

## Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

Lorna Jane Abray — *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. Pp. 272.

Historians usually concentrate on origins rather than later developments, as any reader of biographies of Martin Luther will soon discover: emphasis is on the young Luther and his later years are neglected. But the present study of the Reformation in Strasbourg breaks with historiographical tradition and deals with the city's Reformation over the long haul, stretching from the reform agitation in the opening decades of the sixteenth century, through the triumph of the evangelical cause in the 1520s, down to the definitive (but not total) victory of Lutheran orthodoxy with the passage of the Church Ordinance of 1598. Indeed, the book gives rather short shrift to the much-studied heroic age of Zell, Bucer, Capito, and Hedio, when Strasbourg made its decisive move into the Protestant camp. The reason is that the author focuses attention on the effect of the Reformation on the whole society and only secondarily on the great theological issues that dominated the 1520s. This is, in fact, a social history of the Strasbourg Reformation. The evangelical conquest of the city in the 1520s has been described many times. But the long-term developments and the effect of the Reformation on the life of the people have been less fully studied: and one of the important achievements of this book to its success in carrying the story all the way to 1598.

The book makes a valuable contribution to the political history of the Reformation. This is viewed not in terms of the macrocosm, the Empire, but in terms of the microcosm, the city. Situated in an exposed and delicate position, subject to external pressure from the Emperor, from the surrounding Catholic countryside, and from the kings of France, the ruling councils conducted a complex religious and diplomatic policy that was further complicated by internal sectarian conflicts (especially between strict Lutherans and those who, while perhaps not Calvinists themselves, showed some sympathy for their Protestant neighbors in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands). Should the city link itself firmly to the powerful but distant Lutheran princes of eastern Germany, or should it rely on the near-by (but perhaps heretical) Swiss and Huguenots for diplomatic and military support? Abray's account of the debates over this issue shows that the aristocrats on the ruling councils definitely framed their policy in terms of political and military realities, not in terms of Lutheran orthodoxy. But she also demonstrates the difficulties that this policy created. The councils' active association with the Swiss and the Huguenots imposed heavy political, military, and financial burdens on the city. Still worse, it produced sharp criticism by those citizens who thought the policy too risky, too costly, and too closely linked to the heretical Calvinists. Eventually both internal political changes and changes in the general European situation dictated a shift of policy, so that by the end of the sixteenth century, the foreign policy as well as the domestic religious policy of Strasbourg had become aligned with the conservative Lutheranism of the eastern princes. Abray's description of this tortuous political development is a significant contribution.

The book offers two other conclusions of even greater interest. Woven throughout the volume, but culminating in Chapter Eight, "The Christian Community," is a fascinating account of the tension between the lay leadership and the clerical leadership of the Reformation in Strasbourg. In the 1520s, in order to break the power of the old religious institution, the evangelical preachers exalted the power of the secular government over all aspects of life, including religion. When the city's magistrates abolished the mass and took other actions to ensure the success of the Reformation, and even when they provided a much-reduced social and economic position for the clergy, the preachers welcomed their actions. But when the preachers found the city councils unwilling to impose a godly discipline on the lay population, and still more unwilling to grant the clergy jurisdictional powers or even let them share directly in the new disciplinary agencies (such as the Marriage Court and the Morals Board)

that were created, there was always an undercurrent of tension and sometimes open conflict. The city fathers eventually outlawed all forms of public worship except the official Lutheran one. But they refused to compel local citizens to attend the official religious services; for nearly three decades they refused to endorse the Lutheran Formula of Concord; they refused to hunt out local religious dissidents as long as these persons kept their opinions to themselves; they also refused to let religious considerations outweigh political concerns when formulating public policy. The rulers resisted granting the clergy any powers or recognition that would elevate them much above the level of ecclesiastical civil servants or that would recognize them as an independent corporate entity.

Over the long run, the Church Assembly did manage to become a clerical voice in urban life, and the president of the Assembly (though chosen by the magistrates) did emerge as the real leader of the local clergy, though the city fathers always denied him the use of the proper Lutheran title of superintendent. As time passed, the clergy by its energetic preaching and teaching was able to create among ordinary citizens a degree of Lutheran identity that expressed itself in intense popular resistance to the concessions to Catholicism that the government accepted after its disastrous defeat in the Schmalkaldic War. Again, during the Wars of Religion, the Lutheran clergy rallied considerable popular opposition to the pro-Calvinist foreign policy of their rulers. This clerical resurgence culminated in the 1590s, when a new generation took control of the governing councils, a generation that had been indoctrinated from early childhood by a thoroughly Lutheran clergy. The result was that the city government in 1598 finally endorsed the Formula of Concord and adopted a Church Ordinance which strongly affirmed the Lutheran identity of the local church and greatly strengthened the corporate position of the clergy within it. Even then, however, the Reformation desired by the laity was quite different from the Reformation conceived by the clergy. On purely theological matters, by 1598 the city fathers were at last willing to follow the lead of their preachers. Yet they still kept control of discipline in lay hands; they still granted far more toleration to religious dissidents than the clergy wanted; they still forbade the preachers to impose any excommunication that had civil consequences; they still thwarted the clergy's desire to form a consistory or to require parishioners to submit to a private confessional interview before receiving communion. Even after 1598, when Strasbourg had clearly become an orthodox Lutheran city, the lay authority, not the clerical, was paramount. The Strasbourgeois in general had come to respect, admire, and even love their preachers; and the preachers' remarkably improved intellectual and moral qualities justified that growing trust. But the clergy were never, even at their peak of success in 1598, able to gain an independent authority remotely akin to the power of the pre-Reformation priests.

The second general interpretation advanced by Abray is an explicit denial that for Strasbourg, Gerald Strauss's thesis of a failed Reformation is valid. She is very careful here, noting that Strauss himself qualified his pessimistic conclusions about the effect of the Reformation on the lives of ordinary folk. If judged in terms of the aspirations of the clergy, perhaps the Strasbourg Reformation, too, was a failure. But when she views the local Reformation in terms of the goals of the lay people, Abray is more positive. The ordinary Strasbourg citizens in 1546 had such a strong Lutheran identity that they would have preferred to continue a hopeless war rather than to follow their rulers' lead in making concessions to Catholicism within the city in order to obtain peace from the Emperor. Sixteenth-century Strasbourgeois found their new religion more comprehensible and accessible than the old religion, and less burdensome financially and morally. The new clergy seemed far more acceptable: better educated than the old priest, less inclined to scandalous moral flaws or to egregious neglect of duty. The growing influence of the Lutheran clergy was based on real merit. The new religion seemed far more compatible with the needs and aspirations of family life. While the long-term political effects of the Reformation were disastrous for Strasbourg, leading eventually to the city's assimilation by the kings of France, the new religion did have a profound effect on many aspects of life and cannot be written off as a noble but failed experiment that made little difference in the way people lived. Part of the disagreement between the conclusions of Abray and the conclusions of Strauss may rest on regional differences. But the most important differences result from sources and methods. Strauss has used clerical sources and has taken at face value the gloomy conclusions of official visitation commissions whose task was to uncover, document, and rectify failures. Abray, on the other hand, has noted that the goals and the conclusions of lay people were very different from

those of the local clergy. Viewed from the perspective of the ruling class or even of ordinary citizens, the Reformation in Strasbourg takes on a brighter aspect, seems much more of a success than clerical censors would ever have admitted. Abrey's work does not necessarily invalidate the conclusions of Strauss, but it does raise significant new questions. Additional local studies, focused on the experience of the people as well as on the complaints of the clergy, should help to advance the discussion of this central issue of Reformation history.

Charles G. Nauert, Jr.  
University of Missouri-Columbia

\* \* \*

A.L. Beier — *Masterless Men, the Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985. Pp. xxii, 233.

In *Masterless Men, the Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640*, A.L. Beier presents a comprehensive survey of one of the more serious and familiar social issues of the post-Reformation England. Having worked in and around that issue for over a decade — in a doctoral thesis, several articles and an earlier, if brief, monograph [*The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Methuen, 1983)] — Beier promises consummate authority in undertaking the task before him. His use of thousands of arrest and examination records especially in the towns of Leicester, Chester, Reading and Warwick, and in the counties of Somerset and Wiltshire, and also of punishment records from Essex, London and Norwich, provide the substantial foundation for his study and command our respect for his authority.

As an expert tour guide, Beier takes us through 'all the old familiar places, one by one. Though the vagrancy legislation of his chosen era "reflected a new [?] kind of poverty after 1300, that of masterless men" (p. 12) he sees the emergence of vagrancy as a major problem following the social and economic dislocations of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Here he links vagrancy closely to the increase of population as a whole and (following Margaret Spufford's work on Cambridgeshire villages) to the shift in agrarian tenancy patterns. Rising food prices, a diminishing supply of available land through enclosure, sale and subdivision were also responsible for the large numbers of landless wage seekers in the countryside. They often undertook subsistence migration toward the towns and cities, and this effort often resulted in a reverse flow of statutorily defined vagrants when the object of migration — servants' positions, apprenticeships or simple wage — failed to materialize.

Against the picture painted by at least some earlier historians and often by contemporaries themselves, Beier casts a critical eye to the structure of vagrant "society". He finds that most vagrants were single males engaged in a near nomadic search for work or, barring that, subsistence through begging or any other means available. Such women as were involved were usually prostitutes, or searching for deserting husbands, or pregnant and single. Save for transient Irish paupers and Gypsies, both sketched briefly for us, almost none of the vagrants travelled in large groups or even in family units. Beier sorts through and summarizes his findings on the travelling patterns of the vagrant population, and describes some of the quasi-occupational sub-groups of the whole.

Of the presumed "vagrant underground" popularized in contemporary mythology as well as in some purportedly serious scholarship since that time, Beier is equally sceptical. While not denying some degree of criminal behaviour amongst individual vagrants, he dismisses the frequent assumption of a well developed or even hierarchical organization in support of such activities, and feels that such alleged evidence as the use of a secret "language" is also highly exaggerated.

Finally, Beier turns to the government reaction to vagrancy, not merely to rehearse the familiar litany of legislation, but to survey some of its philosophical underpinnings. In one of his more decisive conclusions, Beier tells us that government was not only far from helpless in its effort to cope, but