Introduction

In early July 1546, war erupted in the Holy Roman Empire. On one side stood the Emperor Charles V, a supporter of the Catholic Church who sought to quell the religious dissension introduced into his realm by the Reformation. Opposing the emperor was an alliance of Protestant estates known as the Schmalkaldic League. Led by the prince-elector of Saxony and the landgrave of Hesse, two of the Empire's most powerful noblemen, the Schmalkaldic League's membership stretched across the geographic breadth of the Empire. Its financial base rested largely on mercantile wealth from its urban members in the south, self-governing republics called imperial cities. Autonomous city-states ruled by elected councils, imperial cities owed allegiance to no territorial lord but the emperor. During the 1520s and 1530s, many of these cities introduced evangelical[1] religious reform within their walls. This severed their ties to the Catholic Church and placed a growing strain on their relationship with the emperor. Fearing imperial retribution for their religious deviance, many evangelical imperial cities joined the Schmalkaldic League, which promised military protection to its members. As armed conflict began in the summer of 1546, imperial cities across southern Germany mobilized their armies in defense of the Reformation.

[1] Since advocates of reform commonly referred to themselves as "evangelical" (*evangelisch*), I have used this term to describe cities or individuals that broke with Rome and introduced some version of religious reform at odds with the traditional practices of the Catholic Church. The term *Protestant*, which came into being in 1529 to describe those estates that protested the antievangelical recess of the Imperial Diet of Speyer, I use sparingly where it helps the reader avoid confusion.

Two exceptions to this mobilization were the Eastern Swabian imperial cities Donauwörth and Kaufbeuren. Located just to the north and south of Augsburg, Swabia's largest and in many ways most influential city, Donauwörth and Kaufbeuren first adopted evangelical reform in 1545. The Reformation in these two cities proceeded under Augsburg's guidance, but the onset of hostilities placed Donauwörth and Kaufbeuren in precarious positions. Faced with a general war against the emperor, the councils in both cities declared their neutrality. This decision had profound repercussions for neighboring towns, especially Augsburg, which found its northern and southern approaches exposed to invasion. Donauwörth's neutrality was particularly galling since the city commanded a strategic crossing of the Danube River, one of the most important waterways in southern Germany. Control of this bridgehead meant control of the river, and Augsburg's council moved swiftly to secure its outer defenses. On July 21, 1546, two squads of troops sent from Augsburg forcibly occupied Donauwörth against the wishes of the local council. In response to its neighbor's protests, Augsburg's magistrates expressed remorse that "you have behaved so poorly toward us and other good friends, who want nothing more than to act fatherly toward you."[2]

Augsburg's occupation of a neighboring religious ally and closely related imperial city marked the collapse of a lengthy series of negotiations concerning Donauwörth's introduction of evangelical reform. These negotiations shaped the course of Donauwörth's reformation, but they failed to secure the city's admission to the Schmalkaldic League. When diplomatic efforts bore no fruit, Augsburg's council resorted to military coercion to ensure Donauwörth's participation in the war. While Augsburg did not use military force against Kaufbeuren, a similar set of negotiations between these cities helped determine the nature of Kaufbeuren's reformation. The interactions between Augsburg and these two neighboring cities represented a wider level of intercity communication in matters of reform that has received only limited attention in past histories of the Reformation. In Donauwörth, Kaufbeuren, and the other urban communes in Eastern Swabia, the introduction of religious reform depended on the support, guidance, and interference of other imperial cities. The Reformation in these cities did not result solely from dynamics within the local community but rather relied on regional political and

[2] Stadtarchiv Augsburg (Hereafter StadtA A), Literaliensammlung (Hereafter LitS), 22 Juli 1546. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

power constellations. Urban reform in Eastern Swabia developed out of a complex process of intercity negotiation that allowed external agents to shape each city's internal reformation.

The course of reform in Donauwörth and Kaufbeuren, as well as that of neighboring cities like Memmingen, Augsburg, and Ulm, highlights the need to reexamine the standard historical models used to describe the urban Reformation in southern Germany. Over the past several decades, historians have focused great attention on the social dynamics of religious reform in imperial cities.[3] The Reformation is often seen as a quintessentially urban affair. In the oft-quoted words of A. G. Dickens, "the German Reformation was an urban event" whose success depended on the active support of burghers.[4] Dickens's formulation is misleading, as recent research has stressed the countryside's importance as a source of enthusiasm for reform thought as well. The economic, social, and religious connections between town and country meant reform in the city was often closely linked to developments in nearby rural communities. Nevertheless, it remains true that urban populations comprised some of the earliest and most ardent advocates of the reform message. A reevaluation of the process by which urban reform occurred, therefore, modifies our sense of how and why the Reformation itself happened. The regional context of religious reform in Eastern Swabia's imperial cities has much to tell about the south German urban Reformation as a whole.

The process of reform in imperial cities has traditionally been viewed from four different perspectives. The first model, which emerged initially from the work of Bernd Moeller[5] and Franz Lau,[6] describes the urban Reformation as a process of "reform from below." Focusing primarily on religious riots, acts of iconoclasm, and the popular appeal of the Reformation's message of salvation, many scholars have portrayed the

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3 For an overview of the historiography on the urban Reformation, see Kaspar von Greyerz, "Forschungsbericht: Stadt und Reformation. Stand und Aufgaben der Forschung," *ARG* 76 (1985): 6–63; Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Forschungsbericht Stadt und Reformation," in *Stadt und Kirche im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978), 9–26; Bernhard Rüth, "Reformation und Konfessionsbildung im städtischen Bereich. Perspektiven der Forschung," *ZSRG, KA* 77 (1991): 197–282.

4 A. G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (New York: Harper, 1974), 182.

5 Bernd Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1962). In English, Bernd Moeller, "Imperial Cities and the Reformation," in *Imperial Cities and the Reformation. Three Essays*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Durham: Labyrinth, 1982), 41–115. Citations refer to the English translation.

6 Franz Lau, "Der Bauernkrieg und das angebliche Ende der lutherischen Reformation als spontaner Volksbewegung," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 26 (1959): 109–34.

common folk as the driving force behind religious reform. In this view,
the Reformation represented a grassroots movement that grew out of late
medieval convictions about the communal nature of religious life. The
reformers' message of "faith alone" and "grace alone" spoke to the reli-
gious sensibilities of the common folk, who led the assault on the Catholic
penitential system. This popular call for reform forced magistrates, often
against their will, to alter the nature of urban religious practice. In the
words of Moeller, "the Reformation was never the work of a town coun-
cil" and "the magistrates were anything but the motive force behind the
Reformation."[7]

The "reformation from below" model remains highly influential, but
its tendency to discount the motivating influence of urban magistrates
has given rise to a competing school of thought that emphasizes the city
council's role in facilitating religious reform. Concentrating on the efforts
of town councils to support or suppress the Reformation, several histo-
rians have portrayed urban reform as a process of "reform from above"
guided by magistrates.[8] According to this model, the urban Reformation
could not succeed without an "institutional focal point."[9] While the ini-
tial pressure for reform may have come from below, the local council's
decision to take up this call and to direct its implementation represented
the crucial moment of urban reform. For proponents of the "reform
from above" paradigm, "the confessional decision and development of a
city . . . corresponded directly with the attitude of the council vis-à-vis the
Reformation."[10]

In the past two decades, these opposing viewpoints have come under
increasing criticism for their one-sided nature. Following the lead of Peter
Blickle, some historians have replaced the dichotomy between top-down
and bottom-up reform with a "communal Reformation."[11] According
to this theory, the notion that the Reformation represented an urban

[7] Moeller, "Imperial Cities," 60–1.
[8] See Thomas A. Brady, *Ruling Class, Regime, and Reformation at Strasbourg, 1520–
1555* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Wilfried Enderle, *Konfessionsbildung und Ratsregiment in
der katholischen Reichsstadt Überlingen (1500–1618)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990);
Robert Scribner, "Civic Unity and the Reformation in Erfurt," *Past and Present* 66
(1975): 29–60; Kaspar von Greyerz, *The Late City Reformation in Germany. The Case
of Colmar, 1522–1628* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980); Ulman Weiss, *Die frommen Bürger
von Erfurt* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1988).
[9] Robert Scribner, "Why Was There no Reformation in Cologne?" *Bulletin of the Institute
of Historical Research* 59 (1976): 235.
[10] Enderle, *Konfessionsbildung*, 380.
[11] Peter Blickle, *Gemeindereformation* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1985).

event obscures important connections between city and countryside. In the years prior to the 1524–6 Peasants' War, both peasants and burghers developed fundamentally the same understanding of evangelical reform. This shared sense of the Reformation's meaning emphasized preaching the pure Gospel and the communalization of the local church by subjecting it to community oversight. In the process, the urban and rural laity sought to reorder society according to a new evangelical ethic rooted in the Bible. This initial popular enthusiasm for reform, however, ground to a halt after the bloodshed of the Peasants' War. The failed rebellion marked a shift from communal reform toward a "Princes' Reformation," where reform was imposed on the general populace from above in service of ruling political authority. The communal Reformation model, therefore, combines aspects of "reform from below" with "reform from above" by placing them in discrete periods in order to explain the evolving nature of the sixteenth-century Reformation.

These three views remain the predominant explanations for how the urban Reformation occurred, but they all run the risk of obscuring the complexity of daily life in imperial cities. While the initial impetus for religious reform in many communities may have come from the general populace, reform could not find an official expression until the city council took up that call and modified it. Magisterial and popular impulses for reform could exist side by side, a realization that has begun to reshape how scholars conceptualize the urban Reformation. It has led Berndt Hamm to conclude "a one-sided 'from above' did not correspond to the urban social structure with its interdependent relationships, which always ... required a certain amount of cooperative consensus building."[12] Taking this line of thinking a step further, Olaf Mörke has argued "reformation 'from below' and reformation 'from above' represent merely two sides of the same issue."[13]

Top-down and bottom-up reform models, therefore, tend to simplify the multifaceted nature of urban reform. For Eastern Swabia's imperial cities, such labels are entirely misleading. The Reformation in these cities represented neither a one-sided affair nor a communal Reformation. Instead, reform depended on the actions of outside agents that altered the direction of each city's internal reformation. Our view of the south

[12] Berndt Hamm, "Reformation 'von unten' und Reformation 'von oben.' Zur Problematik reformationshistorischer Klassifizierungen," in *Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und Debatten*, eds. Hans Guggisberg et al. (Gütersloh: Güterloher Verlagshaus, 1993), 281.

[13] Olaf Mörke, *Rat und Bürger in der Reformation* (Hildesheim: Lax, 1983), 9–10.

German urban Reformation must incorporate multiple actors and contingencies into the process of reform, an approach advocated by scholars like Hamm, Mörke, and Lorna Jane Abray. In her 1985 study of Strasbourg, for example, Abray shows that the common folk, Strasbourg's council, and the city's preachers all exerted unique influences on the city's reform efforts. Reform emerged from a discourse between all segments of urban society. The Reformation and its attendant religious changes did not occur from above or from below, but rather "evolved through the interplay of magisterial, clerical, and popular designs for a Christian church."[14]

We have four models of urban reform: "reform from below," "reform from above," communal reformation, and reform as a product of internal compromise between magistrates, clerics, and burghers. Each of these perspectives has contributed much to our understanding of the urban Reformation, but they all tend to view urban reform in isolation. While many scholars have pointed to the influence of larger political considerations on urban reform, most studies still focus on the Reformation's development in one city while overlooking the importance of regional systems of support. Others take a comparative approach but continue to view reform as a matter decided solely by the local council and its burghers. By concentrating on one city, these case studies often treat the Reformation as an insular, internal event. They depict urban reform as the product of local circumstances largely divorced from the influence of external actors and neighboring imperial cities.

This approach has proved useful in discerning the political, religious, and social dynamics within specific urban communities, but it does not account for the active interference of outside agents, including other imperial cities, in the process of reformation. It leaves unexplored the centrality of regional politics for the introduction, implementation, preservation, or suppression of religious reform. The importance of regional political constellations meant that in each geographic area, the process of urban reform looked slightly different. Large, catchall models cannot explain these divergences, and they obscure the significance of those similarities that did occur by presupposing a uniformity of process. It is therefore necessary to understand urban reform in a wider context, one that moves beyond individual city walls, and instead examines the Reformation's place in a regional setting of political, social, and economic ties. By analyzing religious negotiation in an urban landscape such as Eastern Swabia, we can uncover how regional systems of communication shaped

[14] Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1985), 224.

the Reformation in different contexts. This means adopting a comparative
framework that investigates the influence of patterns of consultation and
regional spheres of influence on the course of religious reform. The urban
Reformation in southern Germany cannot be simplified to a process of
"reform from above" or "reform from below," or limited to internal
interaction between the council and its burghers. It often relied on a pro-
cess of intercity negotiation that involved actors both native and foreign
to reforming cities. These regional systems of negotiation provided the
framework for the Reformation's spread, evolution, and survival in many
imperial cities.

Scholarly attempts to analyze the relationship between urban reform
and the collectivity of imperial cities – what I term the urban hierar-
chy[15] – have focused on what Martin Brecht called the "collective poli-
tics of imperial cities." These studies place the urban Reformation in the
larger political constellation of the Holy Roman Empire, although they
disagree about the ramifications of reform. For some scholars, urban
attempts to pursue common religious policies suffered a major setback
with the official outlawing of the Reformation at the 1529 Imperial Diet
of Speyer and the 1530 Imperial Diet of Augsburg. This caused a "splin-
tering apart of the cities" and an overall decline in the urban hierarchy's
cohesiveness.[16] The appearance of evangelical reform movements in the
1520s undermined the internal estate solidarity of imperial cities, leading
to "the fall of the urban front," an event that "cut the cities adrift."[17]
This view has been refined by Heinrich Schmidt, who "takes the cities'
external relationships as determinants for their religious policies."[18]
While "the common man is the patron of the Reformation,"[19] a chance
for wider societal reform existed in the practice of urban collective

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[15] I have chosen to refer to the collectivity of imperial cities – in German *Städtecorpus* –
as the urban hierarchy. This term portrays an environment where each town council
participated in an intercity system of communication directed in part by the Empire's
largest cities. It speaks to the unequal level of power and influence exercised by urban
communes while highlighting the important ties of influence that connected cities of all
sizes. For an analogous use of this term to describe urban relations in late medieval
Flanders, see Peter Stabel, *Dwarfs Among Giants: The Flemish Urban Network in the
Late Middle Ages* (Leuven-Apeldoorn: Garant, 1997).

[16] Martin Brecht, "Die gemeinsame Politik der Reichsstädte und die Reformation," *ZSRG,
KA* 83 (1977): 180–263.

[17] Thomas A. Brady, *Turning Swiss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 194.

[18] Heinrich Richard Schmidt, *Reichsstädte, Reich und Reformation. Korporative Religion-
spolitik 1521–1529/30* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1986), 2.

[19] H. Schmidt, *Reichsstädte*, 332.

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politics.[20] Ultimately, however, the divide between "Lutheran quietism" and "Zwinglian-Upper German activism" prevented communes from forming a united front. Imperial cities became "victims of the Reformation,"[21] which led in 1529–30 to a "collapse of corporate unity concerning the question of religion." This resulted in "the cities emerging from the early Reformation divided and weakened as an estate."[22]

This first school of thought argues that a rupture in urban cohesiveness during the 1520s prevented cities from pursuing common religious policies. This emphasis on discord among cities has given rise to a competing model that disputes the existence of a disastrous collapse "in the unity of imperial cities." According to this view, the splintering of the urban hierarchy in matters of religion represented only a partial disruption of intercity cooperation. City councils continued to seek consensus with their counterparts in all areas besides religion, while evangelical imperial cities found new outlets for their collective politics in the Schmalkaldic League.[23] Rather than shatter the estate solidarity of the cities, the Reformation encouraged many communes to pursue even broader common policies in order to consolidate and protect religious reform.

Similar to competing theories of urban reform, these two opposing models often gloss over the details of daily negotiation between cities. When applied to Eastern Swabia, an emphasis on the collapse of urban unity in 1530 appears especially problematic. Throughout the 1530s and 1540s, southern Germany's imperial cities continued to negotiate religious reform within their ranks. The spread of council-led reform throughout Upper and Lower Swabia after 1530 meant the exchange of reform ideas and policies between cities became even more central to the urban Reformation than before. This era represented a crucial transitional period between the official formation of confessional lines at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg and the forcible attempt of Charles V to roll back the Reformation at the 1547–8 Diet of Augsburg. It holds the key to understanding how only twenty-five years after declaring the Augsburg

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[20] The term *collective politics* refers to the pursuit of common religious, political, or economic policies by imperial cities, either through collaboration by a limited number of cities or within the framework of formal associations like the Urban Diet, the Swabian League, the Schmalkaldic League, and the Three Cities' League.

[21] H. Schmidt, *Reichsstädte,* 334.

[22] Ibid., 316.

[23] Georg Schmidt, "Die Haltung des Städtecorpus zur Reformation und die Nürnberger Bündnispolitik," *ARG* 75 (1984): 194–233; Georg Schmidt, *Der Städtetag in der Reichsverfassung* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984).

Confession heretical, the Imperial Diet could legalize it as one of two permitted confessions within the Empire. From the perspective of urban collective politics, the 1530s and 1540s reveal how imperial cities navigated the shift from the tumult of the early Reformation to the onset of the confessional age. Grounded in a tradition of political consensus and collaboration, few south German magistrates abandoned attempts to form common religious policies with their counterparts in other cities.

How can we reconcile these different viewpoints on urban reform and urban politics? More importantly, how can we come to a holistic understanding of the Reformation in southern Germany's imperial cities that accounts for developments on the local level as well as the influence exerted by regional and imperial politics? The answer lies in reexamining the nature of urban reform through an analysis of intercity communication. In this study, the term *communication* encompasses both written and oral forms of information transmission between two or more parties. A series of social, political, economic, and religious interactions between parties often created communication networks, which allowed for the frequent and routinized exchange of knowledge.[24] Such communication could occur through the exchange of letters or other types of written correspondence. It could also take the form of personal meetings or official diplomatic embassies. Regardless of their specific local manifestation, systems of communication shaped all aspects of political life in the early modern world. In the Dutch Republic, clientage networks provided government officials with timely political information that guided the formation of local policy.[25] Diplomatic correspondence among Italian city-states played a similar role in defending urban independence against aggressive princes.[26] For the Holy Roman Empire, recent research has highlighted the importance of communication patterns for facilitating

[24] For an introduction to the study of early modern forms of communication, see among others *Kommunikation und Alltag im Spätmittlelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992); *Kommunikation und Region*, eds. Carl A. Hoffmann and Rolf Kiessling (Constance: UVK, 2001); *Kommunikationspraxis und Korrespondenzwesen im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, eds. Heinz-Dieter Heimann and Ivan Hlaváček (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Michael North, *Kommunikation, Handel, Geld und Banken in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000).

[25] Geert H. Janssen, "Dutch Clientelism and News Networks in Public and Private Spheres. The Case of Stadholder William Frederick 1613–1664," in *News and Politics in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)*, ed. Joop W. Koopmans (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 151–66.

[26] Anja Muesser, *Für Kaiser und Reich. Politische Kommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit: Johann Ulrich Zasius (1521–1570) als Rat und Gesandter der Kaiser Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2004), 210.

cooperation between Emperor Ferdinand and the imperial estates during the 1550s. Political communication proved indispensable to the Habsburg ability to govern,[27] which has led Christine Pflüger to argue that Ferdinand's cultivation of a broad communication network "contributed not only to the stabilization and deepening of his contacts to the imperial estates, but also to the extension of his authority and influence in the Empire."[28]

Communication between imperial cities fulfilled similar functions. It could intensify urban relations through patterns of consultation that allowed certain cities to project their power and influence onto other urban communes. As in Italy, systems of communication helped cities defend their interests against the encroachment of other estates while encouraging the rapid movement of reform ideas within and across regions. Accordingly, as Peer Friess has observed, analysis of urban communication networks can shift how we study the Reformation "from a concentration on individual case studies toward the comparative research of urban landscapes."[29] During the sixteenth century, intercity communication influenced almost every aspect of civic governance. In the context of the Reformation, traditions of urban communication enabled south German magistrates to shape the introduction of religious reform in neighboring towns. The urban Reformation in southern Germany often occurred through a process of compromise and negotiation, not only within a city, but also between imperial cities. I call this new model the Negotiated Reformation.

In this study, the terms *negotiated* and *negotiation* refer to the urban practice of exchanging advice, guidance, and information with fellow communes and the influence this communication exerted on urban reform. Negotiation between cities could occur with set goals in mind, such as the introduction of a specific religious confession or the transfer of a specific preacher. It might also represent a process of consultation intended to inform or legitimize magisterial policy. Negotiation, therefore, is a two-tiered idea that highlights how intercity communication shaped the reform policies of urban magistrates. Its success depended on a process of political communication in which each party, even those

[27] Muesser, *Für Kaiser und Reich*; Christine Pflüger, *Kommissare und Korrespondenzen. Politische Kommunikation im Alten Reich (1552–1558)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005); Dietmar Schiersner, *Politik, Konfession und Kommunikation* (Berlin: Akademie, 2005).

[28] Pflüger, *Kommissare und Korrespondenzen*, 14.

[29] Peer Friess, "Reichsstädtische Diplomatie als Indikator für die politische Struktur einer Region," in *Kommunikation und Region*, 137.