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The Reformation in the Hanseatic Cities

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A

The impressive discussion of the German urban reformation, in which American scholars have participated with admirable pieces of research, focuses on the south and southwest German imperial cities. North and northwest German towns have not attracted a similar interest from Reformation historians. At least subconsciously there seemed to exist a common opinion that the bright light of the non-authoritarian elements of the Reformation could not appear in the cloudy and misty districts of the North, that they could reach their ultimate splendor only in the cultivated, intellectually more lively urban centers of the South. The Reformation as "an urban event" took place south of the river Main. The North appears in the famous book of Bernd Moeller and in Professor Dickens's excellent synopsis *The German Reformation and Martin Luther* as "slow-moving areas," slow moving because there was a lack of burghers' commitment to Reformation ideas and consequently an absence of the dynamics of urban reformation.¹ Especially in the Westphalian towns the Reformation—as Professor Dickens says—"began late and made slow progress; moreover, it seems to have been less a religious than a democratic and social movement." These movements were often initiated by anticlericalism, which was "at the bottom economic, not religious."² In Bernd Moeller's early interpretation, the cities in the North were rather marginal because in his opinion they were intellectually and culturally far less lively than the South German cities and less prepared for the new religious message. As in the territorial towns in general, in the Hanseatic Cities "the new movement could only rise with the permission of the princes."³ The main defects of the territorial cities that excluded them from urban Reformation movements of the imperial city type were, according to Moeller, the lack of external political autonomy and of communal institutions in their domestic structure.

* Slightly revised version of the paper read at the Seventeenth International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 1982. In correspondence with the character of the paper, I have added only a few notes with reference to recent books and articles, most of them with full bibliography or bibliographic annotations. I wish to thank Professors Scott Hendrix and Robert Kolb for editorial help.

¹A. G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther*, 2. ed. (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 161.

²*Ibid.*, p. 161ff. Cf. my remark on this opinion: H. Schilling, "Die politische Elite nordwestdeutscher Städte in den religiösen Auseinandersetzungen des 16. Jahrhunderts," in W. Mommsen, ed. *Stadtbürgertum und Adel in der Reformation*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), pp. 235-308, here p. 244, note 17. A modern version of the one-sided interpretation of the Westphalian towns' reformation is given by A. Schröder, *Die Reformation in Westfalen, I*, (Münster, 1979), cf. my review in: *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch* 53 (1981): 382-386.

³B. Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1962), p. 33.

Two decades of detailed research stimulated by his splendid essay *Imperial Cities and the Reformation* have shown that this picture was altogether too simple and that we have to differentiate carefully within the category of non-imperial cities.⁴ This essay is concerned with the *Hanseatic Cities* mainly in the northwest region of the Empire, which were mostly of medium size, with economic, social, and intellectual connections that extended beyond the area of the respective territorial state. I shall argue that they may not be considered ordinary territorial cities but that there was a special type of Hanseatic City Reformation. Certainly we have to distinguish this from the imperial type of city reformation. Nevertheless, it was an urban type of reformation closer to the movement in the Imperial Cities of the South and Southwest than to the princely reformation (*Fürstenreformation*) in the territories which included the territorial cities in the strictest meaning of the word. Two simple considerations may show us in advance that the undifferentiated picture of an intellectually poor and exteriorly stimulated "*Landstadt*" or Provincial Town Reformation does not reflect the cultural and political reality in the towns of Northwest Germany:

1. With regard to intellectual life we have only to refer to the *devotio moderna* and the lively *humanistic traditions* spreading from the neighboring Netherlands. This is the more important since Bernd Moeller explains the communal and republican features of upper-German Imperial City Reformation as a reflection of the humanist attitudes of Bucer and Zwingli.⁵ And as it is correct that Northwest German towns did not produce any "great and independent protestant theologian,"⁶ we have to add that not a few of the Westphalian and Lower Saxon towns produced Lutheran reformers of some intellectual and regional importance—most of them with humanist background. Impressive proofs of intellectual liveliness and corresponding reforming, though not necessarily Lutheran, dynamics are the humanist Gymnasia at Dortmund, Soest and Düsseldorf, founded in the 1540s.⁷

⁴Cf. the excellent review article of H. Ch. Rublack, "Forschungsbericht Stadt und Reformation," in B. Moeller, ed., *Stadt und Kirche im 16. Jahrhundert*, (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978), pp. 9-26; W. Ehbrecht, "Verlaufsformen innerstädtischer Konflikte in nord- und westdeutschen Städten im Reformationszeitalter," *ibid.*, pp. 27-47; Schilling, "Politische Elite" (note 2); H. Schilling, "Konfessionskonflikt und hansestädtische Freiheiten im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 97 (1979): 36-59; the chapters concerned with urban history in my book: *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung*, (Gütersloh:Mohn, 1981), pp. 73-150, 225-291, 376-379; W. Ehbrecht, "Reformation, Seditio und Kommunikation," in G. Köhn, ed., *Soest, Stadt - Territorium - Reich*, (Soest, 1981), pp. 243-325; O. Mörke, "Der 'Konflikt' als Kategorie städtischer Sozialgeschichte der Reformationszeit," in B. Diestelkamp, ed., *Beiträge zum spätmittelalterlichen Städtewesen*, (Cologne: Bohlau, 1982), pp. 144-161 and especially Mörke's forthcoming book on the Reformation in Lüneburg, Brunswick and Göttingen.

⁵Moeller, *Reichsstadt*, p. 48.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷K. v. Greyerz, *The Late City Reformation in Germany*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980); H. Schilling, "Dortmund im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert—Reichsstädtische Gesellschaft, Reformation und Konfessionalisierung," in G. Luntowski and N. Reimann, ed., *Dortmund 1100 Jahre Stadtgeschichte*, (Dortmund, 1982), 151.

2. The second preliminary remark is concerned with the political framework: the picture of a close connection between the Reformation and the will of the territorial rulers is not adequate, simply because the power of these princes was quite limited during the first half of the sixteenth century. In the Northwest of Germany territorial state-building was actually just beginning. And it was primarily the towns—most of them members of the Hanseatic League, with many transterritorial connections and considerable financial and economic strength—that stood in opposition to the rulers' state-building policy. In small or medium territories the Hanseatic towns still had a predominant and very independent position, and their burghers guarded their traditional autonomy suspiciously. In my opinion this intellectual and political constellation produced a special type of Reformation development. It may be called the *Hanseatic City Reformation*.

Indeed, I need to stress that I am not using the term "Hanseatic City Reformation" simply for cities which belonged to the medieval Hanseatic League. "Hanseatic City" instead designates those provincial towns which were set off from most territorial towns by their tradition of municipal freedom and/or their economic significance, and which functioned as partners in dealing with their respective princes. This definition of the term can also be related to the legal discussion of the time, in which Hanseatic Cities, represented by *Syndici*, trained in Roman law, demanded for themselves a quasi-autonomy within the territorial states. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, in several significant legal arguments, the lawyers of the Hanseatic Cities advanced the theory that the Hanseatic cities possessed a special legal status of *civitates mixtae*, that is to say, of a political status between imperial cities and ordinary territorial towns, which were fully integrated into the territorial state.⁸

That which distinguishes the "Hanseatic City Reformation," and thus justifies it as a unique type of city reformation in contradistinction to the Imperial City Reformation, is not to be found in its municipal structures and affairs. As must still be demonstrated in specific instances, this internal side of the Hanseatic City Reformation corresponded in large part to the Imperial City Reformation, as Professor Moeller has described it. The differences between these two types of city reformation lie much more in the realm of external political relationships. They arose out of the Hanseatic Cities' place as provincial towns in the cultural, political, and social system of their respective territories. In substance that meant that the problem of reformation in the Hanseatic Cities was closely bound to the rise of the early modern territorial state. To be sure, the imperial cities were also affected by this development, and thus, too, the reformation of the imperial city. But

⁸Detailed information on this legal context in Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, and Schilling, "Hansestädtische Freiheiten." Strictly speaking, the Reformation in the imperial towns within the Hanseatic area cannot be subsumed under the type of Hanseatic City Reformation.

the consequences and effect of the formation of the territorial state were quite different for each type of city. The same thing was true of the possibilities and the dangers for the burghers of the Hanseatic Cities, or the imperial cities, which resulted from this process of the formation of the territorial state. Since the process of the reformation and in its settlement were important elements within the struggles for early modern "state" building, it directly affected the political and constitutional system of the cities and the legal and social positions of their burghers. The "Hanseatic or provincial City Reformation" was thus even more clearly than the "Imperial City Reformation" set into a political and social framework which was all-embracing. We now wish to consider how this association of religious impulses on the one hand and the political and social initiatives on the other is to be understood.

B

I should like to describe the Hanseatic City Reformation in three steps: The events—that is to say the different waves of reformation movement with special regard to the involvement of the burghers (Part I); the Hanseatic City Reformation as communal burgher movement—the domestic context (Part II); the Hanseatic City Reformation and early modern territorial state building—the external context (Part III).

I. The events—the waves of the Reformation movement and the involvement of the burghers.

As Franz Lau has shown, the main wave of reformation movement took place in the Hanseatic Cities during the early 1530s. It was a burgher reformation supported by craftsmen. "A Magistrate's reformation (*Ratsreformation*) did not exist, let alone a reformation introduced by the territorial ruler as lord of the city."⁹ In some towns this alliance of reformation and burgher movement was initiated or at least prepared in the 1520s.¹⁰

In the early 1520s Lutheran ideas were propagated by intellectuals and in some cases small groups of burghers who met to read and discuss the publications of Luther. Those intellectuals were the teachers at the parish or town schools, special groups within the towns' clergy, and the secretaries or the syndici of the town councils, often humanists. In 1525 strong burgher

⁹F. Lau, "Der Bauernkrieg und das angebliche Ende der lutherischen Reformation als einer Volksbewegung," in W. Hunbatsch, ed., *Wirkungen der deutschen Reformation bis 1555*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), pp. 68-100, here p. 80 (originally in *Luther-Jahrbuch* 26 [1959]: 109-134).

¹⁰Schröer, *Westfalen*; Ehbrecht, *Verlaufsformen*; Ehbrecht, *Reformation Soest*; Schilling, "Politische Elite"; H. Schilling, "Die Vorgeschichte des Münsteraner Täuferreiches," in H. U. Wehler, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 193-238.

movements arose in connection with the Peasants War at Dortmund, Minden and especially in Münster and Osnabrück, demanding, besides political and economic reforms, changes within the church, though Lutheran ideas remained in the background.

This was different in 1527/28, when in many of the Westphalian and Lower Saxon towns the burghers clearly demanded the Lutheran Reformation, making the way for the breakthrough of the early 1530s. The wave of reform in 1531 and 1532 was by far the most important one within the Hanseatic City Reformation. Nevertheless, the alliance between the burgher community and Lutheranism remained of importance beyond this date, even in those cases where the Reformation had been victorious and where the magistrates and the territorial princes eventually took the Lutheran side. After the defeat of the Schmalkaldic League, when princes and town magistrates conformed to the Interim due to political and legal considerations, this alliance became the guarantor of Protestantism all over north and northwest Germany. In some cases the burghers did not hesitate to express their will by the new uprisings.¹¹

We can even trace the alliance up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, at the height of Lutheran orthodoxy, which we are used to seeing in opposition to the "gemeindegkirchlichen" beginning of the Reformation and in coalition with authoritarian forces in state and society. At the end of the sixteenth and in the beginning of the seventeenth centuries Lutheran burgher movements fought against town magistrates and territorial rulers in two different ways: *firstly* with regard to the *Second Reformation*, that is to say against the Calvinism decreed by the territorial authorities (for example: Lemgo in Lippe; Marburg in Hesse-Kassel; Berlin in Brandenburg; the imperial city of Dortmund with similar tendencies in the 1570s);¹² *secondly* within the Lutheran framework itself Lutheran burghers fought against the autocratic tendencies of the princes and their new bureaucratic administration which tried to incorporate the hitherto independent Lutheran town churches into the semi-bureaucratic hierarchy of the territorial church (*Landeskirche*), dominated by the territorial ruler (for example: the Lower Saxon towns of Göttingen, Nordheim, Hannover, and Hameln, which stood in opposition to the Welfian territorial church policy in the last two

¹¹W. D. Hauschild, "Zum Kampf gegen das Interim in niederdeutschen Hansestädten," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 84 (1973): 60-81; cf. also F. Petri, "Karl V. und die Städte im Nordwestraum während des Ringens um die politisch-kirchliche Ordnung in Deutschland," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte* 71 (1978): 7-21; forthcoming: O. Mörke, "Landstädtische Autonomie zwischen den Fronten—Göttinger Ratspolitik zwischen Bürgerbewegung, Landesherrschaft und Reichspolitik im Umfeld des Habsburger Interims," in W. Ehbrecht and H. Schilling, ed., *Niederlande und Nordwestdeutschland im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit, Festschrift für Franz Petri, Städteforschung*, A15 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1983), pp. 213-214.

¹²On the Second Reformation in detail, part C of Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, pp. 151-364. On Dortmund, Schilling, "Dortmund."

decades of the sixteenth century).¹³ In both contexts the burghers regarded the existence and independence of the Lutheran town churches as important elements and sacred symbols of the towns' autonomy within territories that were on their way to becoming absolutistic territorial states.

II. The burghers' case for Reformation and its political, social, and economic implications.

Can one—as Professor Dickens does—make a fundamental distinction between religious elements on the one hand and political or economic elements on the other hand within the burghers' opposition to clericalism and to the autocracy of magistrates and princes? I do not think that this is adequate within the social and legal framework of late medieval and sixteenth century urban life. The ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical *tensions* in the towns formed a syndrome, and so did the ecclesiastical, political, social, and even the economic *demands* of the burghers. Consequently, we should look for their common roots. In doing this we may overcome the isolated views of the Reformation as either a theological or a social phenomenon. It was both. In my opinion the common roots of the Reformation-burgher movements can be found in the constitution and the organization of urban society, in the underlying legal principles, and in the special mentality of burghers in early modern Europe.

To outline my interpretation in advance: The kernel of the problem lies in oligarchic and authoritarian (*obrigkeitliche*) tendencies within the town magistrates and their elites, mostly in *close* alliance with the higher ranks of the clergy.¹⁴ These tendencies were contrary to the communal principles (*Gemeinde- or Genossenschaftsprinzip*) that gave the ultimate legitimacy of the town government to the burghers' community.

I have the impression that in the northwest region of the Empire—perhaps in contrast to the development in the imperial cities of the south—these communal principles became even more important during the sixteenth century, probably in consequence of the permanent threat by the princes and their anti-communal, authoritarian territorial states. And it was these communal principles that formed the intellectual and theoretical basis both of the religious and ecclesiastical as well as the political and socio-economic demands of the citizens.

To prove this I have to start with some information on the constitution of the Hanseatic towns. In contrast to the guild constitutions (*Zunftverfassungen*) of South Germany and the Rhineland the guild-burghers of the

¹³J. Regula, "Die kirchlichen Selbständigkeitsbestrebungen der Städte, Göttingen, Nordheim, Hannover und Hameln in den Jahren 1584-1601," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 22 (1917): 123-152.

¹⁴A striking example is Dortmund, where "Pfarrherren" of all four parish churches were members of the Patriziat.

Westphalian and Lower Saxon towns could not influence the personal composition of the town council directly. The elections for the town council were actually cooptations. The guilds and the burgher community (*Gemeinheit*) nevertheless participated in the town government, probably more effectively than the South German guild constitutions allowed. The burgher participation of the Hanseatic Cities took form in special institutions which supplemented the ordinary magistrates, composed of representatives of distinct craft guilds or of the local units within the towns—"Bauernschaften," "Laischaften," "Kirchspiele," as they were called. The most famous example is the "Gesamtgilde" of Münster, an instrument of the guild masters of the most important handicrafts which represented the interests of the whole community and which played an important role during Münster's development towards the Anabaptist kingdom of Zion.¹⁵ In most other Hanseatic City Reformations it was also those instruments of guild and burgher participation which supported the demands for reformation and which organized the uprisings against the conservative magistrates.

It is wrong to understand the communal principles and communal institutions in early modern towns as being democratic in the present sense of the word. But I want to emphasize that to interpret them as instruments of class rule, designed to smooth over social contrasts, is misleading, too. Burgher movements based on communal principles initiated a distinct type of societal conflict in the towns of the Reformation period.¹⁶ And it is not possible to understand adequately the structure and the special dynamic of social change within early modern urban society without keeping this in mind. As reformation uprisings show, those communal principles allowed the burghers to organize and legitimize successful opposition against the councils and their oligarchies. Admittedly, it was not the lower strata who profited from this opposition, but the middle strata of the guild burghers, led by well-to-do members of rising new families. Nevertheless, at least in the ecclesiastical and religious context, the ideas that triumphed *through* this communal opposition were supported by the great majority of the town inhabitants, including the poor.

Concerning the demands of the burghers and their legitimization, I cannot see a domination of nonreligious over religious ones but a coincidence of both with different emphases in different places and at different times. As a rule the two sets of demands were not amalgamated but put into separate

¹⁵Schilling, "Münsteraner Täuferreich"; K. H. Kirchhoff, "Gilde und Gemeinheit in Münster 1525-1534. Zur legalen Durchsetzung einer oppositionellen Bewegung," in Ehbrecth/Schilling, ed., *Niederlande und Nordwestdeutschland*, pp. 164-173.

¹⁶Within the urban context, this is explained in detail in the books and articles of Ehbrecth and Schilling, referred to in the previous notes. A new conception of the German history in general, based on an accentuation of communal traditions, is now given in P. Blickle, *Deutsche Untertanen. Ein Widerspruch* (Munich: Beck, 1981).

files of gravamina, sometimes—as in Lemgo and Soest—brought before the council on two successive days. But the pattern of argumentation was the same: the burghers emphasized that they were not in rebellion against the authorities but that they were using their *legal* right to influence town policy in matters of common importance. In the religious context the burghers' argumentation shows a mixture of communal principles, secular in origin, and of protestant elements in the form of early Lutheran *Gemeindechristentum*: "The right belief," said the burghers in Lemgo, a Westphalian town of medium size, "does not come unless the congregation can listen to the word of God, and that is not possible without preachers." As the local and territorial authorities did not concern themselves with the employment of those preachers, the divine law and the communal principles—both together, that is important for my interpretation—gave the burgher community the right to install them. Because the magistrates did not do it—so states the Lemgo burghers' pamphlet—"dat Karcspel and ganse gemene," that is to say, "the ecclesiastical and civic community," is entitled to do so. The burghers had come to know the evangelical truth "wat mochte man beter doin dan eindrechtlik einen rechten predicanten tho erwellen."¹⁷ And a similar argumentation came from the late city reformation at Dortmund during the 1560s: "The Councillors," said the citizens, "have to look after 'unser aller Bürger Heil und Seligkeit,' not only with regard to the next world but also with regard to the well being of the city and its burghers in this world." For only if the town has the right religion, will God provide the "ganse Gemeinde mit aller Notdurft (all necessities), täglichem Brot (daily bread) und gemeiner Wohlfahrt (common weal)." And here again the more radical version stated by a burgher leader: "If you councillors don't want to reform the city church, then we, the burghers, are entitled to introduce the religion that is compatible with the word of God and the Confessio Augustana."¹⁸

As to the *consequences*: the activities of the closely correlated *secular* and *ecclesiastical* community within the Reformation context strengthened the communal elements in the town's constitution and the self-confidence of the citizens as well as the position of their representatives. Consequently, the communal movement against authoritarian and oligarchic degeneration of the urban government and civic life in general was greatly strengthened. We can trace this in three fields.

¹⁷Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, p. 81.

¹⁸Schilling, "Dortmund," p. 182.

¹⁹The events are given in Schröer, *Westfalen*. Important observations on the role of anticlericalism during the Reformation: H. J. Cohn, "Reformatorische Bewegung und Antiklerikalismus in Deutschland und England," in Mommsen, *Stadtbürgertum und Adel*, p. 309-329; H. J. Cohn, "Anticlericalism in the German Peasants' War 1525," *Past and Present* 83, 2 (1979): 3-31.

This applies *first* of all to anticlericalism, especially strong in the cathedral towns like Münster, Paderborn, Osnabrück, and Minden, but also in Soest because of the prominent St. Patroklos Chapter.¹⁹ Anticlericalism attacked an alien element within the burgher community, which was well provided with legal, social, and economic privileges but had no civic duties. The higher levels of the clergy usually had close family bonds to the oligarchy of the councillors. The Reformation heightened the traditional pattern of the burghers' anticlericalism by the clear-cut argument that the special class of priests was not only of no use for the citizens but even an obstacle on the burgher community's way to eternal salvation.

Secondly, the political context: the reformation movement strengthened the influence of the burghers' representatives considerably. In an early stage the magistrates tried to get their support in religious matters, which was only granted—if at all—for compensation in other areas. Later on, the citizens enforced closer correspondence between their representatives' activities and the burghers' will. And they tried to get more influence over the election or nomination of those representatives: "Dat man ene unparteyelicke gemeind (that is a representative institution of the community) kesen scholle."²⁰ Often the burghers even gained influence over the recruitment of the city councils, reducing the traditional mechanisms of cooption. Most striking is the case of Münster, where the local subdivisions of the burgher community—the "Leischaften"—began to reactivate their influence on the delegates for the election of the magistrates, which paved the way for an anabaptistic majority.

In most cases the change came by force, through an uprising. Burgher committees (*Bürgerausschüsse*) were elected and took over the authority until a new council was installed. As a rule it was not members of the lower strata that came into political power in this way, but well-to-do members of rising families, up to now excluded from the council but mostly with experience as representatives of the burghers.²¹

The theoretical roots of these burgher movements can be seen most clearly in the fact that in many Hanseatic Cities the burghers' oath was renewed solemnly during the Reformation movement. By this ceremony the legal and moral bonds of the burgher community were confirmed. Each member pledged himself to fight "mit Leid und Leben" for the common weal (the "Gemeine Beste") in ecclesiastical and *secular* matters.²² The ultimate

²⁰Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, p. 90.

²¹Schilling, "Politische Elite"; H. Schilling, "Wandlungs- und Differenzierungsprozesse innerhalb der bürgerlichen Oberschichten West- und Nordwestdeutschlands im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," in M. Biskup and K. Zernack, ed., *Schichtung und Entwicklung der Gesellschaft in Polen und Deutschland (16. und 17. Jahrhundert)*, (Beiheft der VSWG) (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 121-173.

²²On the function of the burghers' oath cf. W. Ebel, *Der Bürgereid als Geltungsprinzip des deutschen mittelalterlichen Stadtrechts*, (Weimar: Böhlau, 1958).

political goals of these burgher movements were the restoration—not the revolution!—of the communal constitutions with the participation of the burgher community and the adjustment of the town church to these communal norms. There were not fundamental alterations of municipal society and its political institutions, except in Münster, where the Anabaptists destroyed the principles of communal constitution in order to build up the kingdom of Zion.

Thirdly, the socio-economic aspects of the burgher movement: beside the religious question and often simultaneously with it the Hanseatic burghers were preoccupied with two problems: the *supply of grain* at reasonable prices and access to *common grounds* as well as to the fishing rights in common stretches of water. The last generation of historians was apt to see these conflicts either in a rather bucolic light or as an indicator of the shrinking of the Hanseatic centers into the “Ackerbürgerstädte” of early modern times. In contrast to this interpretation we emphasize today the importance of those questions to inhabitants of big cities like Münster, Dortmund, and even Cologne, who were certainly no *Ackerbürger*. And due to the research of Professor Abel we know today that these conflicts were the consequence of demographic expansion together with steadily rising prices for food.²³ In this situation the supply of cheap grain and the supplementing of the grain supplies with meat, milk, or vegetables through free use of the common grounds or by tillage of allotments became a question of their very existence for the middle strata of the towns’ inhabitants. Within the context of our interpretation we have to add that the claim of free use of the common grounds was legitimized by the same argument as the demand for reformation and for political participation. The burghers claimed the free use of the common grounds as a traditional right of the community, which must be used “dem gantzen gemhenen tom besten.” Likewise, the burghers’ opponents, the higher ranks of the clergy, especially the big chapters, and the oligarchic circles of the council and old Hanseatic merchant families, tried to convert parts of the common ground into private and individual property—sometimes by enclosure— and to take advantage of the shortage of grain for speculation. The burghers declared both practices to be offences against the commonweal. They were in contradiction to the communal principles of urban society.²⁴

To conclude and summarize the arguments with regard to the domestic side of the Hanseatic City Reformation, I should like to characterize it as a

²³W. Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, 3. ed., (Hamburg: Paney, 1978); W. Abel, *Massenarmut und Hungerkrisen im vorindustriellen Europa*, (Hamburg: Paney, 1974).

²⁴On common-ground conflicts within the Westphalian region cf. Schilling, “Münsteraner Täuferreich”; Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, pp. 65, 91f., 94, 111ff; Schilling, “Dortmund,” pp. 183ff. This problem is worth examination within a detailed study.

*burgher movement based on communal principles,*²⁵ in opposition to autocratic, hierarchic, and oligarchic tendencies in the ecclesiastical and political system as well as in the urban society as a whole, through constitutional and not revolutionary means. And I should like to emphasize that the so-called dominance of political, social, and economic demands within this burgher movement is no indicator of the weakness of religious interests but rather of a strong communal tradition and feeling as the basis for the burghers' claim on participation in secular as well as in religious matters.

III. The Hanseatic City Reformation and early modern territorial state building—the external context.

Having analyzed the domestic context rather extensively, it is possible to sketch the external factors in a few lines. But we have to keep in mind that it is this external constellation that marks the particularity of the Hanseatic City Reformation. In spite of occasional political pressures from surrounding princes and the emperor, the reformation of the imperial cities remained ultimately a domestic struggle between burghers and magistrates. Apart from the few imperial cities in Northwest Germany the situation was quite different in this region. The Hanseatic City Reformation was part of a wider historical process, which took place on the territorial level. Consequently, the bipolarity in the imperial cities between burghers and the council became a triangular constellation between burghers, magistrates, and princely rulers. Here again, as on the domestic stage, the Reformation as a religious movement became seriously involved in secular matters; that is, in the conflict between traditional city autonomy on the one hand and the rising territorial state on the other. It claimed full sovereignty over all parts of the territory, especially over the financially and economically stronger towns. And here again I should like to argue that it is not adequate to contrast religious and secular elements and that in the towns both were bound together by communal ideas of the autonomy of the civic society in both secular and ecclesiastical matters.

In the earliest stage of the North German Reformation the religious and political lines were quite clear: with the exception of Ernst der Bekenner, duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, all territorial rulers took the side of the old church. Consequently, a successful Lutheran Reformation meant at least a demonstration of municipal independence from territorial tutelage, in most

²⁵The important links between the theological, political, and social connotations within this communal conception are described in detail in my book and the articles quoted in the previous notes.

cases even a real short-term expansion of the town's autonomy based on medieval tradition and privilege. Furthermore, the old Hanseatic social network was reinforced as a consequence of the transterritorial connections between the different Lutheran towns, based on personal contacts of the Lutheran preachers and teachers as well as on family bonds of the burghers, especially the elite.²⁶ The tendencies of the early modern state to close off their territories—to establish their "Gebietshoheit"—were weakened and set back for a generation.

The lines became complicated when the next generation of rulers converted to Lutheranism, often due to the influence of Philip of Hesse.²⁷ In some cases the Lutheran territorial churches adopted different ceremonies and even in some adiaphora a different confessional basis than the older Lutheran town churches within the same territory. In nearly all cases the town churches kept for the moment their independent organization, especially with regard to their authority over the ecclesiastical staff. This authority was in the hands of the town council, not seldom in combination with the right of the congregation to elect its pastor.²⁸ But the dynamic of early modern state building and the underlying principle of domestic sovereignty could not permit the autonomous exercise of these local rights within the boundaries of the territory—at least on the religious and ecclesiastical terrain. During the second half of the sixteenth century serious conflicts arose over the question of who should take advantage of the civic regime in the church: the town magistrates, which would mean a decisive strengthening of the traditional autonomy of the Hanseatic towns, or the princes, which would bring them an important step further toward their aim of incorporating the towns completely into the state and into the rising bureaucratic system.

I have already mentioned the different stages and the different methods of the rulers' attacks on the autonomy of the town churches, either by the Second Reformation or by a mere administrative change within Lutheranism.²⁹ I have only to add that this princely attack meant a confrontation between two different social and political systems based on two different principles. On the one hand, there was the traditional urban system based on the communal idea, where in spite of the real preponderance of the council the church remained a burghers' church. On the other hand, there was the territorial, authoritarian system with a bureaucratic church under

²⁶We need urgently more research on this social network and its development during the early modern period.

²⁷R. Wolf, "Der Einfluss des Landgrafen Philipp des Grossmütigen von Hessen auf die Einführung der Reformation in den westfälischen Grafschaften," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte* 51/52 (1958/1959): 27-149.

²⁸These communal institutions and traditions within the urban Lutheranism of Northwest Germany are mostly neglected in Reformation history.

²⁹Cf. Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, part C; Regula, "Selbständigkeitsbestrebungen."

control of the prince and his central administration. As a consequence of the strengthening of communal elements during the Reformation period, described in the previous passage, broad strata of the burghers were engaged in the defence of the urban system, especially of the autonomy of the town church, whereas parts of the political elite of the towns took the part of the princes.³⁰ It was during these conflicts that the lawyers of the Hanseatic towns—especially those of Brunswick, which were seriously attacked by the dukes of Brunswick at the beginning of the seventeenth century—constructed the legal theory of the *civitates mixtae* mentioned at the beginning of this essay. In correspondence to this secular theory some Hanseatic towns argued, with regard to the church government, that they were in possession of a derived *jus episcopale*, giving them limited competence within the town's church.³¹

As you know, both theories were contrary to the legal and political tendencies of the sixteenth century. The Augsburg religious peace gave the *jura episcopala* without any exception definitely to the princes, ignoring the arguments of the Hanseatic towns, which tried to get a special *ius reformandi* like the imperial cities.³² Nevertheless, the tradition of the Hanseatic City Reformation and its communal impetus did not disappear at all. Some towns and their burghers maintained considerable influence on the respective city churches. The Lutheran congregation often took part in the election of its pastors. In some Lutheran town churches there even existed representative institutions of the congregation similar to the calvinistic presbyteries.³³ This participation of the Lutheran congregation in church matters was the consequence of an amalgamation of communal traditions of medieval urban society with the congregational (*gemeindegkirchlichen*) elements of early Lutheranism, which strongly marked the Hanseatic City Reformation. With regard to this tradition and to the congregational institutions that survived up to the end of the *ancien régime* we have to distinguish carefully the type of Lutheranism created by the Hanseatic City Reformation from the type of East-Elbian Lutheranism. The communal traditions were not very strong in eastern Germany at the end of the Middle Ages, and they were weakened decisively by the reformation of the princes, the "Fürstenreformation," which was the East Elbian type of Reformation.

³⁰This division within the political elite of the burghers was a very important consequence of the social, political, and religious developments of the sixteenth century. Cf. Schilling, *Staatsbildung*; Schilling, "Differenzierungsprozesse."

³¹M. Heckel, "Staat und Kirche nach der Lehre der evangelischen Juristen Deutschlands in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 73, Kanonistische Abteilung 42 (1956): 117-247; Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, p. 117ff.

³²G. Pfeiffer, "Der Augsburger Religionsfrieden und die Reichsstädte," *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben* 6 (1955): 213-320.

³³It is regrettable that we know very little about the work of those congregational institutions of the Lutherans. Some observations in: Schilling, "Dortmund," pp. 199ff.; Schilling, *Staatsbildung*, pp. 212f., 230, 283, 380-387.

This comparative view leads to a general remark on the history of German reformation and the study of it. It is not adequate to speak of *the* German Reformation, as it is not adequate to speak of *the* Lutheran or *the* Calvinist Reformations. That is especially true with regard to social and political implications and consequences. We have to establish different regional and systematic types of reformation within the German "Reich." And by comparing them we may get the best pictures of the German Reformation as a whole. It was the aim of this paper to introduce the type of Hanseatic City Reformation and to stimulate a comparative discussion of the German reformations.

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