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# (Review) The Negotiated Reformation: Imperial Cities and the Politics of Urban Reform, 1525–1550

Marc R. Forster

Connecticut College, [mrfor@conncoll.edu](mailto:mrfor@conncoll.edu)

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**Comments**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Negotiated Reformation: Imperial Cities and the Politics of Urban Reform, 1525–1550.* By Christopher Close. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009. Pp. x+284. Cloth \$90.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76020-1.

Christopher Close's study of the Reformation in eastern Swabia emphasizes the importance of political ties between the Imperial cities of this region in the development of Protestantism. This perspective serves as an important corrective to the predominance of local studies, which focus on the internal dynamic that drove the Reformation forward in most German cities. The title of the book, *The Negotiated Reformation*, refers to the related argument that the establishment of the Reformation in the smaller cities of Donauwörth and Kaufbeuren was the result of a process that involved many parties, including the ruling elite, the wider population of these cities, and powerful neighboring cities. Close details above all the political considerations and diplomatic maneuvers that determined the establishment of official Protestantism in these cities, rather than the religious or spiritual motivations of the parties.

The focus on the diplomatic negotiations between cities is partly the consequence of the sources used in this study, primarily the diplomatic archive of the dominant city of the region, Augsburg. As Close reminds scholars, the leaders of Augsburg, like other regional centers such as Nuremberg and Strasburg, actively promoted the expansion of their form of Protestantism in eastern Swabia, hoping that religious common ground would expand the city's political sphere of influence. Augsburg, which had embraced a Swiss-influenced form of Protestantism, sometimes competed with the more conservative Lutherans of Nuremberg for influence in smaller cities.

Cities such as Augsburg sought to influence religious developments in neighboring cities in a number of ways. Preachers circulated from city to city, usually at the recommendation of city councils. Smaller cities would write to larger cities asking for a reliable preacher, particularly when they feared "sects" or the rise of "private religion," often in the form of Anabaptism in southern Germany. Major Reformation figures, such as Martin Bucer of Strasbourg and Ambrosius Blarer of Constance, moved from city to city, helping to write church ordinances and participating in the establishment of orthodox religious practice. The city councils of smaller cities also regularly consulted their counterparts in Augsburg, Ulm, and Nuremberg on religious questions, though they did not always follow that advice.

Close presents two case studies in this book, examining the “negotiated Reformations” in Donauwörth and Kaufbeuern in the 1540s. The 1540s were no longer the early Reformation, the so-called “storm years,” and religious pressure from below had waned in most cities. Under less pressure from the street, city authorities moved carefully in officially adopting the Reformation. Donauwörth, for example, sought advice from both Nuremberg and Augsburg, settling in the end for an Augsburg-style religious system. Political/diplomatic considerations were always near the surface of religious discussions between the cities, with Augsburg authorities seeking to incorporate Donauwörth in the Schmalkaldic League and Donauwörth in turn seeking protection from its powerful Catholic neighbor Bavaria. Kaufbeuern was a problematic case for its Protestant neighbors, Augsburg, Ulm, and Memmingen. Officially Catholic until the 1540s, Kaufbeuern’s disorganized religious establishment made it a haven for Anabaptists and spiritualists of various kinds. Kaufbeuern authorities had traditionally consulted Augsburg about religious issues, and the Augsburg council used its influence to bring Kaufbeuern into the orthodox Protestant camp, thereby preempting the danger of Catholic intervention in the religiously chaotic city.

Close’s contribution to our understanding of the Reformation is neatly summed up in the conclusion. “Alongside the internal dialogue that occurred within many cities, negotiation between cities exerted a powerful influence on the south German urban Reformation” (p. 252). This argument is particularly persuasive in reference to smaller cities such as Donauwörth and Kaufbeuern and works well for regions such as eastern Swabia where there were long-standing urban regional networks, often reinforced by institutional structures such as the Swabian League and the Imperial Circles (*Kreise*). Larger cities, such as Nuremberg, Strasbourg, and Cologne, had somewhat different concerns and were forced to consider political pressure at an international level, often balancing Imperial pressure to preserve Catholic institutions and practices with local pressure for reform. Political and diplomatic considerations were always part of the decisions city councils made in religious matters in the sixteenth century.

*The Negotiated Reformation* also contributes to the discussion of the ways in which the Holy Roman Empire adjusted to the potentially destructive problem of religious division. Thomas A. Brady’s *German Histories in the Age of the Reformation* argues that the Empire was ultimately flexible enough to adapt to a situation of multiple confessions, often drawing on traditions of negotiation and cooperation to overcome religious conflict. Close shows how this same situation applied at the regional level, as traditional political and social ties continued to function after the Reformation. Close argues that “regional power structures” provided the context for the progress of the Reformation, both limiting its progress in some places and pushing it forward in others. Importantly, says Close, these ties also allowed the Reformation to survive military defeat in the 1540s, when “on the regional

level it mobilized systems of support that allowed evangelical communities to survive external attacks on the Reformation” (p. 261).

Close has identified an important aspect of the political and religious culture of sixteenth-century Germany by emphasizing the negotiated character of the Reformation. While the idea of negotiation is not new, his discussion of the inter-city negotiations that influenced the Reformation at the regional level is useful and any analysis of the urban Reformation must take this perspective into account. The concept of communication, also frequently cited in this book, is less clearly developed. Close’s diplomatic sources tend to limit his discussion of communication to letters written between city councils. He recognizes that traveling preachers provided another form of communication, as did merchants and other travelers. What is downplayed is a wider concept of communication, which occurred not only through pamphlets, woodcuts, devotional literature, and other religious writings, but also through personal connections in the context of immigration from the countryside and the movement of journeymen artisans and rural servants between and into cities. Historians of the early urban Reformation, following the lead of scholars such as Robert Scribner, have long been aware of these kinds of communication. The danger of a focus on the diplomatic and political interactions between cities is that historians might lose sight of the lived experience of religion at the local level and of the kind of communication that rarely made it into the correspondence of the city council of Augsburg. As historians reexamine the development of the urban Reformation, the political context presented here should not be ignored; at the same time this perspective should not replace the careful analyses of the appeal of Reformation ideas in concrete social contexts that have done so much to advance this field in the last twenty-five years.

MARC R. FORSTER

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

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*The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice.* By Andre Wakefield. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009. Pp. x+226. Cloth \$45.00. ISBN 0-226-87020-0.

The cameralists were in some ways the management consultants of the eighteenth century. Their job was to enhance the revenues of their patrons—princes in this case, not corporations. They claimed an ability to solve practical economic problems and increase social efficiency on the basis of a science that often appeared spuriously rigorous and suspiciously trendy. And they craved the

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