Alister E. McGrath

Reformation Thought

Fifth Edition

WILEY Blackwell

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An Introduction

Fifth Edition

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Preface to the Fifth Edition

This book is based on a course of lectures I gave to undergraduates at Oxford University during the 1980s and 1990s on the core ideas of the European Reformation of the sixteenth century from about 1500 to 1560. To this day, I still get letters from students who attended those lectures, explaining what they found so exciting about them, and the impact they had on their intellectual development. While the thought of the Reformation remains one of the most fascinating areas of study for historians, it also continues to be of central importance to anyone interested in the history of the Christian church or its religious ideas. This book follows the convention of including mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Anabaptist approaches to the questions under discussion during this "Age of Reformation," aiming for accuracy in scholarship, clarity in explanation, and charity in dealing with disputed questions.

The Reformation embraced a number of quite distinct, yet overlapping, areas of human activity – the reform of both the morals and structures of church and society, shifts in economic and social thinking, the renewal of Christian spirituality, and the reform of Christian doctrine. It was a movement based upon a more or less coherent set of ideas, which were believed to be capable of functioning as the foundation of a program of reform and renewal.

But what were those ideas? How may their origins be accounted for? And how were they modified by the social conditions of the period? One serious difficulty – indeed, perhaps the most serious difficulty – facing those new to the study of the sixteenth-century Reformation is a lack of familiarity with the ideas underlying it. While some students of this period already have a good grasp of basic Christian ideas, perhaps even having a understanding of some of the specific doctrinal debates of this age of Reformation, others will find them unfamiliar, if not incomprehensible.

Many modern students of the Reformation now know relatively little about Christian theology. (The term "theology" has been used by Christians since the third century to mean "talking about God." The word is now widely used to refer to both the core ideas of the Christian faith, and the academic discipline which reflects on these ideas.) For example, the great theological slogan "justification by faith alone" seems incomprehensible to many students of this era, as do the intricacies of the sixteenth-century debates over the eucharist. Why should these apparently obscure issues have caused such a storm at the time? There is an obvious temptation for the student of the Reformation to avoid engaging with the ideas of the movement, and treat it as a purely social phenomenon. Yet this yields a thin and superficial account of a complex and multi-levelled movement, for which religious ideas were important, if not foundational. To study the Reformation without considering the religious ideas which fueled its development is comparable to studying the Russian Revolution without reference to Marx's core ideas.

This book is written for students who want to go beyond a superficial engagement with the ideas of the Reformation, and wish to deal with them seriously. They recognize the importance of these ideas, but are often discouraged from engaging them by the formidable difficulties encountered in trying to understand those ideas, and see why they generated such intense discussion and debate. Many also find themselves overwhelmed by the vast research literature in this field, which has changed our understanding both of the Reformation itself, and of its background in the late Renaissance, particularly in relation to late medieval scholasticism. Some of this work has yet to filter through to the student, and there is a pressing need for a work which will explain the findings of recent scholarship, and indicate its importance for our understanding of the Reformation during the sixteenth century.

This textbook aims to provide the resource such readers need. It assumes that the reader knows little, if anything, about Christian theology, and aims to provide an entry level guide to the ideas that proved to be so central to this movement in European history, while at the same time distilling the findings of much recent scholarship in its field. It aims to take both *theology* and *history* seriously, exploring the core ideas of this fascinating period, yet being alert to the importance of the historical context within which they emerged and became established. In short, it is a work of *historical theology*, attentive to the complex interplay of ideas and social contexts. This theme can be explored in many ways, from traditional Marxist to more recent post-colonial accounts of the conceptualization of religious diversity and transformation in the German Reformation.

This book arose from many years' experience of teaching the field of Reformation studies to students at Oxford University, and I wish to acknowledge my complete indebtedness to those students. It is they who have taught me just how much about the sixteenth-century Reformation, so often taken for granted, actually needs to be explained. It is they who have identified the points of particular difficulty which need special discussion. It is they who have identified the need for precisely this work – and if the reader finds it helpful, it is those students who must

be thanked. I am also grateful to my colleagues from the Oxford University Faculties of Theology and History for many helpful discussions concerning the difficulties encountered in teaching Reformation thought in the twenty-first century.

This book first appeared in 1988. It was immediately clear that it had met a real educational need. An expanded and revised second edition appeared in 1993. The third and fourth editions of 1999 and 2012 offered substantially increased biographical coverage of major Reformation thinkers, and extended its coverage to include the thought of the English Reformation.

This new edition draws extensively on intensive research into the Reformation era and its context which I undertook recently in producing the fourth edition of my work *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2020). It retains all the features which made its earlier editions so attractive to its readers, while incorporating additional material and updating the work as necessary, reflecting scholarly developments since the last edition. In response to user feedback, discussion of the ideas of the English Reformation have now been transferred to and incorporated within earlier chapters, thus allowing a greater appreciation of the wider intellectual context within which these emerged.

Alister McGrath
Oxford, July 2020

How to Use This Book

Three words sum up the aims and approach of this textbook: *introduce*; *explain*; *contextualize*. First, the book aims to *introduce* the leading ideas of the European Reformation, and the individual thinkers who introduced and developed them. Like a sketch map, it outlines the main features of the intellectual landscape of this age, providing suggestions for further reading which will allow its readers to add finer detail later. Second, the book aims to *explain* these ideas. It assumes that its readers know little about the Christian theology which underlies the Reformation, and explains what terms such as "justification by faith" mean, and why they are of religious and social relevance. Third, it aims to *contextualize* these ideas by setting them in their proper intellectual, social, and political context. That context includes such great intellectual movements as humanism and scholasticism, and the political and social realities of the imperial cities of the early sixteenth century.

So how should you use this book? How can you get most out of it? To answer this question, we need to look at its structure, which has two main parts.

1. *The Context of the Thought of the Reformation*

Following an introductory chapter, providing a sketch map of the great movements of reform and renewal which we today know as "the Reformation," identifying its main elements and some of the issues it raised, the next four chapters of the book set the historical and intellectual context for the great debates of the Age of Reformation. The second chapter provides an overview of some of the cultural and social issues which emerged in western Europe during the late Middle Ages, which are thought to have contributed to the development of local reforming movements within the western church from the 1490s, particularly in Spain and Italy.

We then turn to consider the two major intellectual movements that are known to have had a significant impact on early sixteenth century religious thought – Renaissance humanism and medieval scholasticism. The third and fourth chapters of this book consider the leading ideas and representative figures from this period, considering their intellectual backgrounds, religious agendas, and contributions to the Reformation debates. The fifth chapter offers brief biographical sketches of some of seven significant figures of the Reformation, in preparation for the sustained engagement with the ideas of the movement in the second part of the work.

2. *The Core Themes of Reformation Thought*

The second major section consists of six chapters (6–11) which engage the main themes of Reformation thought – such as the authority and interpretation of the Bible, the doctrine of justification by faith, and the nature of the church. In each case, considerable care is taken to explain the positions of a range of contributors, including Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Catholic. At several points, significant English contributions to these debates are noted, referencing key English writers such as William Tyndale and Thomas Cranmer. Although earlier editions included a chapter dedicated to the thought of English writers, their dependence on their continental counterparts made it more appropriate to integrate them into the thematic discussion of issues, and thus allow their significance to be better understood. A final chapter (Chapter 12) considers how the ideas of the Reformation age spread internationally, and their impact on the historical process.

So how should you use this book? My correspondence with users of earlier editions suggests that most fall into one of two groups. I shall briefly describe these two broad categories of readers, and explain how each can get the most out of this textbook.

Some readers will want to go deeply into the thought of the Reformation period, understanding both its historical context and evolution and wider cultural and historical significance. They should read the book in its totality in the order in which the material is presented. This allows a cumulative and progressive approach to Reformation thought, in that each chapter can build on the foundations laid earlier. It is easier to understand the nature and significance of the theological debates of the age of Reformation if you know about their historical context.

Others, however, will want to master the key ideas of the Reformation, aiming to gain an understanding of their theological significance. For such readers, the historical and cultural context is not of pressing importance, and can be explored later. These readers should begin at Chapter 6, and end at Chapter 11. You will find discussion of certain points that reference earlier chapters – especially relating to Renaissance humanism and medieval scholasticism. You can either ignore these, or follow them through later. The work has been designed to allow you to understand the theological issues debated in the age of Reformation, without requiring

a detailed historical knowledge of their background and context. You may also find it interesting to consider the longer-term significance of these ideas, which is discussed in Chapter 12.

This work also includes a series of appendices that deal with difficulties which experience suggests most students encounter as they read works relating to the Reformation. What do these abbreviations mean? How can I make sense of those references to primary and secondary sources? What does "Pelagian" mean? Where should I go to find out more about the Reformation? These questions and others are dealt with at length, making this book especially valuable to those new to the field. I assume that the reader speaks no language other than English, and all Latin quotations or slogans are therefore translated and explained. Although the text of the work draws extensively upon foreign language scholarship, I have woven this seamlessly into the analysis, and limited my bibliographies to works that are available in English.

1
Introducing the Age of Reformation

Many students approach the ideas of the European Reformation of the sixteenth century in much the same way as medieval travelers approached the vast dark forests of southern Germany – with a sense of hesitation and anxiety, in case what lay ahead should prove impenetrable. They often feel like explorers venturing into an unfamiliar world, at times overwhelmed by the unmapped wilderness ahead of them, in which they could easily become lost. Many find themselves longing for a guide who will lead them through what sometimes seems like a dense and impenetrable jungle.

It is understandably difficult for a student who has been immersed in the secularism of modern western culture to come to terms with a movement that was so clearly motivated by religious ideas. It is tempting to marginalize these ideas and view the sixteenth century through the lens of the modern period. Like any historical phenomenon, however, the Reformation demands that its interpreters attempt to enter into *its* world-view. We must learn to empathize with its concerns and outlook, in order to understand how these affected the great flux of history. The Reformation in Switzerland and Germany was directly based upon religious ideas which demand and deserve careful consideration. Even in England, where local conditions led to political factors having a somewhat greater influence, a significant core of religious ideas and concerns shaped the development of the reforming programs of the age. This book aims to explain as clearly as possible what the religious ideas underlying the Reformation were and how these impacted on individuals and communities. So what do we mean by this idea of "Reformation," or the phrase "An Age of Reformation"?

Reformation Thought: An Introduction, Fifth Edition. Alister E. McGrath.

The Concept of "Reformation"

Like many other terms used by historians to designate eras in human history – such as "Renaissance" or "Enlightenment" – the term "Reformation" is open to criticism. For example, the twelfth century witnessed a comparable attempt to reform the church in western Europe – but the term "Reformation" is not used by historians to designate this earlier movement. Other terms might be thought by some to be more appropriate to refer to the sixteenth-century movement we shall be studying in this work.

The term "Reformation" does not designate a specific chronological period – such as "the sixteenth century" (a block of time that is easily demarcated) or "the Middle Ages" (which proves rather more difficult to define). Like the term "Renaissance," it is an interpretative category – a way of mapping out a slice of history in which certain ideas, attitudes, and values were developed, explored, and applied. The present book uses the term "Reformation" in a restricted sense, engaging the leading individuals, ideas, and movements working for the reform and renewal of the church in western Europe over the period 1500–60. As the title of this work makes clear, its particular focus is on the *ideas* that lay behind the Reformation in its various forms. How did they arise? How were they understood? What was their appeal? And what were their consequences?

The term "Reformation" has achieved wide usage, and there are no persuasive reasons for ceasing to use it. It does, however, need to be used with caution. The historian John O'Malley makes an important point that needs to be taken seriously. Terms such as "Reformation," "Counter Reformation," and "Catholic Reformation" are not, he cautions, "simple ideas." Rather, they "subtly directed attention to some issues and away from others, highlighted certain phenomena and cast others into the shadows, admitted some evidence but filtered out the rest."[1] O'Malley's point is that we need to be attentive to the historical evidence, and not allow ourselves to become trapped by preconceived ideas about what the Reformation *ought* to be, or whether it was a *good* thing or a *bad* thing.

The term "Reformation" has come to be generally accepted as the proper designation for reforming movements within church and society in the first half of the sixteenth century, partly because the movement was linked with the recognition of the need for a significant overhaul of the institutions, practices, and – though perhaps to a lesser extent – the *ideas* of the western church. The term, which has achieved wide acceptance, helpfully indicates that there were both social and intellectual dimensions to the movement which it designates. Christianity was woven into the social fabric of western Europe at this time, and the demands for reform included both a review of aspects of the Church which appeared to have become corrupt, and its ideas, some of which were called into question by the new biblical scholarship of the Renaissance. Reform was thus needed at the level of institutions and ideas; it was a demand for both social and theological change.

As it is used in the historical literature, the term "Reformation" is generally understood to enfold four basic components: Lutheranism, the Reformed church (often referred to as "Calvinism"), the "radical Reformation" (often referred to as "Anabaptism") and what was once called the "Counter-Reformation" but is now generally known as the "Catholic Reformation." In its broadest sense, the term "Reformation" is used to refer to all four movements. Some recent studies of this age have used the plural form "Reformations" to suggest that the Reformation was a multi-faceted movement, or a loosely connected set of distinct reforming movements, rather than a single coherent movement with local adaptations.

The term "Reformation" is often used in a somewhat more restricted sense to mean "the Protestant Reformation," thereby excluding the Catholic Reformation. In this sense, it refers to the three Protestant movements noted above. In some scholarly works, the term "Reformation" is used to refer to what is sometimes known as the "magisterial Reformation," or the "mainstream Reformation" – in other words, the form of reformation that was linked with the Lutheran and Reformed churches, rather than with the more radical Anabaptists. Although this work focuses on the ideas of the Protestant Reformation, it is attentive to the concerns and ideas of the Catholic Reformation, which clearly merit discussion and consideration.

The unusual phrase "magisterial Reformation" needs explaining. It highlights the way in which the mainstream reformers developed a generally positive relationship with secular authorities, such as princes, magistrates, or city councils. Whereas the radical reformers regarded such authorities as having no rights or authority within the church, the mainstream reformers argued that the church was, at least to some extent, subject to the secular agencies of government. The magistrate had a right to some degree of authority within the church, just as the church could rely on the authority of the magistrate to enforce discipline, suppress heresy, or maintain order. In contrast, Anabaptism was opposed to recognizing any form of secular authority within the church. The 1534 Anabaptist takeover of the city of Münster, which had to be ended by force, was widely seen as a threat to social stability throughout western Europe, and led to reforming movements throughout Europe being tainted by association with social anarchy – a concern explicitly noted by Calvin in the preface to the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), addressed to the king of France.

All these senses of the word "Reformation" will be encountered in historical and theological works dealing with the sixteenth century. The term "magisterial Reformation" is increasingly used to refer to the first two senses of the term (i.e. enfolding Lutheranism and the Reformed church) taken together, and the term "radical Reformation" to refer to the third (i.e. Anabaptism). Although the present work is primarily concerned with the ideas of the magisterial Reformation, it includes discussion of all the components of this age of Reformation, including the Radical and Catholic reformations.

So how does the term "Reformation" map onto the related term "Protestant"? The term "Protestant" began to be used in the aftermath of the Second Diet of

Speyer (February 1529), which voted to end the toleration of Lutheranism in Germany. In April of the same year, six German princes and fourteen cities protested against this oppressive measure, defending freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities. The term "Protestant" derives from the Latin term *Protestantes* ("those who protest"), which was used to refer to those who dissented from this suppression of religious minorities. It is therefore not strictly correct to apply the term "Protestant" to individuals prior to April 1529 or to speak of events prior to that date as constituting "the Protestant Reformation."

The term "evangelical" is often used in the literature to refer to the reforming movements at Wittenberg and elsewhere (e.g. in France and Switzerland) prior to this date. The French term *évangelique* and the German term *evangelisch* were regularly used at the time within such early reforming movements to indicate their desire to return to forms of Christian life and thought in line with the New Testament. Both these words derive from the Greek word *evangelion* ("gospel"), indicating the need to return to the New Testament to rediscover the core themes of the Christian faith. Although the word "Protestant" is now often used to refer to individuals or ideas dating from this earlier period, this use is anachronistic.

In what follows, we shall consider the main elements of the Reformation. While it is important to note their distinct identities and agendas, these elements interacted with each other, creating a process of self-definition which often took oppositional forms. Although, for example, Lutheran and Reformed communities shared similar agendas, the growing need to distinguish between them for political and social reasons, particularly in parts of Germany during the 1560s, led to increasing pressure to identify their points of difference.

The Lutheran Reformation

The Lutheran Reformation is particularly associated with the German territories and with the pervasive personal influence of one charismatic individual – Martin Luther (1483–1546). As we shall see, Luther was particularly concerned with the doctrine of justification by faith alone (Latin: *sola fide*), which became the central theme and focus of his religious thought. The Lutheran Reformation was initially an academic movement, concerned primarily with reforming the teaching of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Wittenberg was not a major university, and the reforms introduced by Luther and his colleagues within the theology faculty attracted little wider attention. It was Luther's personal activities – such as his posting of the famous Ninety-Five Theses (October 31, 1517) and the Leipzig Disputation (June–July 1519) – which brought the reforming ideas in circulation at Wittenberg to the attention of a wider (though not always appreciative) audience.

Strictly speaking, the Lutheran Reformation really began in 1522, when Luther returned to minister in Wittenberg from his enforced protective isolation in the Wartburg castle (see pp. 98–9). Luther had been condemned by the Diet of Worms in 1521. Fearing for his life, certain well-placed supporters removed him

in secrecy to the castle known as the "Wartburg" until the threat to his safety had passed. (Luther used his enforced isolation to begin translating the New Testament into German.) In his absence, Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), one of Luther's academic colleagues at Wittenberg, began a program of reform at Wittenberg which threatened to degenerate into chaos. Convinced that his own presence was needed if the Reformation was to survive Karlstadt's ineptitude, Luther emerged from his place of safety, and returned to Wittenberg.

At this point, Luther's program for academic reform changed into a wider program for the reform of German church and society. No longer was Luther's forum of activity the university world of ideas – he now found himself regarded as the leader of a religious, social, and political reforming movement which seemed to some contemporary observers to open the way to a new social and religious order in Europe.

In fact, Luther's program of reform was actually more conservative than that associated with his Reformed colleagues, such as Huldrych Zwingli. It also met with rather less success than some anticipated. The movement remained obstinately landlocked within the German territories, and – the kingdoms of Scandinavia apart – never gained the foreign power-bases which had seemed to be, like so many ripe apples, ready to fall into its lap. Luther's understanding of the role of the "godly prince" (which effectively ensured that the monarch had control of the church) does not seem to have held the attraction that might have been expected, particularly in the light of the generally republican sentiments of Reformed thinkers such as Calvin. The case of England is particularly illuminating: here, as in the Lowlands, the Protestant theology which eventually gained the ascendancy was Reformed rather than Lutheran, despite early interest in Luther's distinctive ideas.

The Reformed Church

The origins of the Reformed church lie with developments within the Swiss Confederation – a loose confederation of cantons, including Zurich. Whereas the Lutheran Reformation had its origins primarily in an academic context, the Reformed church owed its origins more to a series of attempts to reform the morals and worship of the church (but not necessarily its *doctrine*) according to a more biblical pattern. Although most of the early Reformed theologians – such as Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) – had an academic background, their reforming programs were not academic in nature. They were mainly concerned with reforming the practices (such as the worship) of the churches in the main Swiss cities, including Zurich, Berne, and Basle.

Whereas Luther was convinced that the doctrine of justification by faith was of central significance to his program of social and religious reform, early Reformed thinkers appear to have had relatively little interest in doctrine, let alone this one specific doctrine. Their reforming program was institutional, social, and ethical, in many ways similar to the demands for moral and structural reform originating

from within the humanist movement. We shall consider the ideas of humanism in some detail presently (pp. 43–71); for the moment it is important simply to note that all the major early Reformed theologians had links with the humanist movement which were not shared by Luther, who regarded it with some suspicion.

The consolidation of the Reformed church is generally thought to have begun with the stabilization of the Zurich reformation after Zwingli's death in battle (1531) under his successor, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), and to have ended with the emergence of Geneva as its power-base and John Calvin (1509–64) as its leading spokesman in the 1550s. The gradual shift in power within the Reformed church (initially from Zurich to Berne, and subsequently from Berne to Geneva) took place over the period 1520–60, eventually establishing both the city of Geneva, its political system (republicanism), and its religious thinkers (initially Calvin, and after his death Theodore Beza) as predominant within the Reformed church. This development was consolidated through the establishment of the Genevan Academy (founded in 1559), at which Reformed pastors were trained for service throughout Europe.

The term "Calvinism" is often used to refer to the religious ideas of the Reformed church. Although this practice is still encountered in the literature relating to the Reformation, it is now generally discouraged. It is becoming increasingly clear that later sixteenth-century Reformed theology draws on sources other than the ideas of Calvin himself. To refer to later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought as "Calvinist" implies that it is essentially the thought of Calvin – and it is now generally agreed that Calvin's ideas were modified subtly – though not inappropriately – by his successors through a natural process of development and reflection. (We shall explore this development in relation to the doctrine of predestination on pp. 231–45.) The term "Reformed" is now preferred to "Calvinist," whether to refer to those churches (mainly in Switzerland, the Lowlands, and Germany) or religious thinkers (such as Theodore Beza, William Perkins, or John Owen) which were grounded in Calvin's celebrated religious textbook *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* or to church documents (such as the famous *Heidelberg Catechism*) based upon it.

A study of the development of the term "Calvinist" suggests that it dates from the 1560s, when a significant alteration in the political situation in the German territories took place. Germany had been seriously destabilized in the 1540s and early 1550s by conflicts between Lutherans and Catholics, and it was widely recognized that such conflicts were damaging to the Empire. The Peace of Augsburg (September 1555) settled the religious question in Germany by allocating certain areas of Germany to Lutheranism and the remainder to Catholicism – the famous principle often referred to using the Latin slogan *cuius regio, eius religio* ("your region determines your religion"). No provision was made for the Reformed faith, which was then a minority presence within Germany.

In February 1563, however, the *Heidelberg Catechism* was published (see p. 272), demonstrating that Reformed theology had gained a firm foothold in this

hitherto Lutheran region of Germany. This catechism was immediately attacked by Lutherans as being "Calvinist" – in other words, foreign. The term "Calvinist" was used by German Lutherans to attempt to discredit this new and increasingly influential document, by implying that it was unpatriotic. Given the original polemical associations of the term "Calvinist," historians have searched for a more neutral term to refer to this movement. The term "Reformed" is widely used for this reason, and is to be preferred. However, some theologians continue to use the term "Calvinism."

The Reformed wing of the Reformation has been of particular importance in shaping Christianity within the English-speaking world. Puritanism, which figures so prominently in seventeenth-century English history and is of such fundamental importance to the religious and political views of New England in the seventeenth century and beyond, is a specific form of Reformed Christianity. To understand the religious and political history of New England or the ideas of writers such as Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), for example, it is necessary to come to grips with at least some of the theological insights and part of the religious outlook of Puritanism, which underlie their social and political attitudes. It is hoped that this work will help with this process of familiarization.

The Radical Reformation (Anabaptism)

Every intellectual movement has its conservatives and radicals. The New Testament's demand to "test everything" and "hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) points to a critical process of sifting and refining, aimed at capturing and then preserving what was "good" about European Christianity and church life at this time. The British philosopher Roger Scruton puts his finger on two themes that lie at the heart of a conservative way of thinking: "the conviction that good things are more easily destroyed than created," and a "determination to hold on to those good things" in the face of social and cultural change.[2] While Luther was clear that there were major issues with the church's teaching on grace, he comes across as an essentially conservative thinker, determined to retain as much as he could of legitimate traditional Christian belief and practice.

Others, however, were more radical, holding that it was necessary to start all over again, setting to one side what had been inherited from the past and reconstructing Christianity in a manner that liberated it from past cultural and political captivities. The movement that is now generally known as "the radical Reformation" was actually quite diverse, reflecting a series of theological, cultural, and political agendas. Some, such as the Socinians and other anti-Trinitarians and rationalists, believed that Christianity had become trapped in a series of irrational beliefs, such as the doctrine of the Trinity; it was time to extricate Christianity from such false turns. Others, such as Caspar von Schwenckfeld, pointed to the need for spiritualizing key Christian ideas. Given the diversity of this movement, it is difficult to survey it properly and fully. For our purposes, we shall focus on the section of the movement that is generally known as "Anabaptism." Not all

radicals were Anabaptists in either the strict or broad sense of the term; nevertheless, this section of the radical Reformation perhaps had the greatest impact on the Reformation as a whole, and thus deserves special attention.

So what was "Anabaptism"? The term "Anabaptist" was invented by Zwingli (the word literally means "re-baptizers") following the rise of the movement in Zurich, and refers to what was perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Anabaptist practice – the insistence that only those who had made a personal public profession of faith should be baptized. Anabaptism seems to have first arisen around Zurich, in the aftermath of Zwingli's reforms within the city in the early 1520s. It centred on a group of individuals (notably Conrad Grebel, c.1498–1526) who argued that Zwingli was not being faithful to his own reforming principles. He preached one thing, and practiced another.

Although Zwingli had made faithfulness to the *sola scriptura* (a Latin slogan meaning "by Scripture alone": see pp. 126–8) principle a cornerstone of his ministry, Grebel argued that Zwingli was inconsistent in its application. Grebel criticized Zwingli for retaining a number of practices – including infant baptism, recognizing a close link between the church and the magistracy, and permitting Christians to engage in warfare – which were not sanctioned or ordained by Scripture. For Grebel and other radical thinkers, thinking and living *sola scriptura* demanded that reformed Christians should believe and practice only what was explicitly taught in Scripture. Zwingli was alarmed by this, seeing it as a destabilizing development which threatened to cut the Reformed church at Zurich off from its historical roots and its continuity with the Christian tradition of the past.

The Anabaptists had good reason to accuse Zwingli of compromise. In 1522, Zwingli wrote a work known as *Apologeticus Archeteles*, in which he recognized the idea of a "community of goods" as an authentic Christian ideal. "No-one calls any possessions his own," he wrote; "all things are held in common." On this point, Zwingli and the Anabaptists seemed to be in fundamental agreement. But by 1525, Zwingli had changed his mind, and come round to the idea that private property was not such a bad thing after all.

Although Anabaptism arose in Germany and Switzerland, it subsequently became influential in other regions, such as the Lowlands. The movement produced relatively few theologians (the three most significant are generally agreed to be Balthasar Hubmaier (c.1480–1528), Pilgram Marbeck (c.1495–1556), and Menno Simons (1496–1561)). This failure partly reflects the forcible suppression of Anabaptism by the secular authorities, following the Anabaptist takeover of the city of Münster in 1534, which was widely seen as a threat to law and order throughout western Europe. Yet Anabaptism's failure in this respect may also reflect the fact that the movement did not have any substantial shared theological basis.

A number of common elements can be discerned within the various strands of the movement: a general distrust of external authority; the rejection of infant baptism in favour of the baptism of adult believers; the common ownership of property; and an emphasis upon pacifism and non-resistance. To take up one of these points: in 1527, the governments of the cities of Zurich, Berne, and

St. Gallen accused the Anabaptists of believing "that no true Christian can either give or receive interest or income on a sum of capital; that all temporal goods are free and common, and that all can have full property rights to them."

It is for this reason that "Anabaptism" is often referred to as the "left wing of the Reformation" (Roland H. Bainton) or the "radical Reformation" (George Hunston Williams). For Williams, the "radical Reformation" was to be contrasted with the "magisterial Reformation," which he broadly identified with the Lutheran and Reformed movements. These terms have gained wide acceptance within Reformation scholarship.

Probably the most significant document to emerge from the Anabaptist movement is the Schleitheim Confession, drawn up by Michael Sattler (1490–1527) on February 24, 1527. The Confession takes its name from the small town of that name in the canton of Schaffhausen. Its function was to distinguish Anabaptists from those around them – supremely from what the document refers to as "papists and antipapists" (that is, unreformed Catholics and magisterial evangelicals). In effect, the Schleitheim Confession amounts to "articles of separation" – that is to say, a set of beliefs and attitudes which distinguish Anabaptists from their opponents inside and outside the Reformation, and function as a core of unity, whatever their other differences might be.

The Catholic Reformation

This term is often used to refer to the revitalization of Catholicism, which is often thought to begin in the period following the opening of the Council of Trent (1545). In older scholarly works, this movement is often referred to as the "Counter-Reformation": this term refers primarily to the strategies that the Catholic church developed as a means of combating the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic church, however, countered the threat from Protestantism partly by reforming itself from within, in order to address and remove any legitimate grounds of Protestant criticism. In this sense, the movement is to be seen both as a reformation of the Catholic church, as well as a critique of the Protestant Reformation.

The same concerns underlying the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe were channeled into the renewal of the Catholic church, particularly in Spain and Italy. The Council of Trent, the foremost feature of the Catholic Reformation, clarified Catholic teaching on a number of confusing matters, and introduced much needed reforms in relation to the conduct of the clergy, ecclesiastical discipline, religious education, and missionary activity. The movement for reform within the Catholic church was greatly stimulated by the reformation of many of the older religious orders and the establishment of new orders (such as the "Society of Jesus," often referred to as "the Jesuits"). The more specifically theological aspects of the Catholic Reformation will be considered in this textbook primarily in relation to its teachings on Scripture and tradition, justification by faith, the church and the sacraments.

As a result of the Catholic Reformation, many of the abuses which originally lay behind the demands for reform – whether these came from humanists or Protestants – were removed. By this stage, however, the Protestant Reformation had reached a point at which the mere removal of malpractices and abuses was no longer sufficient to defuse or reverse the situation: the demand for the reformation of doctrine, religious ideology, and the church was now regarded as an essential aspect of the Protestant–Catholic controversies. This point highlights the need to consider the religious ideas lying behind the "magisterial Reformation," which became of increasing importance to the Protestant–Catholic debate as the sixteenth century progressed.

The English Reformation

There is intense scholarly interest in the English Reformation, reflecting its own distinct agendas and concerns. Although the sixteenth-century English Reformation under Henry VIII bore little relation to its German equivalent, Luther was a significant influence on the development of the English Reformation, even though it ultimately took a course which diverged significantly from that mapped out by Luther. The influential English historian F. W. Powicke (1879–1963) once remarked that "the one thing that can be said about the Reformation in England is that it was an act of State." For Powicke, "the Reformation in England was a parliamentary transaction."[3] There is enough truth in Powicke's generalization to help us identify a key difference between the German and English Reformations.

In Germany, there was a protracted struggle between evangelical and Catholic writers and ecclesiastics during the 1530s, as each attempted to gain influence in a disputed region, and define its distinct identity. The situation in Germany became even more complicated during the 1560s and 1570s, as Calvinism began to make major inroads into previously Lutheran territory. Three major Christian denominations were now firmly established in the same area – Lutheranism, the Reformed churches, and Catholicism. All three were under major pressure to identify themselves. Lutherans were obliged to explain how they differed from Calvinists on the one hand and Catholics on the other. And doctrine proved the most reliable way of identifying and explaining these differences: "we believe *this*, but they believe *that*."

The period 1559–1622, characterized by a new emphasis on the need for purity of doctrine, is generally referred to as the "period of orthodoxy." Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic churches found it necessary to define and defend themselves *theologically*, a process which inevitably led to the construction of theological definitions of identity. For example, the doctrine of double predestination (pp. 240–1) came to be a boundary marker between the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

The situation in England from 1530 onward was very different. Henry VIII simply declared that there would be only one national church within his realm. By royal command, there would be a single Christian body in England, with the monarch as its head or "supreme governor." In the absence of any other viable

Christian body within the realm of England, the reformed English church was under no pressure to justify or define itself in relation to any other Christian body in the region. The Act of Uniformity ensured that there was only one national church, whose unity was symbolized and maintained by the monarch as its "supreme governor."

The manner in which the English Reformation initially proceeded under Henry VIII thus did not make doctrinal self-definition necessary, in that the church in England was defined socially in precisely the same way before the Reformation as after – whatever alterations may have been introduced. This is not to say that no theological debates took place in England at the time of the Reformation; it is simply to note that they were not regarded as fundamental to establishing the identity of the English national church.

The situation remained much the same under Elizabeth I. The Elizabethan "Settlement of Religion" (1559) laid down that there would be only one Christian church in England – the Church of England, which retained the religious monopoly of the pre-Reformation church, while recognizing royal, rather than papal, supremacy. The phrase "Church of England," as defined legally in Halsbury's *Laws of England*, makes no reference to its doctrine: the "Church of England" is regarded as continuous with the church established in England during the period 597–686. Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism – the three Christian churches fighting it out for dominance of the continent of Europe – would not be permitted to operate in England.

The social pressures which made religious ideas so important in the German context never really developed during the period of the English Reformation. There was thus no particular reason for the Church of England to pay much attention to doctrinal questions. Elizabeth ensured that it had no rivals in England. One of the purposes of doctrine is to divide – and there was nothing for the Church of England to divide itself from. England was insulated from the factors which made doctrine so significant a matter on the mainland of Europe in the Reformation and immediate post-Reformation periods.

Indeed, the need to ensure that all English Christians (whether personally inclined toward some form of Protestantism or toward Catholicism) felt reasonably at home in the Church of England led to the necessity of doctrine being played down: an emphasis on doctrine might lead to divisions within the new church, and hence internal weakness at a time when English faced significant external threats. As Elizabeth tried to ensure England's safety in the dangerous world of the late sixteenth century, the last thing she wanted was an England torn apart by doctrinal differences. A divided English church would mean a divided England; and a divided England would be a weak and vulnerable England.

The social context of the Reformation thus has a significant influence on the extent to which religious ideas affected events. In Germany, such ideas proved to be enormously important; in England, their influence appears to have been of less significance. Many scholars suggest that the rise of Puritanism as a significant religious and political force in England toward the end of the sixteenth century led to

specifically theological issues being given a high profile in discussions of the shape and identity of the English church.

From what has been said thus far, it will be clear that the "Age of Reformation" was not homogenous, but involved a complex pattern of interactions between leading reformers, local concerns and opportunities, and local rulers – whether these took the form of monarchs or city councils. These issues will be explored in greater detail as this analysis proceeds in later chapters. In what follows, we shall present an overview of the factors that led so many to conclude that some kind of reform was needed in the early 1500s. While there was divergence on precisely what needed to be reformed, and who ought to carry out such reformations, there was widespread agreement that something needed to be done.

The Call for Reform

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was obvious that the church in western Europe was in urgent need of "reform of head and members." It seemed to many that the life-blood of the church had ceased to flow through its veins. The church legal system was badly in need of overhaul, and ecclesiastical bureaucracy had become notoriously inefficient and corrupt. The morals of the clergy were often lax and a source of scandal to their congregations. Clergy, even at the highest level, were frequently absent from their parishes. In Germany, it is reported that only one parish in fourteen had its pastor in residence. The Frenchman Antoine du Prat, archbishop of Sens, turned up for only one service at his cathedral throughout his ten years in the archdiocese: moreover, his presence and role at this service were somewhat passive, in that it was his funeral.

Many senior ecclesiastical posts were secured through questionable means on dubious grounds, generally relying upon the family connections or the political or financial status of the candidates, rather than their spiritual qualities. Thus, Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy secured the appointment of his son to the senior position of bishop of Geneva in 1451; if anyone had misgivings about the fact that the new bishop had never been ordained and was only eight years of age, they were wise enough not to mention them in public. Pope Alexander VI, a member of the Borgia family (famous for its lethal dinner parties), secured his election to the papacy in 1492 despite having several mistresses and seven children, largely because he bought the papacy outright over the heads of his nearest rivals. Niccolò Machiavelli put the loose morals of late Renaissance Italy down to the poor example set by the church and its clergy.

The Growth of Anti-Clericalism

Perhaps unsurprisingly, anti-clericalism became a significant phenomenon in the late Middle Ages, reflecting a number of social concerns about the elevated social status and unimpressive intellectual caliber of the clergy. The tax breaks enjoyed

Figure 1.1 Erasmus of Rotterdam in the print shop of his friend Johannes Froben of Basle. Corbis PL279.

by clergy were the source of particular irritation, especially in times of economic difficulty. In the French diocese of Meaux, there was considerable local resentment because the clergy were exempted from all forms of taxation. In the diocese of Rouen, there was popular outcry over the windfall profits made by the church by selling grain during a period of severe shortage. Irritated by the low intellectual stature of many parish clergy in the early sixteenth century, an increasingly educated Christian laity turned to writers such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (Figure 1.1) to find an intelligent articulation of their faith.

Yet despite such valid concerns, the extent and significance of anti-clericalism should not be exaggerated. While there were undoubtedly areas in which such hostility was particularly pronounced – particularly in cities – the clergy were often valued and esteemed, especially in rural areas. Many of the great monasteries of western Europe were respected on account of their social outreach and their significant contributions to the local economy. Yet when all this is taken into account, a rumbling discontent remained, often expressed in what is known as "protest literature" (also known as "grievance literature" or "complaint literature"). Nor should the importance of anti-clericalism for the emergence of the Protestant Reformation be overstated. The Reformation may have reduced the number of clergy through a process of decentralization and the reallocation of