Continuity and competition

Luther’s call for educational reform in the light of medieval precedents

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1 Introduction

“In my opinion, it is necessary—particularly in these dangerous times—to order chapters and monasteries to return to their original state at the time of the Apostles and a long time thereafter, when all of their members were free to stay as long as they liked. For what else were chapters and monasteries than Christian schools in which pupils were taught the Holy Scriptures and Christian discipline, where people were educated to govern and to preach.”

With this reference to the apostolic age and the first centuries, Martin Luther made it clear that he saw the Reformation as a return to early Christian principles. Given the towering position of the Scriptures, early church institutions appeared as models with special authority. They were seen as particularly close to Jesus Christ and his revelation of the will of God. At the same time, the passage reflects the influence of Germanic law, which placed ancient custom above change and innovation.

In the first part of this lecture I will attempt to sketch if—and to what extent—Luther’s idea of early Christian schools is justified. In a second part, we will take a closer look at his own educational program and examine where exactly reformed ideas challenged the medieval system. The third and final section will expand the theme of continuity and competition, assessing the specific blend between traditional and innovative features in the Reformation as a whole. This part will also sketch the contemporary discussion on the theory of confessionalization.

2 Christian schools in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Ever since the creation of an ‘established’ church in the fourth century, tensions between secular-pagan education and Christian teaching have dominated the history of Western schooling. The responsibility for education swung like a pendulum to and fro between ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Although early medieval schools derived from classical Roman institutions, they became increasingly ‘christianized’; not
so much in terms of teaching methods, but certainly in subject matter. The sixth century proved an important turning-point: in response to the missionary challenge posed by the pagan Germanic environment, the educational emphasis shifted towards the sacramental and liturgical life of the church. Conversion to Christianity, at the time, was not merely a change of religion, but a much more wide-ranging *conversio* of lifestyle, culture, and manners of speech. From this perspective it is clear that a fundamental re-orientation was needed to develop a Christian educational system. The church had to break with established late Roman practices.

‘Palace’ or ‘court schools’ (*scholae palatinae*) catered to the leading nobility, but their curriculum was limited to the acquisition of basic administrative skills, primarily spoken and written Latin. It was important, therefore, to supplement this level with more sophisticated clerical education. The task was tackled in Central Europe by the Irish-Scottish mission and a new ideal of the ministry emerged wherever British monks established their foundations. Boniface continued this Tradition and erected schools for clerical novices in his Benedictine monasteries. This type of education, of course, was intended exclusively for members of the order (and the occasional aristocratic patron). The emerging gap in the education of the secular clergy was filled by Chrodegang of Metz through the foundation of cathedral schools.

Both kinds of institutions had their legal and financial basis in the Germanic “*Eigenkirchenwesen*”. Local Lords did not only take physical possession of churches and monasteries in their territory, but also exercised extensive spiritual supervision. It was inevitable that princes and emperors gradually extended these powers to ecclesiastical schools, and clerical education, only recently emancipated from secular influence, soon fell again under worldly control. Duke Tassilo of Bavaria, for instance, decreed at the synod of Neuching in 774 that each bishop should found a school at his see and hire a wise man to teach according to Roman Tradition. Furthermore, the ‘*admonitio generalis*’ of Charlemagne (789) ordered that every monastery and every diocese should teach psalms, musical notes, chants, the ‘*computus*’ (calendar calculation), and grammar. In addition, every school had to be in possession of dogmatically sound Catholic books, and the emperor recommended a careful
examination of candidates for the priesthood at annual meetings of the diocesan clergy.

Even traces of compulsory popular education can be detected. With reference to Caesarius of Arles and the Synod of Baison (529), the emperor and bishops called for the establishment of parish schools. Theodulf of Orleans, for example, demanded that in his diocese: “the clergy should hold a school in every village and hamlet; if the pious give their children into the hands of a priest, he is not allowed to reject them and to refuse to teach them ... If the priests fulfill their duties with devotion, they shall not receive any money or payment above a small gift from the parents.”

These schools were to teach reading, writing, and ecclesiastical liturgy, alongside the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer (to be expounded in the vernacular).

Charlemagne's system, developed under the influence of Alcuin, was equally open to secular concerns. Apart from other topics, the reading of profane texts was introduced, and the liberal arts were taught as a preparation for studies of Holy Scripture. Ludwig the Pious, however, advised by Benedict of Aniane, refocused his educational policy on the training of clergymen. The Imperial Diet of Aachen (817) closed monastic schools to outsiders. Henceforth, monasteries ceased to provide public education and limited their teaching to their own needs. At the same time, the boarding school system enhanced the unity of clerical upbringing and training, a principle resuscitated in the sixteenth century by reformers of all confessional persuasions. In short, the church claimed full and exclusive responsibility for education. As a result of tensions provoked by the reform movements of Cluny and Hirsau, however, internal monastic schools were also disrupted.

At the same time, the level of education among kings and princes declined, so much so that cultured rulers such as Frederic II or Alfons X were regarded as exceptional by their contemporaries. From the thirteenth century, a growing number of observers complained about the deplorable educational standards of political leaders and about the unprecedented increase in the power of peasants and other commoners who were eager to learn.

In a fresh educational offensive from the twelfth century, imperial and papal legislators began to regulate the fastly expanding range of new methods of teaching
and study, and eventually helped to establish corporate bodies of masters and scholars in ‘universitates magistorum et scholarium’ under central control. On the secular side, the ‘authentica habita’, issued by Frederic Barbarossa around the time of the imperial diet of Roncaglia (not later than 1158), is viewed as a Magna Charta of the evolving university system: it provided for the safety and protection of scholars whilst travelling to and staying at the place of study, it prohibited their arrest for crimes committed by fellow countrymen, and it guaranteed them a free choice of court.

On the ecclesiastical side, a new wave of Legislation, beginning with the Lateran Council of 1123, endeavoured to expand papal jurisdiction and to consolidate the church’s hold over education. The main elements were: (a) a commitment to the education and training of priests, (b) financial safeguards for teachers (salaries, benefits) and students (new foundations, scholarships, dispensations from residence requirements), (c) privileges of jurisdiction (universities and their members to enjoy immunity from local courts), (d) teaching licences, (e) institutionalization of courses and curricula (limited to certain social groups), and (f) protection of scholarly communities from local authorities. This blueprint for a centrally (in fact, papally) controlled dissemination of knowledge, however, soon fell victim to the dynamics of European state development. National and princely prestige, as well as ambitions of the academic communities themselves, ensured that university expansion failed to adhere to papal planning. Eventually, all institutions were allowed to offer the full range of faculties (arts, medicine, law, theology) and to award their own doctorates.

The growth of the educational system from the thirteenth century, evident above all in the spread of the ability to read and write Latin beyond the clerical estate, cannot be explained by purely socio-economic or purely religious reasons, but depended on a whole range of interconnected factors: the establishment of universities, the foundation of mendicant orders, the increasing number of towns as centres of educational institutions, the emergence of an ambitious ‘middle class’ engaged in commerce, trade, and arts, the growing need for administrative and especially legal expertise in the nascent territorial and city states, and the rising demand for educational and edifying literature among the laity, to name but a few. All of these
tendencies combined to destroy the basic assumption that ‘clerici’ were ‘litterati’ and ‘laici’ ‘illiterati’, albeit without revolutionizing the social order. From the fourteenth century, princes started to found universities in Central Europe, and—alongside the pope—the emperor became one of the main patrons of learning. With ever greater frequency, universities approached them for improved charters and privileges.

Elementary schools, too, had been revived by papal reform legislation in the twelfth century. As a result of the increasing economic and cultural importance of towns, however, magistrates started to intervene in the running of Latin schools, and to promote the establishment of German institutions. This, of course, forms one of the main precedents for Martin Luther's initiatives. Let us thus take a closer look at one particularly striking example: the quarrel about school reforms in Hamburg, starting in the late thirteenth century and culminating in the Reformation of the city in 1524.

Since the foundation, by papal bull, of the grammar school at the church of St Nicholas in 1281, the new municipal institution co-existed with the old cathedral school established by Ansgar. Problems arose about the position of the scholasticus who supervised the schools, appointed the teachers, and determined tuition fees. Almost constantly, the citizens criticized him for neglecting his duties and for using his position for personal gain. In 1289, the scholasticus obtained archiepiscopal support to turn the cathedral school into an exclusively clerical institution and to run St Nicholas school as an elementary school with no access to higher education. The move heightened existing tensions, provoked several lawsuits, and eventually resulted in an agreement in 1337, but a subsequent Visitation showed that its clauses were not adhered to. The archbishop thus admonished the scholasticus to fulfil his duties, ordered a pay-raise for the teachers in both schools, and outlawed corruption in the appointment of staff.

Hamburg's ever-increasing demand for educated men to run its administration and trade then led the citizens to found German schools without papal approval. A bull of 1402 specifically forbade this practice and demanded the closure of illegal institutions. When, in 1472, the scholasticus Hermann Duker accused a priest and two lay teachers of founding a German school, the conflict over educational control resumed. The citizens supported the priest, resorted to active resistance,
and finally closed St Nicholas’s school. In return, Duker secured the excommunication of the city. To obtain absolution and to meet its legal costs after five years of conflict, the town council was forced to part with a large sum of money in 1477. The school reopened and a new institution, which specialized in the teaching of writing skills (Schreibschule) was founded with clerical permission. This, however, turned out to be the council’s last defeat in its quest to obtain control over schooling within the city.

The outcome caused permanent friction between the ecclesiastical school officials and the citizenry. Tuition fees and teaching standards emerged as the main bones of contention: the scholasticus was regularly accused of diverting funds into his own pockets, and in 1522, the citizens complained that the teachers were ‘idiots’ who failed to educate their children. The laity was forced to spend large amounts of money for private tuition in schools outside Hamburg, while any priests prepared to teach within the town faced the wrath of the scholasticus. For these reasons the parents of the pupils at St Nicholas school refused to pay any more fees. After several meetings and disagreements, the magistrates finally forced the schoolmaster Hinrick Banskow to transfer control of St Nicholas to the citizens of Hamburg. The council was to determine and collect the fees, while the citizens were free to appoint properly qualified teachers and to decide about the best possible education for their children. As a result, St Nicholas became a state school and the church lost its towering position.

Even such a brief survey suffices to illustrate the irreversible trend towards secular control over education in Hamburg, and other case studies from the fifteenth and early sixteenth century confirm this impression. An increasingly self-confident citizenry claimed responsibility over schooling. Although most conflicts focused on economic issues, they point to the laity’s emancipation from ecclesiastical supervision. Martin Luther himself, coming from a family which acquired wealth one Generation before the Reformation, could be cited as an example. His program reflected the ongoing readjustment of boundaries between church and state and the increasing assertiveness of late medieval individuals.

3 Luther’s idea of an evangelical school
It could thus be argued that Luther’s reference to the educational system of the Old Church is not completely unfounded. In some periods, at least, monasteries and other ecclesiastical foundations had indeed provided ‘christian schools’. Given his view of early practices, papal interference and scholastic developments must have appeared as a travesty of the original model and it was in part the clericalization of traditional structures which triggered Luther’s call for reform. Yet he found no explicit biblical proof to support this particular line of attack: the formal and institutional aspects of the Wittenberg reforms thus had to be bolstered by legal and socio-economic arguments: the superiority of Germanic over Roman legal principles and the validity of lay complaints about clerical manipulation of medieval schooling. The Scriptures, however, could serve as the prime authority for the definition of the content and ultimate aim of the educational Program, yielding ammunition against scholastic and humanist practices, and helping to develop a specifically ‘reformed’ curriculum.

The first part of Luther’s key text ‘To the mayors and aldermen of all German cities’ (1524) lists three theological arguments for a renewed and stronger commitment to youth education: first, to fight Satan, who strives to destroy God’s creation; second, to retain God’s mercy, which the Germans received in succession to the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans; third, to understand and obey the commandments and the order of creation. In spite of Luther’s subsequent emphasis on the responsibilities of secular authorities, these scriptural references should not be ignored: educating the young is not merely a matter of common sense, but also a theological imperative. As teachers and spiritual advisors, theologians have a duty to identify magisterial neglect and to suggest improvements in educational provision. Luther then merges this joint ecclesiastical-secular responsibility with medieval reform concepts, while distancing himself from a purely secularized overhaul of the system. This duality characterizes the whole of the Wittenberg program.

The text attacks three distinct contemporary approaches: scholasticism, spiritualist-utilitarian tendencies, and pedagogic reform ideas as articulated by some so called “humanistic” authorities like Erasmus of Rotterdam, Petrus Moselanus, Konrad Wimpina and others. Scholasticism is the most frequent target and denounced for a whole variety of reasons: in particular its ineffective, artificially contrived, and often
ridiculous teaching system, which Luther had experienced himself. Ecclesiastical schools are described as ‘ass’s places and devil’s schools’, because they fail to meet divine requirements, and Jesus’ condemnation from Matthew 18:6f is directed against them. Scholastic institutions abuse the children in their care, oppose the teaching of languages, and contribute to the decline of classical education. Their tuition methods and text books are branded as useless for a proper understanding of the Bible.

The anti-educational stance of spiritualist and utilitarian groups attracts the most substantial criticism. The former are chided for their arbitrary exegesis of the Scriptures. Luther is at pains to prove that an exclusively spiritual interpretation must result in error, heresy, and ultimately total anarchy. Even the church fathers, otherwise held in great esteem, are cited as examples of a clerical and misleading reading of the Bible. The utilitarians’ hostility towards educating the ‘middling sort’ is denounced as a simplistic misunderstanding of lay life and priorities. Luther emphasizes the necessity to address real-life needs and to promote the spread of advanced knowledge. Political rulers, too, are reminded of their duty to look after their subjects.

The text finally distances itself from humanist reformers, particularly with regard to the ultimate aims of education. The knowledge of classical languages and other skills should not merely promote the development of autonomous individuals, but help to integrate them in the divine order and the earthly hierarchy of parental and magisterial authority. Even so, Luther does not ignore the more practical aspects of schooling: he calls for the study of languages, the extension of the scholastic trivium, and for didactical improvements: playful instruction on the one hand, and learning by imitation (imitatio) on the other.

Luther’s letter to the mayors and aldermen gradually acquired programmatic quality, but it was written on the spur of the moment; its immediate importance should not be overstated. The author himself was extremely disappointed about its impact. Friedrich Falk, who attempted to prove the letter’s effect on a number of school ordinances, arrived at the conclusion that “the historical influence of the text ... cannot clearly be ascertained. It is mentioned in letters soon after its appearance, but school foundations or regulations only rarely refer to it explicitly. The only direct quotation
appears in the Göttingen church ordinances of 1531.” In contrast, works by Bugenhagen and Melanchthon seem to have had a more immediate effect.

More important than a textual reference, of course, is the personal influence of Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues. All of the main reformers were involved in school foundations and there are numerous written statements outlining their views. Disregarding the subtler differences between Luther, Bugenhagen, and Melanchthon, the following elements emerge as the shared core of their programs: all three advance theological arguments to define the aim of their educational reforms, and all see their engagement as an inevitable consequence of the requirements of the reformed religion. The basic concern is to educate the young Generation in ‘omnibus civitatibus, oppidis et pagis’ even though the necessity of comprehensive popular education was gradually toned down because of financial constraints. There is a strong emphasis on the learning of languages, especially Latin, but less explicit guidance about the position of German schools; confronted with an ever more pressing demand for new Ministers, Latin may have been a natural priority. Even so, many school ordinances refer to Luther’s demand for an adequate education for girls.

The letter to the ‘mayors and aldermen’ also addresses the needs of academic élites. Luther recommends specific measures to assist the ‘prodigy of learning’, and some schools seem to have heeded this advice. The adoption of the humanist studium trilingue, in contrast, was initially largely ignored. The study of languages remained a preserve of the universities—and thus primarily of those students preparing for an ecclesiastical career. Melanchthon, in particular, opposed more General tuition in Greek, Hebrew, and also in German. Luther came to endorse this view in his ‘Sermon admonishing [Christians] to send their children to school’, where he recommended linguistic studies only for scholars’. The reading of classical writers was meant to enable the latter to learn by means of imitation; only Melanchthon, with his strong humanist connections, seems to have put some emphasis on an understanding of the content.

Even though Luther failed to mention religious education in the letter, the 1528 visitations of Saxony and his own catechetical writings suggest that it formed an implicit part of the program. Special Bible lessons can thus be found in nearly all
school ordinances, none of which distinguish, in the ‘modern’ way, between worldly ‘state’ education and ecclesial instruction. Quite to the contrary, almost all assume a close relationship between teaching priorities and church doctrine. Many ordinances prescribe short prayer services at the beginning and the end of each day, with sermons, liturgical training, and choral exercises as further integral parts of the curriculum.

To sum up, it is clear that Luther’s educational program had many medieval precedents: reallocation of ecclesiastical resources, appeals to the responsibilities of secular authorities, rejection of a church monopoly over schooling. Genuinely ‘new’, however, is the undivided supremacy of the Bible in determining the content and aims of education. The principle of ‘sola scriptura’ had been upheld throughout the Middle Ages, but there were arguments about who could interpret its ambiguous parts and who had the authority to settle the resulting disputes. Wittenberg’s reformers knew no such doubts: no one was qualified to tamper with the word of God, for ‘sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres’.

In the later years of the Reformation, particularly in the wake of the dispute between the spiritualists and evangelists, a need for ‘Protestant’ interpretation re-emerged, but in the early phase – from which our texts derive – such turbulences remain below the surface. At first, therefore, the new principle must have appeared as a welcome alternative to the frequent, and seemingly arbitrary, doctrinal interferences deriving from Rome.

Combined with the emphasis on the ‘priesthood of all believers’, the approach demanded the active promotion of ‘critical’ public reasoning and thus an energetic educational offensive. For Luther and his fellow reformers, the primary task lay in the establishment of a system of schools and universities to make as many people as possible familiar with the Bible, in order to enable them to interpret its meaning and to restructure their lives. Everything else was of secondary importance.

Church history, to return to one of the crucial theological arguments in the letter to the ‘mayors and aldermen’, unfolded as a process of precipitating decline until the second coming of Christ. Improved education was seen as a tool in the apocalyptic battle between God and Satan: the study of the past would alert people to God’s
omniscience and help them to understand the Scriptures and the fate of the world. It thus obtained an important place in school and university education, even though profane—and especially classical—historians were to be studied in strict subordination to the overall authority of the Bible.
4 Continuity and Competition or: the question of confessionalization

Given this specific mixture between traditional and innovative elements in the Wittenberg reforms, what exactly is the place of the early sixteenth century in the transformation of the medieval into the early modern world? Did Luther’s theses start a new era, or was he merely a ‘forerunner of the Reformation’? Is there a case for a fresh periodization in European history; should the years between the fourteenth and sixteenth century be seen as one long ‘era of reforms’? My following remarks shall address some of these issues.

Recent historiographical tendencies, especially the emphasis on the functional similarities of early modern confessions and the blurring of traditional dividing lines between the later Middle Ages and the Reformation, have fundamental implications for our interpretation of almost all areas of public and private life in the period. ‘Modernization’ is now associated with late medieval reform movements as well as with the Reformation; the view of a ‘redeemer’, sent to resurrect a derelict church through a complete break with Tradition, has long been abandoned. In fact, it has been turned upside down: fourteenth and fifteenth-century monastic reforms, for instance, are said to have been ‘destroyed by the Reformation’, and developments in territories east of the Elbe interpreted as a ‘reaction to a crisis in modernization’. Even the doctrine of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ was based on medieval precedent, and by 1500 at the latest, the traditional dualism clergy – laity no longer corresponded to social reality; in terms of learning and spirituality, the dividing lines had become increasingly blurred.

The idea of the Reformation as a violent interruption of an ongoing process of modernization, however, cannot fully convince. Many late medieval initiatives had lost their momentum or had been undermined by their opponents; often, it was only the Reformation which brought them to a conclusion. Catholic confessionalization, pursued by the church hierarchy after it had overcome the first shock of the Reformation, in turn resumed late medieval reforms alongside the promotion of new forms of spirituality and organizations. In this sense, the centuries between 1350 and 1650 should indeed be seen as a long and interrelated ‘era of reforms’. 
Returning to the subject matter of this presentation, Luther must be seen as both continuing and competing with medieval precedent. To acknowledge this particular blend neither reduces the importance nor the quality of his reform-ideas.

But there is still the question of what—if not Luther and the Reformation—qualifies the 16th century as a new epoch. This question is inextricably linked to the other problem of whether the reformation is a unique phenomenon. If so we have to ask again for its character: Was the reformation merely a theological dispute with fatal consequences for the unity of the church? Would the whole process better be understood as a wide ranging incident which touched all dimension of life, politics, economy, culture and religion? Following the latter the theological question is only a part of the whole and can not be used to understand the full meaning of what has happened between 1517 and – well, that’s another question: when does this process come to an end: 1555 with the diet of Augsburg, 1580 with the book of concord, 1648 with the peace of Osnabrück or even later with the beginng of a new theology influenced by the enlightenment of the late 17th century?

In the last 20 years these problems were discussed intensivly. The discussion started with the question of periodization of early modern history in Europe: Traditionally, German, and to a certain extent European early modern history as well, is divided into three periods: the “Reformation” 1517-1555, the “Counter-Reformation” 1555-1648, and the “Age of Absolutism” 1648-1789. This division has become almost indestructible because of the simple dialectical pattern it is based upon: a progressive movement, the “Reformation”, as thesis, evokes a reaction, the reactionary “Counter-Reformation”, as antithesis; their contradiction leads to extremely destructive armed conflicts, until Europe is saved by the strong hand of the absolutist early modern state, which because of its neutrality in the religious conflict is considered the synthesis.

This view of history is wonderfully convincing, but quite incorrect. The labels “progressive Reformation” and “reactionary Counter-Reformation” are no longer viable, either as dialectic contradictions or as successive periods of history, because they are in neither sense mutually exclusive. In particular the so-called “Counter-Reformation period” is at least as much characterized by the “second Reformation”,
the expansion of Calvinism, as by increasing Catholic activity. And since Calvinism proves much stronger than Lutheranism, the Protestant “Reformation” reached its culmination at the very moment, when traditional historiography placed the “Counter-Reformation” in ascendancy.

Even though the “Reformation” and the “Counter-Reformation” are closely connected by their origin and background in the late medieval reform-movements the early “evangelical movement” initiated by Luther remains something particular, since it proved an innovative force of modernizing tendency. However, as soon as the princes took over in the 1520’s after the Peasants War, the movement became “Reformation”, that is, a process of religious change organized by conservative authorities in their legal terms.

Empirical research leads us to the conclusion the it would be more appropriate to separate a comparatively short-lived spontaneous “Evangelical Movement” from 1517 to 1525 from these two almost parallel organized processes of “Reformation” and “Counter-Reformation”, which both began in the early 1520’s and lasted two centuries. According to our sources, both could be defined as rather conservative operations with authorities in the lead and legal devices predominating. In this regard, Calvinists, Catholics, Lutherans, and to a certain extent even Anglicans, all acted in remarkably similar ways. No wonder: each faced the same problem. Under the pressure of mutual competition the religious groups had no choice but to establish themselves as “churches”, i.e. stable organizations with well defined membership. These new “churches” had to be more rigid than the old pre-Reformation Church, where membership was self-evident and required no careful preservation. Particular confessions of faith served to distinguish these separate religious communities from each other. And since the German word “Konfession” covers both the confessions of faith and the respective communities, Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling decided to call the formation of the new churches Konfessionalisierung (confessionalization). It began with the first Lutheran visitations and some tentative measures on the Old Church side in the 1520’s and ended after the late seventeenth century: when France re-established religious unity by force (1685, when England secured the protestant character of its monarchy (1688-1707), and when the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg
expelled the Protestants from his country (1731). Obviously “Church” and “State” collaborated everywhere to cut autonomous parts out of the body of one single Christian community by establishing a particular group conformity of religious doctrine and practice among their members. However, the instruments used, and the institutions and personnel to handle them, deserve a closer look, just to demonstrate once again how closely they corresponded to each other in all communities, in spite of theological differences:

1. As already mentioned, the basic procedure consisted in the establishment of the respective pure doctrine and its handy formulation in a confession of faith, which could be used to measure everybody’s orthodoxy. The Lutherans took the first step in this direction with their “Augsburg Confession” of 1530. But the decisive years were the late 1550’s and early 1560’s, when various Calvinist confessions were followed by the Catholic Professio Fidei Tridentina. Then in 1577, the majority of German Lutherans agreed to the Formula Concordia and signed finally the Book of Concord (1580).

2. A complementary measure to this establishment of pure doctrine was the extinction of possible sources of confusion which might lead the faithful astray: double confessional duties of priests, lay chalice, and so on.

3. The new rules had to be spread widely in the territory and, if necessary, enforced. Propaganda might be the first instrument to that purpose. The invention of printing had made Luther’s initial success possible; the calculated use of the printing press now became as essential for indoctrination as for fighting the enemy. Censorship was the negative complement of propaganda, keeping away competitors.

4. Theology under those conditions deteriorated from lofty speculations to continuous battles and almost by definition became controversial. On a lower level, indoctrination of simple believers developed into an elaborate technique, employing a broad range of instruments: catechisms, sermons, church music, more popular spectacles as religious processions, pilgrimages, and the veneration of saints and their relics.

5. It was of great importance to secure the orthodoxy of persons in strategic positions, such as people responsible for teaching or preaching or able to intervene at decisive hours of human life. Theologians, priests, ministers, teachers, doctors,
midwives, and sometimes even secular officials in general were examined on their orthodoxy and made to swear to the respective confession of faith.

6. Each church tried to win the future by **expanding and streamlining its educational system** so as to safeguard the “right” alignment of its children. New school ordinances mushroomed, stressing religious education and exercises together with the control of religious and moral behaviour. If neccessary, new orthodox educational institutions had to be created to prevent future elites from studying abroad, where they might be exposed to dangerous influences.

7. The new **groups should become as homogeneous as possible**. Minorities which could not be amalgamated either emigrated or were expelled. Furthermore, discipline was applied to group members in an active way by the instrument of **visitation**, when ecclesiastical superiors or, more often than not, mixed commissions of clerical and secular officials arrived to investigate in minute detail the religious and moral life of the parish. Finally, the churches established control of that participation by careful **record-keeping** on baptisms, marriages, communions, and burials. Moreover, they stressed, and sometimes even overstressed, those rites which were particularly useful at distinguishing them from their competitors, even if their theology did not demand such practices. Even performances with almost no religious significance were considered confessional property, and therefore became unacceptable to others in spite of obvious advantages. (Calendar reform). Even language did not escape confessional regulation. Of course, churches tried to secure an adequate name for themselves. The Old Church somehow managed to reserve for herself the venerable designation “Catholic”, whereas the new churches were called after their leading reformers. The Lutherans reluctantly accepted this labelling: Calvinists, however, dislike it right down to the present day.

8. Because of the shortage of institutions and personnel, all churches had to rely to a lesser or greater extent on **the support of secular power**. Often secular authorities of cities and states stepped in instead. This became a fact of far-reaching consequences, even if solutions greatly differ from case to case according to local conditions. Therefore, we have to keep the crucial role of the State in mind, when we examine **the results of “confessionalization”**
Without doubt, in the long run the churches succeeded in „confessionalizing“ their members to a remarkable extent. However, in reaching the goal they had in mind, they produced several unintended results!

a) Society after “Confessionalization” was certainly more “modern” than before: education was improved and more widespread, and the first media revolution in history had taken place, the victory of printing. By these means, and by their demand for a much higher degree of religious consciousness, churches had contributed to the further development of rationality. At the same time, they had trained their members in discipline and made them accustomed to being objects of bureaucratic administration—both essential preconditions of modern industrial societies.

b) The constant pressure the churches and their secular allies exercised on the people must have created stress and a potential of latent aggressiveness. Thus Reinhard interprets the notorious witch-craze of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is nothing else but an unconscious collective expurgation of these aggressions at the expense of victims provided by traditional superstition.

c) “Confessionalization” made an important contribution to the growth of modern state in Europe. Not that the churches intended to do so; more often than not it was quite the opposite. However, they all needed the help of secular authorities, a help which was granted willingly, but not free of charge. The churches had to pay for it. Early modern state-builder, on the other hand, knew very well that joining the process of “Confessionalisation” would provide them with three decisive competitive advantages: enforcement of the political identity, extension of a monopoly of power, and disciplining of their subjects. Therefore, it was obvious that a policy of religious toleration would not pay at the stage of statebuilding.

The theory of “Confessionalization” serves not as an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the Reformation and the century after. But it substitutes the former attempts of research with an even wider range of understanding for the particular events. Therefore we have to ask finally for the concrete relationship between religion and political identity. When medieval “Christianity” broke down into different churches, national and territorial states, these new entities still maintained the traditional claim of total commitment. Society was still not split up into more or less autonomous
subsystems as is the case today. Under such conditions, the development of the early modern state could not take place without regard to “Confession”, but only based upon fundamental consent on religion, church, and culture, shared by authorities and subjects.

In the case of German territorial states, the appeal to religious differences is essential, because these principalities lacked a “national” culture to legitimate their political independence. Sometimes there were not even different dynasties to draw clear lines of demarcation between territories, but just rival branches of the same noble house. It cannot be mere coincidence that in such cases the individual lines preferred different “confessions”. Even princes of the same religion carefully separated their respective territorial churches from each other, and if they were Catholic, they tried at least to establish an exclusively territorial bishopric in their country.

Closed borders, limited mobility, and intermarriage to prevent religious contamination also served to enforce political group identity. Religious obedience to authorities outside the state was considered treacherous. However, political identity is enforced not only by isolation of the population, but also by a thorough “confessionalization” of the subjects.

From 1615 to 1628 Duke Maximilian of Bavaria had a “Bavaria Sancta” published. In his preface the Jesuit Matthew Reader he explained what the book wanted to demonstrate: “Cities, castles, markettowns, counties, villages, fields, forests, mountains and valleys all breathe and demonstrate Bavaria’s Catholic religion..., because the whole religion is nothing but religion and one common church of its people”. *Tota regio nil nisi religio* is much more than just playing with the words of the famous formula *cuius regio eius religio*. This was the program of Maximilian’s reign, and he proved so successful in its implementation that still today “Bavarian” and “Catholic” remain almost synonyms.

This kind of close affinity between religion and politics made it much easier to overcome the traditional Christian dualism of the spiritual and the secular spheres, just re-established by Luther in the most radical way, in favor of a unitarian regime, this time, however, with the secular authority in the lead, and not the ecclesiastical, as once in the Middle Ages: “Your Grace shall be our pope and emperor”, some peasants
wrote to Philipp of Hesse, as early as 1523. “Confessionalization” meant gains of power for the State, because the Church became a part of the State in theory as well as in practice.

As mentioned before, to be saved from competition, churches had to pay a high price to their princes. They not only lost autonomy, but estates and revenues too. This expropriation of church property was by no means a Protestant peculiarity. In fact it had in some areas already taken place before the Reformation. And the Protestant secularizations have their less-known counterpart in extensive expropriations by Catholic princes.

Church government by the State and abolition of clerical privilege as practised by both Protestant and Catholic rulers was a decisive step in the direction of a general levelling of their subjects, toward a modern equality not so much of rights as of their loss. In this respect, the Protestant “Reformation” proved a particularly strong promoter of state power. Both the Reformation and the Council of Trent modernized church administration on bureaucratic lines. By joint efforts of Church and State subjects became accustomed to a stricter discipline of life. And where the State still lacked a well organized bureaucracy able to reach every single subject in the countryside, the Church stepped in with its parish ministers.

This alliance of Church and State during the process of Confessionalization reached its culmination in the field of ideas and emotions, where it secured the consent of the subjects to their own subjugation:

   No law is more favorable to princes than the Christian one, because it submits to them not only the bodies and means of the subjects, but their souls and consciences, too, and it binds not only the hands, but also the feelings and thoughts.

Returning to the question in the beginning of this lecture we must consider that continuity and competition are balanced in Luthers reform attempt. To my impression this is exactly what he intended: to find a way back to the grassroots of the original church. What he did not intend was in fact the major contribution to the European history: the modernization and the secular development of early modern society and state. Can we call the latter a failure? I think not. Such a judgment is a moral one and
anachronistic, for it judges a holistic movement from one particular view, that of a
dogmatic understanding of what is true evangelical doctrine and life. Even though the
question of truth and pure doctrine is not to be put aside a onesided theological view
of the reformation and its consequences is no longer adequate. Thus the theory of
confessionalization on the one hand gives a proper interpretation of the whole epoch
and leads on the other hand to a new and more historical interpretation of life and
work of Martin Luther. He is not a saint but a very important and influential
theologian; he is not a national hero but a man with a lot of interesting ideas for the
development of society and state; he is not a heretic but a deep minded searcher for
truth, he is not the founder of the early modern state, the pathfinder for the way to
tolerance, humanity and democracy, the first who detected the individual conscience,
but he opened theology and pastoral care for the problems of people on their way into
another epoch. So he is both: a late mediaval theologian and a modern minded
individual. With this he is—and that is what he actually wanted to be—a true witness
of the evangelical faith and its truth which allways is revealed throughout history.

Thank you for your interest and patience.