Chapter 1
Reformations

A German event

It starts in a thunderstorm in the summer of 1505. On the road near Erfurt, in the Germany principality of Saxony, a young law student is caught in the downpour, and fears for his life amidst the ferocious strikes of lightning. He prays to St Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, offering a bargain: if she will spare his life, he will become a monk. A fortnight later, he bangs on the door of the Erfurt house of the reformed Augustinian friars, one of the strictest of all the religious orders.

Martin Luther told the story about himself, decades later, and it may not have happened that way. But everything about the tale is significant: the intensity of the medieval cult of the saints, the combined quest for material and spiritual salvation, the setting in Germany. Asking why the Reformation started in Germany is a bit like asking why the Communist Revolution started in Russia, or the telephone was invented in America – it happened there because it happened there. Some important 'preconditions' seem absent. In contrast to Hussite Bohemia, or Lollard-flecked England, Germany was pretty much a heresy-free zone in the decades around 1500, with little formal challenge to the authority of the Church. What was distinctive was its political structure. Unlike the emergent national monarchies of France, England, and

Spain, Germany was politically fragmented – a patchwork of petty princedoms, ecclesiastical territories, and self-governing cities, under the nominal suzerainty of the grandly named Holy Roman Emperor. The office was elective, the emperor chosen by seven territorial 'Electors' (including three archbishops). At the time of Luther's entry into the monastery the throne was occupied by the Habsburg dynasty, in the person of Maximilian I. Imperial business was conducted at meetings of the *Reichstag*, or 'diets' of the imperial estates, at which electors, princes, and towns were all represented, and took the opportunity to formulate their grievances, often about the need for reform in the Church.

Germans compensated for political weakness with a passionate cultural and linguistic nationalism. The international scholarly movement for the revival of ancient learning known as humanism (not to be confused with modern secular humanism) had a German limb, which found in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus descriptions of a free and vigorous Germanic people, underlining a contemporary sense of subjugation. The nasty side of German nationalism was an intense Italo-phobia. The far side of the Alps was a source of moral and cultural corruption – and, with one brief exception, all 15th- and 16th-century popes were Italians. There was a political context for this prejudice; Germany was the one important part of Western Europe outside Italy itself where the papal aspiration to direct 'monarchical' government of the Church still had some real purchase. The kings of France, Spain, and England were dutiful sons of Rome. But in a quiet way they had been nationalizing the Church in their territories, securing the right to nominate bishops, for example, and using that power to reward loyal servants. The vacuum of centralized control in Germany meant that popes retained greater power to appoint to ecclesiastical offices, and, via the prince-bishops, to extract taxation from the populace – always a fertile source of bitterness. Anticlericalism – an antipathy to the political power of the clergy – does not equate to rejection of Church teachings. All the evidence suggests that early 16th-century Germany was a pious and

orthodox Catholic society. But national and anticlerical resentments abounded, and they found their voice in Luther.

The Luther affair

On 31 October 1517, Luther nailed a long list of points for disputation – Ninety-Five Theses – to the door of the church near the castle in the Saxon capital of Wittenberg. It is a moment that has reverberated in history, the day on which the Protestant Reformation was born and the Middle Ages suddenly dropped dead. The reality is more prosaic. Some scholars have denied that the Theses were ever posted at all. It seems likely that they were, but this was hardly a world-shattering act. Luther was now a professor at the recently founded University of Wittenberg, and the conventional method of initiating academic debate within the theology faculty was to post theses in advance. Because of its handy location, the door of the Castle Church served as the university's bulletin board, and Luther's gesture has been seen as no more dramatic than pinning up a lecture list in a modern college. The Theses themselves were not particularly revolutionary: they did not reject the authority of the pope, or call for the founding of a new church, and they addressed a fairly minor and obscure point of theology. There was in 1517 no blueprint to reform the Church, no foreseeable outcome. Political circumstances, combined with Luther's stubbornness and eventual willingness to think the unthinkable, allowed it all to get out of hand.

The original issue was indulgences. These were an outgrowth of the Church's teaching on sin and penance. Confession to a priest guaranteed forgiveness from God, but the legal-minded thinking of the Middle Ages maintained this still left a 'debt' to be paid for sin. Some of this could be worked off in this life through performance of penances. The rest would be extracted in purgatory – a place in the afterlife where the souls of all but the truly wicked and the excessively saintly would suffer for a while before being admitted,

1. Lucas Cranach's 1520 portrait of Martin Luther depicts him as still very much the Catholic friar

debt-free and purified, into heaven. Indulgences were a certificate remitting some of the punishment due in purgatory in exchange for performance of a good work (they were originally developed as an inducement for people to go on crusade) or giving money to a good cause. Popes argued that, as heads of the Church on earth, they could draw on the 'surplus' good deeds of the saints to underwrite indulgences. The system had a coherent underlying logic, but it was open to abuse, and had been criticized by some thinkers, especially humanists, long before Luther. The papal indulgence issued in 1515 looked particularly dodgy from the viewpoint of moralists and reformers. It was designed to raise money for a prestige project, the building of the new Renaissance Basilica of St Peter in Rome. Its sale in Germany was arranged by one of the worst of the worldly prince-bishops, Albrecht of Brandenburg, who was to keep a share of the proceeds to pay back the bankers who had financed his purchase of the archbishopric of Mainz. Fronting the campaign was a Dominican friar, Johan Tetzel, who went about his business in an effective but crude and materialistic way, employing the advertising jingle, 'as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory to heaven springs'. Luther was appalled by Tetzel's methods, and by a popular response which seemed to show no understanding of the need for true repentance. There was also no love lost between the Dominicans and the Augustinians. When Pope Leo X first heard of the controversy, he dismissed it lightly as 'a quarrel among friars'.

Luther meanwhile was edging towards a momentous conclusion – if the Church and pope could or would not reform an evident abuse like indulgences, then something must be wrong with the entire structure of authority and theology. For some years Luther had been nurturing doubts about the elaborate ritual mechanisms for acquiring 'merit' in the eyes of God, and coming to the view that faith alone was sufficient for salvation. Luther's 'radicalization' came into full view in the course of a 1519 debate staged in Leipzig, against a clever orthodox opponent, Johan Eck. Earlier, Luther had conventionally appealed against the pope to the authority of a

general council. But by comparing Luther to Jan Hus, Eck manoeuvred him into declaring that the Czech heretic had been unjustly condemned by the Council of Constance, and that councils, like popes, could err in matters of faith. This left only the scripture as an infallible source of religious authority. After Leipzig, there was no going back. Luther was excommunicated by Leo X in 1520, and responded, characteristically, by publicly burning the papal bull of excommunication in Wittenberg. He also published a series of pamphlets castigating the 'Babylonian captivity' of the Church, rejecting the necessity of obedience to the Church's canon law, reducing the number of sacraments from seven to three, and calling on the emperor and German nobility to step in and reform the Church.

Why did what is sometimes seen as an authoritarian Church not crush Luther sooner, before he could do so much damage? The answer is mired in German and international politics. In January 1519, Emperor Maximilian died. The obvious successor was his grandson, Charles. But by a succession of happy dynastic accidents, Charles had inherited, in addition to the ancestral central European Habsburg lands, the wealthy territories of the Netherlands and the kingdom of Spain. The imperial title would cap unprecedented superpower status, and the pope was not alone in wishing to prevent his getting it. For a time, the seven imperial electors enjoyed immense leverage. One of them was Luther's territorial prince: Elector Frederick 'the Wise' of Saxony. Frederick was thoroughly old-fashioned in religion, but immensely proud of the university he had founded, and of its new superstar professor. He thus protected Martin Luther from his enemies. When Charles (who could pay larger bribes) was duly elected, Luther was summoned under safe conduct to the imperial diet at Worms. In front of the dignitaries Luther refused to recant his errors, proclaiming 'here I stand, I can do no other' – a veritable slogan of individual freedom and modernity. In fact, these words may have been a later gloss on what Luther actually said, a declaration that he would not retract anything, for 'my conscience is captive to

the Word of God', a perhaps less appealing motto for moderns. In the aftermath of Worms, Frederick smuggled Luther away to his castle at the Wartburg, where, hidden from the world for nearly a year, he translated the New Testament into powerful and idiomatic German.

In the course of these travails, Luther had become a celebrity, and a German national hero. Humanists (mistakenly) hailed him as one of their own, blowing away the barbarous 'sophistries' of academic theology. Town burghers and rural peasants alike saw in him an icon of resistance to judicial and economic oppression by agents of the Church. He also became in the early 1520s a runaway best-selling author, the J. K. Rowling (or perhaps the Richard Dawkins) of his day. Unlike the writings of Wyclif or Hus, Luther's books and pamphlets were printed. The co-incidence of Luther's protest and the new technology of the printing press seemed to later 16th-century Protestants a veritable providence of God. In fact, printing was not so new. Gutenberg had printed his Latin bible in Mainz almost thirty years before Luther was born, and a well-established printing industry existed in many European cities, with Catholic devotional works the largest category of imprint. Yet Luther's explosion into print marked a momentous turning point in the history of the press, the employment of the printed book for the transmission of opinions, rather than merely knowledge or edification. Here again, the fragmented nature of German society helped. Elsewhere, printing tended to be concentrated in a few towns and cities (in England, nearly all books were produced in London). But in Germany, presses were widely scattered across the empire's many urban centres, making them more difficult for central authority to control.

Zwingli and the beginnings of radicalism

The protest against Rome was not just Luther's affair. He was the prophet, rather than in any concrete sense the leader of the movement, and the Reformation involved discrete reformations

from its earliest stages. Events in the Swiss city of Zürich bear this out. The moving figure here was the resident preacher at the principal town church, Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), who by his own account 'began to preach the Gospel of Christ in 1516 long before anyone in our region had ever heard of Luther'. Zwingli differed from Luther in having a stronger background in humanism, and a deep acquaintance with the works of Europe's leading Christian humanist, and scourge of obscurantism in the Church, Desiderius Erasmus. This was to be significant for the different directions taken by Luther's and Zwingli's theologies. On the question of authority, Zwingli developed a similar position to Luther's: scripture was the sole basis of truth, and the power of popes and councils was illusory. Zwingli's 'Ninety-Five Theses' moment came in Lent 1522, when he presided over a meal of sausages that ostentatiously breached the rules for abstaining from meat in the run-up to Easter. Christian 'liberty' in such matters was a central plank of Zwingli's, as of Luther's, teaching, and no doubt an important element in its popular appeal. In the aftermath of the sausage incident, Zürich's town council backed Zwingli against the local bishop, and gave him the opportunity to defend his views in a (rigged) public disputation. In 1524, religious images were removed from the city churches, and fasting and clerical celibacy were abolished. In 1525, the Latin mass was replaced with a vernacular communion service. This was a pattern of 'urban reformation' replicated across much of Germany and Switzerland in the 1520s, as mini-Luthers and mini-Zwinglis sprang up to demand reform from the pulpit, and town magistrates, sensing the popular mood, decided to recognize their demands. In Switzerland, however, the pace of change tended to be quicker – the important German cities of Augsburg and Nuremberg, for example, did not unequivocally opt for Lutheranism until the early 1530s.

Change was swift in Zürich, but not quick enough for some. A group around the humanist Konrad Grebel felt that Zwingli was acting too slowly in getting rid of statues of the saints, and broke

decisively with him in 1523. Their slogan of 'not waiting for the magistrate' put them at odds with all who wanted the implementation of Reformation to be an orderly and official business. One result of the assault on tradition, and the exaltation of the status of scripture, was to encourage people to read the bible themselves, yet the lessons they drew from it were not always those approved by the leading preachers. Noticing that the practice of baptizing infants was nowhere described in scripture, Grebel began rebaptizing adult members of his group. Zwingli's successor in Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger, would later coin the term 'anabaptists' (rebaptizers) to describe them, a label freely applied by both Catholics and Protestants to all on the radical end of the Reformation spectrum. Luther, meanwhile, was having his own problems with the people he was soon to start calling *schwärmer* – enthusiasts or fanatics. During Luther's enforced absence in the Wartburg over 1521–2, his collaborator Andreas von Karlstadt decided to force the pace of change in Wittenberg, removing images from the churches and celebrating mass in German. Luther approved the ends, but not the way of proceeding, and on his return reversed the changes. Karlstadt became one of Luther's bitterest critics, comparing the gradualist approach to allowing a small child to carry on playing with a sharp knife. Luther accused Karlstadt of having swallowed the Holy Spirit 'feathers and all'. The potability of the Holy Spirit was further signified by the arrival in Wittenberg of the 'Zwickau Prophets', three artisan visionaries ejected from a Saxon cloth town, claiming direct inspiration from God and the imminent end of the world. They had been influenced by the former preacher there, Thomas Müntzer, another militant who decided early on that Luther was a busted flush, and that the 'inner word' of private revelation trumped the 'dead letter' of written scripture.

Popular reformation and the Peasants' War

Luther had sown the wind; now he would reap the whirlwind. So at least his Catholic enemies claimed, arguing that departure from

the time-honoured teachings and traditions of the Universal Church would lead inevitably to anarchy and rebellion. Events in the mid-1520s suggested they had a point. Luther was no social revolutionary. His 'liberty' was freedom of the Christian conscience from the spiritually burdensome rules and rituals of late medieval Catholicism, not a renegotiation of the political and economic bonds structuring society. But what is preached and what is heard are not necessarily the same. Perhaps it is not so much that Luther was misunderstood, as that various groups in German society selected from his teachings whatever made sense to them, and applied it to their existing grievances and ambitions. In some places, like Lübeck, Lutheranism became the ideology for a municipal *coup d'état*, adopted by middle-ranking guildsmen previously excluded from town government by rich patricians. Studies of popular printed propaganda for the Reformation – broadsheets and woodcut prints – suggest that serious attempts to get across Luther's more complex theological ideas were usually sacrificed in favour of broad satirical attacks on the Catholic clergy and hierarchy, with monks and friars depicted as ravening wolves, the pope as a ferocious dragon.

For all that the early Reformation is sometimes described as an 'urban event', it was in the countryside and among the peasants (the overwhelming majority of the population) that the teachings of the reformers were most obviously domesticated to an agenda of social and economic aspiration. The peasantry had longstanding grievances against their landlords, both lay nobles and wealthy monasteries, who for decades had been appropriating common land and seeking to intensify the burdens of serfdom. There had been isolated revolts in the later 15th and early 16th centuries, but in 1524–5 the scale and coordination of rebellion was completely unprecedented, constituting what has been described as a 'revolution of the common man'. Beginning in the Black Forest area of southwestern Germany, the revolt spread to the north and east, with further large outbreaks in Switzerland and Austria. The rebels pulled down nobles' castles and sacked monasteries, doing

so in the name of 'the Gospel', and demanding the abolition of serfdom, since, according to the Twelve Articles adopted by a combined rebel army, 'Christ has delivered and redeemed us all . . . by the shedding of His precious blood'. The relationship between the Peasants' War and the Reformation has been much debated. It was clearest in Thuringia, where the radical preacher Thomas Müntzer himself led a peasant band, believing he was inaugurating the Apocalypse and Second Coming of Christ. Marxist historians – before reunification the revolt was a specialism of East German scholarship – have seen it as a fundamentally secular episode, the peasants expressing economic aspirations in religious terms since they had no other legitimating language available. The sight of his theology transformed into revolutionary ideology horrified Luther, who brought no credit on himself by publishing in May 1525 a pamphlet urging princes to slaughter without compunction the 'robbing and murdering hordes of peasants'. They needed little encouragement: the revolt was crushed with great brutality; Müntzer was tortured and beheaded.

German politics and princely reformation

The Peasants' War was a turning point for reform, and for Germany. Before 1525, the Reformation was a gloriously disorderly popular movement, with aspirations to restructure Christian society. A staple of early pamphlets was the figure of Karsthans, the cocky Lutheran peasant, who out-argues the priests and university dons. After 1525, the Reformation was 'tamed', reform became respectable, and Karsthans disappeared. The dissociation of Lutheranism from social radicalism opened the door for princes to adopt what its adherents now called the 'evangelical' faith. First to do so was Albrecht of Hohenzollern, clerical Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, a crusading order set up in the 13th century to campaign against the pagan peoples of the Baltic region. By 1525, Albrecht had secularized the order's lands, determined to marry, and reinvented himself as Duke of Prussia. At around the same time Philip of Hesse adopted the cause, as did Frederick the Wise's

successor as Elector of Saxony, John 'the Constant'. Princely conversions remained a trickle in the 1520s, but accelerated in the following decade when the greater part of north Germany became officially Lutheran. The powerful Elector of Brandenburg signed up in 1539, and the Elector of the Palatinate in 1546.

In the meantime, official reformations were starting to take place outside of Germany and Switzerland, notably in the Scandinavian kingdoms. After victory in a Danish civil war, Christian III established a Lutheran state in 1536. The following year he imposed Lutheranism on Denmark's vassal kingdom of Norway, though it took a generation and more for the change to be accepted by the Norwegian people. The king of Sweden, Gustav Vasa, was quick off the mark in declaring the Swedish Church independent from Rome in 1527. Yet he never showed much personal enthusiasm for Luther's new theology, and reforms were introduced into Sweden at a snail's place, with no final and emphatic national declaration for the Lutheran faith before 1593. Events in another peripheral European kingdom, England, were in some ways similar. Henry VIII had no time for Martin Luther and the feeling was mutual. For all his deference to properly constituted authority, Luther was spectacularly rude about Henry, calling him a 'damnable and rotten worm' in response to a pro-papal book the king wrote in 1521. Luther's view did not change much, even after Henry had seen his own version of the light: 'Squire Harry means to be God, and do as he pleases', Luther sighed, as Henry married for the sixth time. Wedlock was the touch-paper of Henry's English Reformation. The pope's refusal to allow an annulment of his barren marriage to Katherine of Aragon eventually drove Henry into rebellion, declaring himself 'Supreme Head' of the Church of England in 1534. Henry himself was no evangelical (though some important advisors, like Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, certainly were) but he cheerfully employed 'Word of God' rhetoric to justify radical steps like dissolving the monasteries. Kings, as well as peasants, could select what they fancied from the menu of Reformation ideas.

Within Germany, there was a substantial political obstacle to further expansion of Reformation: the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Charles looked upon himself as the chief defender of Catholic Christendom against its foes. The trouble was, those foes were coming from all directions. North African piracy haunted the western Mediterranean, and in the east, the forces of the Turkish Ottoman Empire seemed in relentless advance, under the brilliant and charismatic sultan Suleyman 'the Magnificent'. In the face of expansionist Islam, compromise at home looked sensible, a view shared by Catholic German princes who considered stable government by heretics preferable to the anarchy unleashed by the Peasants' War. In 1526, the imperial diet at Speyer issued a directive that – until a general council of the Church could convene to settle matters – princely territories and self-governing cities should be free to regulate religious matters as they pleased. The Edict of Worms, condemning Luther, his writings, and all who supported him, was in effect suspended. But intense mistrust remained on all sides, and in 1529 a second Diet of Speyer reinstated the Edict of Worms. Six of the princes present, along with the delegates from fourteen towns, signed a 'protestation' against the diet's decision. Their action created a new proper noun – 'Protestant' – and a new political identity.

Protestants banded together against the fear the empire was about to strike back. Under the leadership of Philip of Hesse and John of Saxony, a defensive alliance was concluded in the Thuringian town of Schmalkalden in 1531. This was a political complement to the Augsburg Confession of the previous year, an agreed statement of core Lutheran doctrine, drawn up by Luther's younger collaborator, Philip Melanchthon. 'Protestants' now shared a name, but they did not all share a platform. Zwingli and the Swiss cities did not adopt the Augsburg Confession, having significant theological reservations, especially over interpretation of the communion service. Several South German towns signed up to a separate 'Confession' of the Strassburg reformer Martin Bucer, though most southern towns trickled into the Lutheran orbit

during the 1530s. In the following decade, German Lutheranism nearly met a premature end. In 1546, the year of the death of its founding father, Martin Luther, war broke out between Charles V and the Schmalkaldic League. Charles's brilliant victory at Mühlberg in the spring of 1547 allowed him to dictate terms. The Augsburg Interim of the following year made a handful of concessions to Protestant sensibilities – clerical marriage was allowed, and communion for the laity with both bread and wine. But otherwise it insisted on traditional doctrine and discipline in formerly Lutheran states and 'Reformed' towns. There was an exodus of principled refugees, particularly from the German South, the first of many waves of religious immigration in the Reformation. Some exiles, like Bucer, finished up in England, where Henry VIII's successor, the child-king Edward VI, was the figure-head of a strongly Protestant regime, which, like Churchill's government in 1940, saw itself as standing alone against a European tyranny.

Pride comes before a fall. The magnitude of Charles's victory alarmed the German Catholic princes, who, fearing for their autonomy, backed away from their military alliance. Several Protestant states resumed the offensive in 1552, supported by the French Catholic king, Henry II, who saw an opportunity to make mischief. Charles was driven back to the negotiating table, though disillusioned with life, he left the negotiating to his brother Ferdinand, and shortly afterwards retired to a monastery in Spain. The mandates of the 1555 Peace of Augsburg are usually summed up in the Latin tag, *cuius regio, eius religio* ('whoever your ruler is, that's your religion'). Princes within the empire were free either to retain Catholicism or adopt the Augsburg Confession. Cities could profess Lutheranism on condition of allowing Catholic worship as well. Religious divisions were thus recognized and institutionalized, and the Reformation was saved in Germany. But Lutheranism's hour of crisis had produced deep internal wounds. Melanchthon's willingness to submit to the Augsburg Interim, as well as his apparent sympathy for some aspects of 'Reformed'

Protestantism, antagonized self-appointed guardians of Luther's legacy. Quarrels between 'Philipists' and 'Gnesio-' (or orthodox) Lutherans were finally resolved by the 1577 Formula of Concord, but by now Martin Luther's urgent reformism was ossifying into a rigid doctrinal system, obsessed with theological correctness. Lutheranism was no longer the beating heart of religious reform, and, while the Lutherans were squabbling, the Reformation had undergone a second birth.

Calvin, Geneva, and the Second Reformation

The site of that nativity was an unlikely one: the unprepossessing town of Geneva (population about 10,000), on the western fringe of the Swiss Confederation. Like numerous other small city states, Geneva had opted for the Reformation in the early 1530s, ousting its Catholic bishop with the help of its larger Protestant neighbour, Bern, and an exiled French preacher, Guillaume Farel. In 1536, Farel begged for the assistance of another French religious exile, Jean Calvin, who happened to be passing through Geneva on his way to Basel. Calvin was a lawyer by training, who had followed a conventional academic career (no dramatic thunderstorm episode!) before fleeing France in the wake of a crackdown on Protestant sympathizers in 1534. Unlike Luther, who wrote copious if disorderly autobiography, we know little about Calvin's early life, or his private character and habits. But we know plenty about the contents of his mind. Where Luther was boisterous and inconsistent, Calvin was logical and methodical. Luther's theology was a scatter-gun; Calvin's a sniper's rifle.

Today, only specialists remember the titles of Luther's countless short works, but the essential features of Calvin's thought were all contained in a single volume, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which expanded in various French and Latin versions from an original edition of 1536. The book's full title advertised to readers that it contained 'almost the whole sum of piety and

2. This 1562 portrait of Calvin at the age of 53 gives few clues about his character or personality

whatever it is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation'. It was a formidable attempt – using logic, grammar, and rhetoric – to schematize everything that was knowable about an ultimately mysterious and transcendent God.

Calvin's campaign to reform Geneva (Farel soon moved on elsewhere) got off to a rocky start. The city council wanted a Zürich- or Bernese-style reformation, where the magistrates retained complete control over the Church. Calvin favoured cooperation, but insisted on freedom of action, particularly over the issue of excommunicating unrepentant sinners, a task which devolved to the Consistory, a body comprising ministers, magistrates, and lay 'elders', with responsibility for discipline and moral regulation. The campaign against 'sin' involved Calvin in long-running battles with sections of the Genevan social elite, who disliked being told not to dance at society weddings, or give traditional family names (and therefore those of Catholic saints) to their children at baptism. In fact, it took almost two decades for Calvin (who held no official post beyond that of preacher) to stamp his authority on the town. His eventual success owed much to the support of large numbers of refugees who made Geneva their home in the middle decades of the century, more than doubling the population. The great majority, like Calvin himself, were from France. But modern Geneva's reputation as international centre par excellence was anticipated in these years. In the mid-1550s, it gave a home to escapees from the (temporary) Catholic restoration of Henry VIII's pious daughter Mary I. One of these, the Scot John Knox, liked what he saw, considering Geneva 'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in this earth since the days of the Apostles'. There were other places where Christ was truly preached, but none for 'manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed'. Posterity has been less effusive, inclined to regard Calvinist Geneva as dour and repressive, a theocratic police state. Modern scholarship has tried to redress the balance, emphasizing the Consistory's role in social welfare and even marriage

counselling. Nonetheless, 16th-century Geneva was not the European capital of fun.

It was, however, the epicentre of a political and doctrinal earthquake, sending the seismic waves of a 'Second Reformation' right across the European continent. Only to a limited extent did Calvin plan and direct this movement, but he was its patron and godfather. Calvin's most direct influence was on Geneva's huge neighbour to the west, and in the organization and attitudes of the French Protestants who became known, for reasons no one has been able to explain satisfactorily, as Huguenots. French émigré pastors were trained in Geneva and sent back into their homeland; the Genevan presses churned out Protestant books for the French market. Calvin wrote letters of advice on the establishment of consistories, and stern warnings about avoiding contamination from Catholic worship. Huguenot numbers grew rapidly in the middle of the 16th century, especially in the towns, with a concentration of numbers in the south and west; they peaked at somewhere between 10% and 20% of the French population. A minority group, blatantly defying the wishes of the French crown, required a militant and self-righteous ideology, and a tight organizing structure: Calvinism supplied both. Local congregations sent representatives to provincial synods, and a 'national synod' convened in Paris in 1559. But what really gave French Protestantism the potential to destabilize the nation was committed aristocratic support, with all that implied for political leadership and military muscle. Backed by the noble houses of Bourbon, Condé, and Coligny, French Protestants ambitiously imagined they could convert a kingdom. Political instability was compounded by the premature death of Henry II, and attempts by the fervently Catholic Guise family to dominate the regency of Francis II. The result was civil war, or rather, a generation's worth of civil wars which ran in fits and starts from 1562 to almost the end of the century. Earlier scholarship emphasized politics in all of this, but recent studies tend to think the 'French Wars of Religion' were aptly named. They became particularly intense

when, due to the failure of all Henry II's sons to reproduce, the Protestant Henry of Bourbon became first heir (1584) and then inheritor (1589) of the kingdom as Henry IV. But France, eldest daughter of the Church, was not ready for a Protestant king. We can add 'Paris is worth a mass' to the list of things famous people are supposed to have said, but didn't. Nonetheless, Henry realized his conversion was the price of political stability. France was the greatest 'might-have-been' of the Reformation era, but after Henry's reconciliation with Rome in 1593, French Protestantism began a slow decline. It was too significant a movement to repress outright, however, and Henry's 1598 Edict of Nantes granted limited rights of worship to Huguenots, institutionalizing the religious divide.

Calvinism played its part in another armed struggle of the later 16th century: that of the Low Countries against Spanish overlordship. The earliest religious dissent in the Netherlands was Lutheran, and ruthlessly suppressed by the government of Charles V. Luther's own opposition to illegal underground congregations, or conventicles, probably didn't help, and over time Calvinist influence increased. The constitutional conflict was not at first obviously religious in complexion. When Charles V abdicated, he divided his dominions: the ancestral lands went (with the imperial title) to his brother, Ferdinand; Spain and the Netherlands to his son, Philip. Whereas Charles (a native of Ghent) understood the Netherlands, with their complex jigsaw of jurisdictions and traditions of local autonomy, the Spanish Philip did not, and began a policy of centralization. The result was open revolt (1566), and an almost universal revulsion, on the part of Catholics as well as Protestants, against the brutal methods of the Duke of Alva's Spanish army sent to repress it. Increasingly, however, Calvinism could paint itself as the creed of patriotic resistance, particularly after it was adopted by the military and political leader of the revolt, William of Orange. Eventually, the Netherlands divided along a religious fault-line. The north espoused Protestantism; the southern 'Spanish Netherlands'

became a bastion of Catholicism, later acquiring the name 'Belgium'. There was a curious development in the independent Dutch Republic, however. Calvinism was recognized as the 'public' religion, but never fully became a state church. Ministers had grown used to controlling members of voluntary congregations through the institution of the consistory, and were unwilling to give this up. The result was that while anyone might attend church and hear sermons, actual members of the Calvinist Church, receiving communion, and placing themselves under the authority of the consistory, remained a minority – only about 10% of the population of Holland as late as the end of the 16th century.

Calvinism was a protean beast. It shaped the Reformation in all parts of the British Isles, but produced different shapes in each of them. John Knox returned to Scotland from his Genevan idyll in 1559, and launched a revolution against the pro-French Catholic queen, Mary Stewart, who eventually (1568) fled south to England, leaving her son James to be brought up a godly Calvinist prince. The Scottish Kirk wore its Calvinist heart on its sleeve, setting up a full 'presbyterian' system with consistories (called here kirk sessions), synods, and a General Assembly. In England, by contrast, the later 16th-century Church was a theological hybrid. Its doctrine was more or less solidly Calvinist, but its governing structures were hand-me-downs from the medieval Catholic Church, involving bishops, cathedrals, and diocesan church courts. This had much to do with a historical and doctrinal oddity of the English scene, the 'royal supremacy' established by Henry VIII. Governing the Church though a score of bishops was much easier for the crown than dealing with gaggles of independent-minded ministers in an assembly. The ossification of English Church structures also owed a lot to the conservative outlook of Elizabeth I, who succeeded her Catholic half-sister Mary in 1558. Having restored Protestant worship, ditched the pope, and re-dissolved the monasteries, Elizabeth determined that nothing else should really change over the course of her 45-year reign, despite the urgings of 'Puritans' who wanted the Church of England more

closely to resemble the 'best reformed' European churches (i.e. Zürich and Geneva). In Ireland, Protestant Reformation went hand-in-hand with English colonialism, and foundered largely for that reason. In the Tudor period, Irish Protestantism was largely confined to 'New English' settlers, as opposed to the 'Old English', descendants of the 12th-century Anglo-Norman invaders, who, like the Gaelic population, remained stubbornly impervious to the blandishments of the Protestant Gospel. Irish Protestantism developed a strongly Calvinist tinge, suited to the mindset of a group which remained a beleaguered minority even after reinforcement by the 'plantation' of Scots Presbyterians into Ulster in the early years of the 17th century.

The religious and ethnic complexity of Ireland was mirrored on the other side of the continent. Eastern Europe was a patchwork of peoples, in which Calvinists jostled with Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Orthodox Christians, and (in Ottoman-controlled areas of the southeast) Muslims. Calvinism made some progress among the nobility of Bohemia, though here it had to reach accommodations with the still-powerful native reformism of the Hussites. The Reformation also put down multiple roots in the huge multi-ethnic state created in 1569 by union of the kingdom of Poland with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This was the opposite of a strongly centralized state, with an elective monarchy and a powerful noble-dominated parliament, the *Sejm*. In 1562, King Sigismund II exempted landowners from the verdicts of the church courts, effectively allowing them to patronize whatever form of religion they chose. This benefited not only Calvinists, but radical 'Unitarians' who denied the doctrine of the Trinity, and for whom Poland now became a haven. It was, however, in the 'three Hungaries' that Calvinism fared best. The nation was divided by 1541 into a northwestern Habsburg kingdom, a Christian principality of Transylvania (a tributary state of the Ottoman Sultan), and a southern region ruled directly by the Turks. The Ottoman advance greatly assisted Protestantism by destroying the control structures of the Catholic Church: half of Hungary's

bishops were slain at the disastrous battle of Mohács in 1526. Uniquely, Transylvania recognized four accepted state religions: Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Unitarian. A pattern throughout the East, however, was that Lutheranism tended to appeal only in pockets of German-speaking communities, while Calvinism had greater saleability among the Poles and Hungarians for whom Germans were historic oppressors.

Calvinism made significant inroads into Lutheran Germany itself, where the Peace of Augsburg had recognized only one alternative to Catholicism. This was a genuine 'Second Reformation', getting underway in 1563 when Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate announced a switch of allegiance for his Lutheran state. Frederick's capital, Heidelberg, site of an important university, became the leading centre of German Calvinism, and the Heidelberg Catechism drafted by two of its professors was used widely throughout the Calvinist world. A number of other petty princes followed suit over the following half century, not always carrying their subjects with them. As elsewhere in Europe, a selling point of the Calvinist system was its malleability. German princely Calvinism had a politically authoritarian style – no synods or general assemblies here. Relations in Germany between Lutherans and Calvinists remained tense at best. But it was Calvinism that stood to the fore in the era's greatest ideological conflict, confrontation with the forces of resurgent Catholicism.

Catholic responses

The revival of the Catholic Church's fortunes is a remarkable, even a surprising story. In around 1560 it seemed the Protestant juggernaut was virtually unstoppable. A northern arc of kingdoms – Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, England – were all lost, and heresy was spreading like wildfire in the previously pious Catholic towns of France and the Netherlands. Across swathes of Eastern Europe, Catholicism was becoming a minority religion, and the Habsburg monarchy appeared unable to preserve the faith

in its own backyard: most of the Austrian nobility became Protestant in the third quarter of the century. Germany was a disaster zone, its population perhaps 80% Protestant; the sole remaining Catholic state of any importance was the Duchy of Bavaria. Only in Catholicism's Mediterranean heartlands – Portugal, Spain, and Italy – had the authorities managed to snuff out the flame of Protestantism almost before it had caught light.

If we fast-forward 60 years, the picture looks very different. The Huguenots were defeated and diminishing in France; the southern Netherlands were recovered and re-Catholicized; most of south Germany was back in Catholic hands; and a vibrant Catholic revival was sweeping through Austria, Poland, and Hungary. Protestantism had its back to the wall, and knew it. How had this come about? A cynical answer has something to commend it: military force. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the pope really did have a lot of divisions. Ultimately, the Huguenots were the losing side in a civil war, and the recovery of the southern Netherlands was due principally to the brilliant victories in the 1590s of the Spanish general, the duke of Parma. The Habsburgs too began to apply military logic to the religious problems of their territories, after the reigns of some pretty diffident emperors in the second half of the 16th century. But force is by no means the whole story. Catholicism remade itself in the course of its own reformation, drawing on its historic strengths but also exposing itself to the shock of the new. The process began in earnest at the Council of Trent (1545–63).

To reformers of all stripes, a general council had long seemed the solution to the Church's ills. But powerful vested interests had kicked it into the long grass. The French king, Francis I, was obstructionist, aware that his rival Charles V would benefit if a council healed the schism in Germany. The popes themselves feared a revival of the conciliar movement, and a draining away of their authority. The result was that by the time a council actually convened, in the northern Italian town of Trent, religious divisions

3. A 16th-century engraving of the Council of Trent in session: its decisions would set the tone for Catholicism for centuries to come

had run too deep, and the reconciliation with the Lutherans that Charles V hoped for was never really on the agenda. In fact, the Council's early sessions (1545–7) were largely concerned with formulating definitions of Catholic doctrine (for example, on the complementary status of scripture and tradition) in a way that clearly distinguished them from Protestant views. The later sessions (1551–2, 1562–3) tackled institutional reform, ordering bishops to reside in their dioceses as pastors to their flocks, rather than swan around as leisured aristocrats or government officials. Perhaps the most crucial reform was the order for all dioceses to set up seminaries for the training of clergy, a distinctly haphazard process in the Middle Ages. The aspiration for a disciplined and educated priesthood was a cornerstone of Catholic reform.

Trent inaugurated a new way of being Catholic, expressed in the Latinized adjective 'Tridentine'. When the Council wrapped up,

the process of Catholic reform still had a long way to go, but the achievements were undeniable. The clarification of Catholic doctrine on virtually all contested issues created a unified template of belief for a single *Roman* Catholic Church, superseding the woollier 'Catholicisms' which had co-existed in pre-Reformation Europe. Trent authorized a standardized catechism (religious instruction book) for the laity, and imposed a uniform order on the celebration of the mass – the Tridentine rite still beloved of Catholic traditionalists. In seeking to eliminate 'abuses', the Council directed the energies of priests and bishops firmly towards the pastoral mission of the Church. Trent also had the opposite result from 15th-century councils, serving to augment rather than diminish the authority of the papacy. Successive popes closely monitored the proceedings, and when Pius IV (1559–65) confirmed the decrees, he reserved to himself their interpretation. Papal authority was enhanced morally as well as institutionally in the aftermath of Trent. There was no going back to the louche atmosphere of Renaissance Rome, exemplified by the disgraceful Borgia pope, Alexander VI. Late 16th-century successors like Pius V (1566–72), Gregory XIII (1572–85), and Sixtus V (1585–90) did much to restore the honour of the papacy through high standards of personal austerity.

In parallel with the Council's deliberations, popes overhauled the central management of the Church. The Congregation of the Holy Office (a papally controlled inquisition) was established in 1542, and a papal 'Index' of forbidden books in 1559, with a Congregation of the Index in 1587 – these are the most notorious examples of 'Counter-Reformation'. 'Congregations' in this sense were committees of cardinals tasked with specified administrative duties. The papacy remained Europe's pre-eminent example of an elective monarchy, but the cardinal-electors (whose number was fixed at 70 by Sixtus V) were taking on the character of an official bureaucracy reporting to the pope, and began less to resemble a class of feuding aristocrats.

One of the Tridentine congregations (established 1622) was that for the propagation of the faith, *Propaganda fide*. The fact that it has given its name to a modern term for political deceit and manipulation is an indication of the cultural prejudices sometimes embedded in etymology. *Propaganda* was a belated official recognition that the Roman Church was no longer a purely European Church. In the wake of Portuguese traders and Spanish conquerors (and frequently in advance of them) Catholicism had become a world religion, the first truly global faith, with adherents in every continent bar Antarctica and the still undiscovered Australia. The evangelization of the wider world was not a direct riposte to the Protestant Reformation. The first missionaries in Mexico were humanist-leaning Franciscan friars who knew little or nothing of Martin Luther. But it soon seemed evident that the harvest of souls in new worlds compensated for their loss in the old. One missionary priest wrote excitedly about Japan in the later 16th century that God 'in the place of so many thousand souls in Upper and Lower Germany who were tempted by the Evil Enemy [the devil]…has elected another holy people from the other side of the world, who has hitherto known nothing of the holy faith.' In so far as the missionary endeavour beyond Europe was part of the competition between Protestantism and Tridentine Catholicism to assert the identity of a universal and apostle-like Church, the latter had shot dramatically ahead on points.

At the forefront of the Catholic missions were the religious orders, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians who had long been the itinerant face of evangelism in Europe. The spiritual fervour of Catholic reformation spawned numerous new religious orders, but none were as significant, at home or overseas, as the Society of Jesus – the Jesuits – founded by the Basque nobleman Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) in 1534, and ratified by the pope in 1540. Within little more than half a century, Ignatius's handful of ragged companions had mushroomed into an international organization of some 13,000 members. The Jesuits' success was matched only by the deep distrust they aroused, in Catholic as well

as Protestant circles – 'Jesuitical' has its cognates in many European languages. Myths about the Jesuits abound: they were not founded to serve as anti-Protestant shock-troops, and they did not take a special vow of 'loyalty' to the pope (rather, a pledge to go on mission anywhere in the world at the pope's command). Their original vocation, and for long their forte, was education. Jesuit schools offered a free education to the poor, and places were also much in demand from social elites (including some Protestants). But the Jesuits were soon drawn into the vanguard of the campaign to recover space and souls from the Reformation – they were active as preachers and confessors across Germany and Poland, and as missionaries (occasionally plotters) in Sweden and the British Isles. The unique Jesuit 'ethos' came from a marriage between traditional monastic structures and flexible activism (members were not bound to recite the 'hours' together in common). It also reflected the influence of a remarkable book, Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* – a 'how-to' manual of interiorized and imaginative prayer, which created the modern concept of the 'retreat'. The Jesuits' instinct was to reform society from the top down, and they were drawn to the orbit of social elites. The devout Habsburg emperor Ferdinand II (r. 1619–37) had a Jesuit confessor, Guillaume Lamormaini, who stiffened Ferdinand's mood of increasing militancy towards his Protestant subjects.

The Thirty Years War and after

The numerous regional confrontations between Reformation and Counter-Reformation were after 1618 subsumed into a general and bloody conflagration, pitting the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs, and a Catholic League headed by Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, against the Protestant states of Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia (James I's England, to the dismay of Puritans, held aloof). The Thirty Years War began as a war of religion, though it didn't end that way. The initial flash-point was that old cockpit of religious contention, Bohemia, and the attempt of Bohemian rebels to replace the then Archduke Ferdinand as their overlord

with the Calvinist Elector Frederick of the Palatinate. Frederick's catastrophic defeat in 1620 at the battle of the White Mountain overturned two centuries of Bohemian religious experiment: the Hussite Church was eliminated, and its pastors, along with newer Protestant associates, were expelled. Shortly afterwards, Catholic League forces sacked Heidelberg. A string of German victories through the 1620s encouraged Ferdinand to impose a radical and arbitrary settlement. His Edict of Restitution (1629) demanded the return of all Church lands and bishoprics secularized in Germany since 1552; it also reasserted an almost complete prohibition on Calvinism in the Empire.

The Edict was a step too far: it alienated moderate allies, pushed Calvinists and Lutherans into cooperating with one another, and provoked an extraordinary military intervention. The king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, invaded Germany wearing the mantle of a Protestant saviour. His stunning victory at Breitenfeld in 1631 reversed the course of the war, and though Gustavus was killed in battle the following year, military equilibrium in Germany was stabilized, and Ferdinand began to explore avenues of compromise. Meanwhile, fearful of Habsburg hegemony in Europe, the wily Cardinal-Minister Richelieu brought Catholic France into the war on the 'Protestant' side. The studied neutrality of the anti-Spanish Pope Urban VIII also made it more difficult to see the war in its last stage as primarily one of religion.

The Reformation in Germany fought itself to a standstill, and a series of agreements known collectively as the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) ended the conflict, though France and Spain would fight each other till 1659. In a triumph of pragmatism over principle, Westphalia stabilized the confessional map by accepting the religious *status quo ante* (1624 was picked as point of reference, to annul the Edict of Restitution). The independence of Protestant Holland was formally recognized, as was the Habsburg *coup de main* in the east. Within the empire, Calvinism was at last given full legal recognition, and, in a striking innovation, Lutheran

subjects in Catholic territories, and Catholics in Lutheran lands, were granted the right to worship quietly at home 'without investigation or disturbance'.

While the Thirty Years War was entering its last phases, the British decided to indulge in their own round of private religious warfare. The differences between the state churches of England and Scotland were magnified after Charles I ascended to the throne of both kingdoms, and prescribed a more ceremonialist, 'high' style of Protestant worship for the Church of England. The attempt to extend it to the Scottish Kirk provoked rebellion, and the signing of a National Covenant (1638) to protect the principles of the Reformation. In 1641, Catholic rebels in Ireland turned with marked ferocity on perceived oppressors in their midst, and news of massacres encouraged paranoid fears in England that Charles was being secretly manipulated by a cabal of Catholic advisors. The English Civil War that erupted in 1642 pitted constitutionalism against unfettered monarchical power, but it had a strongly religious flavour. The defeat and subsequent execution of Charles (1649) allowed Puritans to implement their long frustrated plans for full 'godly' reformation, and also unleashed a wave of popular religious creativity in the form of new radical sects – of these, the Baptists and Quakers would survive the longest. The restoration of Charles II in 1660 restored a kind of political stability but it could not recork the shaken bottle of religious unity. 'Non-conformists' were now permanently separated from the Church of England, whose adherents were beginning to describe themselves as 'Anglicans' – a rather different sort of Protestant from established continental varieties.

It is usually asserted that in the second half of the 17th century the role played by faith commitments in international and domestic politics was on the wane, and that the era of religious wars, the era of Reformation itself, was over. This is true up to a point: the political colossus of the age was Louis XIV of France (r. 1656–1715), and the coalitions ranged against his expansionist ambitions

4. An allegory of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes: Louis XIV oversees Truth unmasking Heresy while (in the roundels) Calvinists abjure their faith and Catholics destroy a Protestant chapel

brought the former standard-bearer of conviction politics – Catholic Austria – into alliance with Protestant states.

But Louis was at the time firmly identified with the Catholic cause, both by the local Catholic minority who welcomed his invasions of the Netherlands, and by the now fervently anti-Catholic English, who in 1688 deposed their own king, James II, for adherence to popery. Three years before that, Louis had given an astonishing demonstration of the convergence of political absolutism and religious triumphalism, revoking the Edict of Nantes which for almost a century had allowed Huguenots the right to worship in France.

The outcome was repression and rebellion, a wave of expulsions and insincere conversions, and a movement of exiles across borders to nurse bitterness and stoke the fears of their hosts. For a century and a half, reformations had been the chief motor of European political and cultural life. They had not quite exhausted that function, as the age of Enlightenment dawned.