The Reformation of the Common Man, 1521–1524

Thomas A. Brady, Jr.


*Editor’s Introduction*

Urban culture was where the Reformation movement found its first supporters and its first institutional context. Without the cities, Luther’s protest would not have spread throughout the German lands as quickly as it did. In the larger cities, the ‘Luther Affair’ first came to the attention of the educated elite. The Humanist sodalities, in particular, were quick to support Luther in his cause against (as they saw it) the twin evils of an outmoded scholastic theology and a Catholic church resistant to reform. In Nuremberg, for instance, members of the Humanist society – which included such local dignitaries as the poet Willibald Pirckheimer, the lawyer Christoph Scheurl, the city councillor Caspar Nützel (who translated Luther’s ninety-five theses into German), the painter Albrecht Dürer, and the city secretary Lazarus Spengler – were the first to follow events. Spengler is also representative of another group of urban citizens that quickly expressed interest in the movement – the urban oligarchy. By the early 1520s many of the major cities in the German lands were ruled by councils with Lutheran sympathizers in positions of power. Spengler, for example, published a tract in support of Luther as early as 1519. The larger Imperial cities, powerful municipalities such as Nuremberg, Augsburg, or Strasbourg, could weather the differences of religious opinion among the ruling elite without compromising traditions of rule. But a problem arose once the city governments were faced with a subject populace demanding the introduction of the Reformation. This is exactly what happened in the early 1520s, as the evangelical movement gathered supporters among
the artisans and labourers, as well as the peasant farmers beyond the city walls.

Thomas A. Brady, Jr. illustrates how these popular demands for the introduction of reform forced the city councils to take control of the movement. Preaching mandates were published, public gatherings were prohibited, the selling of Lutheran books or anticlerical pictures in the public squares was suppressed, the authorities kept a close watch out for quarrels over religion, and public preaching was subject to increased supervision — or outlawed altogether. This happened at various stages throughout the Empire, though some city governments reacted with greater hesitation than others. In Nuremberg, the intensity of popular support forced councillors to introduce religious changes. The Catholic Mass was suspended, evangelical preachers were put in office, the monasteries were closed and placed under the control of the council, a public disputation gave the Reformation its public legitimacy, and the appropriate religious reforms were introduced. Strasbourg followed a similar course (though in a Zwinglian rather than a Lutheran vein) as did most of the other cities surveyed by Brady (Augsburg, Frankfurt, Ulm, Constance, Esslingen, Nördlingen). By the mid-1520s, these German cities had introduced the Reformation, and it was now the task of the urban governments to negotiate the delicate political situation brought about by the change of religion.

Luther’s hearing before the Emperor Charles V and the other imperial authorities took place in April of 1521. On 18 April 1521 Luther gave his defence before the imperial diet, wherein he claimed that he was captive to the Word of God, and he refused to recant what he had written. Unless Scripture could prove it otherwise, he was bound by what he believed. In response, Charles V placed him under the ban of Empire, and on 26 May 1521 the Edict of Worms was published, thus making Luther an outlaw in the realm. With the Edict of Worms and the papal bull of excommunication, it now became both a secular and a spiritual crime to offer Luther safe harbour or to support any of his teachings. This gave rise to political divisions between the estates (Stände) of the Empire, for while a number of princely territories and Imperial cities refused to act against the reform movement (even in its association with Luther), the Emperor Charles V regarded the movement as heretical and vowed to root it out. The debate took place at the level of the Imperial diet (Reichstag), a meeting of the estates usually called by the Emperor and arranged into three colleges: The college of electors (the seven rulers who elected the Emperor), the college of princes, and the college staffed by the representatives of the Imperial cities (Reichsstädte) which sat in two blocs (Rheinish and Swabian). There were lesser forums as well — the cities met in separate diets, for instance, as
did the estates of an individual territory – but the Imperial diet was the
grand stage, and it was at the series of diets held in Nuremberg (1522
to 1524) that the religious question first brought serious division to
Imperial politics.

By looking at the development of the evangelical movement within the
cities, as well as the effect of the urban Reformation on the course of
Imperial politics, Brady illustrates how religious ideas came to transform
the context of social and political relations in the Empire. By 1524, the
system of governance was essentially in a state of stalemate. The Emperor
had been unable to enforce the Edict of Worms through the diets; the
governing council, recently moved to Esslingen, remained ineffectual; and
the Swabian League, the Empire's peace-keeping force, did not act. At the
same time the Reformation took hold in the cities. Support for the evan-
gelical movement continued to grow among the common man. The same
religious ideas that had brought deadlock to Imperial politics inspired
the religious and political thinking of the parishioners. To an extent, the
Peasants' War of 1525, an event Friedrich Engels termed 'the grandest
revolutionary effort of the German people', would cast a shadow over
these developments and return the Empire to its former political state.
But as Brady makes clear, the Reformation had brought about a funda-
mental change in German culture and German politics. The brief alliance
between the Reformation and the common man may have ended with the
decline of the urban front and the rout of the peasants in the war of 1525,
but the memory would long have its role in German history.
The Reformation of the Common Man, 1521–1524

Thomas A. Brady, Jr.

In 1871, the founding year of the Prussian-German empire that arose on the ruins of the Holy Roman Empire, a Bavarian jurist described the free cities’ liberating role in the German Reformation: “The Reformation was not simply prepared in the cities, there it was also first put into practice. There, where civil freedom was greatest, in the free cities, came the earliest reforms. Then, from the cities the spirit of the Reformation and the Reformation itself spread out in ever widening circles.”

A century of research has placed beyond doubt the cities’ role as the nurseries of the Reformation movement, where the Evangelical cause was transformed from a provincial issue into a mighty German movement. After it came the ‘Princes’ Reformation’, which gave German Protestantism its historic shape, but which also drew institutions, personnel, values, and symbols from the ‘urban Reformation’.

When Charles V set a new, hard policy on the religious question in 1524, he put tremendous pressure on the urban governments, within whose communes Luther’s followers were stirring vigorous social movements: groups of committed persons united in collective actions with a common consciousness, who wanted or attempted rapid and immediate changes to the existing religious order, sometimes through noninstitu-

1 Quoted by Rublack, ‘Forschungsbericht’, 10 n. 7, who notes that Maurer wrote one hundred years before A. G. Dickens’s celebrated comment that ‘the German Reformation was an urban event.’ Dickens, German Nation. 182. The massive literature on the urban Reformation is surveyed by Rublack, ‘Forschungsbericht’: G. Müller, Reformation und Stadt; and Greyerz, ‘Stadt und Reformation’ (my thanks to Kaspar von Greyerz for letting me read this in typescript). For a briefer overview, see Brady, ‘Social History’, 167–72.

2 Dickens, German Nation. 221. Whereas Dickens laments the subsequent domination of the Lutheran princes, which he believes fostered ‘legalism rather than ... religious and political liberty’, Oberman contends that, despite ‘the acute disadvantages’ of the princes’ reform, intellectual freedom was better served by the Lutheran reformation than the urban one. Werden and Wertung. 346, 361–7 (English: Masters, 272, 284–8). Heinz Schilling’s very important conclusions (Konfessionskonflikt. 387–91) to some degree parallel Oberman’s, though he makes far less of theology. All three scholars agree on the role of the cities as the nurseries of German Protestantism.

3 See Press, ‘Stadt und territoriale Konfessionsbildung’, 251–96; Schilling, Konfessionskonflikt. 168–76.
tional means. Calling themselves ‘Evangelical’, they wanted to free Christianity from centuries of ‘human additions’ to the Bible. By 1524, the size and militancy of such movements made it impossible for their governments, whatever the oligarchs’ personal views, to enforce strictly the Imperial ban on Luther’s works and ideas.

In this massive and unprecedented intervention, the Common Man made history. Already by 1524, before the great insurrection on the land was fairly underway, popular action had inspired or frightened urban governments into defying the emperor and the law, thereby damaging severely and irreparably the old partnership between Crown and cities. By the deep winter of 1524–5, when the valleys and uplands of the South seethed with incipient revolution, the latest form of the Habsburg system’s urban wing, the urban front, was already a wreck.

The Common Man in the Urban Reformation

Das evangeli frone
auss gotts gnad fürher bracht
Martinus Luther schone,
das vor lang was veracht,
mit fussen was vertreten
und lag ganz in dem staub;
das hat er sauber getjen,
wie wol in nit hat beten
der romanisten raub.

When the Edict of Worms was issued on 8 May, 1521, the southern urban governments hardly rushed to publish it locally, nor did they hurry to censor the printers. The tide of books, pamphlets, and broadsides quickly became a flood, as printers, illustrators, and authors rushed to promote Luther as a holy man and his cause as a holy cause, drawing upon symbols and language that were ‘deeply embedded in the

6 ‘It has come from God’s own grace that the wondrous Martin Luther has restored the Gospels’ splendor; for long years it was despised, trod under the feet of men, and left lying in the dust. He did this with great skill, despite the strong objections of the robbing Roman horde.’ Liliencron. Volkslieder, 3:510, no. 393, stanza 3.
culture and belief of those brought up in the old faith. The cities, centers of all communication – oral, visual and written, learned and lay – became the breeding ground for a mighty movement, though for a few years 'the Luther affair' seemed to disappear from the stage of Imperial politics. The rulers of the towns, however, knew quite well what was going on within their walls, and it troubled them.

From the very beginning, the Evangelical movement had to be a matter for public attention, because 'the concern for the sustaining of the civic commonweal gave even the forms of piety a pubic relevance, which from the first necessarily made the issues of the veneration of saints and of images especially pressing'. One may go further and say that clerical involvement also made the movements public, for clergy were public persons, and the movement began as an attack of one group of clergy on another. The Evangelical leaders were well-educated clergymen from urban backgrounds, sons of patricians, merchants, and artisans. They gained hearings largely because they offered answers to long-posed questions, and they sowed seed on long-prepared soil. Even where such answers and such seed were not, from the preachers' perspective, central to their gospel, they hoped that by addressing such questions – usury, tithes, clerical immunities, clerical indiscipline – they would win a hearing for pure doctrine. Luther showed the way by trying to touch every sensitive nerve of his day, at the price of sowing unclarity about his message, though not about his person. Some of his partisans came to see the world through his central message; others did not. But in these years their cause was a common one. The urban preachers sensed this and tried skillfully to adapt Luther's message to the hegemonic corporate-communal values of their fellow citizens.

The building of followings, however, no matter how militant, was but

8 Scribner, Simple Folk, 245. For very different approaches to printing and the Reformation, see Moeller, 'Stadt und Buch', 25–39 (and Scribner's critical 'How Many Could Read?'); Chrisman, Lay Culture, ch. 7. The current state of research on pamphlets is accessible in Köhler, Flugschriften.

9 Noted by Brecht, 'Wormser Edikt', 479.

10 Oberman, Werden und Wértung, 238 (English: Masters, 188).


12 Oberman believes that, at this point in the history of the movement, Luther was more significant as symbol than as teacher. Oberman, 'Gospel of Social Unrest', 43. I agree.

13 This conclusion of Moeller, Reichsstadt, esp. 34–35 (English: Imperial Cities, 69–90), has been heartily seconded by Schilling, Konfessionskonflikt, 45, 142–3. Both Moeller ('Stadt und Buch', 38–9) and Schilling (Konfessionskonflikt, 376 n. 17a) have criticized my view of the sacral commune as both a leading idea, in the Marxian sense, and a shared value, which at times could be defended by the commons against their rulers, as happened as Strasbourg in 1548 (Brady, Ruling Class, chap. 8) and Lemgo in 1609 (Schilling, Konfessionskonflikt, 241–71).
the first step in a process that had to end with the support and protection, willing or grudging, of the urban oligarchies, who alone could shield the movement from its enemies.

The Evangelical preachers’ freedom to act grew out of the pre-Reformation clergy’s freedom from reform, which had flowed from the many checks on a bishop’s power to discipline his clergy.14 This clerical freedom, rooted in the pre-Reformation deadlock over control of the Church, often threatened good order and civic peace, a fact may oligarchs, engaged or not, Lutheran or Catholic, recognized. At Strasbourg, for example, Augustin Drees (d. 1552), a big man in the Gardeners’ guild, complained that the wooing of his sister by the young preacher Caspar Hedio (1494–1552) was merely one more case of a lustful priest violating the sanctity of an upright Christian home. It mattered little to Drees that Hedio called himself an ‘Evangelical’.15 At Nuremberg, Christoph Kress, a Lutheran, complained that ‘nothing bothers me more than to see the escaped monks and priests running about. If I had my way, they could go to the Devil’.16 And at Augsburg, Ulrich Arzt, a Catholic, wrote amid the upheaval of 1525 that ‘we townspeople are to blame, and I fear it will bring down the honorable cities. Had we got rid of these preachers and allowed their own superiors to punish them, as is just, these things would now be settled and overcome’.17

If such opinions were common among the oligarchs, one may fairly ask, how did the Evangelical movement ever succeed in the cities? The social character of the urban Reformation has, indeed, long been a hotly debated subject. According to a thesis formulated for northern Germany and subsequently extended to the southern cities, ‘the Reformation was never the work of a town council’, and there was ‘a general antipathy to the Reformation especially among the patricians’.18 That is much too categorical, for the early Reformation movement embraced various forces and interests. They included oligarchs and humanists, artisans and journeymen, clergymen and artists, peasants and plebeians, who differed from one another in their views on both the theoretical and practical aspects of the Reformation, and who reacted differently to different situations.19

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14 This is superbly documented by Rapp, Réformes.
15 Brady, Ruling Class, 231–2, 307 (May 1524).
18 Lau, ‘Der Bauernkrieg’, 119; Moeller, Reichstadt, 25, 27 (English: Imperial Cities, 60–1, 63).
19 Vogler, Nürnberg, 323.
These groups briefly saw in the Evangelical movement a common vehicle for liberation from an oppression that they, for the moment, sensed to be a common one, though later the movement began to break into different, sometimes opposed, streams. At the beginning, however, from all classes were recruited 'Evangelicals', that is, men and women who believed that, for the sake either of individual salvation or the integrity of Christian life in this world, or both, the rightly understood Bible required the abolition of certain religious traditions and the curbing of ecclesiastical power.

Townsmen of good family had, to be sure, special reasons for opposing such a movement, ranging from career advantages in the old Church to familial attachments to religious orders to native oligarchical conservatism. Wealthy and politically powerful men nonetheless emerged as early patrons of and participants in the Evangelical movement, before it moved from the monasteries and private homes to the pulpits, shops, guildhalls, and taverns. In a few southern cities, true, such as Rottweil and Schwäbisch Gmünd, ruling patricians closed ranks against the Evangelicals, especially when they also took up the cause of political reform. In most other cities, however, the upper classes did little to defend Catholicism in an organized way after about 1526.

There was much in the reformers' messages to attract the urban oligarchs. The pure gospel 'could be understood by burghers and peasants as the common good translated into theological terms', which justified liberating the urban churches from external authority and bringing whole sectors of clerical activity under welcome governmental control: poor relief, schools, marriage law, clerical citizenship and guild membership, parish organization and the administration of parish and monastic properties. Through cooperation with the popular movements and the preachers, the town councils expanded and intensified their sovereignty over churches and citizens, and this domestication of urban religion converted the ecclesiastical order from a disruptive element in civic life.

As it moved out into the churches, shops, and taverns, however, the movement developed clearly dangerous forms of action, such as iconoclastic riots, and it pressed the governments to clearly illegal measures, such as the dissolution of religious houses. The preachers had a nose for exploiting existing grievances, such as demands for greater political participation, and the urban commons gradually became the motor of the movement, as large numbers – we need not assume undocumented

20 See Brady, Ruling Class, 215–30; Christensen, Art, 71–2.
22 Blickle, Reformation im Reich, 131.
majorities—of ordinary folk supported through their guilds the program of religious change.\(^{24}\) Where the guilds embraced very large shares of the adult-male population—about thirty-five hundred at Strasbourg, a city of some twenty thousand, and almost twenty-three hundred in slightly smaller Ulm\(^ {25}\)—the governments had to deal with the movements through negotiation rather than coercion. The movements had nonetheless to be mastered in the name of the historic civic norms of peace, justice and unity.

The true danger from the Evangelical movement for the oligarchies lay in the fact that, even where the clergy could be controlled, the principle of biblicism stayed to haunt the governments. The identification of the Bible, understood as the *lex Christi*, with the common good admitted of different interpretations, according to whether the Bible was used to legitimate or to criticize existing social structures and practices. Just this ambiguity turned Christoph Führer (1481–1537) of Nuremberg against the Evangelicals, who ‘are making the common people so godless that they will lack all good discipline and human morals’.\(^ {26}\) The realism of his fear is suggested by the remarks of Ott, an Augsburg rope-maker, who was overheard in 1524 to damn the ‘dishonorable priests and the rich . . . who pile up goods and money and keep the truth from us’. ‘We have always been Evangelicals’, Ott blurted out, ‘and we still are today. But, truly, we have been fed many lies. If we truly followed the gospel, we would all have to be like brothers.’\(^ {27}\) Why should the Bible slice through the lordship of bishop and priest but stop at that of artisan master, landlord, and town councillor? Should Christians not also treat their fellow citizens as ‘brothers’ in Ott’s sense? Had the movement for ‘godly law’, ‘Christian commonwealth’, and fraternal cooperation won out, revolution would have come to the village, the town hall, the guildhall and the shop. Whether one calls this program ‘the gospel of social unrest’ or ‘biblicism vs. feudalism’,\(^ {28}\) it could be tolerated by no one who believed that peace, justice, and unity could be established and preserved only from above.

The common challenge the Evangelical movement posed to the urban governments is symbolized by the common measure they first used to gain control of it, the preaching edicts of 1523 and 1524. These laws commanded the clergy to preach ‘nothing but the gospel’ and leave off

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24 Wettges. *Reformation*, 117. For the example of Basel, see Fügliaster, *Handwerksregiment*.
26 Quoted by Reicke, *Geschichte*, 839.
27 StA Augsburg, Urgichten 1524. Produkt 3, at 27 Sept., 1524 (my thanks to Hans-Christoph Rublack for this text).
28 The first phrase is Oberman’s, the second Blickle’s.
'all provocative and insulting comments, including everything which tends to rouse the Common Man to anger or confusion or to a rebellion against his rulers, lay or ecclesiastical . . .' 29 Between 29 January, 1523, and 5 April, 1524, such laws were issued at Zurich, Worms, Basel, Bern, Mulhouse, Augsburg, Strasbourg, Constance, Frankfurt am Main, and Sankt Gallen. 30 Their family resemblance derived both from consultation and from a common descent from the Imperial Diet's decree of 9 February, 1523, by which preachers were to be ordered 'to shun everything that might stir up the Common Man against the rulers or confuse the ordinary Christian; but they should preach and teach only the holy gospel as interpreted by the writings that the holy Christian Church has approved and accepted'. 31 Such laws were proof not of an official partisanship for Evangelical religion but of the urban governments' determination to bring the internal divisions under control through the exercise of their *jus pacificandi*. 32

This cause, bringing the Evangelical movement under control, became the duty of every oligarch pledged to preserve peace, justice and unity, though growing dispute about God's honor and the common good made the duty's discharge ever more difficult. Gradually, however, the town councils went beyond the biblicist minimum of the preaching edicts and began to claim divine authority for their actions. Memmingen's council wrote in 1527, for example, that 'because we wish to defend God's honor, and because we have received our authority from God Himself, we are inclined and determined to issue a law forbidding concubinage and prostitution to all our citizens, both clerical and lay'. 33 Specific changes ought to be seen less as inevitable products of individual politicians' conversions 34 than as actions of urban governments, which, pushed from below by their commons and harangued by the preachers, came to see that the new gospel offered welcome solutions to nagging old problems. The revolutionary events of 1524 and 1525, as Christoph Kress once admitted, pushed the governments farther than

31 *RTA*. Jr. 3:747–8, no. 117. The Governing Council's enforcing edict of 6 March, 1523, is in ibid., 447–52, no. 84.
34 Brecht, 'Politik'.

they had ever intended to go. Few urban politicians dreamed, however, that with the preaching edicts they had embarked on a course that would make them arbiters of Christian doctrine and sole enforcers of Christian morals, a role for which little in their traditions, education, or experience had prepared them.

Urban Oligarchies and Reformation Movement, 1524

Nun wirt das bletlein umbgekart
und fürgewänt ain ander art.
Ich main si all, die sölicher gestalt
erheben sich gaistlicher gwalt
in reichtumb, bracht und übermüt,
zern von des armen schwaiss und blüt,
den si mit unrecht oft und vil
thün zwingen zu irem bübanspil
zu geben alls was er vermag.

Wo man vom evangeli sagt,
So hat man in gar bald verjagt.

By the early months of 1524, the fabric of established authority in many a free city was creaking under the strain of maintaining law and order. Though some have written of a ‘victory’ or ‘breakthrough’ of the Reformation in 1524, the movement’s destructive or purgative phase culminated only with the abolition of the central act of Catholic worship, the Mass, which happened at Zurich in 1527, at Memmingen. Strasbourg and Basel in 1529, at Ulm in 1531, and at Augsburg, Ravensburg and Biberach an der Riss never. During the first months of 1524, by

36 See Brady, Ruling Class, 192–3; Broadhead, ‘Politics and Expediency’, 55–70.
37 ‘Now the page is turning to show another side. I mean to show up them all, who make themselves priests, who live in wealth, luxury, and arrogance and feed on the poor man’s sweat and blood. They do so much harm themselves and force others as well to give them all they have... Wherever the Gospel has its say, they’ve been driven all away.’ Liliencron, Volkslieder, 3:366, no. 352, lines 25–33, 43–4.
38 On the victory thesis, which I discussed in Ruling Class, 204–5, much new light is shed by Rublack, Nördlingen, especially 263; and Abray, The People’s Reformation, who shows that none of the fundamental issues was settled at Strasbourg during the 1520s and 1530s. See Oberman, Werden und Wertung, 348 (English: Masters, 273), on the Reformation’s geographical limitations and ‘loss of substance’, comments he repeats in ‘Stadtreformation’, 88. Bolder is Oxment, Age of Reform, 437–8, though his gloomy conclusion rests on theological rather than historical criteria.
contrast, the movement was in most southern cities just exhibiting its
muscle in public for the first time.

Rarely did solid oligarchic opposition keep the Evangelicals from
sweeping rapidly to victory, though at a few places – Regensburg was
one – the government did indeed plod after the popular movement. In
most of the larger cities, however, rich and powerful individuals and
families lent protection and aid to the Evangelical movement from the
first. Nowhere was this aid more decisive than at Nuremberg, where,
even before a truly Lutheran presence emerged, the cream of local
society had gathered around Johann von Staupitz (d. 1524), the reform-
mined General Vicar of the Augustinians. Anton Tucher was there,
and Hieronymus Ebner, along with Caspar Nützel, Hieronymus
Holzschuher, Endres and Martin Tucher, and Sigmund and Christoph
Fürer, representatives of a ‘typical South German Christian humanism,
shaped by Erasmian biblicism, which is repeatedly and justifiably
regarded as an important point of contact for the Reformation in the
cities’. The senate of Nuremberg, though it did temporize, also called
the first Lutheran preachers to the city in 1522 and protected them from
the bishop of Bamberg. By early 1523, Hans von der Planitz was report-
ing to Elector Frederick that a serious official move against the preach-
ers would provoke an insurrection; soon Nuremberg was gaining a
reputation for heresy. The presence of the Governing Council and the
High Court, plus the staging of three Imperial Diets at Nuremberg
between 1522 and 1524, may well have heightened the senate’s
cautions, and the growth of radical stirrings in the countryside, where
many Nuremberg patricians had substantial seigneurial holdings,
prompted careful reflection about following words with deeds. The

40 Seebass, ‘Reformation in Nürnberg’, 254. This account is based on ibid.,
252–69 (English: ‘Reformation in Nürnberg’, 17–40); idem, ‘Stadt und Kirche in
Nürnberg*, is useful for details but narrowly confessional in perspective.
*Nürnberg*, especially 95–118. On Nuremberg’s reputation, see Abbot Georg Truch-
sess of Wernitz-Anhausen to Gerwig Blarer, Jan. 9, 1524, in Blarer, *Briefe und Akten*,
42 The attitude of the Governing Council toward the Evangelical movement is not
8; Richter, *Reichstag zu Nürnberg* 1524, 12. Archduke Ferdinand wrote to Charles V.
Innsbruck, May 12. 1523, about ‘aulcuns, et en especial de celulli qu’est au lieu du
duc de Saxe, nommé Plains [Planitz], lequel avec plusieurs ses adherans sans aucune
claincte de dieu ne vergoiyne du monde s’emploient tres detestablement . . .’ W.
government therefore both protected Lutheran preachers against the
bishop and Catholic ceremonies against the Evangelicals, though there
can be no doubt about the deep penetration of Evangelical ideas into the
best homes. Many of the officeholders, for example, who marched in
procession on Corpus Christi and Saint Sebald’s Day, 1524 – the last ever
held at Nuremberg in this era – probably did so from respect for tradit-
on rather than conviction.\textsuperscript{44} The senate also tolerated as its public
spokesman the notoriously Lutheran city secretary, Lazarus Spengler
(1479–1534), whose efforts Luther compared with the labors of the
prophets of old.\textsuperscript{45} The situation at Nuremberg during the Imperial Diet
of 1524 thus suggests that the transitional phase of discussion and tol-
erance of parties would come to an end, once Nuremberg escaped the
limelight of Imperial government.

Events at Augsburg ran a similar course at a slower pace.\textsuperscript{46} Some very
big men early joined the typically clerical circles of initial Evangelicals,
including three of the four burgomasters – Georg Vetter (d. 1536),
Ulrich Rehlinger (d. 1547) and Hieronymus Imhof (1468–1539) – plus
such other leading politicians as Conrad Herwart, Lucas Welser and the
younger Martin Weiss. Against them stood an ‘old guard’ headed by the
fierce Ulrich Arzt, and between the parties Conrad Peutinger pursued his
‘middle way’, tending and mending Augsburg’s lines to the Imperial
court.\textsuperscript{47} A report of 1522, that half the Augsburgers supported the
Evangelicals, surely exaggerated; but two years later Clemens Sender, a
Benedictine chronicler, noted that ‘in the year of Our Lord 1524
Lutheranism grew very rapidly at Augsburg, and heresy got the upper
hand’.\textsuperscript{48} This was close enough to the truth that the papal legate,
Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio (1474–1539), was advised in March 1524
that he should enter Augsburg at noontime, when the craftsmen were
indoors eating lunch.\textsuperscript{49} Despite the growing number of Evangelicals in
the government, however, the intense external pressures on Augsburg
– from the Habsburg courts, the Bavarian dukes, and the bishop of
Augsburg – made its magistrates more cautious and reluctant to act

\textsuperscript{44} Soden, \emph{Beiträge}, 159–60.
\textsuperscript{45} WA TR, no. 5426. H. von Schubert’s unfinished biography is by no means
superseded by Grimm, \textit{Lazarus Spengler}, but Berndt Hamm’s forthcoming work will
put the subject on a new basis.
\textsuperscript{46} To the fundamental work by F. Roth, \emph{Reformationsgeschichte}, should be added
Broadhead, ‘Internal Politics’ (of which there is a useful extract in his ‘Popular
\textsuperscript{47} F. Roth, \emph{Reformationsgeschichte}, 1:53–73, 87–94, 136; H. Lutz, \textit{Peutinger},
222–8.
\textsuperscript{48} Sender, ‘Chronik’, 154.
\textsuperscript{49} Rem, ‘Crónica nueva geschichte’, 144, translating ‘handwercksvolck’ as
than their Nuremberg counterparts. This inertia was to lead to the movement’s getting out of hand during 1524.

Outside the Confederacy, no other large city of South Germany moved so swiftly to accommodate the Evangelicals as Strasbourg did. By the end of 1523, the movement had gained powerful patrons and adherents, such as the Ammeisters Claus Kniebis (1479–1552), Martin Herlin (d. 1547), and Daniel Mieg (c. 1484–1541), the future Ammeister Mathis Pfarrer (1489–1568) – who was also Sebastian Brant’s son-in-law – the rich merchant Conrad Joham (d. 1551), and Egenolf Röder von Diersburg (1475–1550), a prominent nobleman with important connections in Middle Baden. Hot words over religion flew in the senate chamber during 1523, and the memorial Mass for Ammeister Heinrich Ingold just before Christmas was the last such Mass ever sung in Strasbourg’s cathedral. When the new senators took office in January 1524, the Evangelicals – militants and moderates together – held a majority, and on 25 January they liquidated the clergy’s ancient immunity and began to attack the monasteries. There were nonetheless very cautious men among the oligarchs, such as Jacob Sturm, whose judgment on the religious parties was that ‘both sides are Christians, may God have mercy!’ External pressures and influences were much weaker here than at Augsburg or Ulm. The one Imperial councillor in the government, for example, was Friedrich Prechter (d. 1528), the Fugger agent in Alsace, but he played a very minor role in public affairs. All in all, Strasbourg appeared in early 1524 to be the major free city sailing most nearly in Zurich’s wake.

Though somewhat smaller in size, Ulm resembled Strasbourg in social structure and politics. Religious change came slowly to this capital of the Swabian League, though the Evangelicals did win over prominent laymen, among them Bernhard Besserer, who was as conservative and cautious as Strasbourg’s Sturm. During 1523, the government’s attitude began to soften, and by December it was reported that the new religion ‘has so rooted and grown in the people, that even with force it would be very hard to put down’. Ulm had no out-

50 This is based on Chrisman. Strasbourg: Lienhard, ‘La Réforme à Strasbourg. I–II.’
51 Brady, Ruling Class. 209–10.
52 Ibid., 205, 229.
53 Brady: ‘Sind also zu beiden theilen Christen’, 76.
55 On Ulm, see Geiger. Reichsstadt Ulm: Naujoks, Obrigkeitsgedanke; Brecht, ‘Ulm’: Walther. ‘Bernhard Besserer’.
56 Quoted by Naujoks. Obrigkeitsgedanke. 53.
standing clerical figure to lead popular pressure against the government, which moved no faster than events forced it to do.

The story of a fifth large city, Frankfurt am Main, contrasts neatly with that of Strasbourg.\textsuperscript{57} The patricians, who had surrendered only one-third (versus Strasbourg’s two-thirds) of the offices to the guilds, still dominated the town’s economy through the chartered fairs, which drew merchants from far and wide. The three collegial churches also enjoyed Imperial protection. The archbishop of Mainz maintained a much greater authority at Frankfurt than did the bishops — Bamberg, Augsburg, Strasbourg and Constance — whose jurisdictions covered Nuremberg, Augsburg, Strasbourg and Ulm. The external pressures on Frankfurt’s government were thus relatively strong. Lutheran ideas first spread here, as elsewhere, among humanist clergymen, and the movement was greatly aided by the patronage of two leading patrician politicians, Philipp Fürstenberger (1479–1540) and Hamann von Holzhausen (1467–1536). Later than in other cities, the movement spilled out of patrician homes and monasteries into the churches and shops, but by early 1524 it had mounted little or no direct action.

This survey of five larger towns may be supplemented by views of three middling ones, Constance, Esslingen and Nördlingen. Constance, squeezed between bishop and Austria, had lost the rich Thurgau in 1499 and its chance to turn Swiss in 1510, and, having no stable past to which to cling, proved very open to change.\textsuperscript{58} One sign of this openness was the early and strong movement of leading patricians into the Evangelical party, such as Burgomaster Bartholomäus Blarer (d. 1524) and Hans Schulthaiss (d. 1538), the richest man in Constance.\textsuperscript{59} The special intimacy, indeed, that developed here between preachers and politicians rested on the fact that the two leading preachers, Ambrosius Blarer (d. 1564) and Johann Zwick (d. 1542), were natives who had brothers in the government. Very early, these circles split from the Erasmians at the episcopal court and provoked some of the earliest episcopal countermeasures in all of South Germany. When Archduke Ferdinand demanded action against Lutheran literature in early 1524, the council expelled his local agent, whom the Evangelicals regarded as ‘an enemy of human salvation’.\textsuperscript{60} Constance’s situation meant that every Evangelical action drew strength from the nearness of Zurich, whereas every counteraction must be tarred with episcopal or Austrian.

\textsuperscript{57} This is based on Jahns, \textit{Frankfurt}, 16–36.
\textsuperscript{58} This is based on Rublack, \textit{Einführung}, 20–6, 34–7; idem, ‘Aussenpolitik’; idem, ‘Politische Situation’; Moeller, Johannes Zwick; Bender, Reformationsbündnisse, chap. 2.
\textsuperscript{59} Rublack, \textit{Einführung}, 16–17, 62–6; Buck, \textit{Anfänge}, 60–9, 519–22.
\textsuperscript{60} Rublack, \textit{Einführung}, 36–7.
brushes, so that by early 1524 Constance had become, after Strasbourg, the most nearly Evangelical urban government.

The movement came to Esslingen later than to Constance, though its leading politician, Hans Holdermann, wondered already at Worms, ‘as to what will become of the monk’s affair, I believe that no one really knows, for I think that it contains a wholly new understanding of things, which not everyone can yet see’.\textsuperscript{61} The movement developed slowly at Esslingen, though the government kept a careful watch on its growth in other towns. The town council protected Catholic clergy and services without suppressing the Evangelicals, and, with one eye on the Habsburg regime at Stuttgart and the other on the Swabian League, remained master in its own house all through the 1520s. The transfer of the Governing Council and High Court, which freed the movement from some constraints in Nuremberg, retarded its growth in Esslingen and allowed the council to pursue a temporizing policy ‘more for the security of public order and civic unity than for loyalty to the Church’.\textsuperscript{62} Pressure from below nonetheless emerged in mid-January 1524, when some citizens asked for Michael Stifel’s restoration to his pulpit and for regular Sunday preaching in the convents. As late as the end of April 1524, Esslingen’s government boasted that the town had no ‘Lutheran disturbance’, though a few days later began the first expulsions for anti-clerical agitation.\textsuperscript{63}

Nördlingen, a final example, was a Franconian cloth town of middling size (about seven thousand).\textsuperscript{64} The Evangelical movement surfaced here in 1522 with anticlerical agitation, tithe resistance, and breaches of the fast. Although the government expelled a local Carmelite, Kaspar Kantz, when he married a butcher’s daughter in 1523, it took no other action until the anticlerical demonstrations of 1524. As in Esslingen, in Nördlingen the presence of Evangelical sympathizers in the town council did not lead to official action, beyond bare toleration, until after the first popular demonstrations.

This survey of eight cities to early 1524 confirms a recent judgment that the situation from 1521 to the end of 1523 ‘has the marks of a transition or advent’, which was characterized by ‘the expectation, that something must and would change’, though nothing was yet decided.\textsuperscript{65} The Evangelical movement had developed out of its original milieu – monasteries, patrician parlors and printshops – into public places; it had

\textsuperscript{61} This is based on Naujoks, Obrigkeitsgedanke; Borst, Geschichte, 218–19, 224–6; Rublack, ‘Reformatorische Bewegung’, from which the quote is taken, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{62} Rublack, ‘Reformatorische Bewegung’, 203.

\textsuperscript{63} Krabbe and Rublack, Akten, 18–20, nos. 2–4.

\textsuperscript{64} This is based on Rublack. Nördlingen, 94–100.

\textsuperscript{65} H. Schmidt, ‘Reichsstädte’, 290; and see excellent summary on 123–61.
taken shape under clerical leadership and petitioned for protection of Evangelical clergymen. But it had not yet moved to disturbances of the civic peace. The degree of official cooperation with popular demands for change seems to have related directly to the strength and intensities of external pressures on the oligarchies: from the bishops and neighbouring princes; from the two Habsburg courts; from the privileged status of vital economic operations, such as trading firms and fairs; and from the presence of organs of Imperial government—the Diet, the Governing Council, and the High Court. Such forces kept the oligarchies from acting, no matter how deeply the new ideas penetrated powerful families, until in 1524 there arose a kind of political scissors, of which one blade was the urban commons’ direct pressure for religious change, and the other was Charles V’s new determination to scotch the Lutheran heresy. The convergence of these two blades made it impossible for most urban governments to continue the policy of benign inaction. The pressure from the commons developed more or less dangerously, depending on whether the social distance between oligarchy and commons was relatively great (Nuremberg, Augsburg and Frankfurt) or small (Strasbourg, Ulm and Constance), and on whether there were politically significant guilds (Strasbourg, Ulm, Constance and Esslingen), relatively weak ones (Augsburg, Frankfurt), or none at all (Nuremberg). In the absence of guilds, even in the presence of great social differences, the craftsmen and tradesmen had no established institutions through which to press their grievances and demands on their governments. Where the social gap was wide and the guilds prominent, as at Augsburg, the oligarchy was the least mobile and the Evangelicals most likely to take their message into socially sensitive areas. Each of these factors—external forces, social structure and constitution—contributed to the urban governments’ variegatedly common situation.

Though some of the town council’s early acts on religion could be justified by its mandate to keep the peace and interpreted as well within the local traditions of church-state relations, by the early weeks of 1524, when the Third Imperial Diet of Nuremberg convened, the limits of tradition were being overstepped, or soon would be, at Strasbourg, Constance and perhaps Nuremberg. Each new challenge by or to episcopal authority brought closer the day when the Edict of Worms would be enforced. The edict was no dead letter. The Governing Council’s supplementary enforcing edict of 20 February, 1522, had been published

by Duke George the Bearded in his parts of Saxony and by the bishop of Freising, and Stuttgart’s own edict was to be followed by others in Western Austria. The Swabian League had nonetheless not yet been stirred to become the guardian of orthodoxy in South Germany, though it very soon would be, and the free cities’ governments felt as yet a palpable threat neither from above nor from below. This situation was about to change.

The ‘Luther Affair’ Surfaces, Nuremberg, 1524

In steten sind aufgstanden
vil predicanten frum,
hand dwarheit gnommen zhanden
und forchten in nit drum,
erboten zdisputieren
menglichem in der welt;
ob iemants könd probieren,
dass sie das volk verführen.
solt helfen sie kein gelt.  

An odd calm about the Luther affair had prevailed in Imperial politics since the Diet of Worms in 1521. The Second Diet of Nuremberg in 1522–3 had reformulated the German powers’ grievances against the papacy, bishops and clergy and had listened to Pope Adrian’s somber confession of the clergy’s contribution to the current disorders and laxity. Nor, to judge from the extant acts, did the religious question disturb the Urban Diet’s deliberations during four sessions between July 1522 and the following June. The subject did surface, however, at the Urban Diet of Speyer in November 1523, when the government of Wissembourg asked for advice about the excommunication of two of its clergymen by the bishop of Speyer. The cities decided not to aid Wissembourg, for the bishop’s action was justified by the Governing Council’s mandate of 6 March, 1523, against divisive preaching, and an opinion to this effect was signed by envoys from Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Ulm in the name of all the free cities, who ‘still

67 Rublack, Nördlingen. 139–45.
68 'In the cities has arisen many a pious man to preach God’s own true Gospel without the slightest fear. They’ve offered to debate it with anyone at all. If any can now prove that they lead the folk astray: they’ll get nothing as their pay,' Lillencron. Volkslieder. 3:510. no. 393. stanza 5.
stood on the ground of the Church’.\textsuperscript{71} For the urban oligarchies, as for the German ruling classes as a whole, down to the end of 1523 the religious question had not disturbed the traditional patterns of politics.

When the Imperial Diet opened ceremoniously at Nuremberg on 14 January, 1524, no sign showed that this calm would not prevail. The Diet’s agenda, drafted for Archduke Ferdinand by the Governing Council, gave highest priority to the reorganization and financing of the Governing Council and High Court.\textsuperscript{72} What no one at Nuremberg knew, and especially not Ferdinand, was that Jean Hannart had come from Spain with a secret instruction, which raised the Luther affair once more to prominence and demanded that the monk’s doctrine ‘must be suppressed and not allowed to spread’.\textsuperscript{73} Apparently – the initiative is still unclear – Charles had decided to bring the religious question to a head and solve it through the Diet’s reaffirmation of the Edict of Worms. Perhaps he was responding to the complaint, voiced by Pope Clement VII’s German legate, Lorenzo Campeggio, that ‘the Edict of Worms is not obeyed by many lay and ecclesiastical princes. How that could happen in the Empire, he [Campeggio] doesn’t understand’.\textsuperscript{74} Whatever the background, Charles’s action was certainly spectacular, if not quite ‘revolutionary’,\textsuperscript{75} for he demanded ‘that every ruler make sure that his subjects live according to His Majesty’s edicts’.\textsuperscript{76} The Diet eventually declared itself willing to enforce the edict, but only to the extent that ‘the Common Man’ was thereby given no cause for ‘rebellion, disobedience, murder, or slaughter’\textsuperscript{77} – a qualification that effectively took back with one hand what it gave with the other – and asked for a ‘national’ council of the Church in the Empire to meet at Speyer in September.\textsuperscript{78}

The Diet acted thus less out of sympathy for Luther than from instinctive resistance to the emperor when he operated, as Charles now did.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 231–40, with new documents; the quote is from 240.
\textsuperscript{72} RTA, J\textit{R}, 4:273, no. 32. See Rublack, \textit{Nördlingen}, 133; and H. Schmidt, ‘Reichsstädte’, 291–335, whose account is fullest and clearest.
\textsuperscript{73} RTA, J\textit{R}, 4:295, para. 3. Headley, \textit{Emperor}, 129. sheds new light on Hannart’s instruction.
\textsuperscript{74} RTA, J\textit{R}, 4:487, no. 106. See Mogge, ‘Studien’, 88–9. There are new perspectives on Charles’s religious policy during the 1520s in Reinhard, ‘Vorstellungen’, and Rabe, ‘Befunde’, especially 101, who notes that the religious question did not play a large role in the emperor’s correspondence.
\textsuperscript{77} RTA, J\textit{R}, 4:507, no. 113. This echoed the urban governments’ argument that they couldn’t enforce the law for fear of the Common Man.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 301, no. 36. See Mogge, ‘Studien’, 91; H. Schmidt, ‘Reichsstädte’, 299–305.
hand in glove with the pope, and from a fine sense for the mounting unrest among their subjects.

The Cities’ House displayed a remarkable solidarity in the discussions of the religious question, which began only after the arrival of Cardinal Campeggio in mid-March and continued until 19 April.\textsuperscript{79} Although they heartily approved the idea of a ‘national’ council, the cities protested en bloc against the reinstatement of the Edict of Worms, and their representatives refused to sign the Diet’s recess. In their memorial to the rest of the Diet, the cities raised above all the spectre of revolt.

because now the Common Man everywhere thirsts after God’s Word and the Gospel, which . . . have recently spread much more widely than before . . . if we accept, approve, or allow to be enforced even the slightest barrier to the Gospel’s spread, the honorable free and Imperial cities . . . could not only not enforce such a law, but they would doubtless provoke widespread disturbances, rebellion, murder, bloodshed, yes, total ruin and every sort of evil . . . The honorable free and Imperial cities, whom these developments would cause the greatest harm, damage and ruin, must prevent them and protect themselves and their people from such injury and ruin.\textsuperscript{80}

This document set the keynote for all subsequent efforts to keep the urban front together despite the division over religion: Without taking formal sides with either Evangelical religion or Catholicism, the cities stressed the futility of all outside attempts to suppress the former, in view of the Common Man’s support for the Evangelical cause and his propensity for rebellion. The cities thus took de facto a pro-Evangelical position without taking sides on doctrinal grounds.\textsuperscript{81} The policy was formulated by a committee with a pro-Evangelical majority from Nuremberg, Strasbourg and Ulm, but it was weakened by removal of positively pro-Evangelical elements to accommodate Cologne and other Catholic governments.\textsuperscript{82}

The actions of the Cities’ House of the Diet at Nuremberg provide the first evidence that pro-Evangelical governments and politicians were beginning to set the tone in the urban front. Only nine cities took much active role in the deliberations, and Nuremberg and Strasbourg seem to have taken the leading parts. On the question of the council, the cities decided to follow Strasbourg’s Hans Bock rather than Nuremberg’s

\textsuperscript{80} RTA, JR. 4: 506–8, no. 113, here at 507, lines 27–37, and 508, lines 1–6. The call for a council is at p. 508, lines 20–2.
\textsuperscript{81} G. Schmidt, \textit{Städteetag}, 481; Scribner, ‘Cologne’.
\textsuperscript{82} G. Schmidt, \textit{Städteetag}, 482–3, who found the document at Frankfurt.
Spengler. Spengler counseled delay, believing that 'the longer it goes on, the more, praise be to God, the Word of God will spread to and take root in all parts of the land, so that nothing can be undertaken against it.' 83 The current dilemma was a test for the city folk, 'whether or not they are Christians', and if they stood fast, Christ would defend his own, 'for I am certain that Christ is Lord also over his enemies and thus is mighty enough to sustain this cause ... against many foes'. 84 'However mighty, awesome, or powerful they might be', he declared, the opposition 'cannot hitch the stirrup one notch higher than where God long ago ordained and decreed it to be'. 85 The danger of a council, he warned, was that it might rule against the Evangelicals.

Strasbourg's government, by contrast, wanted the religious question referred to a council. This policy, first broached by the Imperial Diet at Nuremberg in January 1523, 86 had been taken up at Strasbourg no later than the following December, before the Evangelicals had a clear majority. 87 Bock's instruction for Nuremberg had lamented the misunderstandings and disputes over religion, which only a free, public hearing of the preachers could dispel: 'whatever a free council or Christian assembly [gemein] would then decide, the government and commune of Strasbourg, which have ever been and still are an obedient, Christian member of the Holy Roman Empire, would support and accept'. 88 The urban envoys at Nuremberg endorsed this policy and rejected the reinstatement of the Edict of Worms as unenforceable. This formula, which united Evangelical and Catholic envoys and thus preserved urban solidarity, 'was neither a theological demonstration nor a beacon, but a decision based on considerations of political utility'. 89

83 RTA, JR, 4:491, no. 107.
84 Ibid., 238–9, no. 28, and see 50 n. 1.
85 Ibid., 490, lines 14–15, 27–36, and see 492–3 for his rejection of a council. The document is summarized by Brecht, 'Politik', 188, who exaggerates Spengler's role.
86 RTA, JR, 3:424, lines 23–5, no. 79. See Bernhard Wurmser von Vendenheim and Daniel Mieg to the Stettmeister and Senate of Strasbourg, Nuremberg, 4 Feb. 1523, in ibid., 924, lines 7–8, no. 250.
87 The instruction for the Urban Diet at Speyer in Dec. 1523 is in Annales de Sébastien Brant, no. 4484. Moeller, 'Zwinglis Disputationen, II': 222, is properly cautious about drawing conclusions from it about religious policy, but Brecht, 'Politik', 188–9, is not. On the context, see my Ruling Class, 205–8.
88 PCSS, 1:87–8, no. 162; there is a better text in Bucer, Deutsche Schriften, 1:345–7. Brecht, 'Politik', 189 n. 33, believes that the idea may have come from Bucer, but this cannot be proved. For discussions at Strasbourg, see Annales de Sébastien Brant, no. 4495; PCSS, 1: no. 166.
89 G. Schmidt, Stüdtag, 482, who criticizes Brecht. 'Politik', 190–1.
During the spring and summer of 1524, the popular movement in the free cities ‘reached its first peak’.\(^90\) At Strasbourg five parishes, those of the ‘little people’—fishermen, gardeners, and craftsmen—moved to select their own preachers; and by summer’s end the government ordered the purge of all religious images from the churches.\(^91\) At Augsburg, the government’s immobility brought the city to the brink of an uprising over the dismissal of Johann Schilling, who preached that ‘if the government will not act, the commune must’.\(^92\) After nearly eighteen hundred Augsburgers gathered before the city hall on 6 August, shouting for their favorite, on the ninth the senators appeared in full armor and cowed the crowd outside, and they sealed their courage by sending two old weavers ‘with bloody hands from life into death’.\(^93\) Jacob Fugger closed his office, buried his cash, and fled to Biberach an der Riss. At Ulm, the government called in June the first official Evangelical preacher, Konrad Sam (1483–1533), after a citizens’ petition on 22 May had demanded that Catholic preaching be prohibited.\(^94\) At Constance, where matters were more advanced, the preachers and their Catholic opponents were already squaring off for a disputation à la Zurich.\(^95\) There were riots and demonstrations against the Catholic clergy in many towns, not least in Frankfurt am Main.\(^96\)

No other city seethed more tumultuously during the summer than did Nuremberg, whose population, now relieved of the Imperial government’s presence, took up the Evangelical cause in all seriousness. Lutheran preaching had already become an everyday matter, and it was said during Easter Week 1524 that ‘the preachers here preach more sharply than ever before against the pope, cardinals, and bishops’.\(^97\) Important changes were made in Catholic ceremonies during these weeks, and Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) turned his rhetorical guns on both clerical and lay authorities. ‘He is now also attacking the lay authority’, one report ran, ‘to the degree that the subjects might well rise up against it’.\(^98\) In truth, peasants around nearby Forchheim had

\(^90\) H. Schmidt, ‘Reichsstädte’, 464, who surveys the subject on 444–64.

\(^91\) Chrisman, Strasbourg, 114–16, 138–40, 144; Brady, Ruling Class, 166–8; Bornert, La réforme protestante, 133–4.


\(^93\) H. Lutz, Peutinger, 235.

\(^94\) Kelm, Reichsstadt Ulm, 64–6, 86–8; Naujoks, Obrigkeitsgedanke, 57–8; Brecht, ‘Ulm’, 98.

\(^95\) Rublack, Einführung, 40–1.

\(^96\) Jahns, Frankfurt, 35–6.

\(^97\) Quoted by Vogler, Nürnberg, 58; see 58–63.

\(^98\) Quoted in ibid., 59.
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recently rebelled, and Nuremberg artisans were joining them.\textsuperscript{99} The movement’s first peak also created painful stresses within Nuremberg’s oligarchy, dividing families and friends. Susanna Stromer, a nun of very good family, poured out her distress to Katharina, widow of Caspar Kress:

Ursula Topler has no good reason for leaving her convent, only that she was treated too laxly and that her monk and friends sent her Lutheran books. I’ve not had such a bad life in the convent, and I’ve never wanted to take a husband.

\ldots Dearest Auntie, I trust that you will stick to the old ways and won’t forget entirely the poor nuns here. God searches out his own in all classes of society, finds good and bad everywhere; and the good shouldn’t be wiped out because of the bad. This is God’s punishment on the clergy, and I hope that His divine goodness will yet turn things around and make them turn out for the best.\textsuperscript{100}

Yet the movement could not be held back at Nuremberg, and soon Huldrych Zwingli was saluting the Nurembergers as comrades in arms.\textsuperscript{101}

The rumblings in their own commons did not disrupt the urban front – not yet. The cities came together again in an Urban Diet at Speyer in mid-July 1524. Although the agenda contained six separate points, yet, as Nuremberg pointed out, it ‘is true that among other articles this matter, which has been called the new, misleading doctrine, is not the least, in fact, we would call it the most important, the principal matter’.\textsuperscript{102} It had, in other words, replaced the customs duty, monopolies, and the Spanish embassy as the most pressing subject. The leadership of Strasbourg and Nuremberg, established at the recent Imperial Diet,\textsuperscript{103} still held, though the two governments could not agree on a policy. Nuremberg wanted the cities to frame another appeal to Charles V – their favorite tactic – to ask for a more moderate law, and they insisted that each city should prepare its own case for the national council at Speyer in the fall. The Strasbourgois, however, were instructed to urge the cities to form a stronger unity and to put their


\textsuperscript{100} Pfeiffer, Quellen, 306–7 (after 4 Dec., 1524).

\textsuperscript{101} Zwingli to Willibald Pirckheimer, Zurich, 24 Oct., 1524: ‘Futurum arbitror, ut Norimberga et Tigurum aliquando in eodem jungantur foedere \ldots ’ ibid., 293, from Z, 8: no. 349.

\textsuperscript{102} Quoted by H. Schmidt, ‘Reichsstädte’. 465.

\textsuperscript{103} Simon Reibeiens to the bishop of Strasbourg, 17 April, 1524, in RTA jR. 4:173, lines 27–32. no. 25. The published sources for the Urban Diet of Speyer. 13–18 July, 1524, are collected by Brecht, ‘Politik.’
houses in order through stricter censorship and firmer controls on preaching, so ‘that nothing should be presented and preached but the holy divine scriptures, to the enhancement of God’s honor and love of neighbor, and brotherly concord should be preserved. And all other doctrines, which contradict the holy scriptures and lead to rebellion and discord, should be abolished.’ The cities must also face the national council as one body, and they ‘should prepare a common memorial to justify the chief points: that the priests are taking wives; that the Eucharist is received by laymen under both species; and that no one is bound by church law to confess sins, to fast, and other such things’. As to the Edict of Worms, the emperor must be told that enforcement ‘is not possible’, and that ‘where it is enforced, it would lead to great rebellion and conflict between commune and government, and between clergy and laity’.

Probably the Strasbourgeois tried to make the urban front more decidedly Evangelical than was possible, especially as concerned the preparations for the national council. The Urban Diet could nevertheless agree that the Edict of Worms, restated and given teeth by a mandate from the Governing Council, was simply unenforceable in the cities, and Strasbourg, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Ulm agreed to represent this refusal of full obedience to the Governing Council. Some other cities were not willing to go this far, and none was willing to join Strasbourg and Ulm in planning an urban military league to defend the cities in religious matters. The time was unripe for an Evangelical urban front. The Urban Diet’s letter of grievance to Charles V, however, spoke of a fear every urban officeholder could share:

In the past the honorable free and Imperial cities . . . have always shown every possible form of obedience to the Roman emperors and kings . . . yet this edict is so framed that many of them cannot enforce all of its articles without provoking serious uprisings, the destruction of law and order, and dissension between commons and regimes and between clergy and laity. This will all lead to murder and bloodshed, and the honorable free and Imperial cities will thereby be alienated from His Imperial Majesty. and the Holy Roman Empire will be pushed toward certain ruin.

104 PCSS, 1:92, no. 171. and there too, the following quotes.
106 The recess is in StA Ulm. A 527.
108 Förstemann, Neues Urkundenbuch, 1:211. no. 855, dated to July or early Aug., but almost certainly drafted about 18 July. 1524. For the Ulmers’ position, see Naujoks, Obrigkeitsgedanke, 57; the Nurembergers’ policy is noted by Brecht. ‘Politik’, 196. from Pfeiffer. Quellen. 158-63.
As these lines were written, armed peasants were already patrolling the valleys in the southern Black Forest, harbingers of the coming revolution.

These summer months were the urban front’s Indian summer. To be sure, the advance of the Evangelical movements in some prominent cities gradually shifted the tone in the Urban Diet in a pro-Evangelical direction, but not so strongly that the cities had been split by the religious question. The urban commons were nevertheless pushing their governments farther and farther into illegality and open heterodoxy. The appeal to a national council, which had been framed by the entire Imperial Diet, preserved, for the moment, the urban governments’ freedom of action to meet the pressure from below with concessions. This could continue, probably, so long as the other blade of the scissors did not begin to close.

The Fall of the Urban Front

Also ists vast aufgangen
in allem deutschen land,
zu Wittenberg angfangen,
den Entchrist bracht in shand. 109

While in Germany the Luther affair was developing from the disobedience of a provincial professor into a movement of tremendous power, at Charles V’s court in Spain it could not even be discussed. Or so wrote Margrave Hans of Brandenburg in mid-1525 to his brother, Casimir, confessing that he knew little about the new doctrine, about which no one at court would enlighten him, for fear of angering Charles. 110 Charles himself did not have to rely on ecclesiastical channels for his knowledge of heresy’s progress, for Archduke Ferdinand’s letters expressed mounting concern about it.

One of the most important things Ferdinand had learned since his arrival in 1522 was that the Habsburg power in Germany was truly in danger. He entered an Austria aboil with unrest and rebellion. His agents in Tyrol met armed resistance from country folk, who demanded to be put directly under the emperor, while radicals convened their own assemblies in the Lower Austrian duchies and called for death to the

109 ‘The movement come from Wittenberg has spread on every breeze through the whole German land and brought Antichrist to his knees.’ Liliencron, Volkslieder. 3:510, no. 393, stanza 4.
110 Friedensburg, Vorgeschichte, 104 n. 2.
nobles. Some of his subjects warned him, he reported, that they had to have a natural prince or else they'd turn Swiss. The shade of Maximilian van Bergen, who had not lived to see Ferdinand's Austrian progress, must have smiled. Ferdinand also seems to have comprehended that the unrest racing through his and his brother's lands represented the common desire to extend to entire lands the principles of communal-federal life as learned in the village, district, mining and urban communes and in the territorial diets. It was with good reason, therefore, that he congratulated Charles on the smashing of the Castilian comuneros, whose ultimate demand might very well have suited his own Austrian subjects: 'The notions of the nobles and heathens belong to the past; the entire kingdom should live as one commune in peace and justice under one king and one law.' As a prince of strong dynastic consciousness, but also as a younger brother who very much wanted authority independent from an elder one, Ferdinand strove to convince Charles that conditions in Germany required Ferdinand's election as King of the Romans and successor to Charles, if the decline of Habsburg prestige there were to be arrested.

In reporting to Charles the progress of the German heresy, Ferdinand added to his other motives a desire to protect the religion of his ancestors. 'Sire', he wrote to Charles from Nuremberg at the end of 1523, 'the Lutheran sect reigns so thoroughly in this land of Germany that the good Christians hardly think they can declare themselves and be known as such.' At Constance, heresy was being openly preached, 'and such is no less preached here in Nuremberg and in all the other Imperial cities. Also, the people refuse to pay tithes, eat meat on Friday, take the sacrament without first confessing, and do other things of that sort.' Charles reacted to these and other reports with his 'great displeasure,

111 V. von Kraus, Zur Geschichte Oesterreichs; Lhotsky, Zeitalter, 81–92, 98–104; Fichtner, Ferdinand I of Austria, 22–5.
114 Laubach, 'Nachfolge', 6–10.
that the Lutheran sect dominates in all Germany'. 117 The Third Diet of Nuremberg was just about to end, and Ferdinand fanned the flame by adding—and here the truth gave blessed support to his own ambition—that 'in the Lutheran matter...[there is] the greatest moment and danger'. 118 He then clinched the argument through a messenger he sent to Charles in June 1524, suggesting that the Germans might force 'the electors to elect a new [i.e., a Lutheran] king'. 119 Charles, who had paid dearly for the Imperial candidacy of Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony in 1519, knew what that meant.

Charles, meanwhile, in the spirit of his current policy and convinced, apparently, that the leading southern free cities were indeed fonts of the heresy, wrote to Nuremberg to express his displeasure 'that you and the other estates support Luther so much'. He charged the government with allowing Lutheran books to be printed and sold, thereby encouraging others to similar acts of disobedience. Nuremberg should abandon Lutheranism, 'since most of the others in the Holy Empire will follow your example', and because otherwise the city would lose its liberties. 120 The wisdom of this harder approach was confirmed by Ferdinand in August, when he reported that the free cities, assembled at Speyer (in July), had decided to defend the cause of Luther, 'with whose doctrine they are so thoroughly infected that you cannot imagine it'. 121 Lest Ferdinand be accused of merely trying to increase the pressure on Charles to give him more independence, Jean Hannart, who was no friend to Ferdinand, reported from Germany in the same vein. 122 From Charles's perspective, therefore, the southern free cities, which in the late summer of 1523 had emerged as the best potential supporters of stronger Habsburg rule in the Empire, a year later had become the nurseries of a

118 Archduke Ferdinand to Charles V, Nuremberg, April 27, 1524, in ibid., 115, no. 65, para. 7.
119 Archduke Ferdinand's instruction for Karel de Bredam, Stuttgart, 13 June, 1524, in ibid., 158, no. 76, para. 16.
122 Jean Hannart wrote on 26 April, 1524: 'Item il faut grandement peser le fait de ladite secte luterane, pour ce quelle est desla fort esparse en toute la lemaignes ingendar beaucoup de mauux et desobeissance du peuple, tant contre les gens deglige comme vers les superieurs et justices. Et fait sur ce paz a noter, que toutes les villes imperiales ont proteste contre lexecution dudit mandat de Worms, et a ceste occasion non voulu seeller ledit departement et recez.' Lanz, Korrespondenz., 1:127, no. 55.
movement that, if successful, would undermine the church whose symbols and authority lent legitimacy to the Habsburg sense of dynastic calling.

It remained to find an instrument to bring the cities in line. The Imperial Diet was unsuitable, because it had called for a national council. The Governing Council lay then in the throes of its transfer to Esslingen, a move that would increase princely suspicion of it.123 Of the Swabian League, on the other hand, some expected much as a bulwark against the Lutheran onslaught,124 but the League’s council contained a strong voice from the cities, the objects of repression, and it had princely enemies as well. It was never to be an entirely reliable instrument for the defense of Catholicism in South Germany.

The idea of a new military league, the first of those confessional leagues that would dominate German political life until 1648, probably came from Lorenzo Campeggio, the papal legate, and Duke William of Bavaria.125 It was called the ‘Regensburg Pact’, because of its creation by Archduke Ferdinand, Dukes William and Louis of Bavaria, and twelve South German bishops at Regensburg between 27 June and 7 July, 1524. Its aims were enforcement of the Edict of Worms and a church reform to take the wind from Lutheran sails. Though this league fell victim to the anti-Habsburg turn of Bavarian policy in 1525, it had some lasting success in splitting some of the smaller Upper Swabian free cities – Ueberlingen, Ravensburg, Leutkirch, Wangen and Pfullendorf – away from the increasingly Evangelical Urban Diet.126 The Regensburg Pact also threw Duke William, rather than Archduke Ferdinand, into the spotlight as the political leader of a nascent Catholic party in the South. William had come early to the conclusion that the bishops alone

123 Baumgarten. Geschichte, 2:330–2. See Jean Hannart to Charles V. Nuremberg, 6 March, 1524, in Lanz. Korrespondenz, 1:105, no. 52. On the Governing Council’s religious complexion at this time, see Archduke Ferdinand to Charles V. 12 May, 1523, in W. Bauer and Lacroix, Korrespondenz, 1:59, no. 36, para. 10. Ferdinand wrote to Charles from Nuremberg, 18 Dec., 1523, that ‘d’autre part led. regimen et la ligne de Zwave [Schwaben] ne s’accordent point bien ne est possibles, car ilz sont totalement contraires...’ Ibid., 84, no. 50, para. 9.

124 Gerwig Blarer to Dr. Johann Fabri, May 18, 1524, in Blarer. Briefe und Akten, 1:31, lines 3–4, no. 50. See G. Müller, Kurie, 286; Rublack, Nördlingen, 139–42. There was also a princely opposition to the League, for which see Salomies. Plänz, 36–7.


could not halt the Lutheran advance, and his role as a leader of the Catholic party happily united the defence of the faith with a weakening of Habsburg influence.

The dreamy calm of Indian summer broke in late September 1524, when Charles’s decision on the Diet’s request arrived from Spain. There would be no national council at Speyer on Saint Martin’s Day; and the Edict of Worms would be enforced to the letter. With this Edict of Burgos fell the death blow, not to the Urban Diet or the tradition of urban cooperation, but to the urban front – that is, to the promise of making urban solidarity effective through a new kind of partnership with the monarch. When Charles’s reply to the Diet became known, the Edict of Worms stood alone as valid Imperial law on the Lutheran question. The emperor’s decision fell as a hammer blow on the urban front, not so much because the Speyer assembly might have achieved a solution to the religious question – there was little hope of that – but for two other reasons. First, it came at a time when the Evangelical movement was making perceptible progress, week by week, in the cities, pushing the governments further and further toward partisanship for the new religion. Secondly, it found the South on the brink of the greatest social upheaval in German history, the great Revolution of 1525, called ‘the German Peasants’ War’.

The movement of the leading urban governments toward public defence of the Evangelical cause was no figment of Archduke Ferdinand’s imagination. Two Nurembergers, Hieronymus Ebner and Caspar Nützel, described the recent Urban Diet to Elector Frederick the Wise: “The free cities have appeared in great numbers, and others have sent proxies, to a meeting at Speyer [in mid-July], where they decided unanimously to hold to the Word of God, come what may.” Count Palatine Frederick, too, noted a new sense of unity in this Urban Diet and thought it meant future trouble for the

127 Duke William of Bavaria to Duke Ernest of Bavaria, 2 Jan., 1524, in ARC, 1:162–3, quoted by H. Lutz, ‘Das konfessionelle Zeitalter, I’, 313 n. 2. The text has a phrase that is usually taken as proof of Evangelical sentiments, ‘die gottliehe ehre und unser heiliger glauben’. 

128 The edict is in Förstemann, Neues Urkundenbuch, 1:204–5. Brecht, ‘Politik’, 197–202, describes these events, though he elsewhere (193) seems to confuse an edict of 18 April 1524, drafted in Charles’s name by the Governing Council, with the edict sent from Spain. Borth, Luthersache, 158 n. 233, lists the three edicts.

129 G. Schmidt, Städtetag, 478, rightly criticizes me (in ‘Jacob Sturm and the Lutherans’, 202) for construing the effects too drastically.

130 Oberman, ‘Gospel of Social Unrest’, explains why the term is inappropriate.

131 Förstemann, Neues Urkundenbuch, 1:213, no. 87.
princes.\textsuperscript{132} The surviving documents drafted in free cities for the national council at Speyer reveal an impressive new commitment to Evangelical principles and language, though not necessarily to specifically Lutheran ones, and breathe the strong biblicism native to the urban Reformation.\textsuperscript{133}

The news from Spain reinforced the slide toward an urban front committed to the Evangelical cause. This is visible in the Urban Diet that met at Ulm on Saint Nicholas's Day (6 December), 1524. Some small Upper Swabian Catholic towns boycotted the assembly, but most of the big folk were represented: Strasbourg by two Evangelicals, Egenolf Röder von Diersberg and Martin Herlin; Nuremberg by two burgomasters, Christoph Tetzel and Clemens Volckamer; Augsburg by Antoni Bimel, who already stood under Zwingli’s influence; Constance by Jakob Zeller, a strongly Evangelical guildsman; and Esslingen by Hans Holdermann, who kept his distance from the Evangelicals without opposing them.\textsuperscript{134} The Edict of Burgos frightened away the Frankfurters, who wrote that ‘we must obey this edict [of Worms] insofar as we are able, so that we cannot send anyone to this meeting without incurring considerable risk’.\textsuperscript{135} Called at Nuremberg’s request, this Urban Diet dealt officially with ‘Luther’s doctrine’ for the first time.\textsuperscript{136}

It is not true, as has been alleged, that the Urban Diet of Ulm on 6 through 13 December, 1524, displayed ‘the primacy of the Reformation religious principle in the cities’ common policy in 1524’.\textsuperscript{137} Despite the deliberate absence of a large number of cities, the Diet did not adopt the views of Lazarus Spengler, who criticized his own masters, and those of the other cities, for their timidity.

\textsuperscript{132} Count Palatine Frederick to Counts Palatine Ottheinrich and Philip. 5 Aug., 1524, in Friedensburg. \textit{Reichstag zu Speyer}, 10. Under his presidency, the Governing Council began to move against cities for failure to enforce the Edict of Worms. Naujoks, \textit{Obrigkeitsgedanke}, 58.


\textsuperscript{134} Brady. \textit{Ruling Class}, 317–18, 342–3. Nuremberg’s envoys are listed in the recess. in StA Ulm, A 529, fol. 24\textsuperscript{r}. See also F. Roth, \textit{Reformationsgeschichte}, 1:88, 102 n. 7; Rublack, \textit{Einführung}, 107–8; idem. \textit{Bewegung}, 197; Krabbe and Rublack, \textit{Akten}, nos. 162–5.

\textsuperscript{135} Jahns. \textit{Frankfurt}, 36, Frankfurt did send a proxy to Ulm. StA Ulm, A 529, fol. 25\textsuperscript{r}.

\textsuperscript{136} The meeting was called at Nuremberg’s request (StA Ulm, A 529, fol. 3\textsuperscript{r}) to consider Luther’s doctrine (ibid., fol. 2\textsuperscript{r}). Thirty envoys attended (ibid., fols. 3\textsuperscript{r}–4\textsuperscript{r}). The recess is in ibid., fols. 2\textsuperscript{r}–25\textsuperscript{r}.

They should not be so timid in this matter, which concerns not only this
government but all the Empire’s subjects, and which is not the cause of
any one person, but God’s cause. They shouldn’t start at every carnival
mask, such as are used daily to frighten them; but, as Christian people,
they should trust God. His word and righteousness, because they seek
nothing else than His honor, their subjects’ welfare, and the good of all
Christendom – not their own interests. If you trust God more than men,
He will become your helper in His own good time, and He will never
abandon those who trust in Him. Viewed in the light of God’s grace, this
matter is not so dangerous that the council should abandon those whose
hearts are in the right place or do anything that is improper or disad-
vantagious before God and the world, for the government would other-
wise give a public example for abandoning the gospel.\footnote{Pfeiffer, Quellen. 176; the following quote is at 172.}

The entire Evangelical movement, Spengler trumpeted, is ‘a great . . .
courageous . . . assembly, which will permit no power to wrest it from
the gospel and the Word of God’, and the best way to defend it is through
an embassy to inform Charles V about the conditions in the Empire. The
Constancers wanted to go even farther and send ‘learned and pious
men’ to Spain to instruct the emperor in the new doctrine and its reli-
gious and social benefits.\footnote{Spengler’s memorial is in ibid., 168–77; and the Constance document is
‘Reichsstädte’, 485–502; G. Schmidt, Städtetag, 487–90.}

The Urban Diet at Ulm heard the Edict of Burgos read and then
resolved

not to sit by and do nothing, but to act diligently . . . and, with God’s
grace, to seek suitable ways, means and assistance in nullifying the sever-
lity of said penal edict, or in counteracting it effectively. For if this is not
done, the efforts of the free and Imperial cities’ grim and hateful foes –
especially the fish whose water is removed by the holy, indestructible
Word of God [i.e., the bishops] – will produce evil worse than any pen can
describe . . .\footnote{StA Ulm. A 529, fol. 4; the following quote is at fol. 5.}

The best remedy would be a ‘Christian letter’ [\emph{ein Christenlich schrifft}] to
warn the emperor that ‘it is not humanly possible for the free and Im-
perial cities to enforce this edict on the Common Man or other subjects
or to force them to give up the Word and call of God, without uprisings,
ruin, destruction, and bloodshed within our communes’. This was the
same argument the cities had employed at the Third Diet of Nuremberg
and again at the Urban Diet at Speyer in July 1524. This time, however.
a new spirit, intensely religious and direct, animated their pleas. 'For we confess by our consciences', they wrote to Charles.

and on our souls' salvation, that in this we seek nothing else and ask for nothing more earnestly from God, than that His divine honor, praise and honor of His holy name, and also brotherly love, to be advanced. Also, [we desire] that His authentic Word be preached to all men throughout the whole world for salvation and solace, and that the prosperity, welfare, and prestige of the Holy Roman Empire and of Your Imperial Majesty be increased.\textsuperscript{141}

The envoys were careful, to be sure, to distance themselves from Luther and his doctrine.

It has not been. and is not now, our intention, desire, or opinion to defend in any way or to support Luther's person or his doctrine, particularly where the latter is supposed to be against the Word of God and the holy gospel. For we consider Luther to be a man, who can err as other men do. We were not baptized in the said Luther's name or that of any other man. He did not suffer for us, and he did not bear and pay for our sins. But we believe in God the Almighty as our Creator and head of His Christian churches. Who saved us through the death of His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and Whose Word and gospel we will support, so long as He gives us grace.\textsuperscript{142}

There is nonetheless an unmistakably Evangelical ring to their denunciation of all laws and edicts issued 'to forbid us in any way the Word of God, from which alone we have life, through which we must be preserved and be saved, and which alone we want to protect against all human doctrines, teachings, and opinions'. Nothing like this, surely, had ever before been submitted to Charles V. The Urban Diet of Ulm also worked out a plan of collective security to aid those cities that were being prosecuted for violations of the Edict of Worms, such as those by the bishop of Speyer against Wissenbourg and Landau and that of the bishop of Augsburg against Kaufbeuren. It was not the much-discussed urban league, but it was a step in that direction.\textsuperscript{143}

While the Urban Diet deliberated and framed conclusions, South Germany rolled on toward revolution. The social landscape sprouted volcanoes, as peasants rose in arms in the bishopric of Bamberg.

\textsuperscript{141} Pfeiffer, Quellen. 310, who prints the full text (308–11) from StA Ulm. A 529, fols. 5\textsuperscript{v}–10\textsuperscript{v}. See Brecht. 'Politik'. 200–1.

\textsuperscript{142} Pfeiffer, Quellen. 308–9, and there, too, the following quote.

\textsuperscript{143} StA Ulm. A 529, fols. 11\textsuperscript{r}, 11\textsuperscript{v}–12\textsuperscript{r}, 12\textsuperscript{v}–17\textsuperscript{r}, 19\textsuperscript{v}–w, 21\textsuperscript{r}–22. Well over 90 per cent of the text deals with this issue.
the southern Black Forest and Switzerland. At Wendelstein near Schwabach in Franconia, they drove out their pastor and claimed the right to install a new one, and at Thayngen near Schaffhausen they did the same.\footnote{G. Franz, \textit{Der deutsche Bauernkrieg}, 100–1. See, in general, ibid., 99–112; Blickle, \textit{Revolution von 1525}, 24, 28, 38, 160, 206, 214, 220, 223, 249–50, 277.} From its starting point in the Black Forest, the revolt had spread since early summer into the Klettgau and the Hegau, the politically spongey boundary zone between Swabia and the Confederacy.\footnote{G. Franz, \textit{Der deutsche Bauernkrieg}, 104–18; idem. \textit{Bauernkrieg. Aktenband}, 241. no. 83.} Nowhere did the urban Evangelical movements and the rural uprisings, both nourished by communalism, converge more successfully than along the higher reaches of the Upper Rhine, where Balthasar Hubmaier (1481–1528), a Swabian radical with a strong anti-Jewish record, drew together around Waldshut all the complaints of the Common Man – against the priests, the Jews, the merchants, and the Austrian government.\footnote{G. Franz, \textit{Der deutsche Bauernkrieg}, 110–13; Scott, ‘Reformation and Peasants’ War’.}

The fundamental theme of these movements was expressed by the upland subjects of the great abbey of Sankt Blasien in the southern Black Forest, who declared that they simply wanted to be free, like other ‘peoples’ [\textit{Landschaften}] and pay no more dues.\footnote{G. Franz, \textit{Der deutsche Bauernkrieg}, 107. On the rural movement’s phases, see Blickle, ‘Social Protest’, 7–9.} The Evangelicals’ desire for religious self-rule converged with and mightily strengthened the much broader and older movement for self-rule in general, which had sprung from the erosion and defeat of feudal lordship. Had it not been for the preachers and printers of the early 1520s, who spread common symbols and slogans of encouragement and resistance, possibly the \textit{Bundschuh} actions of 1502 and 1513–17 would now appear as mere aftershocks of the Swabian War of 1499, not as preliminary tremors to the Revolution of 1525.

And so, while the urban governments, pressed from below by their own commons, came to the brink of declaring all-out partisanship for the Evangelical cause, and while their sovereign, who was convinced that the cities were nursing heresy, the mother of rebellion, tightened the pressure on them from above, all around the public peace and the self-confidence of lords were melting away before the fires of revolt. This conflagration would reveal both the fundamental weaknesses of the Habsburg power in South Germany and how impotent the free cities were without effective royal leadership.
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