



Marc R. Forster. *Catholic Germany from the Reformation to the Enlightenment.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. x + 265 pp. \$93.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-69837-2; \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-333-69838-9.

Reviewed by Howard Louthan (University of Florida)

Published on H-German (January, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Germany's Long Catholic Reformation

Marc R. Forster's most recent monograph meets a timely need for students of early modern religion in a number of respects. For the land of Martin Luther, the Protestant side of the Reformation has long dominated the historiography of the Anglophone world, and yet when the dust had finally settled in the seventeenth century, approximately one-third of the population identified themselves as Catholics. Though in the past two decades the study of the Catholic Reformation has blossomed into a flourishing field, geographically its traditional focus has been the Mediterranean world, with the Germans frequently relegated to the sidelines as "a poor stepchild of European Catholicism" (p. 2). Within Germany the situation is somewhat different, where in recent years significant work on the Catholic side of the Reformation has appeared. Forster's volume is in large part so valuable because it offers a crisp distillation of much of this literature. It also reflects important new trends in terms of chronology. In 1997, Helmut Walser Smith and Joel Harrington published an influential article in the *Journal of Modern History* in which they argued that those studying religion in the German lands had much to gain by examining their subject from a broader chronological perspective.^[1] Most studies of the Catholic Reformation today push their chronology into the eighteenth century. Although Forster begins with the fifteenth and peers into the nineteenth, the heart of his study are the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The result is a subtle, if not completely uncontroversial,

overview of a rapidly growing body of research that regularly challenges received commonplaces.

Thematically, Forster's focus is the creation of a Catholic identity in the German lands. More specifically, he explores two sides of the process. He devotes significant attention to the institutional church: reforms of bishops, the impact of religious orders, and developments with local parish clergy. At the same time he considers the formation of a more popular religious culture by considering topics such as pilgrimage, the liturgical calendar, confraternities, and other forms of corporate devotion. With this methodological framework in place, he divides his study into four distinct chronological periods.

He begins with a succinct assessment of Catholic Germany before the Council of Trent. Pulling both from local studies and the broader observations from scholars such as Berndt Hamm, Forster highlights the general contours of late medieval religiosity characteristic of the region. Frankly, a separate volume could be dedicated to developments of this period, for increasing numbers of scholars are revisiting the rich ecclesiastical culture of late medieval central Europe. John Van Engen, Howard Kaminsky, and others have effectively challenged that hoary chestnut of European historiography best popularized by Johan Huizinga, who saw the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a period of decay, decline, and senescence, and thus a necessary prologue to the Reformation. Forster rightly points to the importance of the

Observant movement. Luther himself was a product of such a monastic house. His treatment of the Reformation itself is well balanced, as he illustrates a variety of responses to the Protestant challenge. Particularly interested in the humanist clerics surrounding the Habsburg courts of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, he points to the reaction of Vienna's bishop Johann Fabri who, though critical of the Wittenberg renegade, also admitted, "I like Luther's writings very much; most of what he has written is correct" (p. 33).

Two events helped usher in a new period for German Catholicism in the sixteenth century. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg provided the church with the necessary breathing room to recover and react to the Protestant challenge, while Trent helped redirect its ideological orientation. Here Forster echoes recent assessments of this period that have challenged the older view of Hubert Jedin, who maintained that Trent "produced an almost miraculous revival of Catholicism" (p. 73). He effectively illustrates the tensions that existed between the universal aspirations of Trent to reinvigorate the episcopacy and renew parish life and the local challenges and practices of the regional church. One of the great strengths of the volume is its careful attention to the local. Catholic authorities in cities such as Bamberg and Cologne, at religious houses such as Weingarten and St. Emmeram, reacted to Trent differently and negotiated settlements that reflected the concerns and needs of these localities. Forster includes a separate chapter on the Thirty Years' War. The war in many respects was a shoulder period. On the one hand, Catholic militancy reached its height with the 1629 Edict of Restitution and the forced recatholicization of regions such as the Upper Palatinate. This martial spirit, however, was fading quickly, and the zealous Ferdinand II would be replaced by more accommodating figures, such as Bishop Johann Philipp von Schönborn. It is also during this period that Forster sees the formation and emergence of what he terms baroque Catholicism, an intensification of communal liturgical life that retreated from the more austere piety of Tridentine Catholicism.

The two chapters devoted to baroque Catholicism (1650-1750) constitute the centerpiece of the book and reflect themes developed in Forster's earlier volume on southwest Germany (*Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque* [2001]) and his first monograph on Speyer (*The Counter-Reformation in the Villages* [1992]). He first investigates developments within the institutional church, providing a series of useful snapshots from across the German lands. He applies a Weberian model of professionalization when considering the clergy and concludes

with a helpful section on the religious orders, including female monasticism. Though he wisely focuses on the contrasting styles of the Jesuits and Capuchins, perhaps more might have been made of the great diversity within the regular clergy. For example, he makes no mention of the Piarists, who, among the orders, offered the only educational alternative to the Jesuits in Bohemia and whose church in Vienna had ties both with W. A. Mozart and Anton Bruckner. The following chapter covers the religious culture of baroque Catholicism. Here he focuses on the laity as he considers both the structures of baroque religiosity (churchliness, the liturgical year, and rites of passage) and elements of religious revival (confraternities, pilgrimage, and the sacred landscape). Forster pays close attention to the tensions imbedded in religious rituals. He argues that popular phenomena such as pilgrimage frequently reflected conflicting agenda. Ecclesiastical and secular authorities promoted such routes to encourage allegiance to the state and the development of sober forms of piety while the masses, often unruly and disordered, streamed to these sites in search of miracles.

The final chapter is a useful coda, as Forster fills out the eighteenth century and even glances ahead to the nineteenth. Revisiting familiar themes of the Enlightenment, he discusses how Catholicism was once more remade with the challenge of Jansenism, the emergence of Febronianism, and the impact of Josephinism. Drawing from the work of Rudolf Schlögl, Forster charts the slow growth of secularism and the shift away from baroque Catholicism. In a manner reminiscent of Carl Schorske, Forster sees the ultramontane church of nineteenth-century Germany as reflecting elements of both baroque and enlightened Catholicism.

Forster's eloquent overview is a marvelous distillation of more than three centuries of the Catholic experience in German-speaking territory. Illustrating the diversity of Catholicism in central Europe, his study ranges geographically from Westphalia to Lake Constance, from the Rhineland to Austria. While paying attention to detail, Forster is able to step back and make broad observations and conclusions that are especially useful for students and scholars who may not be German specialists. His writing is consistently lucid and his handling of difficult material adept. As a result, it should be considered for use in the classroom. At the same time, the volume captures the dilemma that many of us face as both teachers and scholars of central Europe. In the classroom we seek to explain and make comprehensible Europe's most complicated and decentralized region. Many of my students are completely baffled by R. J. W. Evans's

characterization of the Habsburg lands as “a mildly centripetal agglutination of bewilderingly heterogeneous elements.”[2] As scholars, though, we often seek to complicate and add nuance and subtlety. In synthetic overviews such as Forster’s volume, these two agendas can conflict. Forster was compelled to make hard decisions about what to include or omit, as well as determining the extent of thematic, geographic, and chronological coverage. In the main, his decisions were judicious, and he has produced a book that I will regularly draw from and urge my students to read. At the same time, however, pointing to two areas that exemplify the complex nature of central Europe’s religious landscape might serve to complicate Forster’s narrative.

The first is the matter of compulsion. Forster argues that Catholicism in its most militant form reached its crescendo during the Thirty Years’ War before giving way to milder expressions of faith more characteristic of its baroque phase. Though I agree with this general formulation, force and compulsion as adjuncts of Catholic reform did not magically disappear from central Europe after 1648. The violent re-conversion of the Upper Palatinate, as illustrated in the work of Trevor Johnson, continued well beyond Westphalia. In Bohemia, of course, coercion, though not omnipresent, continued institutionally into the eighteenth century. To this day Hungarian Calvinists commemorate those of their faith who in the late seventeenth century were condemned to the galleys. In the following century, Salzburg’s archbishop, Leopold Anton Eleutherius von Firmian, sent twenty thousand Lutherans into exile. On a far smaller scale, the ToruÅ (Thorn) incident of 1724, when Polish royal officials executed more than a dozen Lutheran leaders of the city, put Nicolaus Copernicus’s city back on the European map. During this period, Emperor Charles VI was busy formulating confessional guidelines that would essentially direct Habsburg religious policy until the patent of toleration in 1781. Isolating the Protestants of his territories from their co-religionists abroad, the emperor sought their conversion through the combined strategies of evangelization and force. Those communities that resisted the pleas of the missionaries were to be broken up and their inhabitants were to be relocated in the new frontier regions of the East.

A second point to consider is the multiethnic and multilingual nature of central Europe. Forster makes clear that the German-speaking lands of this region are the focus of his study. This in itself is a complicated

area, and he does a superb job of capturing its diversity. Nevertheless, it is difficult, especially when one considers the Habsburgs, to keep the story that simple without masking the ethnic and linguistic complexity of central Europe. If we consider the Jesuits, a prime agent of the Catholic Reformation, we note that in central Europe in 1600, they were organized into three provinces: the Rhine, the Lower German, and the Austrian. The Austrian province, in particular, reflected a mishmash of ethnicities with members speaking German, Czech, Slovenian, Hungarian, Croatian, and Italian. Indeed, one of the Jesuits’ key leaders in sixteenth-century Prague was the Englishman, Edmund Campion. When Forster discusses the *Kelchbewegung*, a movement within the church advocating the lay use of the chalice at the Eucharist, as a German phenomenon he is describing just one part of a broader reform current in sixteenth-century central Europe. The lay use of the chalice was an issue that crossed ethnic boundaries in this region, and it would have been helpful had Forster located his discussion as part of this broader theological debate. The issue was critical for many Bohemians in particular. The chalice had been the symbol of their revolt against Rome in the fifteenth century, and its employment at the Eucharist was the central feature of Utraquist identity. In Poland, too, this practice was a matter of high significance importance. The kingdom’s great Catholic champion, Stanislas Hosius, criss-crossed central Europe speaking and writing against it. At one point Rome actually dispatched him to Vienna to bring the wayward son of Ferdinand I, the future Maximilian II, back to the Catholic fold.

Even if these points complicate Forster’s narrative slightly, they are not intended as a critique of his actual arguments. He has produced a thoughtful synthesis of a significant body of material. His observations are acute and insightful, reminding us that Catholicism was alive and well north of the Alps in the age of Luther. By pushing traditional chronological boundaries, he has provided students of the early modern world a fuller but more nuanced view of German Catholicism.

Notes

[1]. Joel Harrington and Helmut Walser Smith, “Confessionalization, Community and State Building in Germany, 1555-1870,” *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997): 77-101.

[2]. R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 447.

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Citation: Howard Louthan. Review of Forster, Marc R., *Catholic Germany from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2009.

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