

Introduction

The evangelical movement of sixteenth-century Germany began in a flash of millennial excitement. Its rapid spread through the Holy Roman Empire was accompanied by widespread social disruption, violence, and political upheaval, on a local scale and on a regional and supra-regional as well. However, following the Peasants' Revolt of 1525, a tendency towards social conservatism began to set in. The year 1530 saw the subscription of the Augsburg Confession by a group of princes, and with it came the increasing formalization and institutionalization of the new faith.

Over the next few decades, few in Germany expected the schism to have any real permanency. Most expected either continued reform or national religious healing: on the one hand, continued reform ought to bring the eventual withering away of the old Church, or on the other, the healing of the schism would bring Protestants back under the banner of a revived and moderately reformed national Catholicism. Those who foresaw neither of these options looked ahead to the impending end of days. Until the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the only legal provisions for the peaceful coexistence of rival confessions were explicitly temporary in nature. Most assumed that religious unity was a necessary condition of the Empire's survival as a political entity.

In February 1546, Protestants learned to their dismay that Martin Luther – the evangelical leader who had exposed the Pope's antichristian nature – had died, after suddenly taking ill while on a journey to make peace between the counts of Mansfeld. Soon afterwards, rumours began to circulate that Emperor Charles V, a committed defender of the old Church who was determined to extirpate the Protestant heresy, was mustering for war against the Protestants. The League of Schmalkalden, the trans-regional Protestant alliance headed by Philipp of Hesse and John Frederick the Elder of Saxony, prepared to defend itself, both militarily and in print. War erupted in the fall of that year, and ended the following spring with a humiliating and devastating defeat for the League.

At this moment, it appeared doubtful that the Reformation legacy would survive in the Empire. Charles had smashed the Protestant political and military organization, and he was determined to consolidate his power on all fronts – dynastic, legal, economic and ecclesiastical. At Augsburg in 1548, he issued a Church ordinance known as the 'Interim' (so called because of its provisional nature; the determinations of the council of Trent were supposed to supersede it), which – while making a few symbolic

concessions to evangelical sensibilities – would effectively re-establish the fundamental elements of Catholicism in the defeated Protestant territories. With Charles's troops still occupying the proud cities of the south, the Emperor succeeded in forcing many nonconforming ministers into exile and drastically disrupting the religious lives of Protestant communities.

The Protestant city of Magdeburg, however, a prosperous, independent and militarily well-situated town in the middle of the Saxon plain, refused to comply with Imperial demands, and the surprising and far-reaching effects of their non-compliance form the subject of this book. At a moment when the survival of the Protestant movement seemed dubious, the city took remarkable political risks to defend its traditional prerogatives, both in terms of religious autonomy and political independence. As part of this campaign, the city's printing presses became its most formidable weapons. Pastors, theologians, hymnists and satirists living in Magdeburg turned out pamphlet after pamphlet defending the town's actions. Magdeburg, a member of the Schmalkaldic League, had refused to make a formal capitulation to the Empire after the League's defeat in 1547. The *de jure* state of war between town and Empire persisted until 1550, when the city came under attack and was besieged by troops commanded by Maurice of Saxony.

This book takes as its primary focus the German-language pamphlets published by Magdeburg's leaders and spokesmen during the period beginning with the Schmalkaldic War in 1546 through the lifting of Maurice's siege in 1551. Through a close reading of these texts, I attempt to discover what motivated the Magdeburg community to resist in the face of what appear to be very bad odds, and to interpret their resistance in terms of a Protestant worldview and sense of identity. One key trope that emerges from this body of sources is a sharp refusal to countenance the separation of religious identity from political loyalty. While the city's opponents tried to make the case that Magdeburg's Protestantism was a matter of 'the heart' alone and could not be taken as a justification for rebellious acts, Magdeburg's pamphleteers insisted on the inseparability of religious commitment from all other spheres of life. They saw political capitulation as threatening their very salvation, and they cast the city's actions in a salvation-historical, eschatological context.

Magdeburg's most committed defenders saw her stance as exemplifying a Protestant style of politics. Throughout this book, I argue that the Magdeburg texts exemplify an understanding of early modern religion that centres not on items of belief, but on a deeply affective sense of identity and commitment, one that is acted out in rhetorical styles, social behaviour and in attitudes towards the human and natural world. The book is structured thematically and chronologically.

The first chapter sets the stage for the printing campaign. It discusses how Magdeburg's stance in the aftermath of the battle of Mühlberg follows naturally from its prior history, and it examines the material preconditions for the massive explosion in printed output that followed the publication of the Augsburg Interim in 1548.

The second chapter focuses on texts published in the wake of the Schmalkaldic War, whose main focus is the conflict between the Emperor and the Empire's Protestant princes. In this chapter, themes of political justice, regional and national loyalties, and attitudes towards the notion of Empire itself form the main focus.

The third chapter concentrates on texts that respond to the Augsburg Interim. This chapter is primarily theological, and it examines the rhetoric that framed the Magdeburg community's rejection of the Interim and related theological initiatives.

The fourth chapter examines the time of the siege, which is the final stage of the episode covered here. In this period, Magdeburg's pamphleteers shift to a more immediate, more eschatological idiom, and their focus moves to the town of Magdeburg itself – the suffering of her residents, and the religious significance of her ongoing ordeal.

Finally, the fifth chapter attempts to make some broader conclusions about the sensibilities that undergird this corpus of texts, and to draw out some implications for the further study of the period.