

# CHRIST'S CHURCHES PURELY REFORMED

*A Social History of Calvinism*

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Martin Luther towered over the initial decades of the Reformation, Calvinism superseded Lutheranism within a generation as the most dynamic and widely established form of European Protestantism. Into the 1540s, the cause remained confined primarily to Switzerland and the neighboring regions of south Germany. Around midcentury it burst its fetters. Reformed churches took root and grew in defiance of the established authorities in France, Scotland, the Netherlands, Hungary, and the vast Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. England's national church assumed a Reformed cast under Edward VI between 1547 and 1553 and permanently joined the ranks of Europe's Protestant kingdoms when Elizabeth I succeeded Mary Tudor in 1558. A growing number of princes within the Holy Roman Empire accepted the faith and imposed it upon their subjects. By the end of the sixteenth century, Reformed worship was established from Aberdeen to Alba-Julia and from Béarn to Brest-Litovsk. Soon, the colonizing efforts of England and the Netherlands would carry it to North America and South Africa as well.

This dynamic faith inspired extraordinary sacrifices and sparked extraordinary crusades. At its core was the conviction that God's holy word made clear the form of worship expected from his children. God would never abandon those whom he had created, sustained, and granted the gift of everlasting life. The gratitude they owed him in return should inspire them to serve

him in all their deeds, to worship in the manner he had decreed, and to shun all false devotion and idolatry. Such convictions steeled hundreds to face a martyr's death. They repeatedly unsettled the political order by sparking the rejection of established rituals, the formation of illegal new churches, and resistance to princely innovations in worship believed to threaten the purity of God's ordinances. The political history of later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe is incomprehensible without an understanding of the history of Calvinism and the reasons its spread proved so unsettling.

One reason the faith proved so compelling to so many was that it inspired dreams of a dramatic transformation of manners, morals, and the social order. "If the order set forth in this book were well observed among those who call themselves christians," proclaimed the preface to the most comprehensive mid-sixteenth-century set of rules for worship and government within a Reformed church,

the world would not feel the wrath of God, as do and will increasingly those who do not amend their ways. Princes and magistrates would be more peaceful; wars would cease among the nobility; the ambition of prelates would be punished; and all would do their duty in their calling. Children would be instructed from a young age in holy discipline; doctrine would be purely preached; the sacraments properly administered; the populace held in check; virtue would be prized; vices corrected; true penance restored and excommunication pronounced on the obstinate and rebellious; God's honor would be advanced together with the proper invocation of his holy name; the most honorable estate of marriage would be restored to its original form; brothels would be abolished; the poor would be cared for and all begging eliminated; the sick would be visited and consoled; and the dead honored with an honest burial devoid of superstition.<sup>1</sup>

The Latin motto of many Reformed churches today, "*Ecclesia reformata, quia semper reformanda*" (The Reformed church because always reforming) was coined in the middle of the seventeenth century by the Dutch churchman Johannes Hoornbeeck. It captures perfectly the restlessness of a tradition that recurrently generated internal revitalization movements inspired by such hopes even after they had not been immediately realized—as inevitably they were not. Committed adherents always had to ask themselves if they were doing everything possible to serve God and to observe his strict ordinances of worship.

The history of Calvinism is not only central to the religious and political history of the early modern era; influential sociological and historical interpretations deem it the progenitor of essential features of the modern world. The most famous such interpretation asserts that Calvinism encouraged

inner-worldly asceticism and the growth of capitalism. Elements of this interpretation may be traced back to the sixteenth century itself: to the self-perception of the Reformed that they had effected a particularly thorough “reformation of life,” and to the polemical Protestant commonplace that Catholicism fostered idleness through its numerous saints’ days. Holland’s dramatic rise to commercial supremacy in the seventeenth century, Britain’s leading role in industrialization, the disproportionate importance of Protestants among France’s entrepreneurial elites, and the more prosperous character of the Protestant regions of Germany and Switzerland in the nineteenth century all lent further credence to this idea, even before the great German sociologist Max Weber offered the most celebrated explanation for it around 1900 in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This work quickly attained canonical status within the emerging discipline of sociology. Among scholars, it has sparked refutations, reiterations, and extensions down to the present day. Among the broader reading public, it cemented the association between Calvinism and disciplined work. When President Clinton had to spend a wedding anniversary apart from his (Methodist) wife in 1998, he joked with reporters, “Her Calvinism will let me work, but no golf.”<sup>2</sup>

Another long-influential theory credits Calvinism with promoting democracy. Again, the association goes back to the sixteenth century, when hostile Catholic polemics depicted the Reformed as partisans of sedition eager to replace crowned heads with Swiss-style confederations. The Reformed initially threw this accusation back at the Catholics, charging the Jesuits with being the leading advocates of king killing. In the changed political circumstances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, what had once seemed an insult became a point of pride. The deeply influential Whig view of history glorified the apparent connection between Calvinism, revolution, and liberty created by linking into a single chain the political theories of the Huguenot monarchomachs, the Dutch revolt, Britain’s seventeenth-century revolutions, and the American Revolution. The self-governing structures of many Reformed churches were now identified as incubators of political self-determination. Calvin’s vision of church and state acting as coordinate but separate instruments for the advancement of God’s law was said to encourage the defense of mixed constitutions. No single historian or social scientist ever formulated as striking an explanation for the presumed link between Calvinism and democracy as Weber did for that between Calvinism and capitalism, but the desire to explore this apparent association stimulated much research into the history of political thought and of Reformed church organization.

This book surveys the history and significance of Reformed Protestantism in Europe from its origins until the end of the age of orthodoxy around 1700. No single author has attempted to tell this story since John T. McNeill com-

pleted *The History and Character of Calvinism* in 1954.<sup>3</sup> In the intervening fifty years, a dramatic two-part sea change has transformed historical writing about the European Reformation. First, Reformation historians, like their peers who write about other topics and periods, have incorporated the actions and aspirations of ordinary men and women into a tale that long privileged the role of elite actors. Drawing inspiration from the historical sociology of religion and from historical anthropology, they now examine crowd involvement in the Reformation and the history of parish-level religious practice with the same care that they once reserved for the ideas of the era's leading theologians. Second, broader transformations in the contemporary religious landscape have altered the relation between historians of this subject and their topic and have generated a new awareness of the many ways in which confessional blinkers and stereotypes long distorted historical writing about it. Until well into the twentieth century, most church history was written by members of the church in question eager to explore a critical moment in the formation of their religious tradition. Now, with the postwar growth of ecumenical concerns, the rapidly advancing secularization of mass culture, and the declining salience of denominational identity, specialists are far more likely to be aware of the history of all of the major confessional families that emerged from the Reformation and to have studied several of them. The most sympathetic and penetrating studies of Protestant theology are often written by Catholic scholars. Growing numbers of Reformation historians are agnostics of secular or non-Christian backgrounds. All this has led to a "deconfessionalization" of Reformation history and a tendency to see the features that united the various Christian churches in this era as well as those that divided them.

Both parts of this transformation have called into question the classic interpretations of Calvinism's significance for the advent of modernity. In alerting historians to the large gap that often existed between the parish-level practice of a given religion and its formal rules and doctrines, the new social or anthropological history of early modern religion has revealed how risky it is to infer the psychological experience and social behavior of the members of a given faith from its theology—essentially the method of Weber and many other pioneering historical sociologists of religion. The deconfessionalization of Reformation history has meanwhile shown specialists that the claims for Calvinism's unique historical meaning were often made in ignorance of comparable features of post-Reformation Catholicism or Lutheranism. For more than thirty years, historians of early modern Catholicism have emphasized the many features of that tradition's spirituality that promoted self-control, moral effort, and disciplined labor in the world—in short, something very much like a Protestant work ethic. Historians of Lutheran political thought have challenged the old stereotype of a politically passive faith by highlight-



ing Luther's acceptance after 1531 of the legitimacy of resistance to the emperor, the ringing defiance of the Lutheran Magdeburg Confession of 1550, and the clear traces of this work's influence on subsequent Reformed resistance theory. The boldest macrointerpretations of the past three decades have depicted Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism as spurring parallel, not contrasting, transformations in European society, notably a process of "confessionalization" according to which all three promoted state integration and the production of disciplined, obedient subjects, even as they divided the Continent into mutually hostile religious camps through their reciprocal anathematization. And while these interpretations have all challenged the view that Calvinism offered the royal road to modernity, many of the best studies of the religious culture of specific groups of Calvinists have become quasi-ethnographic explorations that divorce their subject entirely from any of the master narratives that have traditionally linked the sixteenth century to modern times. The landscape of interpretation has changed dramatically since McNeill's time.

Four major concerns structure this work. Its first and most basic goal is to provide a clear narrative of the Reformed tradition's development that at the same time answers the most important analytic questions that arise from the narrative. What accounts for the exceptional dynamism of this variant of Protestantism? How and why, after an initial period of limited growth, were Reformed churches able to establish themselves across so much of Europe amid widely varying kinds of circumstances? What was Calvin's precise role in the definition and expansion of this tradition that ultimately came to be associated with his name? Given that he was a figure of the Reformed tradition's second generation, can he even be considered the most substantial shaper of the tradition? If so, how did he come to exercise such influence? How and why did the tradition change in the generations following his death?

A second goal is to assess in the light of current knowledge the classic theories that accord Calvinism distinctive importance in the broader development of Western society. This ambition is less self-evident than it might appear, for while Weberian themes have long shaped the general image of Calvinism's historical significance held by the educated public, they exercised surprisingly little influence on the research of most specialists in this field for the better part of the twentieth century; and interest in them has weakened further in the past decades as a result of the new emphasis on similarities among the post-Reformation confessions.<sup>4</sup> At an international conference on European Calvinism from 1540 to 1620 held a decade ago, a participant observed during the final session that Weber's name had not come up once in the course of three days' discussion. The consensus of those present was that this was for the best. Yet leading contemporary sociologists of religion still express confi-

dence in the fundamental accuracy of Weber's views.<sup>5</sup> Students of economic development return to them whenever current events direct attention to the cultural dimension of economic performance.<sup>6</sup> Because these views remain vital in many parts of the academic world and beyond, readers coming to this subject have a right to expect an evaluation of them. Furthermore, I am convinced that an investigation of them usefully directs attention to key aspects of Calvinism's history that most recent historians have tended to overlook. This history will thus attempt not to lose sight of the issues such views raise.

A third theme emerged with increasing clarity as the book unfolded: the importance of church institutions and of struggles over church institutions within the story of the Reformed tradition. The history of church institutions has rarely excited historians of early modern religious life. No history of international Calvinism can escape this topic. Those who believe that Calvinism promoted a particularly thorough reformation of life have often attributed this to its exemplary institutional arrangements, epitomized most perfectly in Geneva, where a consistory of ministers and elders exercised vigorous disciplinary authority over all church members with the cooperative backing of the secular authorities. Those who believe that Calvinism promoted democracy have attributed this to the apprenticeship in self-government provided by congregational and presbyterial-synodal forms of church organization. Yet the institutions thus highlighted were not found in all Reformed churches, which raises the question of why they arose in some, but not others. Furthermore, bitter disagreements over institutional arrangements divided many Reformed churches. The two greatest centers from which Reformed influence subsequently radiated outward, Zurich and Geneva, each arranged moral discipline and the relation between church and state in different manners, which each city's theologians justified on scriptural grounds. As the movement spread and more churches established themselves amid diverse circumstances, the degree of institutional diversity increased. At the same time scriptural legitimation cast certain institutions as ideals to be struggled for and sparked agitation to establish them where they were lacking. Battles between partisans of church government by bishops and by presbyteries and synods were soon added to the battles between those who advocated the Zurich and the Genevan style of church-state relations. How a multivocal tradition interacted with diverse local circumstances to produce the initial institutional arrangements that characterized each national Reformed church is thus central to the history of Calvinism. So too is the story of the subsequent development of theories of *de jure* presbyterianism and episcopalianism and of the conflicts that these theories engendered. Last of all, the question of how each church's mature institutions influenced its capacity to effect a reformation of manners cannot be neglected.

Just as institutional diversity characterized Europe's Reformed churches, so too did mature Calvinist piety assume more than one style of devotion. The fourth major concern of this book is to trace the emergence of these modes of piety and to understand why they emerged and took root where and when they did. After the great luminaries of the early Reformation pass from the scene, the history of theology and worship typically joins the history of church institutions in the orphanage of historiographic neglect. But the classic sociological theories about Calvinism again direct one's attention to this topic, as does the newer concern to capture the character of lay religious practice. For Weber, the element of Calvinism that stimulated its rationalized self-discipline was the doctrine of predestination, which with each successive generation occupied an ever more vital place in Reformed dogmatics. The doctrine confronted believers with the stark question, Am I among those predestined to salvation or to damnation? and spurred them to live the upright life that devotional writers told them was evidence of their election. The religious culture of the best-studied of Calvinists, the Puritans of England and New England, unquestionably involved a carefully codified, deeply introspective style of precise piety that emerged at a moment when predestinarian themes were strongly emphasized. The exploration of mature Reformed devotional practices across seventeenth-century Europe reveals, however, that this style of piety was strikingly absent or muted in many Reformed churches, even though predestinarian theology was no weaker. Clearly these practices did not arise simply as a logical, if unintended, consequence of the doctrine of predestination. Additional features of historical context were necessary conditions of their emergence in England and of their spread beyond it. This book attempts to identify such features. More generally, it seeks to give theological and devotional developments of the generations after Calvin's death their due place in the history of the Reformed tradition.

Some features of the book's subtitle deserve a brief explanation. I label this a social history of religion, yet one trenchant recent critic has fairly criticized most of the social history of the Reformation of the past decades as a secularized historiography addressed to an audience of agnostics that reduces religious movements to instruments of putatively deeper historical forces and thus misses their *coeur religieux*.<sup>7</sup> This book seeks to exemplify an alternative kind of social history of religion. It is a social history insofar as it attends to the actions and beliefs of all groups within the population and draws upon methods pioneered by social historians. It does not assume that the religious can be equated with the social or is ultimately explained by it.

Particularly fruitful for thinking about the relation between religion and society are the ideas of Michael Mann, the paradoxical sociologist who argues that the very word that conventionally defines his discipline's subject should

be avoided if possible. “There is no one master concept or basic unit of ‘society,’” Mann has written. Rather, what are conventionally called societies are best thought of as overlapping networks of formal and informal systems of constraint that have arisen to satisfy basic human needs. These power networks are of four sorts: ideological, political, military, and economic. None is primary in the sense that it determines the others “in the last analysis.” All interact promiscuously. When one changes, it will both shape and be shaped by the others.<sup>8</sup>

The Reformation unsettled Europe so deeply because it transformed its central institution of ideological power, one whose reach extended into every parish and home: the Christian church. In a religion of the book, religious power derives from the ability of individuals or institutions to convince others that they hold the key to interpreting its sacred texts. The Reformed tradition offered a new interpretation of Christianity’s sacred texts. Inevitably, its emergence affected the other power networks in society, just as its articulation and institutionalization took place within constraints set by those networks. No history of the tradition will be true to its subject unless it recognizes the many ways in which those who built it were driven by the desire to live up to the demands that they believed the renascent Gospel placed upon them. No account of the long-term development of the churches that issued from the Reformation can neglect the internal dynamic of change that arises as insurgent religious movements transform themselves into established churches, codify their teachings, and confront the obscurities and internal contradictions that earlier generations were able to avoid. There is, in short, no gain-saying the force of belief systems in the story of the European Reformation. At the same time, no history of this subject can neglect the ways in which the various Reformed churches were shaped by the conditions of their birth and the intellectual formation of their early leaders. No account of the subsequent unfolding of the tradition can neglect the interplay across successive generations between the force of religious imperatives, the conditioning influence of other power networks, and the play of contingent events. Beliefs make history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing. They are also themselves the products of history. The interplay between the force of a religious tradition and the contexts in which it arose and took root lies at the heart of the approach adopted here.

*Calvinism* is an even more problematic word than *society*. Like its parallels *Lutheran* and *Zwinglian*, *Calvinist* was originally a label attached to certain theological positions by opponents eager to stigmatize them as inventions of fallible individuals. The specific viewpoints so labeled have always varied. The word emerged in the mid-1550s in the context of no fewer than three debates in which Calvin was then engaged, one over the proper interpretation

of the Eucharist, the second over the proper ceremonies of the liturgy, and the third over whether or not the secular authorities had the right to punish heresy.<sup>9</sup> Several generations later, especially within the world of Anglo-American theology, *Calvinism* came most commonly to be used to connote a fourth viewpoint, the high predestinarian theology often summarized in five points captured by the acronym TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. None of these viewpoints, modern Calvin commentators would stress, suffice by themselves to capture what is most characteristic or most essential in Calvin's own thought. Still less can they be taken to identify the essential features of the larger tradition to which Calvin attached himself but of which he was not the sole spokesman. While a few of those attacked as Calvinists accepted the label for the purposes of public debate, most rejected it as the appropriate name for the party or church of which they were a part. They preferred to call themselves variously the evangelical, reformed, evangelical reformed, or reformed Catholic churches, the term *reformed* emerging as the most common label amid the broader process of confessional differentiation and hardening that characterized the long Reformation era. *Reformed* is thus for several reasons a more historically accurate and less potentially misleading label than *Calvinist* to apply to these churches and to the larger tradition to which they attached themselves. Up until this moment, I have used *Calvinist* and *Reformed* synonymously to make myself clear to nonspecialist readers who are more likely to recognize the former term. Henceforth *Reformed* will be this book's label of choice whenever reference is being made to the broad tradition that it examines and to any of the churches associated with that tradition. Use of the terms *Calvinist* and *Calvinism* will be confined to situations in which the ideas of modern interpreters who use these terms are being discussed, in which doctrines distinctive to Calvin as opposed to other Reformed theologians are at issue, or in which those views that subsequently came to be considered quintessentially Calvinist are being examined. In this last case, the word will generally appear in quotation marks. The Reformed tradition broadly understood, not Calvinism in any of the narrower senses of that word, is this book's precise subject.

In the delicate matter of determining just where to draw the boundaries of the Reformed tradition, I have tried to take my inspiration from the period itself and to foreground the historical process by which boundaries were demarcated at the time. Consciousness of a distinctively Reformed variant of Protestantism first took shape in the second half of the 1520s, as divisions emerged within the evangelical movement over the issue of the Eucharist, and Luther and his supporters refused fellowship with those who espoused a purely symbolic understanding of the Lord's Supper. The exact terms of the

disagreement between the Reformed and the Lutherans subsequently shifted in subtle ways, but the antagonism that emerged in the 1520s was never effaced, even if in certain times and places Reformed groups insisted upon their fundamental agreement with the Lutherans, made alliances with them, and admitted them to communion. All of the churches included as Reformed here displayed their belonging to a common tradition by accepting one of a relatively narrow range of positions on the doctrine of the Eucharist, by endorsing one or more of a common set of confessions of faith, by inviting one another's theologians to their synods, and by sending future ministers for higher education to one another's universities. The changing ways in which they drew the boundaries separating them from other groups will remain part of the narrative throughout. Dissident groups born from theological disputes within these churches but anathematized by the dominant voices within them are included to the extent that their discussion is integral to the story of the larger family of the Reformed churches during the time period examined here.

The Church of England stood in a particularly complicated and fluid relation to the majority of Europe's Reformed churches in this period. Although one still encounters historical atlases with confessional maps of sixteenth-century Europe that tint England a hue of its own, as if a distinctive Anglican tradition was born with the Reformation, Reformed theology dominated the Church of England for at least a generation after it had clearly aligned itself with continental Protestantism. During this time virtually all of the church's most influential members considered themselves part of the larger Reformed family. Amid the debates that subsequently developed within the church, some English theologians began to depict their church as *sui generis*, neither Reformed nor Roman Catholic, but instead incorporating the purest traditions of the early church. This view gained ground with the advance of the Laudian party in the 1620s and 1630s, was cast out from the established church during the civil war and interregnum, but survived to return stronger than ever at the Restoration. Even at the height of its strength under the later Stuarts, however, it never so dominated the historical self-understanding of the English church that it eliminated the rival position that the Church of England was part of the larger Reformed family. Thus, a comprehensive history of the Reformed tradition must make room for the Church of England because it was the largest national church associated with the Reformed tradition and a net exporter of theological ideas from the end of the sixteenth century onward. Furthermore, even though many within it sought to dissociate it from the Reformed tradition, it does not make sense to eliminate these voices from the story told here and to include only those who met some doctrinal test of Reformed orthodoxy. To do that would be to silence half of the ongoing dialogue that defined the church's changing character. A substantial portion of

this book is devoted to following the twists and turns of this long struggle to define the character of the Church of England, so that its changing relation to the main lines of Reformed doctrine and practice elsewhere may be understood.

In the fifteen years that I have been working on this book, I have had ample opportunity to learn why nobody else has written a general history of this subject for so long. It is not simply the vastness of the secondary literature in a wide range of languages that discourages the would-be synthesizer. Even more problematic is the striking inconsistency of emphasis and coverage within this literature. Both during and after the Reformation, the fate of Europe's Reformed churches varied dramatically. As a result, the historical imagination of later generations in each country has tended to fasten on different aspects of each church's history. The growing internationalization of historical scholarship in the past generation has narrowed such disparities between national traditions of scholarship. Still, the historian eager to follow themes or problems across the history of all of the major Reformed churches all too often discovers that what has been well studied in one national context has been neglected in another. I set out to write a work of synthesis based on secondary works and the most easily accessible published primary sources. I frequently discovered that it was also necessary to have recourse to manuscript materials and rare book rooms. This remains predominantly a work of integration and interpretation, but it also contains important elements of original research.

Limitations of time and linguistic competence have prevented me from covering every topic I would have liked to explore, especially with regard to central and eastern Europe. At their height, the Reformed churches of both Poland and Hungary were considerably larger than most general histories of the Reformation acknowledge, even if they remained on the periphery of the larger Reformed universe. I have tried to give these churches their due place, but I have been handicapped by the relative paucity of primary sources, by the thinness of the secondary literature in west European languages, and by my own lack of knowledge of either Polish or Hungarian. Little is said about these churches in the section of the book devoted to religious practice and church discipline, essentially for want of adequate studies. One can hope that the crumbling of old barriers between East and West will inspire further research into the fascinating history of these churches.

Finally, in a work like this, readers have a right to know the author's relation to the religious tradition under study. The opening sentence of McNeill's book included his recollection of memorizing the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism as a child; mine can recount no comparable memory. I am a total outsider, an agnostic, nonpracticing Jew raised in a secular household. While I thus lack the easy familiarity with enduring elements of the tra-

## INTRODUCTION

dition that a church upbringing offers and worry about my lack of formal instruction in theology and the Bible, I can only hope that I have been able to overcome some of these handicaps through that most basic of mental processes cultivated by historians: the effort to think one's way sympathetically into a distant and, to a degree, alien worldview.



## PART I

### *The Formation of a Tradition*

The Reformation began with the great burst of enthusiasm for social and ecclesiastical renewal that historians now call the evangelical cause to highlight its protean, ill-defined character. In this time of “magnificent anarchy,” Martin Luther’s criticism of papal authority at the Leipzig Debate of 1519 and his steadfast defense of his ideas at the Diet of Worms in 1521 galvanized intensifying aspirations for a reform of Christendom and inspired a tidal wave of treatises, broadsides, and sermons urging rejection of the authority of Rome and a return to the purity of the Gospel. The watchwords were broad. Even those theologians who would prove most central in shaping the evangelical cause had not yet articulated many of the positions they would ultimately espouse. The thousands of people who responded enthusiastically to their initial words understood them differently according to their experience, upbringing, and aspirations.

As events forced those who emerged as leaders in various regions to confront practical questions about what precise form a proper reformation of Christianity should take and who could legitimately carry one out, diverse understandings began to emerge. Some engendered local experiments in worship and church organization, gained political support, and ultimately gave birth to new church orders. Others inspired a measure of dedication but never became institutionalized or were soon suppressed. Forceful and influential re-

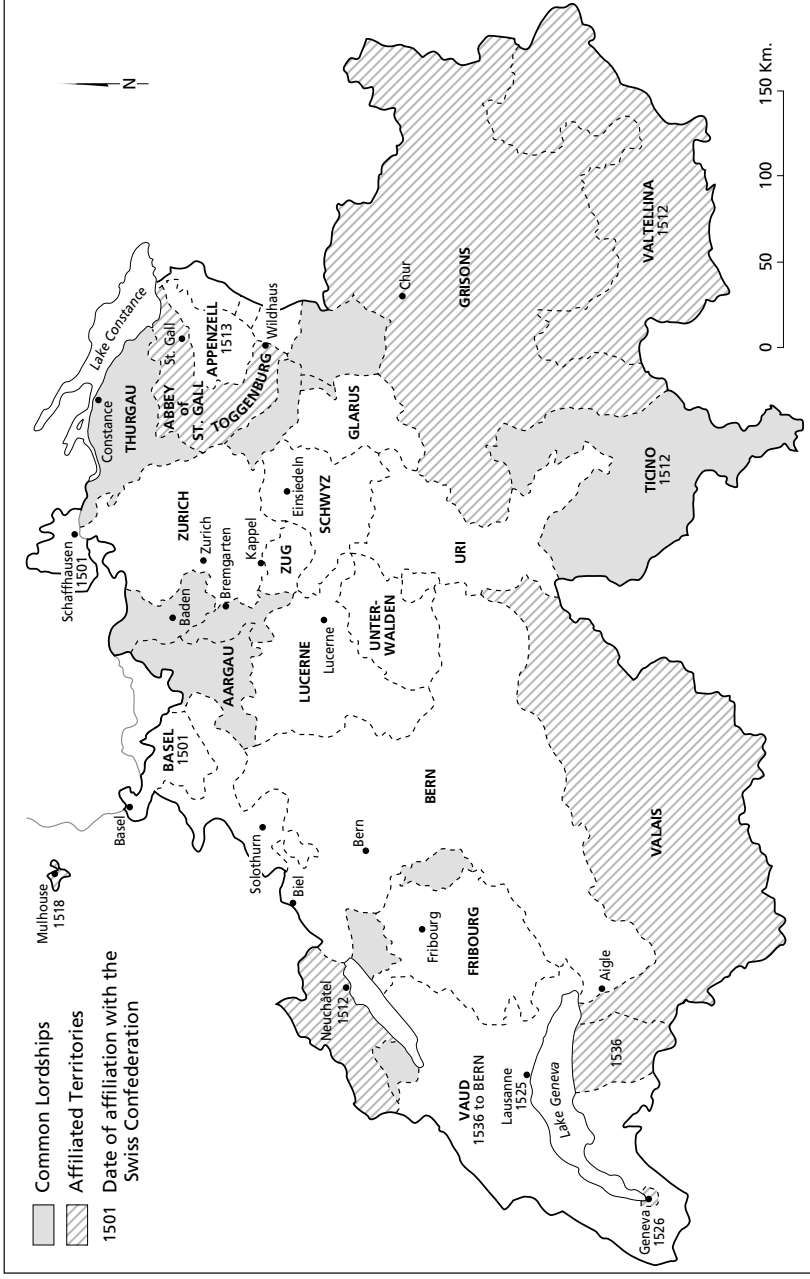
form spokesmen might find that the new church orders they endorsed were adopted by communities in neighboring territories as well, giving rise to regional families of church orders. By the later 1520s and early 1530s, the German-speaking portions of Europe from the Baltic states to Switzerland were dotted with both individual parishes and larger territories that had altered their worship and church life in ways that displayed more local variations and nuances than historians have yet been able to map. As they shaped and argued over these alterations, the leading evangelical theologians defined more clearly not only the positive details of their reforming vision, but also what they could not accept. Because all of these changes were enacted in defiance of both the pope and the emperor, they were legally and politically precarious.

The Reformed tradition can be said to have had two births. Most straightforwardly, it was born in Zurich out of the encounter between Huldrych Zwingli's reforming vision and the political culture of Switzerland's cities. Zwingli was an ardent Erasmian turned critic of Rome. His mature conception of a reborn Christianity included a strong concern for the moral betterment of the community and a desire to purge worship of all material and nonscriptural features. The civic authorities of the recently independent, militarily powerful Swiss Confederation had already begun to oversee the moral and religious life of the community. Soon after coming to Zurich in 1519 Zwingli emerged as the leading evangelical preacher in a city where agitation for change quickly developed. At once a herald and defender of reforming aspirations, Zwingli was also moderate and politically astute enough to win and retain the support of the city fathers. By channeling desire for change in a manner that preserved and reinforced the unity of the civic community, he molded in 1524–25 the first civic reformation in a region that would ultimately witness many. Essential features of the Zurich reformation included a consistently austere style of worship that sought to eliminate all features of medieval Catholicism lacking an explicit biblical basis; an insistence upon the prohibition against worshipping graven images and the consequent removal of altarpieces, paintings, and sculptures from the city's churches; a simple eucharistic service understood as a memorial of Christ's Last Supper; and a new civic-run morals court charged with implementing a reformed set of moral laws. Zurich and its theologians would remain loyal to this pattern of reformation, and the city became a center for its dissemination to other cities and territories, first in the surrounding region and then throughout much of Europe. The call to purge all nonscriptural elements from worship and the hostility to idolatry would henceforward permanently characterize the Reformed tradition. While the range of eucharistic theologies associated with the tradition would widen, all

affiliated theologians and churches would follow Zwingli in rejecting the claim that Christ was physically present in the communion bread and wine.

Seen through a wider lens, the Reformed tradition was also born from the process of confessional definition within the larger world of emerging Protestantism that divided the primal ooze of the early evangelical movement into two rival varieties of Protestant state churches: the Lutheran and the Reformed. In this dialectic of boundary marking, the actions and decisions of Luther and his followers were at least as important as those of the early Reformed champions. Amid the profusion of prophets who sprang up across Germany and Switzerland in the early Reformation, none could match the charisma of the German Hercules whose initial outspokenness had launched the movement and whose copious writings flooded the region. The theological positions that Luther articulated as the movement developed were consequently of enduring significance. His downplaying of the importance of outward forms of worship and willingness to accept practices that might lack biblical sanction but nonetheless did not appear to him to contradict the essence of the Gospel; his commitment to a literal understanding of Christ's words to his disciples, "This is my body"; and his casting of those who favored a metaphorical interpretation of these words as "sacramentarians" in league with the devil were all fundamental steps in demarcating a boundary line that would leave the Saxon pattern of reformation on one side and the Zurich pattern on the other. His associate Philip Melancthon espoused in his later years a eucharistic theology that blurred this line, but the majority of those who claimed Luther's legacy after his death in 1546 rejected this position and advocated instead a "ubiquitarian" understanding of the real presence that sharpened it.

The precarious legal situation of the territories within the Holy Roman Empire that had instituted local reformations gave Luther and later Lutheran theologians great political leverage in the empire. Innovations in worship were outlawed at the conclusion of the Diet of Worms (1521). Territories and localities that introduced a new church order consequently faced the threat of Emperor Charles V coming to Germany and punishing them for breaking the law. To protect themselves, they began to negotiate defensive political alliances, a project that took on special urgency when Charles V indeed returned in 1530. Luther denounced the sacramentarians so vehemently and worked so closely with the most powerful German Protestant ruler, the elector of Saxony, that when the largest and most important evangelical alliance took shape, the princes who joined it refused admission to territories that would not accept a confession of faith containing the eucharistic position they deemed orthodox. Even though Zwinglian and other sacramentarian ideas cir-



Map 1. The Swiss Confederation and Affiliated Territories

THE FORMATION OF A TRADITION



Map 2. The Holy Roman Empire

culated alongside Lutheran ones in the empire and proved more attractive to ordinary townsmen when they were able to compete with them on relatively equal terms, the need to secure the protection of this alliance steadily pushed evangelical territories within the empire toward the Lutheran camp. Such was not the case on the other side of the still-fluid political boundary demarcated by the Swiss Confederation, where imperial law no longer held sway.

By the time Zwingli's life was cut short on the battlefield in October 1531, the political forces that would eventually mold the confessional pattern of the Reformation in Germany and Switzerland alike had already begun to reveal themselves. Zwingli's accomplishments were considerable. He played the central role in shaping the transformation of the ecclesiastical order within

Zurich and gained a powerful voice in the city's governing circles. Working closely with kindred spirits in nearby towns, he helped to ensure the triumph of nearly identical reformations in most of the larger cantons of Switzerland. Church orders that shared many features with Zurich's triumphed in quite a few south German free imperial cities. In the later 1520s, Zwingli was probably the most effective and outspoken clerical champion of an evangelical political action to defend and spread the cause of the reformation through the German-speaking world. Still, when Luther abandoned his previous reluctance to advocate political or military action in defense of this cause and the League of Schmalkalden took shape in the crucial years 1530–31, it quickly became apparent that the center of gravity in the emerging world of Protestant politics in Germany lay in Saxony, not in Switzerland. The disastrous outcome of the aggressive military policies that Zwingli advocated in the last months of his life capped the shift in the balance of power. For the next twenty-five years doctrines and patterns of worship closer in character to those of Zurich than to those of Wittenberg would, though never disappearing, retreat within the empire.

In Switzerland, the Zwinglian legacy also stood in peril after the death of its prophet, for in the aftermath of defeat Zurich's magistrates grew wary of listening to clergymen, while over the ensuing decades Bern and Basel each felt the temptation of aligning itself with the German Lutherans. Here, however, an energetic and effective disciple of Zwingli's, Heinrich Bullinger, assumed the elder preacher's mantle of ecclesiastical leadership in Zurich and became in many ways an even more effective church politician on a wider European scale. Within Zurich, Bullinger attained sufficient prestige to safeguard a measure of independence and influence for the city's pastors. On a larger stage, he defended the principles and extended the reach of Zwingli's theology with tenacity and vigor for upward of four decades. He so successfully cultivated potentially like-minded churchmen and political leaders through both personal contacts and a massive private correspondence that his web of connections came to reach as far afield as England, Poland, and Hungary and to include future leaders of the Protestant cause within each country. He reshaped and amplified Zwingli's central ideas in commentaries and expositions of doctrine that attained far wider dissemination than any of Zwingli's own writings, a task of theological elaboration to which several other skilled theologians who ended their days in Switzerland also contributed. Lastly, he played a central role in drafting a series of confessions of faith that defined a revised Reformed consensus on the eucharist and proved capable of winning the adherence of many churches both within and beyond Switzerland.

During these same years, Reformed churches also came to be established in a few regions on the fringes of Switzerland and the empire whose locations

made them vital relay stations for the subsequent growth of the cause. During the 1540s, John a Lasco, a refugee Polish aristocrat whose theology placed him closer to Zurich than to Wittenberg, shaped the Protestant church of a little territory in northwestern Germany, East Friesland, whose chief port, Emden, was a short sail from the Netherlands. Between 1547 and 1553, a Lasco went to England, where he took charge of the church created in London for evangelical refugees fleeing the Netherlands and France. Both Emden and London became centers for corresponding with and sustaining like-minded souls who remained behind in those countries. Their churches became models for the organization of underground churches there—Reformed models. Still more potent models of a properly Reformed church came to be established in the French-speaking territories on Switzerland's western border that were drawn into political affiliation with the Swiss Confederation between 1512 and 1536, and where Bernese arms subsequently shielded evangelical expansion. The Reformed cause triumphed here in a series of cities including Neuchâtel and Lausanne, but it was the largest city of the region, Geneva, that ultimately captured the leading role in the cause's subsequent expansion.

The Genevan Reformation was not identical to the Zurich one, although it too was shaped by the encounter between the specific outlook of its most charismatic reformer and the distinctive features of its local political culture. Here, the reformer, John Calvin, was a supremely eloquent, supremely determined outsider who had grown up in the milieu of the pre-Reformation church courts and who believed that the Bible clearly specified the offices and disciplinary institutions of the Christian church. The city was a newly and precariously independent commercial crossroads with still weakly developed civic institutions and a strong need for the political reinforcement that both industrious immigrants and moral purity were believed to provide. After a long and closely contested struggle, Calvin was able to sway the Genevans to accept something that urban reformers elsewhere had sought vainly in the preceding decades: a church with an independent system of ecclesiastical discipline and excommunication controlled by the ministers and church elders rather than by the city fathers. Under Calvin's vigorous leadership, this system of consistorial discipline helped make Geneva a model of the successful reformation of manners and morals. The city became a magnet for immigrants, who stimulated its economy and multiplied the capacity of its printing industry. Calvin proved to be an even more prolific, captivating, and penetrating author of theological works than Bullinger. He was scarcely less assiduous than his Zurich counterpart in building networks of supporters and reaching out to politically influential figures far beyond his local power base. He cooperated closely with Bullinger even while differing with him on certain points of theology and ecclesiology.

When the Peace of Augsburg brought the first great phase of the Reformation's expansion to an end in 1555, Reformed variants of Protestantism were thus confined to a few small territories and cities on the fringes of Germany: parts of Switzerland, the affiliated French-speaking territories of Neuchâtel and Geneva, East Friesland, and a few refugee churches in northern Europe. Yet the cause stood poised on the verge of dramatic growth. Zurich, Geneva, and Emden were all centers for the dissemination of Reformed ideas and propaganda. Bullinger and Calvin had extensive networks of international correspondence. Bullinger, Calvin, and a Lasco all enjoyed great prestige among the increasing ranks of people in many lands who had grown convinced that there was something dramatically wrong with the Roman Catholic Church but as yet had no alternative to it in which to worship. Zurich, Geneva, and the refugee churches offered such people three distinct models of how such an alternative might be structured. Finally, and most important, the majority of the key features that ensured that it would be the Reformed tradition, not the Lutheran, that galvanized this diffuse dissatisfaction with the church of Rome into the second great wave of Protestant expansion had by now been articulated. The theological positions defined by its first-generation founders on the question of the eucharist, the reformation of worship, and the relation between personal salvation and moral and social renewal all placed the Reformed tradition more squarely in line with the chief impulses that attracted people to the Protestant cause than the Lutheran alternatives. The leading Reformed theologians of the second generation all emphasized far more strongly than their Lutheran counterparts that those living in Catholic countries who had seen the light of the Gospel had to separate themselves as completely as possible from the "abominations of popery." Calvin in particular argued that the Bible outlined many of the proper institutions of a Christian church and thus was prepared to suggest that believers create churches of their own with these institutions as an alternative to Rome. With Zurich and Geneva offering alternative models of how church and state fit together, the tradition could appeal both to rulers determined to exercise direct authority over sacred things and to ordinary believers in situations of persecution eager to establish a properly reformed church that could function independently of the state.