INTRODUCTION

Periodization is the bane and blessing of historical writing. It permits us to talk rationally about the past by marking off boundaries in which we can develop the specialties our profession increasingly demands. At the same time, it creates artificial borders that can distort, obscure, and hamper investigation into the human record. Periods take on lives of their own; we become their servants rather than their masters, marshalling evidence to accord with artificial conventions meant to signal where one age ends and another begins.

This problem is evident in the way that catechetical instruction on paternal authority has been pressed into service as one of the signposts marking off the end of the Middle Ages and dawn of the Early Modern era. Scholarship now recognizes patriarachelism in literature and legislation as a salient characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the genesis of this trend is frequently associated with the Protestant Reformation.¹ Though

historians offer various interpretations of how and why Protestantism gave rise to such an ideology, there is general agreement that the primary vehicle for its promulgation was the catechism. Through a selective reading of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue—"Honor your father and your mother"—reformers popularized visions of a society held in check by godly men in the home, Church, and body politic. The centrality of this ideology to the Protestant social message is generally explained by a number of related factors associated with the Reformation movement: the pessimistic tenets of Protestant theology; the desacralization of the clerical estate; the emergence of a new lay piety, centered on the home, promoted by pastors who were husbands and fathers; the dependence of Protestants on secular authority for the survival of their movement; and finally the conservative reaction of magisterial reformers to the social turmoil directly fostered by the Reformation itself.

The present work will demonstrate that the study of Protestant paternalism has been conducted far too narrowly. A broad survey of Catholic and Protestant catechetical literature from the late Middle Ages through the sixteenth century shows that the patriarchal ideology of Protestantism was part of a shared discourse for the reform of society which took shape during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and grew apace with the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth. It transcended the boundaries of time and confession because it had less to do with a particular school of theology than with the convergence of religious reform and political power in newly volatile patterns that became apparent during a period roughly demarcated by the Great Schism on one end and the Thirty Years’ War on the other.

2 The biblical texts in which the Decalogue is recorded (chiefly Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-29) do not number the individual commandments. Catholics and Lutherans followed the division favored by Augustine; Reformed Protestants (Zwinglians; many south-west urban Reformers; Calvinists) and Anglicans followed the system proposed by Origin, which made the prohibition against images an independent mandate. In this scheme "honor your father and your mother" became the fifth commandment. For the sake of simplicity, I have consistently referred to it as the fourth. On the historical origins and confessional significance of the various systems see Bo Reicke, Die zehn Worte in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Zahlung und Bedeutung der Gebote in den verschiedenen Konfessionen. BGE 15 (Tübingen, 1973).

3 In terms of other schematizations, the parameters for my investigation thus incorporate the “later Middle Ages” and the “Reformation” era (Protestant and...
INTRODUCTION

While this period too is an artificial construct, it is not arbitrarily chosen. To a remarkable extent, throughout this period the issue of reform—ecclesiastical, judicial, educational, social, and political—dominated public discourse and political policies. As we shall see, much of it was driven by the language of crisis renewed and reappropriated by generations of ecclesiastical reformers. Part perception, part topos, part strategy, "crisis" became a defining characteristic of the clerical estate during the agony of the Schism and the despair of the post-Conciliar era. Successive generations kept it current as the emergence of rival visions for reform hardened into bitterly antagonistic religio-political confessions. The long decline of the temporal power of the Church throughout this era led its most zealous reformers to pin their hopes on secular authority. The ideology of paternal authority was both born from that union and bred to serve it.

If Gerda Lerner is correct, patriarchalism is the oldest ideology, a product of the staggering social metamorphosis of hunter-gatherers into settled urban communities. Yet the forms it takes and the energy with which it is advanced change with time and circumstance. I contend that the later Middle Ages mark the genesis of an era unique both in the content of the discourse and the intensity with which it was promoted. Clerics developed and vigorously championed a vision for reform that depended on godly men in home, Church and government to create order through discipline—that is, through self-control and social control. To a degree that has not yet been grasped, the language, structures and ideals of monasticism were extraordinarily influential in the articulation of this vision. Reformers worked to realize it by the determined and consistent application of tools that would both fashion the kind of leaders they envisioned and bind all others to their benevolent authority. Chief among these was the catechism. Contrary to common views about the low emphasis on education in the late-medieval Church, it was then that clerics set in motion the ambitious program for comprehensive catechesis and

___

Tridentine Catholic); they extend backwards further but terminate earlier than either the “long sixteenth century” or “early modern” paradigms. My chief concern is not to argue for a new periodization, however, but rather to acknowledge the contingency of them all.

the paternalistic agenda that would prove so influential in the following centuries.

Despite considerable differences, the men who promoted this program shared certain characteristics that helped to perpetuate it. They were zealous reformers, deeply critical of the state of society, and especially of the Church; they saw dysfunction in daily life as evidence of God’s anger at human sin; they shared the belief—again, part of the intellectual heritage of monasticism—that the best remedy was discipline, applied by godly men in their respective domains. All of them, finally, were men. When we read their catechisms, we find the contours of a program that unites the most unlikely pairings: Gerson and Hus, Luther and Eck, Protestants and Jesuits.

Findings from this study are intended to contribute to much more than the history of catechesis. They provide a suggestive supplement to the meta-narrative of Norbert Elias, who used books on etiquette and decorum to probe the manner by which social and political competition furthered the “social constraint to self restraint” from the High Middle Ages through the Early Modern period. The catechetical literature on which the present study is based contributes to Elias’ model by bringing to light the role played by the struggle for religious reform in the disciplining of self and society over a greater expanse of time than is usually recognized in research on Germany, where confessional and professional fragmentation has been particularly damaging to our investigation of long-term processes. Along the same lines, the present work suggests that Gerhard Oestreich’s concept of Sozialdisziplinerung may be fruitfully applied to a period long prior to events he regarded as its matrix, the confessional conflicts of the late sixteenth-century.


6 Oestreich’s most extensive discussion of the late sixteenth-century genesis of “Sozialdisziplinerung” first appeared in the collection of essays entitled Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates (Berlin, 1969). The late-medieval origins of “Sozialregulierung”, which Oestreich came to view as a preparatory phase for developments in Early Modern governments, was first laid out in his “Policey und Prudentia civilis in der barocken Gesellschaft von Stadt und Staat”, Stadt-Schule-Universität-Buchwesen und die deutsche Literatur um 17. Jahrhundert, ed. A. Schöne (Munich, 1976), 10-21. The English edition of Oestreich’s collected essays brings these together in one volume in a revised form that its editors claim represents Oestreich’s “last rethinking and reformulation” of this subject: Gerhard
The sources I have used to support my thesis are related by theme and genre. Catechisms and catechetical literature form the basis for an inquiry that expands to include sermons, reform proposals and discipline ordinances. The recovery and analysis of late-medieval catechetical sources has been underway since the antiquarian movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. Serious historical investigation gained impetus in the early 1950s, as Germanisten began to include vernacular religious prose in their fields of inquiry. Subsequent work has revealed an explosive rise in the writing and diffusion of catechetical literature long before the invention of print. We have since learned much about centers of production and transmission, about the social forces that contributed to their development, and the individuals who produced such works.


7 The word "catechism" gained currency in the sixteenth century as the technical term for texts designed to indoctrinate the laity through questions and answers concerning the basic elements of the Christian faith. "Catechetical literature" describes texts that dealt with similar subject matter, also designed for lay instruction, but in forms less fixed than those that would come. A "catechist" is one who created or employed such material; the use of it is "catechesis." I use "indoctrination" and its various forms in the same way contemporaries did, as a neutral term that describes the formal process of imparting doctrine.

8 Among the earliest and most influential was Johannes Geffcken's Bilderkatechismus des 15. Jahrhunderts und die katechetischen Hauptstücke in dieser Zeit bis auf Luther. Band I: Die Zehn Gebote (Leipzig, 1855), the only volume of a projected series. See also Vincent Hasak, Der christliche Glaube des deutschen Volkes beim Schlusse des Mittelalters. Dargestellt im deutschen Sprachdenkmalen im Reformationszeitalter vom Jahre 1470 bis 1520 (Regensburg, 1868), idem, Ein Euphronz oder die Erklärung der zehn Gebote Gottes (Augsburg, 1889); Franz Falk, "Der Unterricht des Volkes in den katechetischen Hauptstücken am Ende das Mittelalters. Die Dekalog-Erklärungen bis 1525", HPBkD 108 (1891), 80-97; idem, Drei Beichtbüchlein nach den zehn Geboten aus der Frühzeit der Buchdruckerkunst. RGST 2 (Münster, 1907); P. Bahlmann, Deutschlands katholische Katechismen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts (Münster, 1894).

9 Walther Stammler's work in this area was groundbreaking: see Kleine Schriften zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters (Berlin, 1953); idem, "Mittelalterliche Prosa in deutscher Sprache", Deutsche Prose im Aufbruch, 2 (Berlin, 1954), 1299-1632.

10 Best known is the so-called "Vienna School", which will be discussed at several points in this study. Indespensible surveys of the works produced there may be found in Hans Rupprich, Das Wiener Schriftum des ausgehenden Mittelalters. Sitzungsberichte Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch-historische Klasse 228/5 (Vienna, 1954), 146-171, and Thomas Hohmann, Heinrichs von Langenstein 'Unterscheidung der Geister' lateinisch und deutsch. Texte und Untersuchungen aus der Wiener Schule (Munich, 1977), 257-276. The vernacular catechetical works of the so-called Lübeck Mohnkopfdruckerei, from the latter part of the fifteenth
Growing recognition of the energy poured into lay catechesis has stimulated interest in the recurring social and ethical norms propounded in catechetical literature. Ethnologists have recently focused on the prohibitions against superstition, magic and witchcraft commonly treated under the first commandment; through such study the thematic and textual links between late medieval catechetical literature and Protestant catechesis are becoming more clear. Further, while research on Germany lags behind work on France and England, we have come to recognize the importance of the catechism to the efforts of paternalistic elites bent on transforming popular culture through indoctrination.


INTRODUCTION

comprise approximately 60 sources drawn from modern editions, older anthologies, manuscripts, and incunabula. These represent only a fraction of what scholars believe to have been among the most popular genres for vernacular prose. I have aimed for a representative balance of texts in various dialects, stemming from the chief centers of production and diffusion.

Sources from the Protestant Reformation are in abundant supply. In addition to the critical editions of works by major Reformers, I have relied on multi-volume studies of Ferdinand Cohrs and Johann Michael Reu, together containing lengthy excerpts or full reprints of scores of Protestant catechisms from 1520-1600.¹³

Sixteenth-century Catholic catechesis is a subject badly in need of investigation. Most research on this theme takes the Jesuit order and the Council of Trent as points of departure. The the state of scholarship for Germany reflects a widespread neglect, however, of both the continued vitality of late-medieval texts and of the works composed by loyal Catholics in the decades between 1530 and 1555.¹⁴ Attention has remained fixed on the catechisms of the Jesuit Petrus Canisius, and the Catechismus Romanus of the Council of Trent, both of which appeared after 1555 and are currently available in modern editions. For the vital period preceding these, I have relied on the nineteenth-century collection of Christoph Moufang, and on the nearly-forgotten Decalogue postils of Johannes Eck.

¹³ Full references to all the source material discussed here may be found in the bibliography.
Since late-medieval catechesis first began attracting the attention of a wider scholarly audience, there have been repeated calls for comparative studies of the fifteenth and sixteenth century sources. The response has been less than overwhelming. While the older tradition is not unknown to historians of early modern Germany, it has been used most often to emphasize the discontinuity between the late Middle Ages and the Reformation. Isolated examples of fifteenth century sources have been dismissed as exceptional curiosities, prescient forerunners of a time not their own. This problem persists, despite a general consensus that the Protestant Reformation can only be understood in the context of social and theological movements which preceded it.

The ‘early’ of Early Modern history has gotten short shrift in scholarship on Germany, largely because the confessional controversies that marked the era bred generations of scholarly partisans content to let Luther and his theological revolution mark off historical boundaries. As ‘Reformation’ history has passed into the hands of scholars less inclined to lionize its most familiar figures, our field has begun to benefit from increased cooperation between intellectual and social historians; the conceptual barriers have begun to come down. Yet studies of Early Modern patriarchalism continue to take Protestantism as their point of departure. This is on the one hand a sign of the fragmentation that plagues all historical inquiry; in our field the late Middle Ages, Protestant and Catholic Germany long have been treated as distinct spheres of specialization. Yet I suspect that there is another reason the homology of patriarchalism has remained hidden. On

---


16 Steven E. Ozment, The Reformation in the Cities. The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland (New Haven, 1975), 22-32, esp. 32: “Protestants would disagree at practically every step with the late medieval catechism.”; Strauss, Luther’s House of Learning, 157-158.

two of the issues of burning interest to the present generation of scholars—gender and politics—the Reformers make very easy targets. It is the work of a moment to lay hands on texts that express Protestant commonplaces about the nature of government or the role of women in society that seem to many not merely antiquated, but immoral.

The themes addressed in this book have become neuralgic, and for good reasons, yet I have aimed to avoid writing history as exposé. Working under conditions far more difficult than most have experienced, Marc Bloch was yet able to insist that the historian’s task is not to judge, but to explain.¹⁸ I am neither certain that the principle is always defensible, nor that I have been entirely successful in following it. Nevertheless, I have tried to steer by Bloch’s advice.

Other assumptions underlying this study require comment. The first concerns the word “catechism”, common in the sixteenth century as the technical term for a genre of didactic religious literature, but exceedingly rare in the later Middle Ages (and applied in none of the sources from that era used in this study). The dangers of anachronism are superseded, however, by our growing awareness of the common texts, methods, and aims of reformers who took up the elementary religious instruction of the laity as a fundamental component for the restoration of church and society already in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁹

In my use of the term “ideology,” I am indebted to Clifford Geertz, who has sketched the differences between what he called the “interest” theory and the “strain” (i.e. ‘anxiety’) theory.²⁰ The former refers to a strictly materialist understanding of ideas, in Geertz’s words, as “forms of higher cunning”; as “masks and weapons” in the perpetual struggle for advantage. The latter approaches ideology as a product of social turmoil, a programmatic response to diagnosed crisis. “In the one, men pursue power, in the other, they flee anxiety.”²¹ I take these approaches as

---

¹⁹ Recent acknowledgement of the late-medieval foundations of sixteenth-century catechesis appears in Denis R. Janz, “Catechism,” in OER 1.275-280; here 275.
²¹ Ibid., 52-53. The gender-exclusive language, a sign of the times in which Geertz wrote, is nevertheless particularly appropriate for the present study.
complimentary rather than mutually exclusive. The anxiety theory only avoids becoming an exculpatory apologia if we recognize that contemporary diagnoses were subjective, filtered through the interests of those who made them. By itself, however, the interest theory drastically limits the need for historical inquiry, for it presupposes a timeless struggle and a patterned response. Once the form is recognized, the motives behind it are predefined.

There is a different sort of problem with the word "patriarchalism": two groups have laid claim to it. In feminist scholarship, the term has been used to define the shifting structures of male domination devised to control women.\textsuperscript{22} Scholars of political theory, on the other hand, follow seventeenth-century theorists who used it to argue for or against an absolutist form of government conceptually identified with paternal authority.\textsuperscript{23} I have used it to describe the program for order and godliness analyzed in this study, which encompasses both issues and extends beyond them. Without question, the control of women was one of the tasks that ideology was marshalled to effect—long before the Reformation. Yet this was one concern among many others. For several reasons that arise from the sources themselves, the term is especially appropriate. The authorities on whom clerics called to govern were male, and the models often invoked to inspire them were the patriarchs of the Hebrew Scriptures. As we shall see, moreover, the same lessons held out to the male heads of household served to define the nature and purpose of power in church and government.

The program defined here is traced in five chapters. The first examines the development, implementation, content, and goals of what I call the catechetical movement. The rest feature comparative and contextual analyses of the social norms promoted for relationships within home, Church and body politic. In general I

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Lerner, \textit{The Creation of Patriarchy}, 259.

\textsuperscript{23} The most notorious seventeenth-century work was Robert Filmer's \textit{Patriarchia. The Naturall Power of Kinges Defended against the Unnatural Liberty of the People. By Arguments Theological, Rational, Historical, Legall}; it is now accessible in the fine edition by Johann P. Somerville, \textit{Sir Robert Filmer. Patriarchia and Other Writings} (Cambridge, 1991). The best comprehensive study of patriarchal political theory is Gordon J. Schochet, \textit{The Authoritarian Family and Political Attitudes}, as in note 1, above. A revisionist work challenges the conventional view that Filmer was merely a risible extremist: James Daly, \textit{Sir Robert Filmer and English political thought} (Toronto, 1979).
have proceeded chronologically. Throughout, my goal has been to accomplish two things at once: first, to better understand how these ideas were meant to work in their own times and their own social contexts; next, to see how they came to form part of a shared discourse that transcends the conceptual gulf between the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern era.

The limits to this investigation must be acknowledged as well. With few exceptions my investigation is confined to Germany. I do not mean to suggest thereby that either patriarchal ideology or the catechetical movement were unique to those lands; I am not proposing a cultural Sonderweg. Indeed, a good deal of evidence, some of which will appear in chapter 1, suggests that the program I trace manifested itself throughout Western Europe. Next, I am aware that the sources I use are prescriptive—they tell us what kind of society social elites hoped to create. Gauging the success or failure of their efforts requires a different sort of evidence and method than I have employed. Finally, though the patriarchal model promoted during these centuries became a dominant one—perhaps the most dominant—it did not completely displace other visions for society and it was not accepted uncritically. Various groups resisted its implementation in ways direct and less obvious. Though I have not tried to tell their stories here, they should not be forgotten.24

In writing this book I have quoted at some length from the sources, because many are neither well-known nor easily accessible. To keep citations as manageable as possible, I have made frequent use of abbreviations. Where practical, the name of the author has been used in the body of the text; the modern editor or anthology title, in the note. This has simplified the citation of the many anonymous, untitled catechetical texts of the later Middle Ages. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.25

24 Two examples of a welcome trend in scholarship, respectively illustrative of resistance to the imposition of the catechism and conflict over the patriarchal model of a pastor’s authority, may be found in the unrelated stories of Anna Catharine Weissenbühler and Georg Bregenzer in David W. Sabean, Power in the Blood. Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany (Cambridge, 1984), 94-112; 113-143.

25 Where I quote the Bible independently of my primary sources, I have used the Revised Standard Version, original copyright held by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the United States of America, 1952.
I have silently supplied vowels and consonants omitted in the texts and corrected obvious typographical errors. Insofar as practical I have preserved the original orthography and spelling, in some few cases providing punctuation to render long and difficult passages more comprehensible. Since good translation is equal parts art and skill, I have aimed to convey the flavor and rhythms of the sources without lapsing into wooden literalism or sacrificing fidelity to the text.