Journal Title: Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany

Article Author: Peter Blickle

Article Title: Reformation and Society

Volume: 

Issue: 

Month/Year: 1992

Pages: 11-62 (scan notes and title/copyright pages for chapter requests)

Imprint: Brill

Call #: BR305.2 .B5313 1992

Location: Main Library

Item #: 

CUSTOMER INFORMATION:

Stan M Landry
smlandry@email.arizona.edu

STATUS: Faculty

DEPT: History

University of Arizona Library Document Delivery
1510 E. University Blvd.
Tucson, AZ 85721
(520) 621-6438
(520) 621-4619 (fax)
AskILL@u.library.arizona.edu

Paged by (Initials) 12-28, 1500

Reason Not Filled (check one):

☐ NOS  ☐ LACK VOL/ISSUE
☐ PAGES MISSING FROM VOLUME
☐ NFAC (GIVE REASON):
Communal Reformation

The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany

Peter Blickle

Translated by Thomas Dunlap

Humanities Press
New Jersey  London
Reformation and Society

One of the noteworthy products of reformation scholarship during the past ten to fifteen years has been the insight that the reformation as a "political" event was preceded by the reformation as a "social" event. In other words, an urban phase of the reformation preceded the reformation of the territorial princes. Historians who study how reformation ideas were spread and received in society have consequently come to assign the townsmen a favored place among the other social groups. By contrast, the nobility and the peasantry, the two other lay estates, have been largely ignored. So far as the nobility is concerned, this attitude is understandable, since it is hard to discern within this group a broad interest in the reformation during the period of the reformation in the cities. Franz von Sickingen's spectacular feud against the archbishop of Trier is best viewed as a movement that was socially and geographically limited to a segment of the lower nobility in the western part of the empire. It is remarkable, however, that the urban focus has not also sharpened scholarly awareness of the village, or at least aroused an interest in rural society. How do we explain this? If we leave aside the argument that one generation of scholars can accomplish only so much—which is always true and therefore doesn't explain much—reasons for this disregard of the peasantry are easy to find, even though it cannot be methodologically justified. Where the reformation is seen as an essentially intellectual movement—summed up in the phrase, "without books no reformation"—the peasant, an illiterate member of society, remains excluded from the circle of potential recipients of reformation ideas.

If this assumption is rejected, then, given the present state of scholarship, the most sensible approach begins by investigating the reformation within peasant society, the largest segment of the population in Central Europe. We can then proceed, secondly, to compare this reformation with the better known "reformation of the cities." And, finally, we will assess the common elements as well as differences between the peasants' and the burghers' reformations.

THE PEASANTS' REFORMATION

The basic sources for a study of the peasants' understanding of the reformation are the petitions, grievances, and articles that were drawn up by individual
communities or entire regions. They fall in the years 1523 to 1525, with a particularly dense cluster in 1525, the year of the “revolution of the common man,” more commonly called the Peasants’ War. The thousands of documents that were drafted in the course of this uprising offer, among other things, insight into “peasant theology.” The fact that among the peasants the reformation movement was closely linked to a revolutionary movement has kept scholars to this day from dealing with the religious beliefs of the peasants, let alone treating them as a worthwhile subject and one which might advance the scholarly discussion about the reformation. After Martin Luther had denounced the peasants’ uprising as the work of the Devil, his verdict on the peasants’ understanding of the new doctrine—that they were merely trying to redress their economic and social grievances under the pretext of the gospel—has been echoed unchallenged from the sixteenth century down to our own day. This charge stifled any analytical investigation of the peasants’ understanding of the reformation. It also improperly narrowed down the entire study of how reformation ideas were received within society, as we can see from the recent demonstration that a genuine “peasant theology” existed in Alsace.

Any attempt at reconstructing the peasants’ understanding of the reformation must start from the normal methodological premise that historical documents must first of all be accepted at face value. Only the second stage of a critical analysis can then proceed to examine to what extent the statements of a source may have been “falsified” through the intrusion of hidden interests, outside influences, or other forces. These methodological considerations might seem too obvious to need mentioning, but they are important in that they determine the course of our inquiry. The first step must be to define the peasants’ understanding of the reformation on the basis of the available sources. This requires that we isolate and draw out the theological and religious statements in the texts. Any analysis of the reconstructed notion of reform must follow this step, not precede it.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, I should emphasize that I do not intend to examine the Peasants’ War as such or to add anything to its explanation, but rather to provide a kind of historical framework for our discussion. This will make it easier to follow the analysis of the peasants’ understanding of the reformation, with its frequent and unavoidable references to the conceptual world that is characteristic of the Peasants’ War.

The revolt of the German peasants can be summarily characterized as the most important mass uprising in premodern Europe. After initial disturbances in the region of the upper Rhine in 1524, Upper Swabia moved into the center of events during the first months of 1525. Thousands, even tens of thousands of peasants massed between Ulm and Biberach, in the Allgäu and around Lake Constance. Where negotiations with the lords—the princes, counts, knights, bishops, prelates, and imperial cities—were already begun, village and regional grievance lists were quickly, even hastily, drafted. Soon these lists were combined on a regional level. One of the most famous of these manifestos is the
Twelve Articles of the peasants of Upper Swabia. They represent a summation and abstract primarily of the village articles from northern Upper Swabia. Compiled and edited with the help of Sebastian Lotzer, a furrier journeyman, and Christoph Schappeler, a preacher from Memmingen, they were printed and widely circulated. At about the same time the peasants between Ulm and Biberach, at Lake Constance and in the Allgäu, combined into a "Christian Union" and created a rough, preliminary constitution for themselves in the form of a Federal Ordinance (Bundesordnung). With the help of the printing press this document also found a wider circulation in the empire.

These propaganda activities of the Upper Swabian peasants were not unimportant for the spread and subsequent course of the movement, as the frequent references to the Twelve Articles in other regions document. Larger peasant unions were formed at the end of March around Rothenburg ob der Tauber, in the Odenwald, as well as in the archbishopric of Würzburg; eventually they spread over all of Franconia. The bands of Franconian peasants scored some spectacular successes. Near Weinsberg they forced an aristocratic garrison to capitulate and, in accordance with the law of war, made them run the gauntlet. The archbishopric of Mainz was forced to declare allegiance to the "Twelve Articles," which the Franconians had adopted from the Upper Swabians with minor modifications. Riding the crest of these victories, two burgher partisans of the Franconian peasants started to think of ways of how the archbishoprics of Cologne and Trier, and the electorates of Brandenburg and Saxony, which so far had not been touched by the uprisings, might be integrated into a comprehensive peasant alliance.

In mid-April the revolt also erupted in the Klettgau, the Black Forest, and Alsace. In Lower Alsace, Erasmus Gerber gathered peasants who were subjects of many different lords into a tight organization. The peasants along the upper Rhine used persuasion, threats, and military force to compel the cities to join them. Their final victory was the capitulation of Freiburg im Breisgau. Before Freiburg had fallen to the rebels, the peasants in Tyrol rose up, for part of the time, at least, under the ideological leadership of Michael Gaismair. The miners, mining entrepreneurs (Gewerken), and peasants in the neighboring archbishopric of Salzburg followed their example, and in distant Thuringia Thomas Müntzer became the leader of rebellious peasants and miners. From the upper Rhine the uprising swept into the Palatinate and into the Swiss Confederation (Basel, Solothurn, Zurich). From Upper Swabia it spread to St. Gall, the Habsburg portion of the Rhine valley, and Graubünden. From Franconia it reached the Duchy of Württemberg. The sacking of monasteries and assaults on castles were familiar sights in all areas of the uprising; monasteries were plundered to provision the peasant bands, often 10,000 strong, and castles were stormed to preempt possible military countermeasures.

At first the lords seemed to respond hesitantly, but eventually they mounted a determined counterattack in the short span of just over three weeks. In mid-April the general of the Swabian League, Georg Truchsess of
Waldburg, succeeded in neutralizing the peasants from Upper Swabia with a peace treaty. Soon after, the Württemberg peasants were defeated at Böblingen (May 12th), the Thuringians at Frankenhausen (May 15th), the Alsatians at Zabern (May 16th), and the Franconians at Königshofen (first week of June). The duke of Lorraine, the landgrave of Hesse, and the prince electors of Saxony, Brandenburg, the Palatinate, Mainz, and Trier and their troops crushed the peasant armies.

Between the time the peasants began banding together and the time they were suppressed by military force, a great many lists of grievances and demands—mostly in the form of so-called articles—were drawn up in villages and on the local, regional, and territorial levels. In fact, hardly any other period in premodern Europe has such an abundance of these documents. As the peasant movement spread it also became better organized. The peasants everywhere formed "bands," military or paramilitary organizations, which frequently joined together into larger Christian Unions. Since the feudal power structure had collapsed, these groups inevitably took on the character of political associations. Both the peasant bands as well as the Christian Unions have left behind Military and Federal Ordinances.

Hardly a single one of the local articles, and certainly none of the regional grievances or Military and Federal Ordinances, neglected to address the question of the reformation. They therefore allow us to reconstruct the peasants' understanding of the reformation, both the essential common characteristics as well as the regional differences. Of course the necessary focus on the year 1525 must not obscure the fact that peasant interest in the reformation actually began earlier, on a larger scale from 1524 onward in Alsace and in Franconia, and in the region around Zurich after 1523.

EXAMPLES, CENTERS OF ACTIVITY, REPERCUSSIONS

During Easter week of 1523, the abbot of Wettingen complained to the mayor and council of Zurich that the community of Kloten was demanding that he, as the holder of the patronage, provide them with a priest who would preach the gospel after the celebration of the Eucharist. If he acceded to this demand it would diminish his rights as a prelate of the church. Zurich’s council took the position that the monastery's legal privileges should not be impaired in any way, but it did give the community permission to hire a priest and support him from community resources.

About two weeks later the community of Kloten took its own complaints to Zurich. The priest (Leutpriester) and his assistant did not satisfy their religious wishes; the abbot of Wettingen should use part of the tithe income from the village to hire a priest who would preach to them "the gospel and the godly scripture." Apparently the community was not only determined to be provided with religious services it deemed proper. It also demanded that the revenues of its ecclesiastical patron, the tithes, be used for this purpose. At a court day two weeks later Zurich gave its decision in the presence of the priest and delegates...
Reformation and Society

from the community and the monastery: the lay priest Ulrich Kern was to hire an assistant "who would preach the gospel with the mandate from the community" and who would be supported by the abbot of Wettingen. Under the protection of Zurich, Kloten had thus been able to achieve two things: to adjust the pastoral care to the religious needs of the peasants—the community had outlined the duties of the lay priest's assistant in the form of a mandate—and to shift the burden of supporting the assistant onto their patron lord.

What the content of such a mandate may have looked like can be seen from a glance at the Franconian village of Wendelstein, a long way from Zurich. In the fall of 1524, the patron lord, Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg, assigned a priest to the parish. The village mayor and the community soon let the priest know "what it is we desire and request, which henceforth you must follow." In a concisely, if not to say sharply, worded statement the community informed their priest of his position and duties:

Thus we shall not recognize you as a lord, but simply as a servant of the parish.
You do not command us, but we command you. And we order you henceforth faithfully to preach to us the gospel and the Word of God, pure and honest in accordance with the truth (untarnished and unobscured by human doctrine).

This introductory article, with its move of subjecting the priest to communal authority and obligating him to proclaim the "pure doctrine," established the basic framework for the community's subsequent demands. The priest should be an example to the rest "in the parish, and in church you must follow the gospel in deeds as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ"; the sacraments should be administered in accordance with the scriptures, "as the Lord has taught and commanded us"; in the future the community would refuse the hitherto customary requests of the clergy, "that is to say alms, bequests for the welfare of one's soul (Seelgerecht), remunerations, and other invented things, which have cost us dearly," but it would not refuse to provide a proper livelihood from the communal church income (Pfarrwiddum); finally, the priest would have to take any claims against members of the parish to the local or margravial court, not to the ecclesiastical court in Eichstätt.

The newly appointed priest pledged to adhere to this village mandate without raising a word of objection: "And the priest of Wendelstein has taken on the post of the parish with this Christian intent, and he has also agreed to obey the parish as a faithful servant of the Christian community, so help him God."

Three or four years earlier, around 1520, the abbot of Wettingen would never have allowed the community of Kloten to choose its own preacher, nor would the priest of Wendelstein have agreed to place himself under the peasants' authority in this way, since parishioners were considered the "priest's subjects," and the community was the "universitas subditorum parochiae." But now the village community insisted on determining the content of the religious teachings and obliging the priest to adhere to it in his preaching. In an explanation that preceded the description of the priest's duties, the community of Wendelstein justified this in the following terms to the margravial officials:
The holy scripture indicates that it is proper for a Christian community to ask the Lord our God to send workers to his harvest, and the community thus also has the power to choose for the community a reputable and upright man who will preach the word of God to them in accordance with the truth, as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, and who will give a good example. The same community also has the authority to dismiss him from his post and to appoint someone else in his place.\footnote{14}

Are these examples, which are geographically far apart, isolated incidents, or are they indicative of a more general phenomenon?

**THE ZURICH REGION**

The territory of the imperial city of Zurich—the Zurich Landschaft—was among those areas where the peasants very early took an interest in the reformation doctrine and agitated on its behalf. First indications emerge from the letter of the notary Johannes Widmer, dated June 1523, to Heinrich Göldli in Rome. Göldli was planning to come to Zurich with a cantor, but Widmer did not think that was a good idea, “for the situation here is such that we priests don’t really know how safe we are in the city, not to say anything about when we go out hunting and ride through the peasants’ enclosures [häg].”\footnote{15} The common man despised the Mass as “an idolatry and corrupter of souls,” and in the pulpits it was declared to be “an open cheat and a fraud.” The people, Widmer continues, were blaming the priest for leading mankind astray for 1,400 years. Only now in the “time of Luther and Zwingli” was the gospel reemerging. What was nowadays being done to the Scripture “is agreeable to the common man, who is led to hope by their screaming and preaching . . . [that] the benefices will be divided up among the common folk.” But since neither pope, nor cardinals, nor bishops were coming to the aid of the beleaguered clergy, the priests had the option “of abandoning their faith and all religious service in all haste or being killed by the common man.”

The three charges that Widmer leveled against the common man—that he threatened the life of the clergy, that he was eager to enrich himself by laying hands on the wealth of the church under the pretext of the gospel, and that he despised the rituals of the church—can serve as the point of entry for the discussion of reformation activities and ideas in the Zurich countryside.

What kind of awareness did the peasants have about religious and theological issues in 1523? There are a number of useful sources that allow us to see the reformation ideas of both individuals and entire communities.\footnote{16} On Corpus Christi Day in 1523, Dr. Lorenz, parish priest at the Großmünster in Zurich, became involved in a revealing argument in the village of Zollikon.\footnote{17} After Lorenz’s sermon, an old, bearded fellow approached him and proclaimed “with stinging, harsh, and intolerable words” that he, Lorenz, “has preached them lies and not the truth.” In the course of the dispute the “peasant” revealed that he did not agree with Lorenz’s view of the Eucharist. Finally, he brusquely declared that he would only continue going to the Lord’s meal if it were offered “to
him... in both forms of body and blood." On his way home to Zurich, Lorenz was stopped a second time, once again because of his sermon in Zollikon, which, understandably enough on Corpus Christi Day, had dealt with the sacrament of the Eucharist. This time he was approached by one Jakob Hottinger, who reproached him for having preached "how the sacrament of the altar in the form of the bread embodies the true God, his humanity, blood and flesh." Hottinger continued: "This is not true, and you should no longer tell lies from the pulpit." Lorenz defended himself and tried to prove through Scripture "that the true God exists in the form of the bread, both flesh and blood." Hottinger, however, insisted on receiving "the sacrament... in both forms"; Lorenz's proof was "derived from philosophy," whereas his "came from the gospel... for Christ took the bread, gave it to his disciples and spoke: take, this is my body; afterwards he took the cup and spoke: take, this is my blood."

The events I have described, which are based on the eyewitness testimony of Dr. Lorenz and Nikolaus Billiter, the "early mass priest" (Frühmesser) of Zollikon, convey a sense of how strongly the common people were affected by the Protestant preaching that undoubtedly came from the cathedral in Zurich in the sermons of Huldrych Zwingli. But they also indicate the theological interest of the common people, which, judging at least from this early evidence, was neither expressed as militant anticlericalism nor aimed at personal enrichment by secularizing and confiscating church property. Additional evidence exists to substantiate this predominantly theologically oriented reformation attitude of the peasants in 1523.

In the spring of 1523, the community of Witikon had gotten into a dispute with the provost and chapter of the cathedral in Zurich. Witikon belonged to the larger Zurich parish and owed a tithe to the cathedral, but it had hired its own pastor, undoubtedly with the hope that the tithe could be used to support him. In the summer of the same year, Witikon, together with Zollikon, Fällanden, Unterstrass, and two other communities, made another attempt to dissolve the tithe obligations to the cathedral in Zurich. It was now argued that the people "have been informed and taught by the holy gospel" that the tithes are alms, although the canons were using them "for useless and frivolous things." It was simply not acceptable that the faithful had to pay "for the ringing of the bells, for baptism, tombstones, and funerals," while the canons were squandering the tithes. Compared to the spring, the language was now more direct and forceful, which probably had something to do with the growing polarization of the old believers and the adherents of the new doctrine. This polarization led to the exchange of insults: in the 1520s, the Zurich council almost daily had to examine, punish, and forbid "invective and insults." The pulpit served both camps as the platform for proclaiming their views. The record of the examination of a witness tells us what the Witikon priest Wilhelm Röbli—a follower of Zwingli, of course—was preaching. He played the "pious peasant" off against the "stinking burgomaster," the "stinking bailiff," and the "murdering, heretic, and thieving priest." Nuns were told that
it would be better for you to come out and take a husband than to stay in the convents. As you are grown up and independent and would like to have a man or desire to be in the company of men, and as you are not able to fulfill your desires with your lovers, you take your fingers and scratch your bone and your thing until the desire passes.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to envision the impact of this kind of preaching.

Given the heated and irritated atmosphere, the Zurich council may have thought it politically wise to allow the community of Witikon at the end of 1523 to appoint a pastor. However, the community itself had to support him, unless it managed to reach an amicable agreement with the cathedral in Zurich concerning the tithe.\textsuperscript{22}

Witikon is not an isolated case. Elsewhere communities were also pushing to obtain reformist preachers, even if it meant accepting a financial burden.\textsuperscript{23} We can get an insight into the motivations behind the demand of the communities to appoint their own pastors by looking at what Marthalen, Truttikon, and Benken, three communities near Schaffhausen, demanded in the summer of 1524.\textsuperscript{24} Although in each case the peasants insisted more or less clearly on pure preaching and did not wish to hear any “fables,” the primary concern was the availability of proper pastoral care within one’s own community. The community of Marthalen considered it burdensome to keep visiting their parish church in Rheinau. It was a long way to Mass, it was often impossible to get hold of the priest when the dying had to be looked after or children needed to be baptized, and the monks of Rheinau refused to take over these pastoral duties. For all these reasons the village had taken on a pastor, although it also expected the abbot of Rheinau, who collected their tithe, to pay the expense to support him. In any case the community imposed a temporary halt to tithe payments to the monastery. The communities of Truttikon and Benken said similar things. After protracted negotiations,\textsuperscript{25} during which Zurich was called in, permission was given to Marthalen and Benken at the end of 1525 to hire their own preachers, and the abbot of Rheinau was placed under obligation to contribute to the expenses for supporting them.\textsuperscript{26}

Around the middle of 1524, demands for the appointment of pastors by the community had already ceased, and in view of the size of the Zurich region they were not all that numerous even for 1523 and 1524. Undoubtedly this had something to do with the fact that the reformation in Zurich was progressing quickly under the urging of Zwingli. Zurich's reformation also shows a unique feature. Unlike what happened in the imperial cities of southern Germany, in Zurich each level of change achieved by the reforming movement was immediately declared by decree to be the binding, enforceable standard for the entire territory. In October of 1523, the council passed a ruling “concerning the Mass and idols,” in which it prohibited the destruction of images, ordered that the Mass be maintained “until further notice and the appearance of a soon-to-be
released explanation," and directed all priests and preachers in the city and the countryside to preach "the holy gospel clearly and faithfully in accordance with the spirit of God." 27 Judging from the length of the text, the emphasis of the decree was on this last provision: printed instructions explaining what was meant by the gospel in accordance with the spirit of God would soon be sent out to the parish priests, and "a number of learned priests" were to be dispatched into the countryside to proclaim the Word of God as understood in Zwingli's doctrine. 28 This confirmed a decree which the council had already published in January following the Zurich Disputation but which seems to have had little if any effect up to that time. The earlier decree had declared that the clergy "should not undertake or preach anything except that which can be verified by the holy gospel or by other proper godly Scriptures." 29 The preaching provisions of the decree preempted an independent unfolding of the peasants' reformation, which in most cases was grounded in the concern for the pure preaching of the gospel. When it came to the crucial theological issues—preaching, the Mass, the Eucharist—neither the Zurich council nor the Zurich theologians had any intention of allowing the communities a larger sphere of action. 30 Communal autonomy in questions of religion was limited to deciding whether the "idols" should remain in the churches or should be removed; 31 violent incidents, which were the work of individuals, had already occurred earlier in the countryside. 32 The disciplined introduction of the reformation under the guidance of the authorities was in line with the policy which the Zurich council followed toward the reformist demands of the communities, a prudent policy dictated by political considerations. The council prohibited religious confrontations in the street—the sort that had occurred in Zollikon—declaring that one should "let the preachers straighten things out." 33 It protected the cathedral's rights to the tithe against the claims of Witikon and other communities; 34 initially it also did the same for the monastery of Rheinau in its quarrel with the communities of Marthalen, Benken, and Truttikon, 35 although not without expressing its sympathy for the demands of the peasants.

The extent of the consensus created in this way between the reformation in the city and the reformation in the countryside can be gauged from the "plebis-cite" of November 1524. The council of Zurich approached the guilds in the city and the communities in the countryside in order to enlist broad support for its foreign policy toward France and its religious policy toward the Catholic communities of Switzerland—both issues were a severe strain on the Confederation. 36 Of the surviving replies from 36 communities, 15 declared themselves explicitly in support of the prevailing religious policies of Zurich, and the remainder did so more or less implicitly. Occasionally there were also more fervent responses. The peasants of Neumätt, for example, wanted "to place their life and property in service to the Word of God, to their lords and superiors, and to the city of Zurich." 37 In vain do we look for independent positions on the reformation, which could have been articulated on this occasion. All we get are
scattered requests to Zurich for a better preacher, here and there the desire "that some agreement be reached regarding the Mass, the Word of God, and the images, so that one person doesn't go this way and another that way."³⁸

It required an outside impetus to reignite the reform movement in the countryside, although this time with an unmistakable emphasis on primarily worldly demands. Clearly inspired by the Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian peasants, the better part of the Zurich countryside—the lordships and districts (Ämter) of Greifensee, Kyburg, Eglisau, Andelfingen, Neuamt, Rümlang, and Grünigen—demanded at the end of April and the beginning of May 1525 the right of the communities to appoint their own pastors.³⁹ Following a proven procedure, the peasant demands were deliberated upon by commissions,⁴⁰ whose vote the council eventually adopted.⁴¹ It was decided to give a careful hearing to the complaints of the communities and, if necessary, to provide them with decent preachers; thus the initiative could come from the communities, but the final decision remained with the council.⁴²

In the initial phase of the reformation movement in 1523, when the city fathers had not yet channeled the reformation stirrings in the countryside with the help of decrees, the communities insisted on the appointment of reformation-minded pastors. They were also willing to support them, even though the demand that their livelihood should be paid from the tithe was present, first as a latent undercurrent and then openly expressed. The theological substance of the peasants' understanding of the reformation should not be underrated, even though it cannot be empirically substantiated as much as we would like. At least the events in Zollikon reveal that the common people had some grasp of the controversial points regarding the Eucharist. In the wake of the city-directed reformation in the countryside the beginnings of an independent peasant theology faded away. As a result no impulses for social and political change arose from the countryside. The concerns which Johannes Widmer conveyed to his correspondent in Rome turned out to be unfounded—the common man in the Zurich countryside had no intention of enriching himself at the expense of the traditional church, and he was not seeking violent revenge against its clergy.

"AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY BY ITSELF SHALL CHOOSE A PASTOR"
—THE CASE OF UPPER SWABIA

On 6 and 7 March 1525, peasant delegations from all of Upper Swabia met in the imperial city of Memmingen to deliberate.⁴³ They had been sent by three peasant bands that had formed in January and February in the Allgäu, at Baltringen, and near Lake Constance. They thereby established the "Christian Union" in Upper Swabia, a peasant league very similar in purpose to a territorial peace. As its programmatic name declares plainly enough, it was created "for the praise and honor of the almighty and eternal God, for the exaltation of the holy
gospel and the Word of God, and in support of justice and godly law.” Among the “legislative” measures of the Union was an ordinance on preaching, which was intended to place the clergy of Upper Swabia under obligation “to read, teach and preach solely the Word of God, and to explain its proper meaning.” Should a pastor adhere to the “old ways and customs . . . a parish congregation may forthwith dismiss him and appoint someone else in his place, who might seem competent and agreeable to them.”

The demand of the community to appoint its own pastor was set by the Upper Swabian peasants within a larger explanatory context in the so-called Twelve Articles. Drafted at about the same time as the preaching ordinance, the Twelve Articles went through 25 printings in two months and had a remarkably powerful resonance throughout the empire. It would therefore be wise to begin by reconstructing the peasants’ understanding of the reformation on the basis of the Twelve Articles. The peasants began their list of grievances and demands as follows:

First of all, we humbly ask and beg, and we all agree on this, that henceforth we ought to have the authority and power for the whole community to elect and appoint its own pastor. We also want authority to depose a pastor who behaves improperly.

The pastor was placed under obligation to teach in accordance with the Scriptures; he should “preach the holy gospel purely and clearly, without any human additions, doctrines, or precepts.”

The pastor “who clearly preaches the Word of God” should be supported from the grain tithe, which “from now on . . . our church wardens, appointed by the community, shall collect and receive.” It was the task of the wardens to use the tithe “to provide our elected pastor with a decent and adequate living for himself with the consent of the whole community.” What was left from the tithe was to be distributed to the poor “according to need and with the community’s consent,” all this “as the Bible commands.”

What the Upper Swabian peasants demanded in this document, and propagated all over the empire in tens of thousands of pamphlets, was the reestablishment of the church on the basis of the village community. The noble and ecclesiastical patron lords, who had hitherto selected the candidates for the post of parish priest, were shut out. The bishops, who had hitherto confirmed the candidates of the patron lords, were passed over. The tithe holders—princes, counts, knights, bishoprics, monasteries, and hospitals—were either dispossessed or compensated for the loss of income. The community took over the rights and privileges of all these people and institutions—the community was “communalizing” the church.

The Twelve Articles—trenchantly argued, succinctly worded, and supported only with brief biblical references—were the end result of a lengthy and difficult process that gave rise to a peasant concept of the reformation. Starting out as a rude anticlericalism expressed only in negative terms, the
peasant's understanding eventually developed into a refined and positive conception of communal Christianity.

From the Allgäu comes an eyewitness account, written by the nobleman Georg von Werdenstein. Owing to Werdenstein's personal involvement and realistic description of the events, his testimony can claim a high degree of authenticity. We are told that Werdenstein's family was planning to celebrate the feast of St. Valentine with a festive mass in the castle's chapel. But as the day began, some unexpected trouble cast a cloud over the atmosphere. A group of peasants suddenly appeared in the courtyard of the castle. Their designated spokesman, Schmid by name, declared, as Werdenstein reports, "that they would no longer pay me interest or taxes, nor would they be obedient or subject to me in any way." Werdenstein asked, "My dear fellows, of what do you accuse me, or what have I done to you?" To which Schmid responded that Werdenstein had not done anything that other lords don't also do; but they did not wish to have a lord any longer, and Schmid continued to say that they also wanted the priest to preach as was done at Kempten, and especially like the preacher on the hill (who has been hanged) and in Sankt Martins Zell (who has fled) -- a reference to places of early reformation preaching in the Allgäu. "The priest is right here," Werdenstein replied to Schmid, "I cannot tell him how to preach," and the priest explained: "Dear fellows, until now I have told you the truth and reason, and I don't know how to preach any other way, to that I will pledge you my soul." Werdenstein reported, "At this the same Schmid replied and said to the priest: 'I shit on your soul, you cannot pledge your soul for us..."" With their anger possibly dissipated by this dramatic confrontation, the peasants left. The priest and Werdenstein went "up to the castle; we took the morning meal together and were both not very happy, as everyone can probably well imagine."

The anticlericalism expressed by these peasants did not go very far, and even such as it is, it is not substantiated by contemporary peasant sources. One day after these events at the castle, Tigen Rettenberg, an Allgäu lordship belonging to the prince-bishop of Augsburg, formulated its grievances, which allow us to describe more clearly the goals of peasant anticlericalism. Here the demand was raised that the pastor know theology, that he reside in the community, and that he not enrich himself through the sacraments. Those "who do not adhere to the regulations concerning the pastors should be relieved of their offices and incomes." The clergy was not to exercise any high justice, and it was to be subject to the secular court in worldly matters, pay dues to the secular authorities for its landed property, contribute to the taxes, and stay out of secular professions.

A few days later the Allgäu peasants joined together, among them subjects of Werdenberg and Augsburg. A preamble to the public announcement of the formation of the "Allgäu Band" gave a brief justification for this step: "Thus we wish to stand by one another and by the holy gospel and the Word of God and
the godly law, and to help each other attain justice. To achieve this we pledge our bodies and our possessions and everything God has given us.”50 Consistent with this expressed purpose, the list of subsequent articles is headed by the concrete request that the pastor within the community “preach the holy gospel, the Epistles, the Old and New Testament, and whatever is equal to these scriptures, and not human inventions and precepts.” The preaching of the “pure gospel” is a fundamental requirement, as the following provision underscores: “and whoever does not wish to do this and refuses to be instructed shall be dismissed and gotten rid of.”

Of course one must be careful not to push the interpretation of this limited evidence too far. At least the following generalization, however, can be drawn from the sources: the basic and fundamental demand for the preaching of the gospel, a demand not open to debate, necessarily required that pastors who refused to fall into line had to be dismissed.

There are no surviving village demands for the Allgäu, but we have such demands for the region that was under the influence of the Baltringen Band, which took its name from its camp at Baltringen south of Ulm. These demands confirm the developments in the Allgäu, which went from the plea for the preaching of the “pure doctrine” to the right of dismissing “nonevangelical” pastors. But they also show how the general demand for the communalization of the church emerged from village grievances and gradually took shape.

The articles of the villages attached to the Baltringen Band were drafted in mid-February, and a majority of them—in so far as they addressed religious-ecclesiastical issues at all, which is true for at most 10 percent51—demanded merely the preaching of reformation doctrine. The peasants of Achstetten requested “that we be provided with a pastor who will bring us the pure and plain word of God,”52 while the tenants of the Biberach hospital demanded “that the word of God be preached to us as well as that which is contained in the gospel.”53 The villages of Erolzheim, Waltershofen, and Binnenrot, however, went further. They introduced their list of articles with the demand

that we may ourselves appoint preachers who shall preach to us the holy Word of God purely and clearly without any human addition; their preaching shall be based solely on the Bible and the holy Scripture. We ourselves shall provide these same preachers with the necessities of life.54

In this instance the appointment of a pastor is justified through the concern for the true preaching of the Word of God, and the community is willing to shoulder the expense. A few weeks later the community of Weicht, in a letter to their patron lord, the monastery of Steingaden, more or less reversed the argument:

The peasants no longer wish to pay the pastor the small tithe, offerings [opfer], and gifts for the salvation of one's soul [seelgerett]; and if the pastor does not do what he owes them, they will not refuse the tithe, but will collect it themselves and use it to support a pastor who is agreeable to them.55
In insisting that a pastor fulfill his duties, which would be enforced, if all else failed, by the choice of a new pastor, the community of Weicht adopted elements from the arguments used by Tigen Rettenberg.

The peasants from Lake Constance expressed their understanding of the reformation more clearly and forcefully than either the Allgäu or Baltringen peasants. Their delegates to Memmingen came with a set of instructions, the Three Articles, which developed ideas of a communal Christianity that seem closely related to the Christian Union and the Twelve Articles:

First of all we desire and demand that the holy gospel and the Word of God, unobscured and unadulterated by human doctrine and judgment, along with its fruits, be preached and taught to us clearly and purely by men learned in the Holy Scriptures and suitable for the task. Furthermore, these same men shall furnish and provide us with all the Christian rites and needs free and not for money, as has been the case until now. Item, secondly, that we wish to furnish these men and theirs with an adequate livelihood, just as St. Paul has told us to. Item, thirdly, that we and our communities shall have the authority to select, appoint, and dismiss all those who are our pastors and instructors in the Word of God, and whom we support, as was said above. 56

If we carefully classify the data from the Upper Swabian sources, we can gain some general insights into the gradual nature of the process that gave rise to a peasant understanding of the reformation. Of course the applicability of these general observations must for now remain strictly limited to Upper Swabia. It would appear that two starting positions are conceivable (see Fig. 1).

Once the two original requests became nonnegotiable demands, this raised the question of what the consequences would be if the pastor refused to preach the new doctrine or failed to reform his pastoral conduct. Both circumstances gave rise to the demand by the peasants that under these circumstances the pastor be dismissed. Of course it was not to be expected that the patron lord or the bishop would take this step, and so it would have to be done by the parishioners, that is, by the community. This had additional ramifications. For example, how was a deposed pastor to be replaced, or how could a new cleric, an adherent of the new doctrine, be appointed alongside the existing pastor? The answer was: appointment of the pastor by the community. But this immediately raised the question of how to support the pastor, to which the peasants gave two answers. Some were willing to shoulder the expense themselves. Others demanded that the cost be defrayed by the tithe, which in their eyes had originally been a church tax; now, under communal control, it should serve to support the clergy.

What I have given is a reconstruction of the stages in the peasants’ thinking about religious preaching and its implications, based on the chronology of local and regional articles and ordinances. It is not unimportant for the future course of our inquiry that the period in which the evidence can be placed is very short: four to six weeks in the months of February and March of 1525. We have no evidence earlier than this.
FIGURE 1 STAGES OF PEASANT REFORMATION IN UPPER SWABIA

A comparison of the sources in their chronological sequence reveals the slowly emerging notion that the church, so badly in need of reform, could only be a church established on and rooted in the community. The appointment of the pastor by the community, maintenance of the pastor by the community or with the help of the tithe, over which the community was to regain control, and the distribution of the tithe revenue by the community—all this demonstrates repeatedly that the peasants focused the organizational framework of the reformation movement closely on the village. At the same time there can be no doubt about the religious seriousness, the deep piety, and the yearning for salvation expressed by the peasants. The Upper Swabian peasants demanded in their Twelve Articles "to hear the gospel and to live accordingly"; the Allgäu peasants were willing "to lose our lives for the gospel, for we are brothers in Christ"; the peasants at Lake Constance wanted the gospel "preached solely for the salvation of our souls"; and the peasants of the Hospital of Biberach demanded pure preaching, because Christ "has left his eternal word to strengthen us, with which and through which we are supposed to live and govern, and to follow him." The practical consequences which the peasants derived from such an understanding of Christianity underscore the seriousness of their desires; they were willing to shoulder the financial burden of their convictions by supporting at their own expense a priest who preached in accordance with the gospel.
The line of reasoning used by the majority of the peasants progressed as follows: pure preaching; dismissal of the pastor; appointment of the pastor by the community; and, finally, support of the pastor by the community itself. These guiding ideas also inform the Federal Ordinance adopted by the Christian Union of the Upper Swabian peasants on 7 March 1525:

Item, wherever there is a pastor or a vicar, they shall be kindly asked and requested to preach the holy gospel. Those who are willing to do so shall receive a proper livelihood from their parish. But those who refuse to do this shall be dismissed, and the parish shall be provided with someone else.\(^{61}\)

Repeated printings of the Federal Ordinance spread this three-tiered regulation—pure gospel, appointment of the pastor by the community, support of the pastor by the community—far beyond Upper Swabia.\(^ {62}\) The Twelve Articles, whose radius of influence was even wider, differ from this regulation in one point: support for the pastor would come from the tithe. The regional differences which thus emerge within Upper Swabia need to be more closely defined, although for this we need more comparative material from other areas. It would appear that the idea of regaining communal control of the tithe, from which the pastor's salary would come, was introduced into the Twelve Articles by the Baltringen peasants. Close to 50 percent of all local articles of the Baltringen Band demand the abolition of the small tithe and the abolition or conversion of the large tithe; in the Allgäu and at Lake Constance such demands are weakly attested or not at all.\(^ {63}\) In view of these findings our investigation must take regional differentiations into consideration. It is not possible to simply speak of a uniform concept of reformation among the peasants.

"ALL GODLESS PEOPLE MUST BE EXTERMINATED"
—THE TYROL AND SALZBURG

In his territorial constitution (Landesordnung) of 1526, Michael Gaismair told the Tyrolean peasants "to exterminate and put away all godless people who persecute the eternal Word of God, oppress the common man, and obstruct the common good," and he called upon them "to set about and erect a wholly Christian order which is based in all things on the holy and eternal Word of God, and live by it completely."\(^{64}\) Gaismair was a tireless propagandist for a complete and thorough Christianization of government and society, and he campaigned for the implementation of his goals with Zwingli and in Zurich, in Venice and among the Salzburg peasants.\(^ {65}\) With his radically egalitarian, biblical-Old Testament program he drew up a constitution whose specific demands reveal that it was firmly rooted in the regional grievances of the Tyrol peasants. We have four regional grievance lists from Tyrol, two from northern and two from southern Tyrol, each of which can claim to be representative of several villages and hamlets: the articles of the rural districts (Landgerichte) of Thauer-Rettenberg and Sonnenburg and those of the "peasants at the Etsch
river" (probably the communities south of Meran) and of the subjects of the prince-bishopric of Brixen/Bressanone. The dates at which the articles were put into writing do not allow us to rule out entirely influences from outside (for example, from Upper Swabia and the Allgäu), but they clearly rule out the possibility that these texts influenced each other, since they were composed in quick succession on May 14, 15, and 16.

The peasant understanding of the reformation in the Tyrol can be basically summarized in four points (compare the synopsis of the regional grievances in the Tyrol on pp. 27–30):

1. The peasants demanded the freedom to preach the pure gospel. This explains the appeal to the territorial prince, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, to release the imprisoned preachers. This demand is understandable in the area of the lower Inn valley (Thauer-Rettenberg and Sonnenburg), since the nearby mining regions with the smelting houses (Pfannen) and foundries around Schwaz, Hall, and along the lower Inn, had been centers of reformation preaching from 1520 on. The Innsbruck authorities time and again suppressed these activities, although apparently with little success.

2. In order to guarantee preaching of the pure gospel, the peasants demanded the right for a community to appoint its pastor.

3. As elsewhere, the tithe was to be used to support the pastor, although with the remarkable stipulation that the entire tithe revenue (Sonnenburg) or half of it (Brixen) should go to the territorial prince, on the grounds that it was he who protected the land.

4. All four regional grievance lists uniformly demanded a thorough reform of the regular and chapter clergy. At the very least the peasants demanded that the monasteries and prince-bishoprics (Hochstifte) be stripped of their secular jurisdictions, although some went further and called for their expropriation (peasants at the Etsch) or secularization (Brixen peasants). We cannot fail to note that the anticlerical sentiment is noticeably stronger in southern Tyrol. The explanation for this undoubtedly lies in the fact that the political and economic importance of the church—as represented by the prince-bishoprics of Brixen/Bressanone and Trent—was much more visible and pronounced here than in northern Tyrol, which had only a few monasteries with modest jurisdictions.

SYNOPSIS OF THE REGIONAL GRIEVANCES IN THE TYROL

The articles dispense with more extensive justifications. The sole exceptions are the articles of Thauer-Rettenberg, whose preamble conveys a more detailed picture of the peasants' understanding of the reformation. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God—with these words the rural districts of Thauer-Rettenberg began their articles to the territorial prince. But since the Word of God "has until now been so greatly obscured with human doctrine that our future salvation has been seriously
endangered,” the Word of God must once again come to light “pure, clear, and unadulterated.” This is all the more imperative as the end result of differing and contradictory theologies is that “a simple person does not know which one to adhere to and follow, and is thereby driven to conspiracy and rebellion against his will (since he doesn’t know what to do and what not).” Only the preaching of the pure gospel can guarantee the restoration of “peace and quiet.” The salvation of the soul of the individual person and the political peace within the community are the guiding principles to which the individual demands are subordinated—and both seem guaranteed only if the pure Word of God is preached.

The individual articles of the regional grievances were picked up and developed further by the Meran Articles that were drafted two weeks later; on 22 June they were presented to the territorial prince at the diet of Innsbruck as the binding program of the peasants and burghers of Tyrol. Fundamental to the program were still the repeatedly expressed demands for the preaching of “the Word of God without any self-serving additions” or “unjustified additions,” and the desire “that each city and district [gericht] shall have the authority to elect, appoint and dismiss its own pastor,” and that the pastor be supported through the tithe. The regulations concerning the regular and chapter clergy were formulated more extensively and justified at greater length. The monasteries in the region (Land) were to be reduced to a maximum of three, the bishoprics dissolved, convents abolished, and the mendicant orders outlawed. In so far as monasteries remained in existence or were newly established, they had no claim to secular jurisdiction of any kind, their material circumstances were to be limited to a modest subsistence, the number of monks or nuns was to be restricted, and admission into the monastic house was to be dependent upon a theological qualification in accordance with reformation doctrine. The peasants justified their demands by arguing that especially the clergy had to live up to the maxims of the Christian teachings: they “should no longer lead such an elevated lifestyle as has been the case until now,” be content with “adequate food, drink, and clothing,” and “behave decently and not hang around in the taverns.”

The same criteria were applied to the secular clergy. The pastor would be properly supported with a benefice, but pluralism and the levying of “servile death taxes, fees for services for the dead [selgrat], confessional fees, preaching fees [verkündgelt],” as well as fees for “blessing new mothers and newlyweds” were resolutely opposed. To the believer the church had to be not only free of charge, it also had to be present and available, hence the pastor was obligated to reside in the community. By paying the pastor a modest but adequate and decent income, and by secularizing church income, the community would free up revenues that had previously been wasted. In keeping with the Christian commandment of charity, these revenues could be spent on the poor. Hospitals were to be established not only in every city, but in every district (Landgericht),
“in which each district could provide for and help its poor, not only the lame and the cripples, but also the ‘home-poor’ (hausarme), provided they behaved faithfully, piously, and decently.”74 A solution thus seemed at hand for the problem of begging and poverty throughout the land.

The Meran Articles elaborated a vision of the reformation which had the potential of reaching deeply into the social and political spheres of life. The gospel-inspired reform of the church—with its demand that the clergy preach the Christian message and live adequately and modestly in keeping with its teachings—found its counterpart in the gospel-inspired reform of the world to promote greater altruism and the common welfare. This opened a broad range of new possibilities, allowing the common man in Tyrol to demand reforms in the economic, social, and political spheres. It is important to note that the 96 Articles are variations upon the basic theme of the “pure Word of God.” The comprehensive nature of the peasants’ vision of reform was thus outlined with corresponding clarity in the preamble:

Therefore, in order that the glory and Word of God be preached without any self-interested addition, that brotherly love be kept and the common welfare promoted, we request that Your Princely Highness establish the following articles for the benefit of Your Princely Highness and the common welfare, and create a new territorial constitution.75

The final goal was a new territorial order, which was to be guided by the principles of the Word of God, brotherly love, and the bonum commune.

The peasants and miners in Salzburg were also aiming for a new territorial order based on the principles of the reformation. The “Twenty-four Articles of the Common Assembly of Salzburg” called upon each and every lover of evangelical truth and godly law to take counsel, with the consent of all the authorities, on how to take measures and steps to preserve the glory of God and the Christian order; and in so far as these have been perverted by the enemies of God, how to reform them again and return them to their proper order and nature.76

The enemies of God, the “anti-Christian villains, destroyers of souls, and seducers” have “led the multitude of the common people far from the path of evangelical truth and to the devil with very seductive means, and in the process have devoured the common welfare.”77 The articles portrayed the loss of the salvation of souls and the chaos in the world as a result of the suppression of evangelical truth, which had to form the basis of a reformation of the ecclesiastical and secular order. The proposals put forth by the Salzburg peasants were nothing new, but they do reveal the profound pent-up hatred for the Roman church that was released by the reformation movement. In the first place, they demand that the pure Word of God must be “preached without any human nonsense or precept or embellishment.” This demand is justified with reference to simony, fraud, the raging against evangelical truth, and the false councils and decrees, which have “cast a veil over the eyes of true Scripture.”78 Second, the
articles assert that the community shall have the authority to appoint and
dismiss its pastor. This demand is justified with reference to Rome’s practice of
appointing courtiers to the parishes, who never carried out their duties, “never
preached,” appointed incompetent vicars to take their place, and left “their
mistresses and children” to the charity of the community. No longer should
considerations of any kind be shown to clerics of this sort, “instead one must tear
open the bag-string and pour out the filth and see such simony and villainy and
robbery in the light of day.”79 Third, the articles declare that the pastor will be
supported through the tithe, which henceforth would be collected by the church
wardens and serve to supply the pastor with housing, clothing, and food, in
accordance with the judgment of the community. An end should be put to the
abuses related to the tithe. These abuses had been driven by greed and fraud and
had merely contributed to the “gluttony of the rich and the strengthening of
their arrogance.” But if the tithe was meant as an offering to God, which it now
wasn’t, it belonged to the poor; consequently whatever was not needed to
support the pastor would go to the poor.80

This powerful denunciation of the clergy probably came from the pen of a
preacher,81 but the grievances from Gastein attest that this mood and these
kinds of demands were widespread throughout the region.82 This is also con-
firmed by the way the community of Gastein dealt with its pastor in June of
1525, who under threat of violence was forced to return the parish’s assets,
which he had taken to safety outside the valley.83

THE MESSAGE SPREADS

The Zurich countryside, Upper Swabia, and Tyrol were centers of peasants’
reformation. Impulses radiated from here into the neighboring territories and
promoted the vision of a new kind of church. Upper Swabia, however, was
particularly prominent, because the repeated reprinting of the Twelve Articles
that were drafted here ensured them a particularly wide radius of influence.

The peasants of distant Ichtshausen, near Gotha, informed Duke Johann of
Saxony at the end of April “that we want to choose, as we see fit, a pastor who
shall proclaim to us the Word of God clearly and unadulterated with human
doctrine; to supply the same pastor with a suitable income, and, if he acts
improperly, to dismiss him.”84 The historical context makes it quite clear that
this demand was inspired by the Twelve Articles.85 At the same time the
peasants around Fulda demanded the following: “since there is need to save the
souls of mankind, the gospel shall be preached pure and clear without any
human additions, and we are to be provided with evangelical priests and
curates.” And they referred implicitly to the source of their demands by saying
that “the Twelve Articles, as they have now emanated from the peasants of the
Black Band, shall remain in force.”86

A line of continuity connects the grievance list from the Rheingau with the
customary of 1324 from the same region.87 The following demand, however,
seems to reflect outside inspiration: "henceforth an entire community shall have
the authority to choose its own pastor, who will proclaim the truth; where this is
not done, the same community shall have the authority to dismiss its pastor and
choose another one." A few weeks earlier, the peasants in the county of
Hanau-Lichtenberg, on the western border of the empire, had sent a para-
phrased and shortened version of the Twelve Articles to the imperial city of
Strasbourg along with a note "to establish the gospel in this manner." In the
territory of the city of Basel, the following threefold demands appeared at the
beginning of May: election of the pastor, support of the pastor through the large
tithe, and abolition of the small tithe. At the end of August, finally, these same
demands were faintly echoed in the Bern countryside.

It is likely that influences radiating from Zurich and Upper Swabia crossed
paths in Basel and Bern, although wherever they spread, they always underwent
an independent development. Franconia is a test case that allows us to illustrate
this general observation in greater detail. The Amorbach Articles adhered very
closely to their Upper Swabian model, down to the choice of words. The
demand for the right to appoint the pastor played a particularly important role
among the Twelve Articles, as might be inferred from the oath which Francon-
nian nobles had to swear when they joined the peasant federation, either
voluntarily or under compulsion. Apart from a general obligation to uphold
the Twelve Articles, the formula of the oath placed special emphasis on the
following provision:

wherever there is a hamlet or district belonging to a nobleman, in which the
pastor is unlearned and bad at preaching the Word of God, that pastor shall
be dismissed and the community shall choose someone who is more capable
and agreeable to them.

In fact, it can be shown that more regionally limited peasant articles, as for
example those from the villages of Rothenburg's territory from the end of March, did
not yet contain an article concerning the election of the pastor. However, one
should not derive from this the general conclusion that the peasants in Franconia
did not develop similar conceptions of the reformation; in fact, the example of the
community of Wendelstein which I cited earlier seems to suggest exactly the
opposite. Further confirmation comes with the events of the summer of 1524, when
pro-reformation movements led to widespread refusals to pay the tithe in and around
Forschheim and in the Nuremberg region.

All this leads us to believe—even in the almost complete absence of local
grievances—that the Twelve Articles touched a latent predisposition for a
communal reformation among the peasants. From Franconia also arose the
efforts to ensure such a vision of the reformation would receive general recogni-
tion within the empire. The following provision was inserted into Friedrich
Weygandt's reform program for the empire: "let every community strive for good
shepherds who will pasture their flock solely on the Word of God as grounded in
the Scripture; it shall appoint and dismiss them"; this in turn imposed upon
the community the obligation of supporting their pastor. In principle Weygandt always maintained that a "Reformacion" of the empire would need the help of the theologians; after all, the widespread demand in Franconia for a "Reformacion" involved a thorough Christianization of society as an extension and continuation of reformation doctrine. But the right of appointing pastors was hardly among the issues that were still considered open for discussion. Prior to the planned meetings between the peasants and the authorities, the spiritual and secular princes, the electorates of Cologne and Trier, Brandenburg, Bavaria, the nobility, and the imperial cities were to promise on oath to accept the Twelve Articles. If it were necessary the peasants would force them to do so, following the example of the Franconian peasants, who had compelled the archbishopric of Mainz in May of 1525 to accept the Twelve Articles.\(^9\) By binding the imperial estates to the Twelve Articles on oath, Weygandt wrote to Wendel Hipler, "that other undertaking [he means the "Reformacion"] would gain an instrument with its own inherent means of enforcement. For if any prince or lord does not keep his word and breaks his seal and oath, there is no doubt that his own subjects will kill him."\(^7\) What emerges in these words is a political dimension of the peasants' reformation that was very threatening to the princes. It would be premature, however, to discuss it at this time. It is sufficient to point out that Weygandt's ideas were rooted in the Franconian reformation movement. In Amorbach he had joined the "bright shining band" of peasants, and as a fiscal official (Rentammann) in the town of Miltenberg, in the territory of the electorate of Mainz, he had actively campaigned for a reformation-minded preacher.\(^8\)

Our analysis has shown that, despite local variations in details, the peasants' conception of reformation was centered on the appointment of the pastor by the community. Secondary were the implications which flowed from this central concern, and which were elaborated to varying degrees from one region to the next. The southern boundary of the demand for the election of the pastor ran from Solothurn across the Zurich countryside to St. Gall, and from there via Rhaetia to the Trentino and finally into the Salzburg area.\(^9\)

In the north the line ran from Erfurt via Fulda and Mainz to the western border of the empire.\(^10\) Lorraine and Burgundy marked the boundary in the west. Bavaria became a barrier to the further spread eastward and prevented a direct link-up of Franconia and Salzburg.

**Preconditions and Consequences of the Peasant Idea of Reformation**

Wherever peasants stood up for the reformation movement, they insisted on the appointment of the pastor by the community. The community for its part would assume the responsibility of supporting the pastor, either at its own expense or by placing the tithe under communal control. This was the essence of the peasant conception of the reformation, which we encounter in the most diverse regions of Central Europe.
To place this finding in the proper perspective, we must first examine whether the scattered references about the extent of this peasant conception can be made generally valid. In the case of Upper Swabia it is enough to point out that its Federal Ordinance adopted the article on the appointment of pastors, and this covers the area between the Lech River and the Black Forest, between the Danube and Lake Constance. One may estimate that perhaps 30,000 peasants stood behind the program of the Upper Swabians. The communal reformation had equally broad support in the duchy of Württemberg and Franconia. The area adjacent to Upper Swabia and Württemberg, the Upper Rhine region—the Black Forest, Breisgau, Sundgau—decree the following in its Federal Ordinance:

Item, wherever there are pastors (vicars we totally reject), they shall be kindly asked from now on to proclaim the gospel and to recognize and put an end to their error. Those who wish to do so shall receive from their parish an adequate livelihood suitable to their office. But those who do not wish to do this shall be dismissed and the parish shall be given to someone else elected by the parishioners. About 10,000 peasants—not counting the Sundgau, for which we have no figures—must have supported this demand. The Meran Articles, representing at first only the peasants of southern Tyrol, were presented at the diet in Innsbruck and thus became the binding program for all districts and towns of the Tyrol. The same goes for the Twenty-four Articles of the Common Assembly of Salzburg, which the cities, hamlets, and rural districts took as the basis for their negotiations with Archbishop Matthäus Land in the provincial assembly. The so-called Second Ilanz Manifesto (Artikelbrief) of 1526 laid down for the three Rhaetian leagues that “each community shall have the authority to elect and dismiss its pastor at any time, as it sees fit.”

This sketch of the peasants’ ideas regarding religion and the church covers the area from Alsace to Salzburg and from Graubünden to Franconia, thus emphasizing the extremely broad appeal of reformation stirrings in rural society. What were the conditions in rural society that allowed the reformation movement to spread so widely?

**RURAL PREDISPOSITION TOWARD COMMUNALIZATION OF THE CHURCH**

A particularly good example for studying the background to the communalization of the church is the canton of Graubünden. There are two reasons for this: first, in Graubünden the right of the community to elect its pastor was not inextricably linked to reformation doctrine, a fact which allows us to isolate the areas of conflict between peasant society and the old church; second, the problems that were seen to affect the church and the faith were very broadly conceived, and this allows us to define more precisely the question we are examining.
Our analysis will be based on two constitutional documents, the two so-called Illanz Manifestos (Artikelbriefe) from 1524 and 1526. They were issued by the "district judges [Landrichter] and the community of the Three Unions [drei pünkh] . . . for us and all those who reside in and live in our Three Unions." The Three Unions referred to were the League of God's House (Gotteshausbund), the League of the Ten Jurisdictions (Zehngerichtebund), and the Gray League (Grauer Bund), all of which had emerged during the late Middle Ages. Characteristic of all Unions was a strong representation of the peasant-communal element, although the leagues varied in the vigor of this representation. The League of the Ten Jurisdictions was an exclusively peasant association, while the League of God's House was more or less a corporation of territorial estates with the bishop of Chur as its territorial lord. The older local historians summed up the historical development of Graubünden with the phrase "from feudalism to democracy." Although this terminology is not without its problems, it does indicate a real trend, namely the growing influence of rural communes. The shift of political weight within the estates is revealed by the fact that the bishop of Chur no longer placed his seal on the first comprehensive Federal Charter of the Three Unions, in which we can see the outlines of a communal polity of "Graubünden." The sources we are about to examine are therefore texts which clearly bear the imprint of peasant communes. Since they applied to all of Graubünden, we may assume that the problems and solutions they outline are very broadly representative.

The first of the Illanz Articles of 1525 decreed:

in order that the word and teaching of Christ will be more faithfully proclaimed to the common man and he will not be lead astray, henceforth no one—be he pastor, chaplain, monk, courtier, or of whatever estate or title—shall be accepted as an absentee holder of the benefices in our Unions nor shall we give out such absentee appointments. Instead, every pastor shall reside in and personally look after his parish or benefice, assuming he has one and has been appointed to it.

If a clergyman had good reasons for why he could not meet the residence requirement, and if the pastoral duties were to be entrusted to a different clergyman, this had to be done "with the goodwill and consent of community or parishioners in which the benefice is located." Anyone who made clandestine arrangements behind the community's back "has forfeited his benefice, and the parishioners shall appoint someone else who seems suitable and competent." The same sentiment informs the stipulation that in filling a vacant post, the "feudal lord" of the church—a common Swiss term for what in southern Germany is more frequently known as the "patron lord"—must act in concert with the "parishioners." The community wants its pastor in the village, and it wants to have a say in deciding who that pastor will be. The peasants were primarily concerned about reliable pastoral care; consequently, "each pastor shall remain with his subjects in times of mortal danger, he shall faithfully look after and comfort them as best he can, on pain of losing his benefice." But a
second concern was that pastors set a good example of Christian living, "so that the common man may learn and follow their good example."

Two years later the demand for better pastoral care read:

It is our belief that from now on each and every pastor shall be given a decent and proper livelihood as he deserves, from whatever property [guotti] a community deems appropriate, as is just and proper, and each and every community shall also have the authority at any time to appoint and dismiss its pastor, as it sees fit.\textsuperscript{114}

The pastor thus became totally dependent on the parish community, in regard to both his income and his job security. This radicalization was the logical extension of a movement that was no longer willing to accept the validity of traditional Christian norms or put up with the growing abuses within the church. The radicalization of the church ordinances that were issued for Graubünden no doubt owed something to the reformation movement, which experienced a certain high point in 1525, as the Religious Disputation of Ilanz attests. Under the direction of the delegates of the Three Unions, a dispute was held in Ilanz in January of 1526, but it eventually ended without having produced any concrete results.\textsuperscript{115} No theological agreement was reached, although the anticlerical sentiment seems to have intensified considerably. We see this reflected in the Second Ilanz Manifesto, and the explanation may be the Religious Disputation itself, which failed to bring about the breakthrough of the reformation doctrine, apparently because of the canons of Chur, whose influence still seems to have been considerable.

If we return to a comparison of the two manifestos, the growing aggression toward the Roman church manifested itself also in restrictive legislation aimed at the ecclesiastical court of the bishop of Chur. In 1524, the peasants decreed by "statute" that "masses and other Christian services shall be conducted" even if the commune and the land have been placed under interdict,\textsuperscript{116} since the interdict was being irresponsibly and improperly used. Moreover, the court's alleged illegal expansion of its jurisdiction was strongly cut back in favor of the commune:

This we have decreed and decided to staunchly uphold: from now on a cleric cannot cite a layman before the ecclesiastical court, or a layman a cleric, or a layman another layman, nor in any way place him under ban on account of money owed, insults, felonies [fräffel], or any other quarrels,\textsuperscript{117} with the exception of marital disputes and demands for the payment of rents to the church or benefice; the disputes now fell within the jurisdiction of the communal court of the defendant. The ecclesiastical court in Chur was further prohibited from charging inflated court fees and was ordered to conduct the proceedings in the German language.\textsuperscript{118} The Second Ilanz Manifesto of 1526 replaced these elaborate stipulations with the terse statement that the bishop should be stripped of every kind of jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{119}

In 1524, the peasants contemplated several measures concerned with an
“inexpensive” church; the pastors were to behave “in a priestly manner, as is becoming to their position.” Because “the poor, honest common people had been burdened with great expenses for consecrations [wischen], be they of churches, chapels, altars, liturgical vestments, or other things,” the leaders of the Unions reduced the customary special revenues for the suffragans to food and a suitable gift. In 1526 the “inexpensive” church was no longer a problem; the secular jurisdiction of the bishop was abolished and the monasteries were placed on the road to eventual secularization. These measures provided the communes with sufficient income to give their pastors a suitable livelihood.

Graubüden is an interesting test case, because the reformation movement here did not boast of any particularly distinguished exponents of theological matters. Moreover, communications between the city of Chur, which was favorably inclined toward the reformation, and the outlying districts was enormously difficult because the latter were in isolated locations and could be reached only via mountain passes that were often impassable for months at a time. All this strengthens the argument that outside influences, carried either by peasants from other areas or prominent theologians, remained relatively negligible. Thus the Bündner sources touch upon three areas of conflict: pastoral care for the community, the “inexpensive” church, and the ecclesiastical court.

First among the demands repeatedly raised by the peasants were the residency requirement for the pastor and the elimination of vicars as preconditions for obtaining proper pastoral care for the community. As we learn from the Federal Ordinances of the upper Rhine and Upper Swabia as well as from the Articles of Tyrol and Salzburg, opposition to the vicariate was not directed against the institution itself but against its abuse. Because of incorporation, absenteeism, or pluralism, parishes were not adequately staffed and the pastoral duties were left to vicars who were not even paid enough. In 1525 the community of Gossau, in the jurisdiction of the prince-abbey St. Gall, complained to the communities under the monastery's overlordship “that parishes and their revenue are no longer bestowed upon proper pastors who reside in the benefices; instead parishes are looked after by vicars who are given a salary while the remainder is collected by the monastery.” The case of Gossau sheds some light on the reasons behind the rejection of vicars, which often seems puzzling because it is not explained. Gossau complained to the monastery that its previous abbot, Franz Gaisberg, had, “with papal authority,” brought the parish “into the hands and power of the monastery, seizing for itself the rents, tithe, revenues, and landed property belonging to the parish.” The parish had been granted to the deacon of the monastery, who for his part used the revenues to pay for a vicar. The chronicler of the imperial city of St. Gall, a credible witness and one who was familiar with local conditions, reported that in 1516 the abbot of the monastery had [obtained] a papal bull that he might lease all his incorporated benefices to the members of the convent. The latter may then provide the parishes with
lay priests who have to be changed as they see fit, and thus the lords are in the convent and the priests do the work.\textsuperscript{124}

This passage may contain the real motive for the peasants' rejection of the vicars: a proper parish was entitled to a proper pastor. And a proper pastor was entitled to draw from his benefice and the church revenues—for example, the tithe—a proper income appropriate to his standing and office. The mayor (Schultheiß) and council of Liestal demanded from their tithe holder, the cathedral chapter of Basel,

that you sincerely provide our churches and us with the word of God from the three parts of the tithe, which we pay and in return for which you do nothing for us, so that we shall not suffer any shortcoming or injury, and especially that you compensate our current priest, whom we like, so that he can remain and will not be taken from us.\textsuperscript{125}

Appointing candidates to benefices that were still occupied, absenteeism, incorporation, and pluralism—all these practices alienated a church from its village. In the prince-abbey of St. Gall the papal Curia obtained the right to appoint future candidates to numerous parishes, of course only to those which yielded a very substantial income. What this could lead to can be seen in the case of Henau. Its pastor, a certain Schindelin, who had held the post since 1502, had to vacate the parish in 1506 on orders from the abbot of St. Gall to make room for the courtier Jakob Stäbiner; and since Schindelin initially refused to leave, he was excommunicated in addition to being dismissed.\textsuperscript{126} The various diocesan bishops granted the right to be an absentee holder of a benefice in return for a fee; how widespread absenteeism was is difficult to gauge.\textsuperscript{127} Absenteeism could severely affect the quality of pastoral care and be seen as an insult by the community, as we learn from the case of Gantersheim, whose pastor Gebhard had purchased from the court the right of nonresidence between 1479 and 1482.\textsuperscript{128}

More important still were, undoubtedly, the practice of incorporation and the entire system of benefices. Through incorporation a parish church along with its income was absorbed by an ecclesiastical institution—a monastery, a prince-bishopric, or a hospital. The revenues of the benefice that originally went to the pastor—church revenues, a portion of the tithe or specific kinds of tithes, endowments—would now flow into the coffers of the incorporating institution, and the pastoral duties would thereafter be in the hands of chaplains, vicars, or possibly monks. But in every case the pastoral care for the community suffered. Vicars and chaplains commonly drew a very meager salary, which explains why they tried to better their income by charging fees for some of their services. As members of monastic orders, monks were naturally not required to reside within the parishes. Frequently they only celebrated Sunday Mass and were not available to the faithful for emergency sacramental services, such as Extreme Unction. In Augsburg, 57 percent of the 1,000 parishes were incorporated on the eve of the reformation; in the dioceses of Worms, Constance, and Strasbourg the
percentage may have been even higher; in Württemberg the ratio of pastors to vicars has been estimated at 1:5.129

Pluralism had the same deleterious effects. If a single cleric held numerous appointments, he was not able to meet the pastoral duties in each benefice but had to entrust them to a vicar or curate. Naturally the latter were paid less than the benefice yielded—that, after all, was the logic of the system. The extent of pluralism is almost impossible to recover from the sources. However, we must imagine a broad range, from the three benefices of Wattwil, Henau, and Jonschwil held by Dr. Anton Thalmann of Toggenburg130 (territory of St. Gall), to a Dutch cardinal’s 100 benefices all over Europe.131

All this explains the peasants’ demand that the pastor must reside in the village and be properly supported. The purpose of these changes was to reestablish what was believed to have been the original, purer form of pastoral care, the “inexpensive” church. “And since we have been informed by the gospel” that divine services “are given free of charge by God and not sold for money,”132 the peasants in Wendelstein (Franconia) refused to pay for any of the pastor’s services. The pastor of the Upper Swabian community of Langenerringen, who had “no house of his own” and received so little of the grain tithe that “he can barely feed his chickens,” was to receive a “proper livelihood” from the large tithe. To that end the community threatened to stop paying the tithe unless their tithe lord supported the pastor properly.133 The Salzburg peasants complained that the clergy had “urged simple people in confession to give money ... when someone was taken ill, the confessors urged the sick person and got a florin for the confessor.” Finally, they had “sold the holy ground dearly for a lot of money, as they demanded from a dead body 4, 5, 6, or even 8 or 10 fl.”134 At Hochheim near Mainz, it was customary that when “a poor man or servant wishes to get married, he must give the pastor a fee of 6 albus and 1 wax candle.”135 The villages of the city of Schaffhausen on the upper Rhine demanded that the tithe be used exclusively for communal needs. It was to be used primarily

to support the one who serves the community, preaches the Word of God, administers the sacraments to the people and also looks after them in life and death, so that from now on we shall be free from other burdens, such as services for the dead, ban fines [bannschätzen], for penance fees, court fees [Richtgeld], baptismal fees, offerings, and all the other hardships.

Outside the parish village, in hamlets and isolated places, “in times when heavy storms ... water or snow” make it impossible for the people to come to church, “a mass shall be celebrated there at no expense to the poor people and for no special fee.”136

Where the authorities supported and promoted the reformation movement, as for example in the city of Zurich, such grievances were redressed and thereby acknowledged to be legitimate. Similarly the imperial city of Basel promised the districts in its territory that it would take steps so that “the secular priests ... will be [provided for] by the large tithe, in order that they will have an adequate livelihood and must no longer search for an income by burdening their subjects,
as has hitherto been the case.”¹³⁷ Indeed, even the nobility and the cities on the upper Rhine apparently could not evade the legitimate demands of the peasants. In an agreement they conceded

that the pastors shall have a decent, suitable, and adequate support from these tithes, such that a pastor—as it should be—will not press for additional exactions in church, be they offerings, confessional fees, or other dues; rather, he shall be at the service of each and every parishioner without any special compensation.¹³⁸

The demand for a resident pastor and a “cost-free” church were complementary, as the examples have amply demonstrated. A pastor who drew a proper living from the revenues of his church had no need to burden his subjects with special fees for pastoral care and to sell his services like so much merchandise. Of course, communal control seemed the best guarantee that this demand would in fact be met. The communal principle which emerged here also formed part of the basis for the enormously strong opposition to the ecclesiastical court.

The effectiveness of the ecclesiastical courts must have varied considerably from region to region. We know of very few complaints from Upper Swabia and the Tyrol, while in Alsace, in the Rhine valley in Vorarlberg and Graubünden, and in Salzburg they seem to have been widespread and were directed against the ecclesiastical courts of the bishops of Strasbourg, Chur, and Salzburg.¹³⁹ The Salzburg peasants complained to the clerics that they were being sued in the ecclesiastical court “for debts, worldly goods, injuries, insults, fights, blows, sexual misconduct [Unzucht], and material or worldly matters,” even though “these things did not concern matters of the faith or the gospel.” The peasants now demanded that such cases be heard before a secular court.¹⁴⁰ The same thing was demanded by the city of Forchheim and its surrounding villages: the clerics were to sue for rent and debt in regular secular courts.¹⁴¹ The Rheingau peasants declared that henceforth they “would not accept . . . any summons, inhibition, edict, and the like in worldly cases, such as concerned secular goods, debts, and like matters.”¹⁴²

The peasants’ opposition to ecclesiastical courts had two aspects. First, they refused to tolerate any longer the special status of clerics, their separate jurisdiction, their aloofness from society—a sentiment which goes very well with the noticeable trend toward a communalization of the church. Second, they refused to accept any longer ecclesiastical punishments for secular transgression, meaning punishment through the exclusion or temporary exclusion from the church.

The ecclesiastical courts in the empire competed with their secular counterparts. They held jurisdiction over clerics and in issues relevant to canon law, such as adultery, oath-breaking, and the tithe. Whenever the church was involved in legal transactions—whether through its representatives in person or through monasteries, cathedral chapters, or hospitals as rent collectors—adjudication could go to the ecclesiastical courts, with possibilities of appeal first to the relevant episcopal court and eventually all the way to Rome. A trip to the ecclesiastical court was long and costly for a peasant, and the whole procedure
could be rather meaningless because the proceedings were not infrequently conducted in Latin. Karl Stenzel, who has done one of the few detailed studies on ecclesiastical courts, has described the working of the court of the bishop of Strasbourg:

... with no regard for the prescribed or proper timetables, people are dragged right from the field in the midst of their work for every trivial matter, to answer before the court as defendant or witness. Harsh sentences are swiftly passed, imprisonment [Fröhnungen] is ordered even if there is no reason to fear that the defendant might abscond and in the absence of any other danger. Notwithstanding the strict prohibitions in the statutes, the ban, expulsion, suspension of the Mass, and the interdict are placed upon the insolvent debtor and the entire community in the most trivial matters, and the former is driven from his house and home into misery without any pity or mercy.143

Apparently such extreme abuses were not found everywhere. I have earlier noted the absence of complaints in the Tyrol against the ecclesiastical courts. The reason for this was probably that the territorial constitution of 1404, republished in 1486, had severely restricted the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts to matters involving the tithe, services for the dead, and marital issues. I should mention, though, that the preamble to the constitution speaks of earlier complaints as one of the reasons for its redaction.144

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION AND EVANGELICAL LOGIC
OF THE COMMUNAL REFORMATION

The neglect of pastoral care, the commercialization of sacramental services, the abuse of ecclesiastical courts—from the perspective of the peasants these were corruptions and aberrations within the church which had to be corrected. Naturally enough a peasants' reformation of the church, given its view of things and its needs, had to start from the very foundation of the church hierarchy, the parish community. It was within the community that the conditions of the church had to be set right again. This could be most readily accomplished if the community itself obtained greater say in the appointment of the pastor and regained control over how its contributions to the church—tithe, Widdum, and endowments—would be administered. Concern for the welfare of souls was certainly the decisive impulse behind these efforts. It is also well known that already in the Middle Ages, and increasingly so in the late Middle Ages, rural people strove to obtain better pastoral care by means of a denser network of parishes. Moreover, the evidence of the few existing visitation records from the end of the fifteenth century shows that rural communities in general took a strong interest in the Mass and religious instruction.145 These fundamentally religious needs also explain why the demand for the election of the pastor could prevail only if it was based on a predominantly theological justification. The demand for the pure preaching of the gospel "without human additions"—a contemporary slogan for the rejection of traditional Roman church doctrine—was the only justification invoked, and its inherent logic invariably led to the
demand for communal appointment of pastors and the idea of communal Christendom. To back this up again with references to the sources would simply be a repetition of my regional analyses. I will only briefly recapitulate the argument: the categorical demand of a “pure gospel” placed the pastor under obligation to behave accordingly, and it obliged the patrons and feudal lords to provide their parishes with evangelical preachers. Where that was not done, the community, for the welfare of its soul, had to take matters into its own hands, even if that meant violating existing legal rights. Of course this was always the final step; as far as we can tell, there is no known case where the peasants did not initially try to obtain an evangelical pastor by petitioning their patron lord and the authorities.

The abuses within the church made the peasants generally predisposed for a reform of the church on a communal basis; only the theology of the “pure gospel” gave rise to the concrete demand to elect the pastor and to the comprehensive and total communalization of the church.

We can reexamine and empirically verify this argument by looking at the controversies involving the tithe. The reassertion of communal control over the tithe and the right to appoint the pastor were in a sense reciprocally linked; each was the precondition and consequence of the other. Correspondingly, the “pure gospel” was of equal importance as a justification in both cases. The tithe was among those rights of lordship most strongly denounced by the peasants.146 The primary reason for this was probably not the fact that the tithe, in the form of the large tithe of grain, loomed largest among all the charges exacted from the peasants, normally far exceeding the rent to the lord, not to mention the taxes to the territorial ruler.147 Rather, what needs to be emphasized is the fact that the tithe was constantly expanding—usually under the name of “small tithe.” The peasants of Hochheim near Mainz had to pay the small tithe on lambs, pigs, chickens, geese, apples, pears, and nuts, the Salzburg peasants on all livestock, the peasants on the upper Rhine on all livestock and fruit, as well as on wood, flax, beets, and onions.148 It appeared that there was no limit to what could be tithed. The peasants of Truttikon in Switzerland saw no logic in this system; it was unreasonable that they had to tithe pigs and chickens, since they had already paid the tithe on the feed for the animals. At Christmas time the abbot of Rheinau sent a servant who collected from every resident [Hausgenosse] a penny as tithe on each calf and each herb garden.149 All this explains the strong emotional opposition to the tithe in general, and it invariably grew even more intense wherever the idea gained ground “that the tithe was nothing other than a charitable offering”150 that belonged to the poor, or that the tithe had to be repaid with a return service, namely pastoral care. These ideas probably never completely disappeared from rural society, for without them it would be difficult to explain why even before the “pure gospel” dictated the amount and use of the tithe, the Upper Swabian peasants demanded in 44 percent of their grievance lists the abolition of the small tithe, and in 41 percent the conversion of the large tithe or its rededication to a different use.151
It is quite clear that the fundamental attack on the tithe was launched from the basis of the "pure gospel." Peasants in Alsace denied that they had to pay more than the grain tithe: "in this we base ourselves on scripture." Peasants in the Swabian-Franconian border region declared that "according to the gospel we are not obligated to pay" the small tithe. The villages of the imperial cities of Memmingen and Solothurn rejected all legal claims to every kind of tithe, "because," as the Memmingen peasants put it, "the New Testament does not impose this duty on us"; they declared their willingness, however, to support the pastor. To the Salzburg peasants the tithe became the veritable work of the devil, because it "has no foundation in Scripture."

What eventually prevailed were relatively uniform ideas regarding the obligation of paying the tithe and the use to which it should be put, ideas that were probably strongly influenced by the Twelve Articles, although we cannot be certain of that. The small tithe was in principle no longer paid. The large tithe was withdrawn (with or without compensation) from those who collected it (cathedral chapters, monasteries, hospitals, nobles) and redirected to new uses: to support the pastors, to help the village poor, and, if necessary, to pay for taxes. Control passed into the hands of the community, which collected the tithe and determined how much would be distributed to the pastor and the poor.

The appointment of pastors and the communal control of the tithe greatly expanded the community's sphere of jurisdiction, but this growth in autonomy was grounded solely in the peasants' interpretation of the "pure gospel."

It appears that the practical application of the theoretical principle of the pure gospel quickly led to uncertainties and difficulties for the peasants. What was to be done if a pastor claimed to be preaching in accordance with the gospel, while the community believed he was not? Who would decide which view of the Eucharist was truly evangelical, that of the Roman church, Luther's, or Zwingli's? Which cleric was interpreting the message of the New Testament correctly? Interpretation could clearly not boil down to mere biblical philology—the Sermon on the Mount, if taken literally, could expose mankind to starvation. The linking of the two principles "pure gospel" and "appointment of the pastor by the community" in the end had to place the decision on correct doctrine into the hands of the community—a conclusion which the peasants drew only hesitantly, unwillingly, driven by circumstances rather than conviction. Correspondingly rare were statements demanding the authority over doctrine in the same uncompromising way that they demanded the right to elect the pastor. What we read in the Federal Ordinances of the upper Rhine and Upper Swabia seems comparatively forceful. In cases of doctrinal disputes between adherents of the old faith and the new faith,

the pastors of the same region or villages [Flecken] shall be called together with their Bibles, and they shall decide and settle the matter in accordance with the content of Holy Scripture and not in accordance with human discretion, in the presence of the common parishioners of the same localities.

In doubtful cases a religious debate was thus to be held, apparently based on
the premise that the Bible was its own interpreter, and—here our interpretation runs into uncertainties—that the faithful, the parishioners, were able to distinguish true from false doctrine. The Tyrolean peasants seem to have believed that such issues could be settled through the constitutional powers and institutions of the land, the territorial ruler and the diet; that, in any case, is how one could interpret their presentation of demands to Archduke Ferdinand.\textsuperscript{158} The only religious debate that was in fact organized by peasants was the Ilanz Disputation,\textsuperscript{159} although we must seriously ask whether the Three Unions did not arrange this event in their capacity as a governing body. The Franconian peasants, by comparison, were inclined to let “those learned in the holy, godly, true Scripture” decide “what is established by the holy gospel.”\textsuperscript{160}

Despite such uncertainties the reformation demand for the “pure gospel” set free a powerful social dynamic within the evangelical movement, whose manifestations deserve close examination. What prompted the peasants to transfer the pure gospel into the secular realm was the intent—in the language of the Twelve Articles—“to hear the gospel and to live accordingly.”\textsuperscript{161} The gospel should not only be preached, but one “should follow it and live in accord with it,” as the Württemberg peasants said.\textsuperscript{162} As the peasants of the district of Thauer-Rettenberg in Tyrol saw it, the gospel gave rise to the command “henceforth to live in its godly spirit in accordance with its statutes and commandments.”\textsuperscript{163} Thus the gospel became the guiding principle for the life of the world—the evangelical logic of the communal reformation was beginning to unfold. The social and political orders were measured with the yardstick of the gospel. The villages of the imperial city of Rothenburg wrote to the city council that on the basis of the “eternal Word of God we find . . . that we are sorely oppressed in many ways,” and this was the justification for presenting their demands.\textsuperscript{164} And the peasants of the Klettgau demanded from the city of Zurich, the arbiter in their dispute with the counts of Sulz, a judgment “in accordance with the only true guideline (that is, the Word of God).”\textsuperscript{165}

This practice of legitimizing the demands to the authorities by deriving them from the gospel was widespread.\textsuperscript{166} Because of the many copies in which the Twelve Articles were circulated, its wording became the classic model. All demands by the lords were justified to the extent that they could be grounded in Scripture, and all grievances of the peasants were justified to the extent that they could be verified with biblical passages.\textsuperscript{167} As far as we can tell, the formulation in the Twelve Articles was a more precisely thought out and more carefully worded successor to a version that is attested earlier on the upper Rhine. The latter had intended to take measures “for the peace of the land and the quiet of the poor,” to the extent that the measures “conformed to Scripture,” and it renounced all demands “that are seen to be incompatible with or even contrary to Scripture.”\textsuperscript{168} The chancery of the Baltringen peasants in a sense anticipated the wording of the Twelve Articles when it wrote: “Whatever that same Word of God takes and gives, we shall gladly accept it and take what good and bad it brings us.”\textsuperscript{169} The gospel no longer pointed the way only to the salvation of the soul; in equal measures it outlined the secular order.
Understandably enough, the real problem for the peasants was formulating consistent guidelines for an evangelical life based on Scripture. The initial helplessness of the peasants is well described in the account of Johann Kessler of St. Gall concerning the events in the camp of the Baltringen peasants in February 1525; in view of Kessler’s close personal ties to Upper Swabia, his report is considered highly authentic. When a delegation of the lords appeared in the camp for negotiations, the leader of the Baltringen Band, Huldrich Schmid, asked “for forgiveness,” but there was no need for a court session (Rechtstag) since “there was no complaint here.” The lords, however, insisted on a judicial settlement of the peasants’ demands and suggested that the Imperial Cameral Court (Reichskammergericht) be used as the authoritative tribunal. Asked by the lords which law the peasants intended to invoke,

Huldrich answered: godly law, which tells every estate what it should and should not do. The lords responded with mocking words: Dear Huldrich, you are asking for godly law. Tell us, who will render such law? God will hardly come down from heaven and hold a court day for us.

Huldrich Schmid did not hesitate with his reply. He would urge all priests to pray to God “that he might indicate and appoint for us learned, pious men who know how to judge and settle this dispute in accord with pure godly Scripture.”

The distinction between the gospel and godly law was admittedly slight. Godly law nevertheless joined the gospel as a rallying cry, and we cannot really grasp the peasants’ idea of reformation without examining it. The line dividing the gospel and godly law ran between heaven and earth, between the hereafter and life on earth, between the church and the world, although the idea that the two concepts were interlinked, even closely intertwined, was never abandoned. In other words, mankind needed the gospel for the salvation of the soul and godly law for life on this earth. The Upper Swabian Federal Ordinance declared that “whatever we are obliged to render to ecclesiastical or secular authority owing to godly law” shall be duly rendered. The Klettgau peasants considered all services to their lords as questionable “without instruction from godly law.” In a brief letter to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria (a mere forty lines), the Allgäu peasants used the phrase “godly law” no less than nine times. Here, too, it was employed as a yardstick to measure to what degree the obligations they owed their lords were admissible. The peasants called upon Ferdinand to be “the protector of godly laws, ... to graciously protect, shield, and rule [halten] us under the godly laws, and not to let us be oppressed.”

The appeal was directed not to the archduke as the territorial prince but to Ferdinand “as governor and deputy of the Roman imperial majesty,” the emperor was thereby placed under obligation to be the protector of the law, something the peasants did not expect of any territorial prince.

What had the peasants gained by invoking godly law? First of all it gave them a concept to oppose to “venerable law,” to “venerable tradition,” to the
historically evolved law which circumscribed the rights and obligations of peasants and lords. For the peasants to have played off godly law against venerable law makes sense only if they believed that the old law had lost its ethical function, that it was no longer considered useful in solving actual problems and responding to concrete needs. One thing the peasants had clearly learned in the years leading up to the reformation: subjective legal claims could no longer be pushed through on the basis of the old law. We know of sixty peasant revolts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in each of which the rebels justified their actions with the claim to be restoring the old law. For the most part they achieved no notable success, and reasons for this failure are easy to find. The difficult economic conditions during the late Middle Ages, which affected peasants and lords alike, fueled the struggle over the distribution of agricultural resources. As the peasant revolts show, this struggle eventually turned violent. To prevent the peasants from leaving the land, the lords reactivated older legal titles of serfdom; to take maximum advantage of the high price of timber they used their jurisdiction over the forests to monopolize the woods; to raise rents they undermined the peasants’ claims to the land by invoking old land registers (Urbare); to raise taxes they dressed up their patronage and protective rights as territorial sovereignty. Old law could now hold its own only if it was “codified” old law. Its ethical substance was weakened as individual self-interest became increasingly dominant, with the result that the legal norms were defined by the powerful. The making of law by the lords increasingly displaced the legal principles of the peasants, chartered law acquired greater force than witness testimony, and forged charters were played off against the traditional rights of the peasants. The hopeless impotence of the old law explains why the peasants sought refuge in godly law.

We can illustrate these developments I have sketched out in the abstract with some examples. Around 1490, the peasants of St. Gall expressed their helpless frustration toward their lords with the following battle song: “We’re going to catch the abbot’s councillors, they are well versed in legal matters . . . they help him make false documents, make them look old and hang them into the smoke, and many other a ruse they think up.” The complaint that the monastery’s lawyers were forging documents by smoking new pages of parchment drew only a half-hearted denial from the abbot. More important for our purposes is the obvious helplessness and frustration which the song expresses. This explains why the peasants of St. Gall also had recourse to godly law. “Since it has now come about by God’s grace and help and through the Word of God,” the peasants of the community of Steinach declared in 1525, “that they and others may present their grievances, they believe they should be allowed once again to cut building timber and firewood, as it used to be of old.” The liberating power of the gospel becomes strikingly apparent here. Even the use of wood could no longer be regulated within the system of the old tradition. It was only the invocation of the newly discovered gospel which made it possible to formulate grievances in the first place. All the problems which the previous generations had been unable
to solve now came to the fore. Death taxes were "against the doctrine and the Word of God, and against Christian brotherly love," the confiscation of the estates of illegitimate children was "against godly law, against the holy Scripture, and no longer acceptable." The demand for freedom to hunt and fish was justified "because all animals on earth and the fish in the water were created by God the Almighty for the common use and sustenance of all mankind." Such concrete issues eventually gave rise to the general demand by the subjects of St. Gall that they should be allowed to live with "the holy Word of God, the gospel, the holy Scripture, and godly truth." \(^{185}\)

Winfried Becker has labeled godly law as "characteristically empty of content and arbitrary in nature." \(^{186}\) This may be so, but it hardly diminishes the godly law in comparison with the old law, for the latter was certainly no less arbitrary. Unlike the old law's indeterminancy or arbitrariness, which was based on privileges, the godly law presents us with a more self-critical arbitrariness, for the peasants themselves pleaded with the theologians to provide it with substance or content.

Of course godly law was not merely a negation of the old law. By pointing to the gospel as the source of all norms in human life, it introduced into the hardened mental categories of this pre-Enlightenment society new possibilities of thinking about the nature of man. With godly law as the foundation of all human legal order, natural law was reintroduced to the social discourse, from which the social doctrine of scholasticism had eliminated it by "merging godly law and positive, 'old' law" in the concept of relative natural law. \(^{187}\) What godly law intended was to "define the content of the central values that are binding in a Christian society, thus holding all legislative action to a predetermined goal." \(^{188}\) Since many theologians persisted in rejecting the request for clarification, the peasants had no choice; unless they were willing to abandon their reformation they were forced to define godly law through the formulation of ethical principles. The fact that they did this, and the manner in which they did it, had consequences more far-reaching than anyone could have imagined.

**Political Consequences: The Gospel's Logic and the Godly Law**

The desire and need to give the gospel and godly law an imminent presence in this world compelled the peasants to create biblically based ethical principles for the social and political orders. By establishing the church in the community, the community as a political institution was given new dignity and legitimacy, which served to elevate the community to a new level of importance as a foundation for political order in the consciousness of rural society.

**Ethical Principles for the Social and Political Order**

In the mind of the peasants the gospel and godly law presupposed each other. In so far as the peasants had the firm conviction that godly law could be expounded
through the gospel, they frequently used the gospel and godly law as synonymous or mutually interconnected concepts. Once again I should point out that a clean distinction of the gospel and godly law was undoubtedly beyond the peasants’ mental powers of abstraction. Nevertheless, we can detect the rudiments of different approaches in deducing ethical norms. Broad ethical guidelines were justified more frequently through the gospel and thus through the New Testament, while individual ethical principles were more likely justified through godly law.

To praise and honor God, to reveal the gospel, and to promote godly law—these were the aims invoked by the Christian Union in Upper Swabia to justify the alliance, which the peasants entered into “especially to increase brotherly love.” Kunz Diebold, the leader of the Stephansfeld Band in Alsace, justified the actions of the peasants to the city of Strasbourg by declaring that they wished to promote “the honor of god and the brotherly love of one’s fellow man.” The peasants in the Black Forest in southwest Germany wanted to serve “the common weal,” and the rural folk in Brixen intended to prohibit usury, “which is after all un-Christian and completely against the common weal.”

It is thus not surprising that brotherly love and the common weal were given a prominent place at the very beginning of the regional manifestos and ordinances as guiding principles. The manifesto of the Black Forest peasants tried to get cities and villages to join the Christian Union “in order that the common Christian weal and brotherly love be established, raised up, and increased,” and it presented this as the will of God. At the Innsbruck diet of 1525, the representatives of the cities and districts demanded a new territorial constitution, so that “brotherly love will be kept and the common weal promoted,” a program that was indirectly justified with reference to the will of God. Even where these two concepts were not explicitly used to describe the aims of the peasants, they were implicit or they followed from the intent of individual demands.

Godly law was held up as justification for demanding the release of hunting, fishing, and the commons from the control of the lords. And occasionally the “Word of God” was invoked with reference to Genesis, as for example in the articles of the villages of Memmingen, which point out that when God created man, “he gave him power over the fish in the seas, the birds in the sky, and over all animals on earth.” An interesting argument from natural law appears here, and it soon gained wide popularity. It claims that the use of uncultivated land was open to everyone, a position which found some support even from a historical perspective. Land not under cultivation, whether forests or meadows, rivers or lakes, had always been used by the peasants: the forest for building timber and firewood, the rivers for fishing and for irrigating the meadows. In the fifteenth century this relatively open system was gradually restricted by prohibitions and rules imposed by the lords. The high price of wood, the result of rising demand in the growing cities, led to the exclusion of the peasant from the forest. To satisfy their insatiable hunting passion, the nobility and the clergy preserved too much wild game, and this led to frequent devastation of the fields by deer.
and wild boars. The lucrative business of raising sheep gave rise to exclusive jurisdictions over the commons by seigneurial and territorial lords.\textsuperscript{196}

We cannot begin to estimate the damage to the peasant economy from these restrictions. Judging from the sources from Upper Swabia, the commons, fishing, and hunting were initially not among the primary grievances;\textsuperscript{197} apparently it was only the notion of godly law which allowed them to come to the fore. Owing to "godly and common written laws . . . all running waters [shall] be free and open to everyone for fishing and any other uses . . . on account of godly and righteous laws" everyone shall be allowed "to hunt, shoot, and catch game, both large and small, free of punishment."\textsuperscript{198} In the end hardly any of the transregional grievances or programs lacked the demand for the freeing of forest, water, and commons. The explanation for this may be that the concept of godly law or the interpretation of God's intention as expressed in Genesis reactivated old ideas of natural law.\textsuperscript{199}

A much clearer connection existed between traditional, general ideas of liberty based on natural law and the demand for the abolition of serfdom, which is found in all articles and programs, and for the most part at the top of the list. The peasants of the upper Rhine fought against serfdom with the argument that "by law every person is originally born free," while the Salzburg peasants rejected it with the comment "that we all are by nature and by God's liberty free and not in bondage."\textsuperscript{200} Serfdom was certainly a considerable, sometimes oppressive burden, especially in southwestern Germany and Switzerland. Restrictions on marriage, no freedom of mobility (Freizügigkeitsverbot), frequently high death taxes that could amount to the confiscation of half the inheritance—all this impinged upon the peasants' life in very tangible and direct ways.\textsuperscript{201} The titles of the seigneurial lords (Leihherren) were based on the historical law of older servitude.\textsuperscript{202} In Central Europe natural law always remained subordinated to historically evolved law until the old feudal order dissolved. Only during the reformation period was the now commonplace concept of fundamental personal liberty successfully justified on theoretical grounds. If God is Lord, the peasants concluded, there can be no lords (Leihherren) over people. "No one but God, our creator, father, and Lord, shall have bondsman," the villages of Schaffhausen demanded, and many manifestos picked up this direct and concrete justification.\textsuperscript{203} In addition, serfdom was also challenged through godly law, and in this way the link to natural law was reestablished, as for example among the peasants at Lake Constance, who felt forced into bondage "against all justice and godly laws."\textsuperscript{204}

The gospel and godly law furnished ample arguments to attack various elements of the social and political order and to challenge its very legitimacy. The concept of "brotherly love," derived from the New Testament and applied to the secular order, invariably favored egalitarian tendencies. The "common weal," employed as a concept to counter the "self-interest" of the powerful and the lords, could not but subject the entire system of feudal rents and dues to a critical examination. The reassertion of communal control over the tithe made deep
inroads into the system of ownership in the early sixteenth century and could be a serious threat to the economic foundation of feudal lordship; not infrequently the tithe accounted for half of a lord's entire revenues.\textsuperscript{205} The demand for the release of forests, waters, and commons threatened not only a status symbol by attacking the feudal monopoly on hunting; given the rapidly rising price for wood, it also endangered economically lucrative privileges. In large parts of upper Germany the rejection of serfdom could essentially uproot noble and ecclesiastical lordship, because lordship as such was not infrequently based on the power over people. It is no coincidence that the manifestos again and again assured the lords that the demand for liberty should not be read as the abolition of every kind of lordship.\textsuperscript{206} But it was clear that the nature of authority was to be reexamined, especially since the peasants put a great variety of demands before their lords and the authorities, guided by the goal expressed in the preamble of all manifestos: "to open the gospel," "to support the word of God," and "to protect godly justice." The logic of peasant theology was given an exemplary formulation in the articles of the community of Embrach to the council of Zurich. It is here that serfdom was first challenged with the help of the gospel. The gospel was the source and foundation of "the freedoms," and these freedoms the peasants interpreted in concrete terms to mean "that from now on no one shall be subject to such bondage in body or property."\textsuperscript{207} This argument attacked two of the three fundamental, mutually supportive pillars of feudal lordship: serfdom and lordship over the land. Only legal jurisdiction remained unchallenged, and consequently Zurich's lordship was now reduced to the exercise of legal protection. The gospel had thus made the entire political order suspect and had cast its very legitimacy into doubt. Since the lords could not submit to the gospel or to the ethical principles derived from it without abolishing their own positions, the peasants had to redefine the political system themselves. And nothing was more natural for rural society than to approach the problem of the social and political order from the basis of the community.

\textbf{The Community as the Basis of the Political Order}

The "pure gospel" had made it possible to communalize the church and had thus strengthened the autonomy of the community. The belief that the community should judge what was true doctrine and was capable of doing so—a belief that was only slowly accepted and then not everywhere—gave the community a completely new and vastly more important place in the broader structure of political groups. The community had arisen in the late Middle Ages from wild roots, as it were, and it had no real place in the political structure of estates or their theoretical underpinnings. Now for the first time this institution was given a theological justification, and in an age virtually obsessed with piety and religiosity—who would dispute that the "reformation century" was such an age?—such justification invariably represented the highest form of legitimacy.

With a church scaled down to the communal level the Roman church became
superfluous, and with it the clergy as the leading estate of the existing political order. This loosening of the hierarchical structures could turn into their dissolution under the impact of the ideas of freedom derived from holy Scripture and godly law. The individualism of a personal freedom grounded in God’s order of creation could be played off against the traditional feudal ties that bound the peasants.

This background explains the vitality which the community displayed in the reformation period. The peasants’ plans for a new political order always took the community as their starting point. In the small territories of the empire, in Upper Swabia, along the upper Rhine, and in Alsace, the communities came together to form so-called bands, which in turn grouped together into the federative structures of the Christian Unions. In this way Upper Swabia, the area of the upper Rhine centered around the Black Forest, and Lower Alsace became political entities, which they had not previously been. Where the peasants encountered political structures based on the estates, they adopted the institutional framework but gave it a totally different character. It was no longer the “estates” that were represented in the diets, but communities—villages and rural communes (Landgemeinden), urban communes and mining communities. Since the institutional Roman church had now been reduced to insignificance, deprived of its political rights and stripped of its economic privileges, the only question that needed to be solved concerned the role of the nobility within the political system. On the whole the peasants were inclined—although it was not always so clearly expressed—to accept the nobility, provided it was willing to submit to the communal associations, the bands, or the Christian Unions.

Irrespective of the regions’ differing constitutional structures, as the basic unit of the state the community advanced the principle that elections should determine how political offices were assigned. The communities chose their deputies to the peasant bands or to the territorial diets. The bands elected their representatives in the Christian Unions, and the diets determined through election the provincial government. These political associations, based on completely new principles, were given a constitutional basis in the so-called territorial constitutions (Landesordnungen). In the Tyrol, Salzburg, Württemberg, Alsace, on the upper Rhine, and in Upper Swabia, territorial and federal constitutions were to be drafted, guided by the principle that they should embody principles of the gospel and of godly law and thus lead to a Christianization of society. A still predominantly peasant society thus seemed to have found a form of political organization that was suited to its needs and its disposition. As Ivan Vargas has put it, “the transcendentalization of political protest is the only path toward politicization of the transcendent.”

THE SWISS AND GERMAN REFORMATIONS GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS

With the theoretical concept of a communally based political order, which was realized in 1525 in Alsace, on the upper Rhine, in Upper Swabia, and in
rudimentary forms also in Franconia, the region of southern Germany between
the duchy of Lorraine and the duchy of Austria approached the constitutional
structures of the Swiss Confederation. In doing so it posed a serious threat to the
continued existence of the empire. In the Zurich countryside itself the commu-
nal reformation did not produce any far-reaching political ideas—unless one
interprets the later Anabaptist movement as such. The explanation for this lies
no doubt in the fact that the community held a secure place within the structure
of the state. Zurich headed off the peasants' reformation when the council itself
vigorously promoted the spread of the reformation in the countryside, unless
political considerations dictated otherwise. It did this not only in an authori-
tarian fashion, but also by wooing and winning the active consensus of the
communities in the countryside. Swiss historiography tends to characterize the
"plebiscites" of 1524 rather as a formality while emphasizing the authoritarian
nature of the evangelical movement.210 This is not incorrect, but it needs to be
qualified once we examine the issue comparatively by bringing in the region of
southern Germany that belonged to the empire. In the latter no effort was made
anywhere to coordinate the choice for or against the evangelical movement with
the communities. Even imperial cities such as Strasbourg, Nuremberg, and
Memmingen showed relatively little interest in the mood in the countryside as
long as there was no serious threat to the political peace. In Zurich, on the other
hand, a broad consensus existed between the urban and rural communities in
regard to the position to be taken in confessional matters. At the basis of this
were constitutionally established ideas about consensus and participation, which
were applicable beyond Zurich, as the example of Bern can attest.

The first pro-reformation sentiments were voiced in Bern in 1523 with the
preaching mandate, although they did not come to fruition until after the Bern
Disputation of 1528, when the city and its territory joined the reformation.211
This decision came at the end of a gradual, five-year maturation process, during
which time there was constant contact and communication with the Bern
countryside. In preparation for the assembly (Tagstzung) of the confederates,
scheduled for Lucerne in 1524, and whose agenda included also the question of
faith, the council sought a broad basis for its vote by conducting a "consultation
of the districts" (Amterbefragung) to find out whether the "new doctrine should
be extinguished" or whether "the holy gospel and the godly Scripture, as well as
the New and Old Testaments, should be secured and implemented."212 The
districts voted overwhelmingly in favor of retaining the old faith or they left it to
the council as the "protector" to make the necessary decisions.213 As a result the
council continued in the tracks of the established church when it came to
questions of religious policy in its territory and within the Confederation,
although not without pushing for reforms on this basis.214 When the religious
issue became heated between Zurich and the Catholic Forest Cantons in 1526,
and there was growing unrest on the eve of the planned pan-confederate
religious disputation, Bern turned to its subjects in February and May and got
back the answer that they wished to remain in the old faith.215 And when in
1527 a clear majority in favor of the reformation emerged and carried the day in
Bern, there was yet another consultation of the districts.\(^{216}\) It is true that on this occasion Bern made it quite clear where it stood and what it expected, but it was also just as interested in the freely rendered decisions of the communities.\(^{217}\) After the majority of the communities had voted in favor of the new doctrine, the official reformation mandate for the city and territory of Bern was issued in February of 1528, after the Bern Disputation.\(^{218}\) The mandate was once again presented to the communities for confirmation, and in case there was no clear support for it, it was left up to the parish communities to decide by majority vote whether or not "the mass and images [should be] eliminated."\(^{219}\)

We do not have to decide to what extent Bern's "coaching" influenced the voting during the consultation of the districts. Important for our purposes is solely the fact that the city was clearly interested in obtaining an active consensus in its territory. This concern is also reflected in the fact that the rural communes of Bern had more extensive rights than their counterparts in Zurich, where the communities could decide only about "images," but not about the Mass.

Wherever the evangelical movement in Switzerland was headed off or appropriated by the urban councils or unfolded under their careful leadership, the peasants' communal reformation could not become politically dangerous. The better part of Switzerland—after all, Bern and Zurich controlled the largest territories in the Confederation—thus presents a picture of the peasants' reformation that is very different from what we find in the southern German lands of the empire. There the communal reformation could only realize itself by becoming the vehicle of a fundamental antifeudalism. The strength of the feudal structures thus became a crucially important factor in shaping the course of the reformation. This is confirmed by those areas of modern Switzerland that were ruled by ecclesiastical territorial lords. In the territory of St. Gall political unrest broke out both in the "old lands"\(^{220}\) (Alte Landschaft) of the abbey's traditional core and in the county of Toggenburg, which had been in the monastery's jurisdiction since the fifteenth century. Compared to the ancient lands, Toggenburg possessed much broader political rights through its own Territorial Council and independent ties to the outside world in the form of alliances with Schwyz and Glarus. After 1524, the prince-abbot of St. Gall continually complained that the communities were appointing pro-reformation pastors on their own initiative.\(^{221}\) In the following years the reformation movement resulted in the de facto—if temporary—separation of Toggenburg from St. Gall, after the Territorial Council had taken it upon itself to decide on the true doctrine and had called a synod in 1529 which brought the land over to the reformation.\(^{222}\) Much the same goes for Graubünden, where the bishop and the cathedral chapter of Chur felt the political expansion of the reformation movement in the form of massive attacks on their rights of lordship.

In the empire the peasants' reformation provoked a fundamental crisis of the political order, since the recourse to the "pure gospel" and its concrete application to the structure of social and political life meant that lordship was no longer
accepted as God-given unless it could show itself to be Christian lordship. And it was “Christian” in the eyes of the peasants only if it subordinated its actions to scriptural norms and principles of godly law, or at least if it claimed to be doing so. Zurich and Bern did this and thus provided the peasants’ concept of reformation no political point of attack. As a result the peasants’ communal reformation remained a side branch of the broader movement of urban reformation and could hardly develop its own identity and character. The princes and lords in the empire, on the other hand, were concerned to recapture the legitimacy which the evangelical movement had undermined. This they could accomplish only through a military confrontation and by crushing the peasants. Once that had happened the peasants’ reformation had no chance to take root, let alone flourish.

The reformation in rural society is best characterized as a communal reformation. Beginning in 1523 in the Zurich countryside, it quickly spread northward to the upper Rhine and in 1515 seized the entire region of southern Germany. By 1530 it had run its course, crushed by the princes or incorporated by the cities. Characteristically enough it prevailed only in those areas where feudal lordship was so weak that it did not survive politically the fury of the reformation, as in Graubünden, or where the political structures were based on the communities, as in Swiss Glarus. In this way eastern Switzerland moved closer to Zurich and Bern, both in regard to its confessional choice and the internal structure of the church. The gap between Switzerland and the empire widened. “Pig-Swabians” and “Cow-Swiss,” to use epithets of the time, were henceforth separated not only by different political identities but also by different confessional identities.

Notes

3. Basic for the course of events is Günther Franz, Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, 11th ed. (Darmstadt, 1977).
7. Ibid., 129, no. 359.
8. Ibid., 129, no. 360 (9 March 1523).
9. The meaning of the passages, in the form in which they are given by Egli, is not entirely clear; but the context reveals that the patron was to pay a part of the salary or all of it.


11. I list here only the more important points; the so-called request itself is more detailed.

12. This quote and all previous ones in Franz, Quellen, 315.


15. Egli, Akten­sammlung, 134ff., no. 372 (28 June 1523). When Egli gave the complete texts of the sources, he frequently provided additions in brackets in order to make them more readily readable, but these additions often changed the texts grammatically and in meaning. In principle I have omitted these additions.

16. The edited documentary material that is available for Switzerland (see the bibliography of sources and secondary literature) far exceeds in extent and depth comparable editions for Germany and Austria, at least concerning the issues I am addressing.

17. Egli, Akten­sammlung, 133f., 369 (23 June 1523).
18. Ibid., 125, no. 351 (19 March 1523).
19. Ibid., 132f., no. 368 (22 June 1523).
20. References in Egli, Akten­sammlung, passim.
21. Ibid., 137, no. 378.
22. Ibid., 179f., no. 450.
23. Ibid., 128, no. 354; 140f., no. 383; 178, no. 444.
25. Egli, Akten­sammlung, 246f., nos. 568, 569.
27. Egli, Akten­sammlung, 173ff., no. 436 (27 October 1523).
29. Egli, Akten­sammlung, 114f., no. 327. Already in 1522 the Zurich Landkapitel had accepted the scriptural principle, for which see Oskar Vasella, "Bauernkrieg und Reformation in Graubünden 1525–1526," Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Geschichte 20 (1940): 43.
30. Compare, for example, Egli, Akten­sammlung, 234ff., no. 543.
31. Ibid., 237, no. 546.
32. Ibid., 177f., no. 440; 214, no. 491.
33. Ibid., 134, no. 369.
34. Ibid., 132f., no. 368.
35. Ibid., 246, no. 568.
36. Ibid., 254–264, no. 589.
37. Ibid., 258.
38. Ibid., 261.
39. Ibid., 323–326, no. 710 (7 May 1525); 319ff., no. 703 (2 May 1525); 318ff., no. 702 (25 April 1525).
40. Ibid., 332–336, no. 725. On the article concerning the election of pastors there are two different votes by commission members (both of which were adopted by the council); in the final analysis they both preserved the council’s right to make appointments, although the right of appeal by a community was not ruled out.
41. Ibid., 336–339, no. 726. On the article concerning the appointment of pastors see Egli, Aktenammlung, 338.
43. For the historical background see Franz, Quellen, 127–130.
44. Ibid., 196, no. 51.
45. Preaching ordinance of the Christian Union of May 1512, printed in Franz, Quellen, 198, no. 53.
48. The account is in Franz, Quellen, 136ff., no. 29. He is describing events that occurred on 14 February 1525.
49. Ibid., 163ff., no. 35. We are dealing here with a kind of summary version of the peasants’ statements (originally probably expounded more fully) incorporated into a city chronicle.
50. The so-called Allgäu Articles are printed in Franz, Quellen, 166ff., no. 38.
51. Compare the synopsis of the grievances in Blickle, Revolution, 296–301.
53. Ibid., 150, no. 26d.
54. Ibid., 154, no. 26 note.
55. Ibid., 165, no. 31.
56. Franz, Quellen, 190, no. 47.
57. Ibid., 175, no. 43.
58. Ibid., 166, no. 38.
59. Ibid., 190, no. 47.
60. Franz, Bauernkrieg Aktenband, 150, no. 26d.
61. Franz, Quellen, 197, no. 51.
62. Claus, Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, 29ff., lists eight editions.
63. The statistical analysis is difficult because we cannot determine in every case whether a village belonged to the Baltringen Band. Of all the available grievance lists, 44 percent demand the abolition of the small tithe, 41 percent the abolition or conversion of the large tithe. See Blickle, Revolution, 38, plus the synopsis of the grievances in 296–301.
64. Jürgen Bücking, Michael Gaismaier: Reformer-Sozialrebell-Revolutionär. Seine Rolle im Tiroler “Bauernkrieg” (1525/32), Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit. Tübingen

65. Ibid., 96-105.
66. Hermann Wopfner, ed., Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges in Deutschtirol 1525, Acta Tirolensis, vol. 3 (Innsbruck, 1908; reprint: Aalen, 1973), 70-78, no. 18; 78-82, no. 19; 68f., no. 17; Bücking, Michael Gaismaier, 149-152. Bücking attributes the grievance list from Brixen to Michael Gaismaier and labels it his "first" territorial constitution; consequently the only Gaismaier constitution hitherto known, from the spring of 1526, is called the second constitution. There is no doubt that a broader consensus existed among the peasants, though there is no compelling reason for attributing the individual parts to Gaismaier. See Bücking, Michael Gaismaier, 63, 149.
68. Wopfner, Quellen, 70f.
69. Ibid., 35-47, no. 15a; 50-67, no. 16. Largely identical with the Meran Articles, expanded by the so-called Innsbruck Additions to a total of 96 articles.
70. Ibid., 35, 37, 44.
71. Ibid., 36f., with minor variations, 51f.
72. Ibid., 36.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid. Hausarme were respectable people who had been reduced to poverty through no fault of their own and did not wish to be publicly supported as beggars or alms receivers.
75. Ibid., 35; analogously, 50f.
76. Franz, Quellen, 297, no. 94. For evidence of the important role the articles played in the debates at the subsequent diets in the archbishopric of Salzburg, see Blickle, Revolution, 268f. On the background to the (provisional) territorial constitution drafted in 1526 (along with the text) see now Franz Viktor Spechtler and Rudolf Uminsky, Die Salzburger Landesordnung von 1526, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, vol. 305 (Göppingen, 1981).
77. Franz, Quellen, 295f.
78. Ibid., 297, 299.
79. Ibid., 298f.
80. Ibid., 300f.
81. Friedrich Leist, ed., Quellen-Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bauern-Aufstands in Salzburg 1525 und 1526 (Salzburg, 1888), 6-10, no. 1.
82. I quote here the article concerning the appointment of the pastor (Leist, Quellen-Beiträge, 6f.):

... in these our grievances we consider this the first point and most necessary article: that we have properly God-fearing pastors who know and preach the Word of God, in the manner described above, without any fear and human threats; we also earnestly desire that when we elect or appoint such a pastor among us, no ecclesiastical or secular authorities of any kind shall dismiss him without a compelling reason or good cause; instead, a satisfactory investigation shall first be undertaken whether this pastor behaved decently or not.
83. Leist, Quellen-Beiträge, 19f., no. 13.
84. Franz, Quellen, 540, no. 170.
85. Franz, Bauernkrieg, 244.
86. Franz, Quellen, 466f., no. 155.
87. A Weistum is a record of customary law in the form of a collection of judicial sentences which serve as precedent. On the placement of the article concerning the election of the pastor, see Adolf Waas, Die Bauern im Kampf um Gerichtigkeit 1300–1525, 2d. ed. (Munich, 1976), 155f.

88. Franz, Quellen, 447, no. 147.
89. Ibid., 238f., no. 71.
91. Printed in Franz, Quellen, 342f., no. 107.
92. Ibid., 370, no. 121.
93. Ibid., 328f., no. 101.
96. See Franz, Bauernkrieg, 195.
98. On Weygandt's life most recently see ibid., 278f.
99. For the Zurich territory, see Egli, Akten­sammlung, 318f., no. 702; 319f., no. 703; 323f., no. 710 (Zurich). For St. Gall, see the grievances of Gossau in Johannes Strickler, Amtliche Sammlung der älteren eidgenössische Abschiede, vol. 4,1a (Lucerne, 1876): 716f., no. 289. This document in all likelihood presupposes a knowledge of the Twelve Articles; see Peter Blickle, "Bäuerliche Rebellionen im Fürststift St. Gallen," in Peter Blickle, ed., Aufruhr und Empörung? Studien zum bäuerlichen Widerstand im Alten Reich (Munich, 1980), 279f. For Rhaetia, see Constanze Jecklin, ed., Urkunden zur Verfassungsgeschichte Graubündens, Beilage zu Jahresberichten der historisch-antiquarischen Gesellschaft von Graubünden, 3 parts (Chur, 1883–1886), 97. For the Trentino, see U. Corsini, "La guerra rustica nel Trentino e Michael Gaismair," Studi Trentini di scienze storiche 59 (1980): 164, plus the Italian version of the Meran Articles in Wopfner, Quellen, 48, no. 15b. For the Salzburg area, see Leist, Quellen-Beiträge, 7.
104. Maurer, "Massenerhebung," 255f. It should be noted especially that Maurer was able to confirm the reliability of the contemporary estimate with the help of "objective" sources.


107. Ibid., 78–83, no. 37 (4 April 1524); 89–98, no. 38 (25 June 1526).

108. The quote is based on the protocol of the First Ilanz Manifesto, ibid., 78; similar wording in the Second Manifesto, ibid., 89.


113. Jecklin, *Urkunden Graubünden*, 79. The subsequent quotes are also from 79.

114. Ibid., 93.

115. See the contemporary, though partisan, account of the participant Hofmeister. It appeared as a pamphlet and was published in 1904 by the Religiös-freisinnige Vereinigung des Kantons Graubünden und der Stadt Chur under the title *Sebastian Hofmeisters Akten zum Religionsgespräch in Ilanz*. See also Vasella, "Reformation," 42f.


117. Ibid., 80.

118. Ibid., 81.

119. Item 17. "Thus we believe that no community or district within the parish shall bring an appeal to the bishop of Chur or his lawyers"; instead, other impartial tribunals were to serve as courts of appeal. Although this article was undoubtedly concerned primarily with the bishop's secular jurisdiction, we cannot completely eliminate the possibility that his ecclesiastical jurisdiction was also meant to be included. This is suggested by the anti-episcopal tenor of the entire document, and by the fact that the ecclesiastical court is mentioned at no other time in 1526.


123. Ibid.


127. No figures are available for the specific region under discussion. In the region of Osnabrück we know from the early phase of the Reformation (1517–1534) that 43 of 100 rural parishes were looked after by vice-curates for longer than a year (23 for
more than ten years, 16 for five to seven years); Heide Stratenwerth, *Die Reformation in der Stadt Osnabrück*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz, vol. 61 (Wiesbaden, 1971), 22. It has been shown that numerous absentee holdings existed in the bishopric of Eichstätt, although the parishes generally seem to have been properly looked after. See Peter Thaddäus Lang, "Würfel, Wein und Wettersegen—Klerus und Gläubige im Bistum Eichstätt am Vorabend der Reformation," in Volker Press and Dieter Steuermann, eds., *Martin Luther. Probleme seiner Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1985), 219–243.

128. Egli, Toggenburg, 74.


130. Egli, Toggenburg, 70f.


133. Ibid., 201f., no. 56.

134. Ibid., 299f., no. 94.


140. Franz, *Quellen*, 299f.

141. Ibid., 325, no. 96.

142. Ibid., 448, no. 147.


145. See Dietrich Kurze, *Pfarverwahlen im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gemeinde und des Niederkirchenwesens*, Forschungen zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte, vol. 6 (Cologne and Graz, 1966); and Lang, "Klerus im Bistum Eichstätt," 23f. Using the visitation records for Eichstätt, Lang has also been able to prove (ibid., 19) that rural people at the end of the fifteenth century regularly attended Sunday Mass and went to the yearly confession and communion at Easter.

146. See the indices in the relevant source collections, for example Franz, *Quellen*, 653f.; Franz, *Bauernkrieg Aktenband*, 443; Wopfner, *Quellen*, 213.


148. Struck, *Bauernkrieg am Mittelrhein*, 175; Franz, *Quellen*, 293, 564. As yet there is not a monograph on the tithe in the late Middle Ages. For now see Gunter Zimmermann, *Die Antwort der Reformatoren auf die Zehntenfrage. Eine Analyse des*


150. Egli, Aktenammlung, 132. See the arguments of the villages of Rothenburg, in Franz, Quellen, 329.

151. Blickle, Revolution, 38. In this context we should note the mention of individuals who refused to pay the tithe, contained in the visitation records of the bishopric of Eichstätt. See Lang, “Klerus im Bistum Eichstätt,” 25.

152. Franz, Quellen, 239.

153. Ibid., 410.

154. Ibid., 265f., 169.

155. Ibid., 300.

156. Article 2 of the Twelve Articles. Ibid., 176.

157. Text according to Franz, Quellen, 194; corrected version (“Kriegsgenossen” to “Kirchgenossen”) on the basis of archival sources in Blickle, “Nochmals zur Entstehung,” 290.

158. Wopfner, Quellen, 50–67, no. 16.


160. Franz, Quellen, 368.

161. Ibid., 175, no. 43.

162. Ibid., 420, no. 137.

163. Wopfner, Quellen, 70.

164. Franz, Quellen, 328, no. 101.

165. Ibid., 226.

166. Egli, Aktenammlung, 319, 324; Franz, Quellen, 168.

167. Franz, Quellen, 178f.


172. Franz, Quellen, 196. Similar formulations of the Upper Swabians appear in the sworn articles and in their correspondence. Ibid., 191, 197f.

173. Ibid., 231, no. 66.

174. Ibid., 191f., no. 49.

175. I think it should be emphatically pointed out that when Ferdinand was to be bound to godly law, he was addressed merely as the emperor’s deputy.

176. I would like to point to an interesting reference, although it does not come directly from the pen of the peasants. On 13 December 1524, the city of Villingen wrote to the estates of nearer Austria that the peasants had informed them in a letter “they would not deny the house of Austria anything of what belonged to it by godly and imperial law.” Karl Hartfelder, “Urkundliche Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges im Breisgau,” Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberschlesien 34 (1882): 406.

177. See, for example, the writing of the Buchlo Band to Duke Wilhelm of Bavaria, in Franz, Quellen, 209, no. 60.

178. See on this Blickle, Revolution, 140–149.


182. Everything indicates that the fifteenth century saw the monasteries once again engaged in forgery on a vast scale. Massive forgeries (for the purpose of pushing through alleged rights over the peasants) are attested, for example, in Kempten (Franz, Bauernkrieg, 11) and St. Gall (Johannes Häne, „Der Klosterbruch zu Rorschach und der St. Galler Krieg 1489–1490,” Mitteilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte, hg. vom Historischen Verein des Kantons St. Gallen 26 [1895]: 81). We may assume they existed also in other regions. See Peter-Johannes Schuler, „Die ‘armen lüt’ und das Gericht. Eine Straßburger Schrift über die Reform des geistlichen Gerichts,” in: Peter Classen, ed., Recht und Schrift im Mittelalter, Vorträge und Forschungen, vol. 23 (Sigmaringen, 1977), 229.


184. Müller, Rechtsquellen, 201.

185. Ibid., 164f., 174, 175, 160 (references in the sequence in which they are quoted).


188. Ibid., 234.

189. Franz, Quellen, 196.


191. Franz, Quellen, 504, no. 169.

192. Bücking, Michael Gaismair, 152.

193. Franz, Quellen, 235.

194. Wopfner, Quellen, 50f.

195. Franz, Quellen, 170.


198. Ibid., 122, 117.

199. See on this the conjecture of Bierbrauer, “Das Göttliche Recht,” 228.

200. Ibid., 121, 302.

201. In recent years scholarship has broadened its range considerably, and as a result the problem of serfdom has been more closely examined than any other right of lordship in the late Middle Ages. The basic study is that of Claudia Ulbrich, Leibherrschaft am Oberrhein im Spätmittelalter, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für


203. See Franz, *Quellen*, 263 (Saffhausen), 164 (Schussenried); Egli, *Aktensammlung*, 318 (Grüningen), 319 (Kyburg); Franz, *Bauernkrieg Aktenband*, 148 (Apfingen).


205. Broad comparative material is lacking, but the studies to date seem to point in this direction. See Hippel, *Bauernbefreiung*, 209; Bickle, *Revolution*, 27f.

206. This was formulated with particular emphasis in the third of the Twelve Articles (Franz, *Quellen*, 176f.), and from here it was spread further.


208. Instead of supplying extensive references, I refer the reader to the treatment of this topic in Bickle, *Revolution*, 196–223.


211. The essential study, with a critical examination of the older literature, is now that of Ernst Walder, "Reformation und moderner Staat," *Archiv des Historischen Vereins des Kantons Bern* 64/65 (1980/81): 445–583.


220. The most important sources are in Müller, *Rechtsquellen*, 153–252.


