholars as well as myself have amply documented, fifteenth-century studies are rife with crisis and failure theories, mistakenly cast in terms of a process that led from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of modern times.[12] Medieval legend knew it was the devil who wanted the chronicler to recount history as a process by presenting a straight line between cause and effect, between sequence and consequence. The fourteenth-century preacher's handbook *Fasciculus morum* taught that only the devil could measure the distance between heaven and earth, since he alone, in his fall, followed a straight line.[13] It is revealing that the Western mind has changed the original meaning of "devious" into "erring," so that which literally meant "departure from a straight line" took on the meaning of "deviant." Only by exorcizing this devil can we advance our understanding of history and recover a fresh awareness of unexpected turns of events on the contingent intersection of lines that are not straight. In short, the good historian is bound to be devious.

In what follows I intend to deal with four cultural clusters, which I will call "trends" so as not to fall into the terminological pit of describing them as a single dominant process. I will treat each of these trends equally rather than as subordinate elements in a preestablished grand narrative, and I will trace them through what is fashionably called the long fifteenth century. Some forty years ago, in order to gain an untrammeled perspective freed from Lutheran or Catholic confessional lines, one had to insist on the study of the later Middle Ages in its own right.[14] Today, however, we may draw on scholarly advances in all four of these clusters. With

them we can stay on course without resorting to the blinders once needed for protection against the distracting glare of later events. By venturing well into the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation—the long fifteenth century—the concept of the late Middle Ages is able to withstand partisanship and prejudice and establish its legitimacy. Late medieval studies have come of age.

Almost twenty-five years ago, I presented what I called a premature profile of major currents in the fourteenth century.[15] I intend to take up the same quest here by examining new challenges, events, and trends, taking into account the impact of the Black Death, the rise of the Third Estate, the decline and survival of conciliarism, the monastic mission to the masses, and the rising tide of anti-Semitism, touching finally on Renaissance humanism and the cutting edge of the New Learning.

THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF THE BLACK DEATH

Although we no longer describe the impact of the Black Death on Europe in terms quite as stark as we once did, there is no disputing its severe demographic repercussions. In its first horrendous phase from 1347 to 1351, the bubonic plague raced through Europe from Marseilles throughout France, Italy, England, the Low Countries, Germany, and Russia, killing one-third of Europe's population of some 75 to 80 million people. Not until the end of the sixteenth century would the population return to its pre-plague levels. It is therefore understandable that historians like to refer to the aftermath of the plague in the fifteenth century as a period of demographic depression. The problems begin, however, when we have to specify the economic and social impacts of the steep decline in rural and urban populations. Even the effect on mentality as expressed in the *ars moriendi,* the dance macabre and *Totentanz*,[16] is no longer a matter of course in view of the findings of Jan de Vries that "death rates rose in a period that saw the final disappearance from Europe of the bubonic plague."[17] Recent scholarship has turned its interest to the patterns of recovery and accordingly has shifted its emphasis from doom and stagnation to the revitalization of Europe by innovative crisis management. As Bartolomé Yun put it, "From the vantage point of the rest of the world, this era marked the birth of Europe."[18] We are confronted with a whole

complex of factors with widely differing regional variants and shaped by such historical contingencies as state formation and warfare.

With respect to our first cluster, the intellectual climate of the fifteenth century, it is helpful to take a closer look at a study of the plague by David Herlihy.[19] Herlihy deals successively with the medical dimension, the new economic and demographic system that broke the "Malthusian deadlock," and finally, in the part which concerns us here, with the new modes of thought and feeling. Whereas the medical history of the Black Death would perhaps be written today with other nuances, the conclusion of the second part stands, accurately summarizing the salient characteristics of the post-plague recovery as a more diversified economy, an intensified use of capital, a more sophisticated technology, and a higher standard of living.[20] Problems, however, emerge when these new findings are grafted onto the old tree of Etienne Gilson's end-of-the-road notion of the late Middle Ages. Herlihy invokes a Saint Thomas–driven caricature of late medieval nominalism to explain the emergence of a new mentality: "The human intellect had not the power to penetrate the metaphysical structures of the universe. It could do no more than observe events as they flowed. Moreover, the omnipotent power of God meant in the last analysis that there could be no fixed natural order. God could change what He wanted, when He wanted. The nominalists looked on a universe dominated by arbitrary motions. Aquinas' sublime sense of order was hard to reconcile with the experience of the plague—unpredictable in its appearances and course, unknowable in its origins, yet destructive in its impact. The nominalist argument was consonant with the disordered experiences of late medieval life."[21]

Whereas David Herlihy is remembered with respect and gratitude for his signal contribution to medieval family history and, as in this case, for the all-too-rare effort to chart the interplay between intellectual and social history, his admiration for Thomas Aquinas as "this great Dominican" with his "sublime sense of order" may well explain why such an eminently critical scholar uncritically perpetuates assumptions of the past that in the past thirty years have been shown to be caricatures.[22] Ironically, Herlihy's final conclusion can readily be accepted: "The nominalist argument was consonant with the disordered experiences of late medieval life." The experience of the plague may in fact help us understand the fifteenth-

century ascendancy of nominalism, its innovations in the whole field ranging from theology to science, and its successful invasion of schools and universities, where it was firmly established as the *via moderna*. What must have seemed to conservative Thomists of that time to be a threat to the hierarchy between heaven and earth was actually a fact-finding search for order by demarcating the distinct realms of faith and reason. In the domain of faith the epochal shift from God-as-Being to God-as-Person allowed for a fresh reading of the sources of the church in Scripture and tradition as attesting to the personal God of the covenant. At the same time, in the realm of reason the new quest for the laws of nature could be initiated once physics was liberated from its domestication by metaphysics, the speculative welding of Aristotle and the Scriptures. In any account of the transformation of the West, the crucial metamorphosis of the capital sin of curiosity into the nominalists' *bona curiositas* validated the exploration of the real world and is therefore to be given a high place in the range of factors explaining the "birth of Europe."[23]

Not even in the *Cambridge History of Late Medieval Philosophy* would Herlihy have learned of the new findings, for that authoritative work only occasionally touches on the fifteenth century.[24] In spite of the achievements of John Emery Murdoch in enlarging the scope of the history of science and of William Courtenay in tracing the antecedents of fourteenth-century philosophy, there has not yet been initiated a comprehensive study of the encounter between physics and metaphysics in the fifteenth century.[25] Only in its final section on the "defeat, neglect, and revival of scholasticism" does the *Cambridge History* cover the fifteenth century, whereas in the more substantial chapters on "happiness" and "conscience," the fifteenth century is ignored. This lopsided, old-fashioned preoccupation with the logical dimension of nominalism cannot help us understand such a card-carrying nominalist as Wessel Gansfort, who interpreted his move from Thomas and Scotus to the via moderna as a conversion and as the key to entering new intellectual territory, setting him on course toward a fresh and therefore challenging interpretation of Christianity.[26] Though developed in the rarified discourse of academic disputations and cast in the heavy language of terminist logic, the fundamental advance in shifting the terms of the centuries-old debate on universals was that radical turn from the deductive to the

inductive method. This legitimized a new search for the laws of nature unencumbered by supernatural presuppositions. Whereas the many *incurati* who joined the cause made sure that theology would serve the *itinerarium mentis ad Deum,* the arts faculty was set free to pursue the *itinerarium mentis ad mundum.* It may not be a coincidence that works of Pierre d'Ailly, one of the masters of the via moderna in the tradition of Jean Buridan and Nicole Oresme, were found in the library of Nicolaus Copernicus. Rightly understood as the creative platform from which long-held, no-longer-tenable assumptions could be reassessed, the new critical spirit fostered by nominalism was part of the intellectual reorientation of the long fifteenth century. Whether and to what extent it was a factor in the pursuit of wealth and knowledge that drove the Age of Discovery is a difficult question for historians. It does not seem to be visible in the management of the crisis of the Black Death. Not only the stars but the whole realm of human society and nature could be investigated, as it were, with new eyes.

FROM PAPAL RULE TO POLITICAL CONCILIARISM

Conciliarism is perhaps the best-known and most intensely investigated aspect of fifteenth-century religious history. The Councils of Pisa (1409), Constance (1414–1418), and Basel (1431–1449) have long formed part of the canon in courses on medieval history. More important, perhaps, they were recognized as key events even as they were happening. Over the past thirty years, the study of conciliarism has taken on a new vitality and a novel direction, especially under the influence of Brian Tierney, Francis Oakley, and Antony Black—the first through his discovery of the antecedents of conciliar theory in canon law, and the latter two in drawing out the implications of conciliarism for constitutional and parliamentary history.[27] As Tierney makes clear, the new findings have not gone uncontested and have even found significant, indeed passionate, resistance.[28] This cannot surprise us when we consider the near reversal of the traditional roles assigned to papalism as the defender of orthodoxy and conciliarism as the at-least-potentially heretical alternative. Conciliarism proves to be the outgrowth of the earliest Decretist cohort in the evolution of canon law, whereas the doctrine of papal infallibility is shown to

have originated quite late in the circles of heretical Franciscans. *Structures of the Church,* with its proclamation of the superiority of the council above the papacy, perhaps the most lasting work of Hans Küng on the Council of Constance, gives this scholarly discussion the sharp edge of public controversy, fueled and intensified by the debate about the reception of *Lumen Gentium* in the wake of Vatican II.[29]

Understandable as this concentration on the decrees of the Council of Constance and the legitimacy of the conciliar claims may be, the relevancy of these issues for modern times led to a preoccupation with the rise and fall of conciliarism as an ecclesiological issue. This limited our purview and warped our understanding of what I would like to call political conciliarism. Studies on Pope Eugene IV (1431–1447) and Pius II (1458–1464), as well as the crossing of party lines by several leading conciliarists such as Nicolas Cusanus, have left the impression that the mere transferal of the Council of Basel to Ferrara and its continuation in Florence from 1437 to 1439 marked the end of conciliarism. The suspension of the meeting in Basel may well have derailed conciliar theory as envisaged by Constance, but it did not spell the end of conciliar reality. In the form of political conciliarism, it would shape the emerging nation states and remain an influential principle until thwarted—more by the growth of royal absolutism than by claims of papal supremacy.

In 1438, the French King Charles VII confirmed the liberties of the Gallican church in the form of a charter called the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges, thus achieving one part of the conciliar platform concerned with curtailing papal jurisdiction. Bernard Chevalier has dismissed this charter as an illusion, arguing that "the French clergy escaped neither papal authority nor royal control."[30] If this had been the case, there would have been no need for Pope Leo X to seek the concordat with Francis I that was concluded in Bologna in 1516. And even this delineation of papal and royal rule over the French church did not prevent Henry II from seeing to it that the French prelates would vote during the Council of Trent on a Gallican platform in keeping with the liberties of 1438. Moreover, it has not been recognized that Calvin's campaign against the so-called Nicodemites had as its prime target the Gallican faction that hoped to combine new reformed ideas with the consolidation of their Gallican church. A number of well-placed, influential French bishops,

among them Calvin's early school friend Gérard Roussel,[31] regarded themselves as leaders of the Gallican church. If Calvin had coopted their platform, it might have been broad enough to forestall the need to contain or exile Huguenots. As it happened, both the *Église prétendue réformée* and French political conciliarism saw their designs aborted not in papal Rome but in absolutist Versailles.

In England, the King's Great Matter allowed political conciliarism to bypass the formidable obstacle of royal supremacy that was to abort the movement in France. Notwithstanding certain queries and revisions in details, Geoffrey Elton has succeeded in reconstructing the achievement of Henry VIII's reign by reuniting the story of the establishment of the *ecclesia Anglicana* with the birth of the early modern parliamentary English state.[32] Nevertheless, our preoccupation with the question of whether it was a reformation from above or from below as well as with the question of continuity despite the "stripped altars" of the newly reformed English churches has not allowed us to see clearly enough the extent to which the Anglican church is a variant in the broader European story of political conciliarism. The Europeanization of English history, for which John Elliott called in his inaugural address as Oxford's Regius Professor of History, will permit us to get a firmer grasp of this aspect of the long fifteenth century.

A brief look at the German territories will complete this section. Again, political conciliarism supplies a hitherto unwritten chapter in the history of the Reformation in Germany. The Acceptatio of Mainz (1439) and the Vienna Concordat (1448) contain far less of the reform program of the Council of Basel than the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges in France. Yet, once confronted with the challenge of Martin Luther, the formation of an *ecclesia Germanica* fell just one vote short of realization. In September 1524, the imperial Diet was cited to Speyer and was prepared to vote on the establishment of a German church with the full support of all imperial estates, including the anti-Lutheran prince bishops and the Emperor Charles V's brother Ferdinand. Our historians' preoccupation with what actually happened probably causes us to miss out on the significance of alternative paths that history might have taken. Such virtual history would illuminate the actual course of events.

THE MODERN DEVOTION: A TIP OF THE ICEBERG

For a long time the Modern Devotion was presented as the Renaissance north of the Alps and as the first stage in the liberation that was the Reformation in the Low Countries. Inspired by such scholars as Willem Lourdaux and R. R. Post, preoccupation with the Modern Devotion as the cradle of the Renaissance and the Reformation gave way to the study of the movement on the basis of its own testimonies. Post's richly documented, groundbreaking study, *The Modern Devotion,* was published in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* in 1968 and widely hailed because he approached the fifteenth century on its own terms. In our view of the long fifteenth century, we cannot avoid reengagement with the question of its relation to the coming of the Reformation, but we will do so in terms that Post's magnum opus already suggested in its subtitle: "Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism."[33]

For our approach to these questions we are greatly in the debt of two scholars who have recently produced critical editions of key documents. John Van Engen has deepened our understanding of the relation between the original vision of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life and the later regular canons of Windesheim.[34] Whereas Van Engen recovered the rich regional variants in the response to the steady pressure on the *devoti* to join the regular clergy, Kaspar Elm has presented the movement as placing itself programmatically, as he put it, "between the monastery and the world." By describing the *Devotio Moderna* as the tip of the iceberg of what he called *Semireligiösentum,* Elm liberated the devoti from the isolation in which proud Dutch scholars had placed "their" movement.[35]

The movement of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life was a striking success. Within the borders of today's Netherlands alone, there were two hundred foundations between 1380 and 1480, the heyday of the movement. Of this number, 35 monasteries and 30 nunneries belonged to the network of the Windesheim Congregation. It would be more accurate, however, to invert the traditional designation and call the movement the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life, for the extent to which the Devotio Moderna was a women's movement has not yet been fully

absorbed. More than 52 percent, namely 105 houses, were communities of the Sisters and only 15 percent, 30 in total, were establishments of the Brethren of the Common Life.[36]

On April 3, 1418, as the Council of Constance was in its last days, Jean Gerson raised his voice to defend the movement against the accusation of heresy by Matthew Grabow. The Dominican Grabow had charged the Sisters and Brethren with being a cover organization for Beghards and Beguines. Much has been made of Gerson's defense, for which the devoti considered him to have the status of a church father; nevertheless, a scrutiny of the history of individual convents shows that house after house was forced to accept an official rule, usually that of the third order of the Franciscans. Grabow thus proved to have a longer reach than Gerson. Notwithstanding this general trend toward regularization and remonastication in the direction of the Windesheimers, Geert Groote's original vision of the common life as the crucial alternative to the cloistered life was retained in the basic tenant that *religio* should not be understood as the monastic life but as Christian faith. For all three branches of the movement—the Sisters, the Brethren, and the Canons Regular of the Windesheim Congregation—*purus Christianus verus monachus* (the true Christian is the true monk).

In order to understand Erasmus's view of the early modern Christian city as a religious community, his *magnum monasterium,* and to grasp the impact of Luther's programmatic treatise *On the Monastic Vows* (1521), we will have to take into consideration that the Devotio Moderna in all its phases insisted that it observed the oldest rule, namely the Golden Rule, and acknowledged the highest abbot, namely Jesus Christ. As I read the evidence, the original intention of the movement is misunderstood when taken to be antimonastic. On the contrary, it should be entered under the rubric of "the pursuit of holiness" as a parallel phenomenon to the growing fifteenth-century Observantist movement. Only in the rhetoric of the defense against such attacks as Grabow's could the program of the Devotion be represented as serving a more general late medieval criticism of the friars.

The same caveat applies to the recent investigation into the late medieval roots of anticlericalism. Even if I assume the broadest definition of the term, I can find no trace of anticlericalism or of its related form, the

disparaging of the parish clergy as irreformable. We find such sentiments not among the devoti, but in the sermons of the Observant friars. In fact, great awe for the office of the priest is evident in the diaries and chronicles recording the hesitation of Brethren urged to seek ordination. In this awe we touch on an essential characteristic of the movement, namely the *timor Dei,* in the Dutch chronicles usually rendered as *vrees* or *anxt.* According to Thomas à Kempis and Petrus Hoorn, the fifteenth-century biographers of Geert Groote, this anxious awe so dominated the movement's founder that he often abstained from the Eucharist, preferring to participate in the communion service *spiritualiter* rather than *sacramentaliter.* Although it would be interesting to consider how Groote's sentiment might feed into the discussion of the Ozment thesis of the Reformation as a response to late medieval anxiety and guilt, we will confine ourselves here to its relevance to our main subject, the long fifteenth century. The respectful awe that led Groote to distinguish between partaking of the Lord's body sacramentaliter and spiritualiter was already a long-established part of traditional church doctrine. In existentially mobilizing it, Groote alerts us to an unexplored aspect of the related *Corpus Christi* procession. This ritual was—among many other things—a form of spiritual communion, and its emphasis on spiritual eating did not challenge the significance of the Eucharist. On the contrary, it enhanced it.

The implied sufficiency of the spiritual eating is exactly the missing link to Cornelius Hoen's famous treatise of 1524. Probably connected to Wessel Gansfort, who was living in a sister house in Groningen and closely associated with the Brethren in Zwolle, Hoen's letter was spurned by Luther but became the basis for the famous symbolic interpretation of Huldrych Zwingli and the spiritualist left wing of the Reformation. Here the Eucharistic meal was highly honored as eating spiritualiter, regardless of the denunciation by all the critics including Luther.

Living between the world and the monastery did not imply any moral compromise. The chronicles attest to the fact that in housing, food, and dress, the devoti lived an ascetic life more rigorous even than that of the Observant friars. Augustine Renaudet has vividly described the rigor of life in the Parisian Collège de Montaigu, the most westerly extension of the movement and the training ground for Erasmus, Calvin, and Ignatius of Loyola. Jean Standonck, the Collège's *spiritus rector*, is characterized by

Renaudet as the lifelong disciple of the devoti: “Il resta toujours le disciple de Thomas de Kempen, de Geert Groote et de Ruysbroeck, mais avec une sévérité presque barbare.”[37]

Our sources suggest that the asceticism at Montaigu was extreme but by no means more rigorous than in the northern houses of the Modern Devotion. Henry Bullinger, who was to succeed Zwingli as the reformer of Zurich in 1531, had been sent to the Latin school in Emmerich in 1516, when he was thirteen, and remained for three years. Though he never resided in the Brothers’ convent, he noted in his diary, “Strict discipline was also required” (*disciplina quoque adhibetur severa*), and, alluding to the strict rules of the Brethren and their harsh punishment of transgressions: “I was so impressed that I considered joining the Carthusians.”[38] The Modern Devotion gives us access to a movement that recruited from society’s “simple folk”—the lower orders, middling merchants, and artisan class. Critical of the intellectual and social elite in church and society, and intent on avoiding the moral dissoluteness of those elites, they opposed what they regarded as the luxurious, sinful lifestyle of “these modern times.” The *contemptus mundi,* once the typical battle cry of medieval monks and friars, was now taken over by a laity seeking to establish new institutional forms for their devout imitation of Christ. Their quest did not demand a reformation of faith but a reform of morals, which from the perspective of a modern liberal society must seem barbaric and which the Protestant Bullinger condemned as superstition. Nevertheless, it is this same contemptus mundi, with its high regard for self-discipline and public moral control, that fifty years later would prove to be a major factor in the amazingly rapid spread of the reformed Reformation.

FROM PARADISE: THE MENDICANT MESSAGE

In his Braudelian social history of early modern Europe, George Huppert has presented the clash between the late medieval pursuit of holiness and the pursuit of profit as an uneven battle: “Neither wars nor epidemics could stay its course. Moralists complained about the insidious effects of money, peasants rebelled against the pressures of a rudimentary capitalism, clerics thundered against usury—all in vain. . . . In time, seigneurial

domains were transformed into real estate and the church became a corporation subservient to its bankers."[39] Although he might be embarrassed to find himself associated with them, this modern author's sentiments are not far removed from those expressed by the devoti seeking to establish a viable counterculture of simple life between Church and World.

In this final section we turn from the sotto voce of the Devotio Moderna to Huppert's "thundering clerics," the itinerant Franciscan preachers north and south of the Alps. Their vociferous public platform of reform, quite different from that of the Brethren, and the astounding response it evoked reveal a development without which our characterization of the fifteenth century would be deficient. At the beginning of the next century, under the withering critique of Renaissance humanists and reformers, the status of the friars would be significantly diminished. Thus the success of the early Jesuits would be partly due to their careful avoidance of any form of association with the mendicant friars in dress, rule, or organization. In the fifteenth century, however, the friars were sought after by kings and bishops, princes and town councils, and urged to undertake preaching campaigns. They gathered masses of attentive listeners on village commons and town squares with widely reported miraculous healings and dramatic conversions. By carefully reconstructing the message and impact of two of the most popular of the thundering friars—Bernardino da Siena, who began his career as an itinerant preacher in Italy in 1405, and his spiritual successor, Giovanni da Capistrano, who started his trek north of the Alps in 1451—Kaspar Elm has made a valiant effort to overcome long-standing caricatures.[40] Understandably, there is an apologetic touch to Elm's defense against the charge of superstitious mass manipulation. But two precious, related insights emerge from his close scrutiny of the sources. In the first place, both men, strict papalists, opposed—and indeed persecuted—the Fraticelli, Franciscans who interpreted Saint Francis and his time as the beginning of the end time, bringing with it the end of established, papal Catholicism. Rejecting this apocalyptic reading, the two preachers called for immediate conversion of sinners in fear and trembling of the Final Judgment.

Elm's second insight is directly related to the theme of individual conversion: both Bernardino da Siena and Giovanni da Capistrano also

insisted on a reform of society through the restoration of family, commune, and social peace in cities and territories. On May 18, 1451, in Villach, the first city on Giovanni's transalpine itinerary, he started his campaign "in the name of Jesus Christ and the Holy Bernadine of Siena." Trekking through Austria to Vienna and points north, he spoke with such fervor about social injustice that audiences in one place after another responded by heaping up piles of Fastnacht masks, dice, playing cards, jewelry, and fashionable shoes and dresses, and setting fire to them. As all reports make clear, their aim was to bring about a reordering of public life even before conversion.[41] What they were attempting to bring about can perhaps best be understood against the backdrop of the Benedictine vision of the *stabilitas loci* "in paradise," that is, within the walls of the monastery. The itinerant friars abandoned the ideal of the stabilitas loci for a ministry of begging and preaching, and thus exported the monastic experience and quality of life into the world by seeking to establish, as they put it, the *civitas Christiana* in secular space and time.

The story of itinerant Franciscan preaching has never made it to the list of key events of the century. Enlightenment-bred scholars have been embarrassed by the credulity of sources recording the fabulous deeds of the friars as faith healers. Historians of conciliarism were intent on the growth of the conciliar idea rather than on these preachers of papal supremacy; and finally, when these friars do appear in a central role it is as characters on the darkest pages of the books on the history of anti-Semitism. In his study of mendicant persecution of Jews, Jeremy Cohen concentrates on the thirteenth century and does not go beyond the fourteenth.[42] Had he done so he would have been little surprised by Giovanni da Capistrano's active role in the Breslau trial of 1453 dealing with Jewish desecration of the host: "Every Jew trembles at his very name!"[43]

The three themes of superstition, papalism, and anti-Semitism have kept our friars on the books, but only as exempla to prove the need for a Protestant or Catholic reformation in the century to come. Quite apart from the fact that exactly the same three ingredients provided continuity between the later Middle Ages and the era of Renaissance and Reformation, the key goal in the mission of the friars should not be overlooked. They were engaged in a concerted effort to defend and extend the boundaries of the civitas Christiana in a crusade against the devil. To them the

Evil One was no longer confined to the monastic inner hell of *tristitia* (melancholy), *acedia* (apathy), and the *Anfechtungen* (temptations) of the soul, but threatened public life in the form of the mammon of luxury and the might of the Jews. Bernardino da Siena and Giovanni da Capistrano were but two of an as yet uncounted army of friars plodding from village to village with their urgent message of conversion in the face of the coming judgment. Even more important, the preaching friars were spearheading a much larger campaign to reach the grassroots of society and protect them against contamination by the demons "of these modern times." As Robert J. Bast has shown, the invention of the printing press allowed for a widespread assault on ignorance: catechisms, long held to be the typical tools of the age of Renaissance and Reformation, were published, distributed, and debated throughout Europe.[44] The target group is not only the laity but the clergy as well. And Peter Dykema has carefully documented the concerted effort to provide the lower village clergy with hands-on instruction to help them execute their daily priestly and pastoral duties.[45]

I shall try to summarize. In the wake of the Black Death, the greatest natural disaster ever to strike Europe, and with the intensive efforts to cope with its effects, the centuries-old pursuit of holiness came into conflict with the new pursuit of profit. This called for new responses. In the domain of the intellectual life of Europe, the via moderna provided tools for discerning order in the chaos of unrealistic speculation. In the realm of polity and politics, conciliarism survived well beyond Basel, providing the constitutional solution of territorial churches. In the domain of mentalité and religious experience, the Modern Devotion and the preaching friars proved to be representative of a much more widespread effort to extend the communal life of the monastery into secular space and time.

All of this could be well established by looking only at the shorter fifteenth century. Yet, the view to the long fifteenth century reveals how important it is to disregard the artificial divide of the year 1500 and allows us to discern the innovations of sixteenth-century reform and reformation in the light of an unbroken continuity. Toward the end of the long fifteenth century, medieval Catholicism does not display any of the characteristics we have come to expect under the tutelage of Etienne

Gilson, Joseph Lortz, or for that matter, nineteenth-century Protestant historians. We could not confirm such general epitaphs for the age as philosophical skepticism, theological ambiguity, social dissolution, or moral dissipation. On the contrary, late medieval Christian society showed all the signs of the vitality and resourcefulness necessary for effective crisis management. The fifteenth century appears as a time of remarkable recovery from the onslaught of the Black Death, the confusion caused by the Western schism, the challenge of the Fraticelli, and the failure of the Hussite crusades. Even the sharp rise in the tide of anti-Semitism fits this general picture, insofar as not merely the annual period of Lent but especially the periodic waves of revival always spelled dangerous times for Europe's Jewish population.

There are fault lines to be noticed as well. With the emergence of the national states was a concomitant jockeying for power that resulted in near-incessant military conflicts punctuated by short periods of peace. Quite apart from the constant Turkish threat, the Hundred Years' War slid over into the phase of aggressive extension of the papal states and the colonizing aspirations of France and Spain in Italy. In reaction, nearly all of the emerging intellectual elite north of the Alps—be they an Erasmus, a Luther, or a Zwingli—went through a phase of pacifism that was to remain part of their dream of a new society even after the Turkish advance forced them to compromise their ideal.

A second fault line would prove to be more consequential: the spread of historical-critical testing of the foundations of faith, Scripture, and tradition. Lorenzo Valla's proof of the forgery of the Donation of Constantine enjoyed only a limited Italian circulation until the end of the fifteenth century. The prosecution of Wessel Gansfort for his biblical findings by the Inquisitors Jacob Hoek and Antonius de Castro, O.P., was not widely known until the documents were published in 1521. But the concerted effort of the Dominicans Jacob van Hoogstraten and Silvestro Prierias to achieve the condemnation of Johannes Reuchlin in a litigation process that stretched from 1514 to 1521 was notorious, pitting the highest echelon of the medieval teaching office against the most recent findings of a renowned biblical scholar. The *Letters of Obscure Men* (1515, 1517) was far more than a spoof of self-appointed defenders of Renaissance humanism.[46] In the form of satire, it confronts the puritan vision of

the civitas Christiana propagated by our itinerant Franciscans, and it questions the very authority of the friars. Just as the Franciscan vision materialized into social control of the marginalized Jews, so the Dominican guardians of orthodoxy sought to mobilize the church against scholarly dissent among ranking members of the Christian intelligentsia. Turning from Wessel and Reuchlin to Erasmus and Luther, they met with varying degrees of success. Wessel died in 1489, and Reuchlin in 1523, just after his condemnation. Erasmus sought to defend the *consensus ecclesiae,* the Catholic middle ground between "the rabid friars"—with the Dominicans on the one hand and the Luther faction on the other.

It is therefore not by chance that we encounter, among Luther's first opponents, three battle-tested Dominicans: Tetzel, Prierias, and Hoogstraten. By that time, however, Luther could no longer be written off as just another irreverent intellectual. He had become a leader in the movement that, to his own surprise, developed an alternative vision of the civitas Christiana, hence initiating the end of the long fifteenth century.

With reference to Protestant triumphalism, I do not hesitate to uphold the lasting significance of Luther, broken, redirected, and constantly reemerging in a variety of new social constellations, at times perhaps more creeping than soaring, but always grounding the modern quest for moral man in an immoral world. Here I stand with Moeller. Yet Luther as Person der Weltgeschichte is a rhetorical claim beyond the scope of any serious validation: I fail to share the view of discontinuity that was embedded in Bismarck's anti-Catholic Kulturkampf and the Prussian Protestant claim to advance European civilization.

Double-sided must also be my assessment of the Brady vision. I see Brady as a partner in my own program of pursuing historical continuity; I see him as an opponent of my concomitant effort to identify more accurately the innovative dimension of early modern Europe, including the Reformation. I profit richly from Brady's work on Hapsburg German territorial holdings, with his sophisticated grasp of the institutional resources of the Empire. He shows how it was able to weather the storm of the Reformation, and he has a profound sense of the sustaining, inspiring force of religion. But he does not sufficiently relativize his thesis of continuity with an equal emphasis on the European-wide emergence of an antiabsolutist, antipapal republican countermovement—too easily

ridiculed as Whig history. By positioning himself in Germany he gains a strategically placed, central observation post, but for our whole period this also has a major drawback. As I see it, the so-called Peace of Augsburg of 1555 caused Germany to implode by burdening it with the legally complex execution of the legally complex mandate to correlate *regio* and *religio.* The German *Sonderweg* did not start with Bismarck or Versailles but with Germany's withdrawal from European affairs after 1555. Henceforth Germany would be bent on securing the Teutonic walls against the Turks and establishing an internal balance of power while mortgaging Europe's future to the Roman Curia, the Jesuits, and the Huguenots. The European phase of the Reformation, for most of Europe the *first* Reformation, will have to be brought to the center of a truly grand narrative with a radical marginalizing of German political, cultural, and theological sentiment. The reformed Reformation of international Calvinism was, body and soul, programmatically carrying the burden of *Europa afflicta.* Spreading through France to the Low Countries, it thrived under the heavy hand of Philip II and the zealous cleansing of Alva's Spanish troops. Thus autocratic Spain produced refugee masses that were forced to abandon the medieval social contract of stabilitas loci. Driven spiritually out of the Middle Ages, they were to become settlers of new restless worlds beyond the ken of an Aquinas or a Luther.

Communalism, republican self-government, and the rejection of political and religious tyranny will continue to dominate our research agenda. The new millennium seems modern, but—and here I share the new epochal vision of Heinz Schilling—this very modern agenda can be seen emerging above the horizon of the very long fifteenth century.