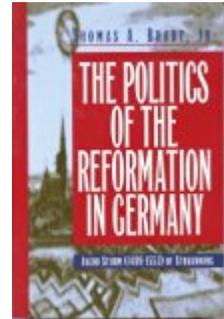


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Thomas A. Jr. Brady. *The Politics of the Reformation in Germany: Jacob Sturm (1489-1553) of Strasbourg*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997. xix + 280 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-391-04004-5.

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This work is not merely the paperback edition of Professor Brady's *Protestant Politics: Jacob Sturm (1489-1553) and the German Reformation* published in 1995. Rather, as the author states in his preface, this is a revised account "for people who read history but are not specialists in the field" (p. x). To enhance this particular purpose, Dr. Brady, a Professor of History at Berkeley, has provided four maps, a glossary of technical terms and terms for German institutions, a ten-page list of recommendations for further reading (all in English) in lieu of a traditional bibliography (although there are plenty of original sources and German references in the notes at the end of each chapter), an index of places and subjects, and an index of persons.

Dr. Brady's primary concern is neither with a biography of Jacob Sturm nor with an account of Protestantism's early spread, but rather with a question of historiography. In his introduction, he states that "this is a book about the place of the Protestant Reformation in German history" (p. 1). After briefly mentioning the nineteenth century Protestant version of German history associated with the hallowed name of Leopold von Ranke and justified by the unification of Germany under Prussian auspices, Brady brings to bear two aspects of recent German historical studies which he believes validate a new look at the place of the Reformation, viz., the reception of the Reformation by "large numbers of ordinary urban and rural folk" (p. 3) (or the social history of religion during the first half of the sixteenth century) and the appreciation of "dispersed governance" (p. 3) as the essential feature of the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

For this version of his work, Professor Brady has

added introductory chapters on the Empire and on Strassburg and the Upper Rhine region. He has done a masterful job of making a complex subject available to the non-specialist for whom this book is intended. His discussion of the golden shackles preventing meaningful reform of the Church in the generation before Luther is exhilarating and delightful to read (pp. 23-24, 27-30, 56-58). In the core chapters of his book, Brady traces the critical role played in the spread and development of German Protestantism by the Strassburger patrician and diplomat, Jacob Sturm. After experiencing the heady wine of Erasmian humanism, Sturm became a supporter of an Evangelical form of Christianity somewhere between Luther's and Zwingli's. Fundamentally shaken by the events of the Peasants War, Sturm set about ensuring order by welding the Reformation to the authority of princes and magistrates. He was a major architect of the League of Schmalkalden and a significant player on the Imperial stage at each step between the Diet of Speyer (1526) and the Interim of Augsburg (1548). A man of considerable ability, Sturm spent himself in the service of his city and his somewhat flexible but nonetheless sincere Protestantism. Another gem of concise analysis is the description of the opposing views of Sturm and Chancellor Granvelle, representing the Protestant and Catholic outlooks (pp. 220-21).

The events in the life of Jacob Sturm and in the unfolding of the German Reformation provide the scaffolding for Brady's elucidation of his thesis—that the German Reformation was both furthered and limited by the dominant German social and political forces of the sixteenth century. The initial popular response to Luther's call for reform reached its untidy culmination in the Peasants War, resulting in a continuing fear of revolt from below

on the part of Sturm and other representatives of the established social order. “The events of 1525 hung like a great shadow over Sturm’s policy ...” (p. 245). To guard against this threat from below, Sturm turned for support to the existing secular authorities, in his case the magistrates of Strassburg, and for the Empire as a whole, the princes and cities represented in the League of Schmalkalden, i.e., to the “dispersed governance” or particularism of the Germans. Brady writes of “local government, which in effect had become the Church” (p. 220). Sturm sacrificed the Zwinglians for the security of the League, he sacrificed the Protestants of Metz in order to uphold authority, and in the end he accepted a good part of the Interim of Augsburg in order to prevent disturbances from below. The story of Jacob Sturm truly encapsulates the tragedy of all revolutionaries: once the overthrow of one established authority is justified, it becomes increasingly difficult to defend any established authority. Hence, “... the Protestant Reformation simply completed the process of reshaping the church by fusing it with temporal governance” (p. 30). Brady concludes that, “the political culture of particularism, far more than Lutheran doctrine, as is often alleged, lay at the root of the political passivity for which German Protestantism, especially Lutheranism, was to become notorious” (p. 136).

Brady makes his points very well, but could have done so better had there not been several weaknesses in the work. He argues, quite convincingly, against seeing *The Reformation* as a kind of Platonic idea, fixed and immutable, and linked inevitably to the unfolding of the German national spirit. This view may characterize the Protestant, Prussian version of German history, but anyone familiar with Catholic polemics from Thomas More through Bossuet, Goerres, Pastor, and Belloc to Ronald Knox would know that from the other side the chief char-

acteristic of Protestantism is its tendency to split into an ever-increasing number of particularisms. Brady quotes Chesterton to the effect that the problem with the Protestant is that he reads *his* Bible rather than *The* Bible, but he seems to have missed the larger context. Secondly, emblematic of the schism within the historical profession between those devotees of Clio who see themselves in the rhetorical tradition—perhaps even engaging in the history Bolingbroke described as “philosophy teaching by example”—and those who prefer the stern discipline of science, (even if a “soft” science), Brady describes how Sturm implemented his decision to adhere to the Protestant cause, but nowhere tells us why he made this decision. Perhaps the evidence does not tell us the “why,” and only the “how,” but the emphasis here is distinctly on the social rather than the intellectual. At one point this becomes a problem. One of the leading reasons for the failure of the Lutherans and the Zwinglians to unite was their disagreement over “real presence” in the Eucharist. As presented by Brady, Sturm was both surprised and aggrieved that theologians thought this doctrine worth the conflict. One gets the impression that neither Sturm nor his biographer understood what was at stake. Whether this impression is correct or not, it is almost certainly a product of being more concerned with the “how” than the “why” of reality.

Finally, Thomas Brady tells his reader that, “I have avoided some anglicized gallicisms ... and accepted others ... so long as the choice introduced no confusion” (p. x). This reader, at least, found no confusion but considerable annoyance in some of the choices, especially “Strasbourg” and “Strasbourgeois” throughout for “Strassburg” and “Strassburger”, but most of all by “lansquenet,” a pure and unanglicized gallicism and even more arcane than the German “Landsknecht.”

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