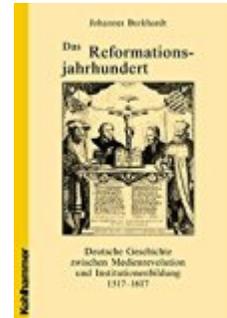


Johannes Burkhardt. *Das Reformationsjahrhundert: Deutsche Geschichte zwischen Medienrevolution und Institutionenbildung 1517-1617.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2002. broschiert, ISBN 978-3-17-010824-0.



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Almost since the Reformation began, scholars have been debating its significance. In this book, Johannes Burkhardt surveys the Reformation's impact on German history in its first century, from the start of the "Luther Affair" in 1517 through the celebration of the Reformation's centenary in 1617. Burkhardt sees German history in this period as marked, above all, by three major developments: the Reformation's "media revolution," confessionalization, and the institutionalization of state authority. In choosing these one hundred years to delimit his study, Burkhardt argues that these developments mark this period as a pivotal moment in the advent of the modern era.

With its focus on the impact of printing, the formation of confessional identity, and the process of state-building, Burkhardt's book is an attempt to synthesize three of the most important fields of historical inquiry on the German Reformation. Drawing extensively from recent German- and English-language scholarship, Burkhardt skillfully marshals this material into a comprehensive overview of the period. Readers looking for new evidence will not find it here--the book is

based primarily on secondary research. Burkhardt's contribution, however, lies in his ability to draw these three fields of scholarship together into a perceptive analysis of the Reformation's impact in its first one hundred years.

Perhaps the most compelling section of the book is Burkhardt's discussion of the Reformation as a "media event." The importance of print to the spread of the Reformation has, of course, been recognized since the Reformation itself, but Burkhardt vividly demonstrates the impact of the medium on the Reformation message. Drawing on the work of Mark Edwards, Michael Giesecke, and Werner Faulstich, he insists that the history of the Reformation cannot be separated from the history of communication.

Throughout the book, Burkhardt stresses the utter interdependence of print and reform. Before the Reformation, he argues, printing was a technology in search of a market. Popular interest in the reformers' message created a readership for printed works that, for the first time, reached beyond the elite sphere of humanists and clerics. While the Reformation expanded the economic

potential of the new industry, the press, in turn, spread the reformers' message. In the process, the press re-created the reformers as heroes and prophets in the public imagination, thus helping to establish the "Reformation myth" central to later generations' understanding of the movement.

While stressing the impact of the press, Burkhardt rightly notes the importance of non-printed communication in spreading the Reformation. In a largely illiterate society, sermons, songs, images, and public discussions all combined to transmit the Reformation message. In turn, Burkhardt argues, print helped to fix and spread new forms of oral usage, songs, and symbols. Indeed, Burkhardt sees Luther's ability to capture the sense of spoken German in his translation of the New Testament as an example of how "old media" adapted to new forms through print. Burkhardt's discussion of these "old media" is limited, however, and further attention to these non-printed forms of communication would clarify his analysis of both the Reformation's spread and the precise nature of the "media revolution" he describes.

Burkhardt argues that the desire to communicate the "correct" understanding of the Gospel also precipitated a drive toward confessionalization and, with it, state-building. In his discussion of confessionalization, Burkhardt relies heavily on the work of Heinz Schilling and Gerhard Reinhard, seeing the definition of religious identity and the promotion of confessional consciousness as a largely parallel development within the three major faiths of Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism in the later sixteenth century. However, Burkhardt notes that the process of confessionalization took different forms within each church. For Lutherans, print remained a primary tool of indoctrination. Stressing what he calls the "primacy of doctrine," Burkhardt shows how Lutheran churchmen worked to promote confessional consciousness among the laity through the dissemination of printed catechisms and statements of

faith. The so-called "radical" Reformation and the Calvinist churches, however, emphasized "the primacy of practice." In these communities, Burkhardt argues, the primary vehicles of confessionalization were religious practices, particularly in the form of the enforcement of moral discipline and the reformation of religious ritual.

Noting what Mark Edwards has called the "Catholic dilemma," Burkhardt argues that the Roman Catholic Church's reluctance to open matters of faith to public debate meant that it could not rely upon printed texts to solidify its message among the laity. Thus, it emphasized what Burkhardt terms "the primacy of the organization," turning to Church institutions to promote Catholic confessional identity through the assertion of papal and episcopal authority, the establishment of new religious orders, and the reform and education of local clergy.

While Burkhardt tends to share Schilling's and Reinhard's emphasis on the role of state and ecclesiastical institutions in the process of confessionalization, he addresses the criticisms of historians such as Heinrich Richard Schmidt that such a model overstates the influence of elite authorities in shaping popular practice and belief. In his discussion of the Catholic Reformation, for example, Burkhardt notes that, while Tridentine reform may be characterized as "confessionalization from above," the work of Marc Forster and others has suggested that the impulse toward reform could also arise "from the bottom up." Burkhardt sees the reality as lying somewhere in between--in certain points of consensus between the laity and church authorities, as represented most especially in the shared emphasis placed upon matters of ritual and popular devotionism in the Tridentine Church.

Burkhardt concludes with a look at state-building and the institutionalization of political authority in the wake of the Reformation. As an example of how the Reformation could coalesce power in the hands of state authorities, he ex-

amines that most ambitious of Reformation-era princes, Charles V. Burkhardt shows how the Emperor sought to reconcile his claims to universal monarchy with the decidedly fractionalized religious landscape of his empire. Ultimately, Burkhardt argues, Charles's political ideal failed to recognize the confessional realities of the post-Reformation world and thus doomed his empire to irresolvable, long-term conflict. On a more regional level, Burkhardt also chronicles the transition of political authority from the personal state of the late Middle Ages to the institutionalized, territorial states of early modern Europe. Central to this process within the Holy Roman Empire, Burkhardt stresses, were the development of the territorial estates and the imperial courts, and the institutionalization of state finance and tax collection.

Burkhardt's book is a valuable synthesis of the major themes and issues dominating the first century of the German Reformation. His interpretation of these developments is careful and insightful and offers a comprehensive assessment of the Reformation and its impact. Burkhardt's argument that this movement represented a pivotal shift toward modernity is somewhat less convincing, but is nonetheless worthwhile. He carefully resists the temptation to view this era from a teleological perspective, stressing, instead, the reformers' own essentially conservative understanding of their movement. While noting the continuities linking the Reformation to the modern age, he is alert to the discontinuities, as well. Overall, Burkhardt's careful and perceptive analysis, combined with his command of the scholarship, offers readers a valuable perspective on the German Reformation.

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