CHAPTER THREE

CONFESSIONAL FRONTIERS AND BORDER WARS:
THE CONFESSIONALIZATION OF BAVARIA AND
THE PALATINATE

The court played an important role in shaping the religious identity of the Wittelsbachs’ territories through exercising the dynasty’s responsibility as territorial parents. Both Frederick III and his Catholic Wittelsbach rival and cousin, Duke Wilhelm V of Bavaria, enjoyed the epithet “the Pious” thanks to their zeal in confessionalizing their courts and territories as Landesväter (“Fathers of the Land”).¹ The Wittelsbach female consorts also played an important role in the confessionalization of court and country through their role as Landesmütter (“Mothers of the Land”).² In this capacity, the consorts were expected to support their husbands in taking care of the state. They were also supposed to be role models for mothers in their territories and demonstrate fidelity, charity, and piety, not political activity in the modern sense.³ Wittelsbach efforts to confessionalize their territories and bind them closer to the dynasty included the use of poor relief, church visitations, catechisms, universities, and schools. The Bavarian Wittelsbachs also promoted pilgrimages and Marian devotion in their efforts to defend the land from ‘heresy.’ The Palatine Wittelsbachs’ zeal in defending the land included offering refuge to Calvinist exiles from abroad.


³ Paravicini, 15; Bojcov, 328.
who were supposed to make economic contributions to the territory. The Wittelsbachs’ efforts resulted in confessional frontiers and cultural border wars that reflected the confessionalization of Renaissance humanism.4

This chapter examines this process by first introducing the broader concept of ‘defenders of the faith’ within its cultural milieu, and then discussing the use of piety, church visitations, catechisms, universities, and schools within the context of territorial parents. This is followed by a discussion of how the Upper Palatinate reflected a house divided. Finally, it concludes with an analysis of how Marian pilgrimages and Calvinist refugee settlements contributed to the contours of confessional frontiers and dynastic tensions.

Like the Carolingian mirror of prince literature, the Old Testament kings and patriarchs served as models for the Wittelsbachs, as well as other German princes, after the Peace of Augsburg.5 For instance, in his last will and testament, the Calvinist Palatine Elector Frederick III admonished his descendants to follow his pious example. He remarked that he himself was following the example of the patriarchs and King David by making such a testament.6 Likewise, he suggested that God would consecrate his efforts at keeping the faith in his family, court, and territories as a father of his country, just as happened with Abraham.7 When Frederick III took the reins in Heidelberg, he encountered a religiously divided court and territory that included disputes between Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Calvinists. His own

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7 Ibid., 68.