

12-2009

## (Review) Walter Ziegler, Die Entscheidung deutscher Länder für oder gegen Luther...

Marc R. Forster

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

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/histfacpub>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [History of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Forster, Marc R. "Walter Ziegler, Die Entscheidung Deutscher Länder Für Oder Gegen Luther: Studien Zu Reformation Und Konfessionalisierung Im 16. Und 17. Jahrhundert.Die Entscheidung Deutscher Länder Für Oder Gegen Luther: Studien Zu Reformation Und Konfessionalisierung Im 16. Und 17. Jahrhundert. By Walter Ziegler. Gesammelte Aufsätze. Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien Und Texte, Volume 151. Edited By Peter Walter. Münster: Aschendorff, 2008. Pp. X+437. €62.00." *The Journal Of Modern History* 4 (2009): 987. Web.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact [bpancier@conncoll.edu](mailto:bpancier@conncoll.edu).

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

---

(Review) Walter Ziegler, Die Entscheidung deutscher Länder für oder gegen Luther...

**Keywords**

Germany, Reformation, Lutheranism, Catholicism, confessionalism

**Comments**

Initially published by *The Journal of Modern History*, December 2009, Vol. 81, Issue 4, p987-989.

© 2009 by University of Chicago Press

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/650675>

DOI: 10.1086/650675

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/650675>

W. Bush's policy of general war against terrorism and preemptive strikes against probable attackers. Balfour and Quiroga relate this to the nationalism inherited from the pretransition right, with its aspiration to national autonomy and imperial projection. The bombing of the Madrid commuter train and the subsequent victory of the socialists under Rodríguez Zapatero reversed that policy and brought Spain back to a policy of collaboration with the core countries of the European Union. The authors conclude the chapter with the observation that since the democratic transition, various Spanish governments, helped by massive investment in the Olympics and World Fair of 1992, have effectively replaced the overseas perception of Spain as traditional and quaint with an image of Spain as a dynamic and modern country with an interesting history.

The main conclusions of *The Reinvention of Spain* find that Spain has emerged as a country with a series of national and regional elites that argue excessively about central authority and identity as opposed to regional autonomy and identity. At the same time, the vast majority of Spaniards appear to be untroubled by living with three overlapping identities—European, Spaniard, and Basque, Catalan, Gallego, Andaluz, and so on. The authors also conclude with the observation that regional and national elites invent imagined pasts for their various constituencies. They then offer the improbable suggestion that Spain's political elites should take note of the "actual" history of the country. This somewhat naive suggestion apparently forgets that history is usually written by those in power at the moment.

Taken together, these two books offer a useful interpretive thread for understanding Spanish nationalism and identity politics in the twentieth century. Quiroga's *Making Spaniards*, a title that refers to the aspirations of the Primo de Rivera regime rather than to any project that was actually achieved, provides the background for the nationalist agenda of the Franco regime. This heritage, in attenuated form, then is part of the explanation for the right-wing government of Aznar's generally unpopular foreign policy in the late 1990s. Quiroga, in *Making Spaniards*, is less specific about the nationalism of the left, other than to comment that it was shaped as a negative reaction to various aspects of Primo's, later Franco's, nationalist agenda. Perhaps the most hopeful long-term view is the suggestion of Balfour and Quiroga in *The Reinvention of Spain* that perhaps we are seeing a new, postnationalist identity taking shape. Unhappily, the politicians have not caught up with the general public in articulating this idea and shaping political institutions to meet the popular trend.

DAVID RINGROSE

*University of California, San Diego*

**Die Entscheidung deutscher Länder für oder gegen Luther: Studien zu  
Reformation und Konfessionalisierung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.** By  
Walter Ziegler. Gesammelte Aufsätze. Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und  
Texte, volume 151. Edited by Peter Walter.  
Münster: Aschendorff, 2008. Pp. x+437. €62.00.

This collection of articles by Walter Ziegler, professor of Bavarian *Landesgeschichte* (regional or provincial history) in Munich, reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of a rather traditional kind of early modern German history. Published in the 1980s and 1990s, the articles treated older historical issues that have lost much of their force over the last decade, for example, the debate over the "confessionalization thesis." Ziegler seems to recognize this problem in the introduction but argues, with some justification, that his presentation of a regional perspective on religious developments in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries is necessary to correct the simplistic “structural” generalizations that (he argues) have dominated this field. At the same time, Ziegler unabashedly laments the declining interest in the history of the Reformation and the Confessional Age in postwar Germany, the result (he says) of the dominance of social history and the new cultural history, as well as the ecumenical tendency within the German churches and a broad secularization of society. In general, Ziegler comes across in this collection as both a proponent of a traditional mode of history writing and also as a thoughtfully skeptical critic of grand theses and modish developments in the field. This is an honorable position to take and one early modern German historians need to take into account.

This collection of thirteen articles is organized around four themes. The first group comes out of Ziegler’s work as one of the editors of the seven-volume collection of articles on the territories of the Holy Roman Empire (*Die Territorien des Reiches im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1759* [Münster, 1989–97]). Ziegler emphasizes in these articles that the Reformation (as well as Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation) played out at the level of the territory. In contrast to the scholars who emphasize either the broad appeal of Luther’s ideas across Germany or those (in the Weberian tradition) who see religious reform as an element in the modernization of state and society, Ziegler emphasizes the particular historical context that led a region to embrace Lutheranism or retain Catholicism. Ziegler tends to emphasize the political, institutional, and constitutional factors that gave princes the space to embrace the new religion rather than social pressures pushing them to abolish the Mass, close monasteries, and promulgate Protestant church ordinances. Ziegler does recognize the appeal of Luther’s ideas in cities and among the nobility but argues that one should not overestimate the importance of cities and nobles in the decisions of princes to adopt Protestantism. Ultimately, the Reformation in the territories was a matter of state policy.

Ziegler’s discussion of the Reformation in the prince-bishoprics (the *Hochstifte*) is packed with information about these ecclesiastical territories. Ziegler points to the deep traditionalism of these states, the slow pace of Catholic reform there, and the weakness of state structures. He argues that the leadership of these territories felt no need to make a decision for or against the Reformation—maintaining Catholic institutions was a matter of tradition, continuity, and inertia. In the long run, however, most ecclesiastical territories remained Catholic and became the setting for a Catholic religious revival in the seventeenth century.

The second section of the collection consists of three essays that mount a vigorous critique of the confessionalization theses. Confessionalization, introduced and promoted in the 1980s by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, posits the parallel development of Lutheran, Calvinist, and Catholic confessions and the close cooperation of church and state in the development of unified, homogenous religious cultures. Ziegler’s critique of this thesis has several elements. He argues (along with others) that the confessionalization ignores (or at minimum egregiously downplays) the theological and religious differences between the confessions. Ziegler insists that historians remember that questions of theological truth mattered to early modern people. Furthermore, Ziegler rejects quite forcefully the notion that the three confessions experienced parallel structural developments, for example, in the areas of regularizing theological positions, disciplining the laity, and training the clergy. Ziegler argues that these parallels were more apparent than real and that Catholicism differed decisively from the Protestant confessions because of its commitment to continuity with the traditions of the medieval Church.

As Ziegler recognizes, the tension between continuity and change was a feature of

the developing Lutheran and Calvinist churches as it was in Catholicism. Historians of Catholicism continue to debate the role of the Council of Trent, the Jesuits, and other reformers in “refashioning,” “reviving,” “remaking,” or “restoring” Catholicism from the middle of the sixteenth century on. In this context, Ziegler’s insistence on the “continuity and unity” of Catholicism (182) seems a rather traditional perspective, harking back to an earlier kind of confessionalized history. Certainly he overstates his critique when he calls the confessionalization thesis “unusable,” even as he cites approvingly historians, such as Andreas Holzem, who have used the concept quite productively, if not uncritically, in their work (186–88).

The third and fourth sections of this collection provide examples to buttress the general arguments presented above. These are mostly regional studies, for example, of the history of Protestantism in the Habsburg lands or the recatholicization of the Upper Palatinate. Ziegler has written several important articles about developments within monasticism in the sixteenth century. In this context he makes the important point that the abolition of the monasteries in Protestant territories was not the result of a kind of secularization but, rather, the consequence of Luther’s persuasive antimonic arguments. Ziegler, as is typical of this collection, also argues that monasticism in the German-speaking lands was far from monolithic and that any notion of a widespread crisis of monastic life in the late medieval period is an exaggeration, if not an unacceptable adoption of sixteenth-century Protestant propaganda.

The forcefully argued articles published here deserve the attention of specialists in this field. Ziegler’s critique of the confessionalization thesis is certainly not the only one, though it is perhaps one of the most extremely stated. Unfortunately, the range of analysis found in these articles is limited by an almost exclusive engagement with German historiography. There are almost no references to the many works by English-speaking scholars of the Reformation or Catholicism. Perhaps more unfortunately, Ziegler’s engagement with the history of Catholicism did not lead him to consider important regional studies of German areas by French scholars like Étienne François and Gerald Chaix, nor the influential syntheses of Louis Châtellier (*The Europe of the Devout* [Cambridge, 1989], and *The Religion of the Poor* [Cambridge, 1997]). The result is a book that challenges and provokes but that remains unfortunately limited in its perspective.

MARC R. FORSTER

*Connecticut College*

**Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire.** By Tara Nummedal.  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Pp. xviii+260. \$37.50.

One of the major trends in the history of science of the last thirty years has been the “rehabilitation of wretched subjects,” namely, the integration into mainstream history of the disciplines, practices, and practitioners of subjects that, to the modern eye, seem “nonscientific” or bordering on the “irrational.” Such an effort would not come as a surprise to historians of early modern Europe, who have long struggled to make sense of witchcraft accusations and persecutions. As Stuart Clark has shown (*Thinking with Demons* [Oxford, 1997]), many of the period’s greatest scientific minds believed in witches and spirits, whose actions were deemed tangible and real. Alchemy and alchemists, alongside witches, spirits, magicians, and astrologers, deserve to be taken seriously in historical scholarship.

The importance and centrality of alchemy for scientific giants of the period such as Newton and Boyle are now fairly well known even outside the specialized field of

Copyright of Journal of Modern History is the property of University of Chicago Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.