



the reformation of the keys



CONFESSION, CONSCIENCE,
AND AUTHORITY IN
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY
GERMANY

RONALD K. RITTGERS

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Confession, Conscience, and Authority
in Sixteenth-Century Germany

RONALD K. RITTGERS

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For Jana

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Introduction

In the Gospels there is a story about Jesus healing a paralytic that claims an awesome authority for the “Son of Man” (Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26). Jesus had returned to the home of two of his disciples in Capernaum, and so many people had come to hear him preach that there was no room left in the house, “not even in front of the door.” The paralytic’s friends wanted to bring their stricken colleague to Jesus but were prevented from doing so by the crowd. Determined to gain an audience with the preacher, the four men climbed to the top of the house, dug up a portion of the roof, and lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying before Jesus. Impressed by the friends’ faith, Jesus declared to the invalid, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” This statement angered some of the religious leaders who were present, for it smacked of blasphemy: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” they asked. Jesus, aware of their skepticism, posed a question of his own: “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’” Then, in order to demonstrate that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” he commanded the paralytic to stand up, collect his mat, and go home: the man obeyed. Everyone in the house was amazed: they had witnessed two miracles that day, though the evangelists clearly wished to present the former—that is, the forgiveness of sin—as the greater.

Not only do the Gospels claim authority over sin for Jesus; they

also assert that this divine power was entrusted to his disciples. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus promises to give the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" to Peter, following the disciple's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus tells Peter, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13–20). Later in the same Gospel, Jesus extends the authority to bind and loose sins to all of his disciples, promising to be present with them—in glorified form—when they come together to deliberate about an unrepentant member of the Church. As with Peter, Jesus asserts that their decision to forgive or retain sins will be reflected in heaven (Matthew 18:15–20). In John's Gospel, the resurrected Christ appears to the disciples and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit, saying, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21–23).

The belief that the Church possesses the power of the keys has been central to Christianity from the beginning. It has informed the theology, worship, and mission of the Church down through the centuries, and has served as the basis for ecclesiastical claims to authority in both spiritual and temporal affairs. The conviction that the Church is able to forgive and retain sins in the name of God has also had a profound impact on Western civilization. So many defining institutions, events, and practices in the premodern West can ultimately be traced back to belief in the keys: the papacy, the Crusades, and auricular confession, to name but a few. Far from being static or somehow immune to the forces of historical evolution, the keys have been shaped and reshaped as Christianity has taken on a variety of historical incarnations. As Christian ideas about sin, guilt, and forgiveness have developed over time, they have had a tremendous influence on the religious, social, and political life of Christianity's various host cultures. Changes in the keys have contributed significantly to the shape of past societies.

This book is about one of these changes. It examines a period of European history from roughly 1450 to 1560 during which the power of the keys underwent a profound transformation or, to be more precise, a thoroughgoing reformation. In this period Protestant Christians effected fundamental changes in the way the keys were conceived and practiced, and in so doing permanently altered their world and ours. The reformation of the keys in the sixteenth century contributed to a

reformation of Church and society in early modern Europe that is still affecting us today.

The surprising thing about this change in the keys is how little attention it has received from scholars, including those who specialize in sixteenth-century Germany. Scholars of the German Reformation have limited their analysis of the keys largely to examinations of the sacrament of penance—the place at which the power of the keys touched the late medieval laity most directly—and its role in the origins of the evangelical movement.¹ There has been a vigorous debate among Reformation scholars about how the alleged abuses of late medieval auricular confession may or may not have contributed to the appeal of the Reformation among German burghers.² But no one has ventured beyond the question of Protestant origins to examine the plight of the keys in the German Reformation itself; no one has attempted to tell the rest of the story, at least not in sufficient depth.

This lack of attention to the keys in the evangelical movement has been most unfortunate, for it has greatly impoverished our understanding of the German Reformation as a whole. It has also kept concealed one of the evangelical movement's most interesting innovations: a reformed version of private confession. Lutherans, like other Protestants, objected to the sacrament of penance, viewing it as a man-made ritual that subjected the laity to clerical manipulation and the burden of works righteousness. However, unlike other Protestants, Lutherans developed a modified version of private confession that they practiced until the end of the eighteenth century. Though initially beset by difficulties, Lutheran private confession eventually became an accepted and integral part of evangelical piety.³

English-speaking historians have largely ignored the Lutheran version of private confession in their treatments of the German Reformation. We have a few brief treatments of the practice,⁴ but most scholars simply gloss over it. German-speaking scholars have paid greater attention to Lutheran private confession, and we possess several valuable surveys of the establishment, transformation, and eventual decline of the new ritual.⁵ However, most German treatments of evangelical confession have been concerned to trace the development of Protestant dogma. They are works in historical theology and, as such, rely on a limited number of sources: credal statements, theological treatises, catechisms, and church orders.⁶ No German scholar has provided a fully historical treatment of Lutheran private confession

that examines its social and political implications in addition to its theological underpinnings. No one has related the new ritual to the larger reformation of the keys that took place in sixteenth-century Germany, nor to the German Reformation itself.

The present study seeks to remedy these deficiencies in the scholarship on the power of the keys in the German Reformation. It provides the first thorough treatment of the topic in English and the first fully historical examination in any language. The discussion is organized around several guiding questions: Why did sixteenth-century Lutherans retain private confession, and what specific modifications did they make to the sacrament of penance? How did leaders of the evangelical movement seek to implement the new practice? What obstacles did they face in doing so? How did private confession, initially an object of derision among early Lutherans, eventually become an accepted part of evangelical piety? Finally, how did the Lutheran version of confession influence the balance of power in evangelical cities and duchies? The German Reformation succeeded, at least in part, because it promoted enhanced lay control of religion. How did private confession, such an important component of traditional clerical authority, fare in this new order? In other words, what was the relationship between the power of the keys and the new evangelical version of confession? It is these final questions about Lutheran private confession and religious authority that will receive special attention here.

All scholars agree that the Reformation contributed directly to a transference of religious authority from clerical to lay hands. The Reformation helped resolve the centuries-long conflict between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium* in favor of the former. By stressing the divine right of civil authorities to govern, the evangelical movement enabled lay rulers to become secular bishops. But what few scholars appreciate is the important role that Lutheran private confession played in this process. The development of an evangelical version of private confession was part of a larger reformation of the keys that was central to the secularization of religious authority in sixteenth-century Germany. The story of this reformation of the keys, in turn, reveals something very important about how religious authority was exercised in the German Reformation.

A good deal of the recent scholarly literature on the German Reformation maintains that the evangelical movement failed to live up to its own highest ideals of religious reform. The promise of spiritual

freedom, so important in the early years of the German Reformation, was soon replaced by calls for discipline and order, especially after the common folk sought to interpret evangelical liberty according to their own lights. Paradise was lost and never regained, at least not the paradise of modern scholars—that is, a more democratic society. Central to the Reformation's fall from grace was the decision of Luther and his followers to form an alliance with secular rulers. Rather than protecting lay consciences from intrusive clericalism, as Luther intended, this move only led to greater oppression. The evangelical movement played into the hands of German princes and magistrates who used it to achieve their goals of political hegemony, with little concern for the common folk. The Reformation gained the world but lost its soul.⁷

Viewing the development of the German Reformation from the vantage point of Lutheran private confession provides a different perspective on how the new secular bishops used their religious authority. The emergence of the Lutheran ritual demonstrates that while evangelical magistrates sought to discipline the common folk, they also endeavored to protect them from unsolicited incursions into their consciences. What is more, the Lutheran clergy assisted the magistrates in this endeavor, in most cases quite willingly. At least from the perspective of confession, the German Reformation appears to have been a much more balanced affair than many scholars recognize. Lutheran private confession represents an important piece of counterevidence to the thesis, so popular today, that the German Reformation was fundamentally about control and discipline. It demonstrates an important line of continuity between Luther's original emphasis on spiritual freedom and the mature religious practices that the evangelical revolution produced. Discipline had its limits in the German Reformation.

The discussion focuses primarily on the reformation of the keys in Nürnberg, one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the Holy Roman Empire, and arguably its cultural center. Nürnberg provides a valuable case study of the reformation of the keys in sixteenth-century Germany for several reasons. During the 1530s and 1540s the city experienced Lutheran Germany's most important conflict about confession and absolution. Many of the major reformers were involved in it, including Luther, Melancthon, Brenz, and (especially) Osiander, along with prominent evangelical rulers and common laypeople. Nowhere was the Lutheran practice of confession put more severely to

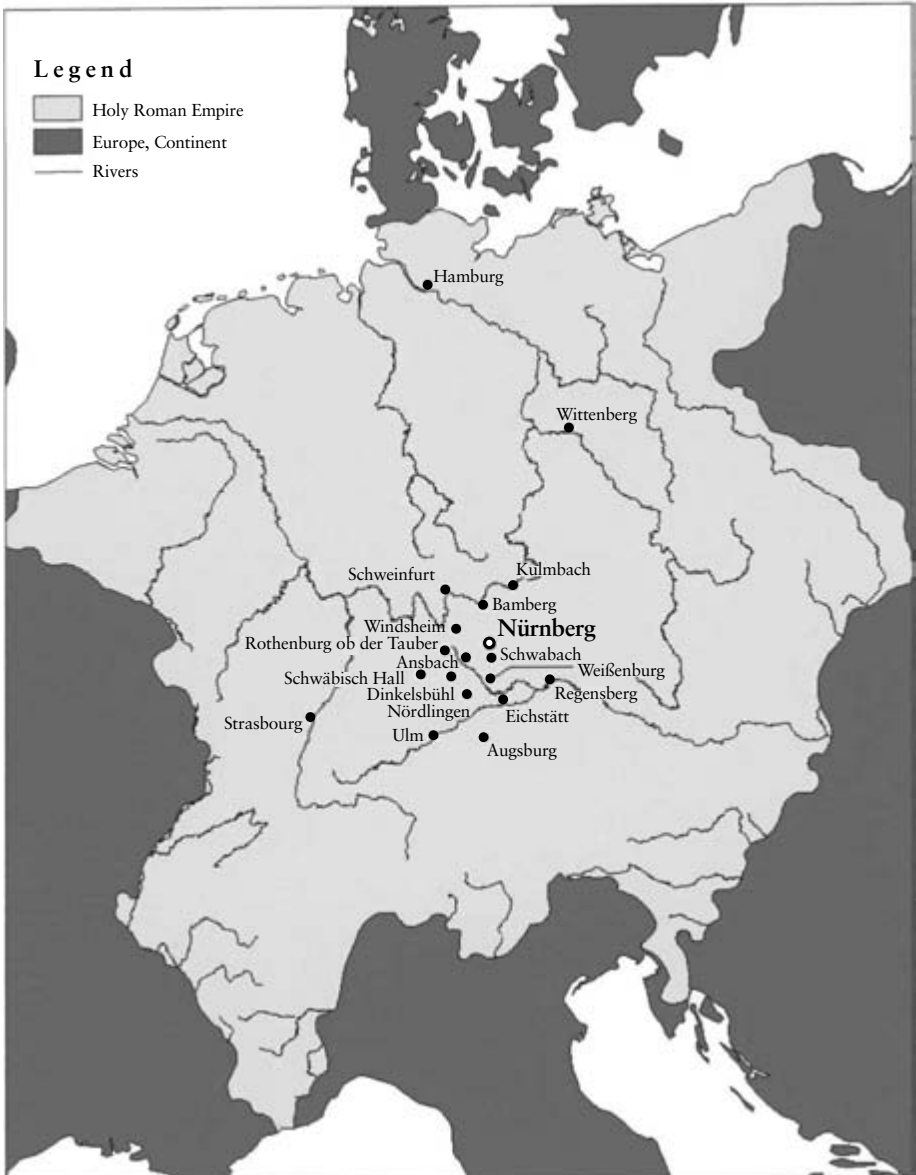
the test than in sixteenth-century Nürnberg, and nowhere was the connection between the reformation of confession and the larger reformation of the keys more obvious. The outcome of the so-called Nürnberg absolution controversy shaped the practice of confession throughout Lutheran Germany and revealed a great deal about evangelical attitudes toward religious authority.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century, Nürnberg was also one of the leading cities of the Reformation. The first imperial city to adopt the new faith, Nürnberg played a crucial role in the promotion and institutionalization of the Reformation, especially in southern Germany. Nürnberg's evangelical church orders and catechisms spread throughout the region, thus making it one of the most important centers of Lutheranism in Germany. The imperial city's official registers are full of letters from other German towns and cities seeking advice on how to implement evangelical reforms: a good portion of Lutheran Germany looked to Nürnberg as a model evangelical city. Thus, by studying Nürnberg, one comes into contact with the German Reformation in its most articulate and influential form.

Finally, historians have been especially critical of how Nürnberg's clergy and magistrates exercised their authority over the city's religious life. One scholar has accused the imperial city's lay and clerical leaders of seeking to convert the common folk into passive automata who conformed, both inwardly and outwardly, to the new evangelical creed, the most important article of which was submission to civil rulers.⁸ The story of confession in Nürnberg reveals a much more judicious use of authority, one that sought to protect and console, as well as discipline and control. The Reformation in Nürnberg was as much about defending lay consciences against unwanted intrusions as it was about creating submissive burghers. This story also illustrates that Nürnbergers were anything but passive about matters that concerned their souls. Artisans, along with ruling elites, influenced the final form of confession in their city. Common burghers played as important a role in the reformation of the keys as did magistrates and clergy in Nürnberg.

The discussion begins with an examination of the role of the keys in German politics and piety on the eve of the Reformation, paying special attention to late medieval Nürnberg. It then moves on to consider how early Lutherans in the imperial city and elsewhere sought to undermine this role as the evangelical movement burst upon the scene in

the late 1510s and early 1520s. Next the discussion turns to consider the challenge that leaders of the German Reformation faced throughout the 1520s as they endeavored to create a uniquely evangelical version of private confession, one that reflected the theological, social, and political concerns of magistrates, reformers, and laypeople alike. The study then examines the obstacles leaders of the evangelical movement in Nürnberg faced in implementing the new version of private confession from the mid-1520s on. The centerpiece of the book, Chapter 7, examines the conflict over the keys in Nürnberg during the 1530s. This is followed by a discussion of how Lutheran private confession was eventually established in the imperial city in the late 1540s. The final chapter examines how the new ritual was depicted in evangelical catechetical literature and how it was actually practiced in Nürnberg and its environs. The study concludes with an attempt to relate the reformation of the keys in Nürnberg to the larger context of the German Reformation.



Map of the Holy Roman Empire showing relevant towns and cities. Produced by Abraham Parrish and Michael Funaro of the Sterling Memorial Library Map Collections, Yale University.

Allegiance to the *Regnum*

In medieval Europe the power of the keys influenced not only piety and devotion but also politics and government. The authority to bind and loose sins had very real implications for the balance of power between clerical and secular rulers. There had long been the potential for conflict between sacerdotal and monarchical claims to temporal authority in Christendom, but aside from a few noteworthy exceptions, kings and princes had usually held sway over bishops and priests. This situation began to change in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as reform-minded popes challenged the status quo. The resulting conflict between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium* dominated the political landscape of Europe in the high and later Middle Ages, and would only finally be resolved in the sixteenth century. Nürnberg was profoundly shaped by this struggle for “right order” in Christendom.¹ It quickly sorted out its loyalties in the prolonged battle for hegemony in the temporal sphere, eventually becoming one of the most important bastions of political conservatism in the empire.

The origins of Nürnberg go back to the eleventh century when the Salian emperor Henry III built a fortress on a hill north of the Pegnitz River.² The city derived its name from the rocky (*nuorin*) terrain on which this stronghold (*burg*) was constructed.³ Henry founded Nürnberg ostensibly to protect imperial territory in Franconia from potential Bohemian aggression, but he also had a larger purpose in mind: to restrain the influence of ecclesiastical princes who had grown

powerful under previous regimes.⁴ Nürnberg inherited a conflict with the *sacerdotium* as part of its birthright. The emperor transferred to the new stronghold and its settlement several of the possessions and privileges that had hitherto belonged to the nearby bishopric of Bamberg (established 1007), including the right to mint coins, collect imperial tolls, and hold markets.⁵ Henry considered Bamberg vulnerable to attack and also wished to recover some of the wealth Emperor Henry II had lavished upon it.⁶ This decision angered the bishops of Bamberg, under whose spiritual jurisdiction Nürnberg lay, though they could do little about it; Henry controlled appointments to the bishopric.⁷

After Henry III's death in 1056, the bishop of Bamberg successfully pressured the new emperor, Henry IV, who was just twelve years old at the time, to restore his previous rights and privileges.⁸ Though the bishop pushed for control over Nürnberg as well, the young ruler refused, a decision that did much to shape the future identity of the Franconian stronghold.⁹ During the ensuing conflict over lay investiture (1073–1122), Nürnberg consistently supported Henry IV and his effort to protect monarchical control over Christendom against the revolutionary designs of Pope Gregory VII. From the beginning, Nürnberg was wary of sacerdotal claims to temporal authority based on the power of the keys.¹⁰

Nürnberg again demonstrated its allegiance to the *regnum* during the reign of the Hohenstaufen emperors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. When the bishops of Rome protested Hohenstaufen challenges to their temporal authority in Italy, Nürnberg sided with the imperial cause, and was twice placed under papal ban—in 1160 and 1240—for its insubordination.¹¹ The emperors rewarded the fortress-town handsomely for its loyalty.

Nürnberg had grown considerably during the century since its founding, attracting an ever-increasing number of imperial servants, knights, and artisans, the majority of whom owed their livelihood in one way or another to the *Burg*. As the settlement itself became fortified (ca. 1163), merchants began making it their home, owing especially to its central location on several major trade routes and long-standing market privileges. Frederick Barbarossa preferred the Franconian stronghold above all other imperial residences, and convened more imperial meetings in Nürnberg than in any other place.¹² In 1219 Frederick II granted Nürnberg a charter (*Freiheitsbrief*) that

greatly enhanced its political and economic fortunes. The charter referred to Nürnberg as a *civitas*, thus recognizing its status as a privileged corporation, and guaranteeing the security of the city's inhabitants and their possessions.¹³ It also granted Nürnbergers exemption from various imperial tolls and taxes elsewhere in the empire, thus making it an even more attractive home to merchants. Most important, the charter established the emperor as the burghers' advocate and protector (*Vogt*), which meant, among other things, that the city's inhabitants were protected from all litigation save before the emperor's personal representative in the city.¹⁴ This latter provision was specifically designed to undermine the bishop of Bamberg's legal jurisdiction over many of the city's inhabitants.¹⁵ Though Nürnberg would have to wait more than a century before it would become a free imperial city, already in the early thirteenth century the emperor had made it clear that he alone was the city's ultimate overlord.

During the so-called Babylonian Captivity of the Church, when popes resided in Avignon rather than in Rome, Nürnberg was again in the foreground of the ongoing battle between popes and emperors for hegemony in Christendom. When Pope John XXII questioned the legitimacy of Louis of Bavaria's claim to the imperial throne, the new emperor retreated to Nürnberg to mount his defense. Louis had recently defeated a rival for the throne, and had then been duly elected emperor by the German princes and crowned in Aachen.¹⁶ John XXII, who supported Louis's rival, insisted that he should have been called in to settle the dispute and refused to recognize Louis as the new emperor. The German ruler responded that the pope had no business seeking to question or override the decision of the German princes, and issued a statement to this effect in Nürnberg. Like the Hohenstaufen emperors before him, Louis favored the Franconian stronghold above all other imperial residences.¹⁷ Louis then commissioned the city secretary of Nürnberg to draw up the "Nürnberg Appellation," which became the basis for the famous "Sachsenhausen Decree" (1324).¹⁸ In the latter document the emperor accused the pope of seeking to enhance his own power in the empire by causing discord and unrest among the Germans, especially by supporting Louis's rival. The emperor also charged the pope with abuse of the keys, citing his recent excommunication of pious Catholics in northern Italy who were advocates of Louis's reign. Finally, the decree asserted that the pope had forgotten the original source of the Church's prestige and in-

fluence: the Emperor Constantine. Louis argued, “[the pope] does not ponder that whatever liberty or honor the Church has today, Constantine most magnificently conferred on Pope St. Silvester, who was living hidden in a cave at that time.”¹⁹

John XXII disagreed strongly with the emperor’s interpretation of Church history. Echoing the argument of popes like Gregory VII before him, he believed the keys, not Constantine, were the source of his temporal authority, a fact he sought to demonstrate by excommunicating Louis a short while after the Sachsenhausen Decree appeared. The pope later placed all of Germany under interdict. In Nürnberg alone the papal ban was in effect for a quarter of a century.²⁰

The Franconian city soon became host to another central figure in the ongoing battle between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium*, Marsilius of Padua, the former rector of the University of Paris and the fourteenth century’s most articulate opponent of priestly rule. Marsilius had fled Paris in 1326 when it was discovered that he was the author of the *Defender of the Peace* (1324), a landmark treatise of political thought that would have a profound impact on the reformation of the keys in the sixteenth century. John XXII excommunicated Marsilius in 1327, after the latter had already found refuge at the emperor’s court in Nürnberg. Like the emperor, Marsilius put little stock in papal excommunication.

Marsilius was deeply concerned about the lack of tranquility in Europe. Everywhere one looked, there was warfare and strife, especially in Germany and Italy. For Marsilius, as for Louis, this unrest could be traced to one clear source: papal pretensions to worldly rule. When commenting on John XXII’s claim that he possessed supreme jurisdiction over the emperor, Marsilius asserted, “This wrong opinion of certain Roman bishops, and also perhaps their perverted desire for rulership, which they assert is owed to them because of the plenitude of power given to them, as they say, by Christ—this is that singular cause which we have said produces the intranquillity or discord of the city or state.”²¹ According to Marsilius, the clergy—and especially the pope—continually frustrated the attempts of temporal rulers to establish and maintain the peace by seeking to compete with them for worldly authority. This habit of interference, in turn, was based on a deeply flawed understanding of the authority that Christ had given to the Church in the keys. For Marsilius, everything hinged on achieving a clear grasp of the keys.

As the Son of God, Christ could have invested his followers with considerable power over temporal matters, but, according to Marsilius, he did not.²² Christ intended for his followers to continue in the same kind of earthly ministry as he had himself engaged, one of poverty, charity, and, most important for Marsilius, submission to civil authorities.²³ The Son of Man had declared that his kingdom was not of this world; neither was that of his servants.²⁴ Only Gentiles—and not the true vicars of Christ—were concerned about lording it over others. Thus, when Christ gave his disciples the keys, he had a very restricted purview in mind: the soul. The power of the keys, according to Marsilius, was limited to the spiritual realm alone. Priests were simply to “show” to Christians that God had forgiven them their sins.²⁵ Beyond this, the task of the clergy was to teach the laity about the way of salvation and to model a Christ-like life.²⁶

A crucial corollary of Marsilius’s understanding of the keys was that the clergy could exercise no coercive authority in the temporal sphere. As he put it, “Not only did Christ wish to exclude himself from secular rulership or coercive judicial power, but he also excluded it from his apostles, both among themselves and with respect to others.”²⁷ Marsilius asked, “Why, then, do priests have to interfere with coercive secular judgements? For their duty is not to exercise temporal lordship, but rather to serve, by the example and command of Christ.”²⁸ Priests could not even excommunicate without the approval of temporal rulers (or of a general council convened by temporal rulers).²⁹ Thus the pope was completely overstepping his bounds when he placed secular princes and their realms under the ban.³⁰ In fact, it was they—that is, the temporal rulers—who were authorized in Marsilius’s scheme to punish popes.³¹ This was a view of the keys that would have outraged Gregorian reformers of the past, and which would inspire Protestant reformers of the future, including those in Nürnberg.³²

The German princes, whose authority the pope had called into question, welcomed Marsilius’s attempt to restrict the influence of the clergy to the spiritual realm. In 1338, at the Diet of Rhens, they took a decisive step toward undercutting papal authority in the empire: the princes formally declared that they alone had authority to elect emperors, whether the pope approved of their choice or not. Any emperor duly elected by them was to be considered the Lord’s anointed.³³ Louis’s successor, Charles IV, then confirmed this arrangement at an

imperial diet in Nürnberg (1355), stipulating seven prince-electors who henceforth would be responsible for electing the emperor. The results of this meeting appeared in the famous Golden Bull (1356), which also required newly elected emperors to hold their first diet in Nürnberg.³⁴ Like so many emperors before him, Charles IV had fallen under Nürnberg's spell, making it his second home, behind his native Prague.³⁵

Nürnberg made significant progress in its own struggle with the *sacerdotium* during the later Middle Ages, especially after the papacy had returned to Rome and suffered the devastating consequences of the Great Schism and conciliar movement. In an effort to regain a portion of their earlier prominence, late medieval popes entered into formal concordats with European rulers in which they agreed to recognize increased secular control over the Church in exchange for rejection of conciliarism. The international Catholic Church disintegrated into a series of state and territorial churches, nominally under the authority of Rome, but practically governed by princes and magistrates.³⁶ The "age of concordats" led to the formation of state churches in England, France, and elsewhere, well before the advent of Protestantism. In the empire, however, things developed differently. There were no lasting concordats in Germany.³⁷ Owing in large part to the decentralized nature of the empire, the papacy continued to exercise significant influence over the German Church. There was no single monarch to oppose the pope, as in England and France: the emperor, while powerful, was always kept in check by the prince-electors. The myriad constituent members of the German nation were left to their own devices to negotiate mini-concordats with the *sacerdotium* for control of their religious life. Some were more successful in this endeavor than others.³⁸ Nürnberg fell into the former camp.

Three factors contributed to Nürnberg's ability to become virtual master over its own religious house: it was not a bishopric and therefore had no ecclesiastical prince immediately within its walls to contend with; it enjoyed tremendous economic and political advantages as a result of its privileged place in the empire; and, most important, it had a ruling body that had mastered the art of late medieval *Realpolitik*. The Nürnberg Council (*Rat*) emerged during the chaotic years of the Interregnum (1250–1273), as leading families of the polis sought to provide stability for their beloved city, and also protect it from land-hungry princes who wished to engulf it within their ever-expand-

ing territories. As in many other medieval towns and cities, over time the Council came to hold all executive, legislative, and judicial functions of the city in its hands. The Council would also achieve near complete hegemony over Nürnberg's religious life.

Prior to the emergence of the Council, Nürnberg had been ruled by a proxy of the emperor, a so-called *Burggraf* or count of the fortress. When this office fell to the rival Hohenzollern, Barbarossa created a new position, the bailiff (*Schultheiß*), who was directly under Hohenstaufen control.³⁹ From then on the count ruled the fortress, while the bailiff governed the town and its high court. The Council eventually bought both of these offices, the bailiff's in 1385 and the count's in 1427. The latter purchase marked the formal end of Hohenzollern rights within the city, although Nürnberg would continue to battle nearby representatives of this family for control over the surrounding countryside well into the early modern period.⁴⁰ (Over the years Nürnberg accumulated most of the land and villages that lay within a twenty-five-mile radius of the city's walls, the largest buffer zone of any late medieval German city.)⁴¹ The purchase of the bailiff's position in 1385 marked Nürnberg's transformation into a free imperial city (*freie Reichsstadt*), thus making official the city's long-standing relationship with the emperor as its sole overlord, and also granting it new rights of participation in imperial diets.⁴² By the early sixteenth century there were some sixty-five imperial cities, and Nürnberg, with a population of 40,000, was among the largest and most important.⁴³

As was true of most late medieval cities, inhabitants of Nürnberg fell into three broad groups: an upper class that included the patricians and the members of honorable families, a middle class consisting primarily of lesser merchants and self-employed artisans, and a lower class that contained various day-laborers, lesser civil servants, and the poor.⁴⁴ The lower class made up one-third of the population, the upper and middle classes, 5 percent and 65 percent, respectively.⁴⁵ Nürnberg was largely a city of artisans, with some 150 crafts, the most successful of which produced various metalwares, with iron knives and swords being the most popular.⁴⁶

The Nürnberg Council was part of a sophisticated political structure in the imperial city that was designed to avoid the twin evils of tyranny and anarchy. This structure sought to accomplish the former by preventing the concentration of power in any one person's hands, the latter by limiting the distribution of power to elites. Nürnberg's government had two primary parts: the Great Council (*der Grosse*

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Late medieval Nürnberg. Adrian Wilson, *The Making of the Nuremberg Chronicle*. Amsterdam:
Nico Israel, 1976. Plate 9.

Rat) and the Smaller Council (*der kleinere Rat*), or Council proper. The former assembly was composed of approximately 300 men, the so-called “designated men” (*Genannte*), who came from one of Nürnberg’s honorable families.⁴⁷ The Council periodically summoned this assembly to approve new taxes, declare war, discuss matters related to the city’s safety, and ratify new laws.⁴⁸ Already in 1370 the magistrates had relieved the Great Council of the latter duty by creating positions for eight “senior designated men” (*alte Genannten*) on the Council proper. This group attended Council meetings on a purely voluntary basis.⁴⁹

The Smaller Council was composed of forty-two men, including the eight senior *Genannte* and, interestingly, eight artisans. Unlike most late medieval cities, there were no guilds in Nürnberg; the Council exercised direct control over the crafts in the imperial city.⁵⁰ After Nürnberg’s artisans revolted in 1348, the magistrates granted them eight seats on the Council in order to head off any future violence.⁵¹ However, like the eight senior designated men, the artisan representatives were invited but not required to attend Council meetings. All members of the Council were chosen annually from the Great Council by specially appointed electors; this latter group displayed a consistent preference for incumbents.⁵²

The real holders of political power in Nürnberg were the twenty-six mayors (*Bürgermeister*), all of whom could trace their roots back to either the city’s earliest imperial knights or its most prosperous merchants. Though their duties often involved rendering verdicts in forensic proceedings, none of the mayors could be doctors of law. The Council retained several lawyers from whom it sought advice, but always made its own decisions.⁵³ Each Council member had to swear an oath always to follow the majority in all decisions, regardless of his personal views. The goal was to present a united front.

The twenty-six mayors were divided into two groups: thirteen Junior Mayors and thirteen Senior Mayors.⁵⁴ Throughout the course of the year Junior and Senior Mayors paired off and governed the city for twenty-eight-day periods. During their term the two Mayors were responsible for full administrative oversight of Nürnberg, everything from settling legal disputes to receiving foreign ambassadors to counting votes in Council.⁵⁵ Seven of the Senior Mayors were designated as Elders (*ältere Herren*), the inner core of the Council. These seven met daily to discuss all important matters among themselves and then pre-

sented their conclusions via the reigning Senior Mayor to the other members of the Council for discussion. Three of these seven were appointed Captains General (*oberste Hauptmänner*), the most powerful men in Nürnberg: a War Captain (*oberste Kriegsherr*) and two Treasurers (*Losunger*), one of whom was considered the first man of the city.⁵⁶ Additionally, the Council employed secretaries to record all official decisions. At least one, the senior secretary (*Ratschreiber*), attended all meetings of the Elders and prepared their official correspondence. Though no late medieval city possessed a political structure identical to Nürnberg's, most adopted a scheme that was similar in terms of larger organization and overall purpose.

The Council took seriously its responsibility to govern Nürnberg well. Its members believed they had been given a divine mandate to guide their city in the narrow way of justice and piety. They also thought that they alone had the God-given talent to do so. As one of Nürnberg's jurists observed, "all power is of God, and only those may exercise it whom the Creator has endowed with special wisdom."⁵⁷ After 1521 the number of those families believed to possess this divine gift was set at forty-two, a decision that was reconfirmed each year when members of these patrician families gathered for the annual dance at the town hall. Though others outside this elite circle could attend, only the patricians received official invitations.⁵⁸

The Council governed Nürnberg as a caring but strict father. It sought to bend Nürnbergers' will toward the good without breaking their spirits. Never utopian in its vision, the Council simply wanted a well-ordered society. No issue was too small to escape its attention in pursuit of this aim. Magistrates regulated everything from the price of meat to the length of women's bodices—one finger's breadth below the collarbone.⁵⁹ They established official curfews and set rules for wedding celebrations.⁶⁰ They also remained in the city during outbreaks of plague and ministered to lepers during Lent. Few inhabitants of the imperial city objected to the Council's paternalistic attitude. Most thought life precarious and welcomed the efforts of the magistrates to protect them from danger. When protests occurred, they were usually about a specific policy of the Council, not about its style of government.

The Council's bid to achieve control of Nürnberg's religious life began in the early fourteenth century, when it started appointing Church

Guardians (*Kirchenpfleger*) to oversee the physical maintenance of Nürnberg's seven churches, six monasteries, and two convents.⁶¹ These lay administrators always came from the patrician class. The magistrates justified this practice by seeing it as an extension of their legitimate authority over all real estate and construction in the city. The office of Church Master (*Kirchenmeister*) was later added in order to relieve the Church Guardian of the responsibility for the actual oversight of a given church or monastery. The Church Guardian thus became more of an honorary office, though the Church Master required his approval for all major decisions. Like the Church Guardian, the Church Master had to come from one of Nürnberg's honorable families but, unlike the Guardian, not from the patrician class.⁶²

In the fifteenth century the Council endeavored to extend its jurisdiction of Nürnberg's religious life to include control of the clergy as well as supervision of physical structures. The bishop of Bamberg was understandably alarmed at the Council's intention to encroach upon his turf. In the 1480s he complained about Nürnberg's desire "no longer to be subject to us or to our chapter (*Stift*) in spiritual matters."⁶³ The bishop had good reason for concern. Since the middle of the fourteenth century the wealthy imperial city had begun to forge a direct relationship with the papal curia to promote the Council's objective of complete liberation from the bishop of Bamberg.⁶⁴ Already in 1388 the Council had obtained a bull from Pope Urban VI mandating that priests serving in the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches, the city's two largest parishes, had to reside in their offices throughout the year. The bull further stipulated that the income from the two churches should be used for the support of the local clergy only. These requirements effectively ended the bishop of Bamberg's ability to siphon off money from Nürnberg churches by appointing priests who would shuttle back and forth between the bishop's court and the imperial city.⁶⁵

Nürnberg's spiritual overlord suffered another blow to his authority when, in 1402, Pope Boniface IX issued a series of bulls designed to restrict the bishop of Bamberg's legal jurisdiction over the imperial city. (In spite of the provisions for legal autonomy in the 1219 imperial charter, the bishop of Bamberg had continued to exercise a great deal of influence over Nürnberg's judicial life, frequently summoning lay inhabitants of the city before his court and meting out very stiff penalties.)⁶⁶ Among other things, the pope mandated that lay Nürn-

bergers could not be made to appear before a court outside the city walls, even if the case involved spiritual matters.⁶⁷ The bishop of Bamberg complained bitterly about this decision and successfully persuaded the pope to reverse himself seven months later. Nürnbergers had to wait several decades before their magistrates were able successfully to challenge this reversal. Finally, in 1463, the Council gained papal approval for an agreement it had reached with the bishop of Bamberg in the form of an Order for the Court of the Cathedral Dean. Similar to the 1402 ruling, this agreement effectively limited the jurisdiction of the bishop's court in Nürnberg to spiritual matters that concerned clerics, though it was somewhat fuzzy about the precise meaning of "spiritual."⁶⁸

The Nürnberg Council obtained a series of crucial decisions from the papacy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that continued to promote its goal of independence from Bamberg. In 1474 Pope Sixtus IV granted the Council the right to present priests to the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches during papal (that is, odd) months. Three years later, the same pope changed the status of the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz senior priests from rector (*Pfarrer*) to provost (*Propst*). This move entitled the new provosts themselves to appoint and oversee the clergy under them.⁶⁹ By exercising its right of presentation to the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches, the Council gained substantial control over both the provosts and their clergy. Finally, in 1513, the Council reached an agreement with the bishop and cathedral chapter of Bamberg that extended its right of presentation to both episcopal (that is, even) and papal months. The deal cost the Council a one-time sum of 1,000 gulden plus another 100 gulden per annum. In 1514 Pope Leo X confirmed the Council's full right of patronage over the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches, and the magistrates began formally to exercise this new privilege in 1517.

Between 1474 and 1517 the Nürnberg Council spent almost 7,500 gulden—an enormous sum—to achieve its nearly complete control of the imperial city's religious life.⁷⁰ It was even able to tax the city's clergy, bar them from competing with burghers economically, and win substantial control of the indulgence trade in the imperial city.⁷¹ All of this occurred with full papal approval. Despite its deeply ingrained bias against the *sacerdotium*, the Council had a relatively good relationship with the papacy before the Reformation.⁷² It always dealt with the bishops of Rome respectfully and fully understood the strate-

gic value of staying on good terms with them—it was the only way to win independence from the bishop in its own backyard. For their part, the popes seemed quite willing to work with Nürnberg in its bid for autonomy. Sacrificing the rights of a relatively modest German bishopric like Bamberg in exchange for a more direct relationship with a wealthy imperial city like Nürnberg seemed warranted. There were rifts between Nürnberg and the papacy, to be sure. The Council did not take kindly to being placed under papal interdict, and it also complained about popes summoning burghers to appear in Rome or taking more than their fair share of proceeds from the sale of indulgences in the imperial city.⁷³

All of this was typical in late medieval Germany.⁷⁴ A more serious breach occurred in 1522, when Pope Hadrian VI demanded that the Nürnberg Council once again pay for papal confirmation of its 1513 agreement with the bishop of Bamberg, even though it had already rendered the set amount to Pope Leo X.⁷⁵ This event contributed to the Council's decision to break with Rome, but it should not be seen as representative of Nürnberg's relationship with the papacy before the Reformation. Owing to the diplomatic skill of the Council, the imperial city was able to forge its own concordat with the Holy See, which benefited both parties considerably. Meanwhile, the bishops of Bamberg had to console themselves with the monetary compensation they received from Nürnberg in exchange for the loss of their spiritual privileges.

Late medieval Nürnberg came very close to achieving its goal of complete autonomy in religious matters; the bishop of Bamberg's rights were severely restricted within its walls.⁷⁶ Other imperial cities like Augsburg and Strasbourg also assumed substantial control of their religious life before the Reformation, but not as extensive as in Nürnberg.⁷⁷ Some, like Regensburg, on the other hand, remained largely subject to the *sacerdotium*.⁷⁸ Nürnberg adhered to the model of religious authority it had inherited from its founder, one that allowed for divinely anointed laymen to govern the *corpus Christianum*, both in its universal and local incarnations.⁷⁹ Like Henry III, the members of the Council had little time for overreaching priests who sought to undermine their rule. They sought to curtail papal and (especially) episcopal use of the keys where it threatened their autonomy. The Council was largely successful in this endeavor, although the threat of excommunication and interdict still remained quite real,

a fact the city would experience firsthand in the Reformation. The great irony of the situation is that while the power of the keys in temporal matters was on the wane in late medieval Nürnberg, the authority to bind and loose sins was having a profound influence on the city's devotional life.

Between Hope and Fear

In his 1512 *Brief Description of Germany*, humanist Johannes Cochlaeus wrote of Nürnbergers, “their devotion is as great toward the supernatural as it is toward their neighbors.”¹ Inhabitants of the empire’s leading city manifested this admirable sense of duty to God and neighbor in many ways. They flocked to hear the preaching of God’s Word, for which there was ample opportunity in the city.² They were unsurpassed in their generosity toward the city’s churches, monasteries, hospitals, and hostels, ensuring that all were adequately funded and lavishly decorated. Cochlaeus boasted that nowhere could one find more candles being used during worship services. Finally, the inhabitants of Nürnberg also showed great concern for the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised. Every year during Holy Week the patricians and their wives served dinner to hundreds of lepers.³ For Cochlaeus, late medieval Nürnberg was a model community of devout Christians dutifully fulfilling their religious obligations to God and to each other.

This account of Nürnberg’s religious life on the eve of the Reformation is admittedly one-sided. Cochlaeus’s work was more a polemic against Italian humanists who had depicted Germans as uncultured barbarians than an attempt at accurate historical description. As other sources make clear, there was also plenty of impiety in late medieval Nürnberg. Nevertheless, Cochlaeus’s description of the imperial city as a place of burgeoning lay piety corresponds well with the findings of many modern Reformation historians who have studied

the religious life of this period as a whole.⁴ Scholars generally agree that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Europe witnessed an outpouring of lay devotion that far surpassed anything of its kind in preceding centuries. The defining characteristic of this piety, according to Bernd Moeller, was its “consistent churchliness.”⁵

All across late medieval Europe the number of religious festivals, processions, and pilgrimages increased dramatically. Construction of new churches and founding of religious confraternities reached unprecedented levels. In many cases, proceeds from the sale of indulgences, the most controversial form of late medieval piety, helped fund this construction. The laity endowed more masses and bought more devotional works than ever before. Lay devotion to the cult of the saints—especially to the Virgin Mary—and their relics greatly intensified. Many new forms of popular piety like the rosary and the stations of the cross emerged in this era. Scholars emphasize that the impetus for this flowering of piety came from the laity: they initiated, shaped, and financed it. Moeller explains, “as never before, ‘the folk’ of this age becomes not only a participant, but a molder of religious life within the Church.”⁶ Nowhere in late medieval Europe was this surge in lay devotionism more noticeable than in Germany.⁷

As scholars have sought to account for the flowering of lay piety on the eve of the Reformation, they have observed the presence of a distinctively late medieval mentality informing the myriad devotional practices of this period. Various referred to as a “book-keeping” or “calculating” mentality, this habit of mind applied the principles and assumptions of mercantilism to the religious life.⁸ The result was a preoccupation with sheer quantity of good works performed, coupled with a strong concern for assessing what one owed God and how much grace God had agreed to give to his sinful debtors. In late medieval Nürnberg, for example, a pious burgher named Sebald Schreyer, who served as the Church Master of St. Sebald Church, compiled an indulgence calendar in which he dutifully calculated that one could receive an annual total of 367,759 days’ remission of penance (over 1,007 years!) by visiting the altars and participating in the various rituals of St. Sebald Church alone.⁹ At stake in this kind of spiritual arithmetic was the believer’s fundamental sense of religious security. Only by receiving a sufficient quantity of grace and by producing an adequate number of good works could one achieve a measure of confidence relative to one’s status with God and the Church. Late medi-

eval piety was a highly penitential form of religious devotion, that is, it offered human beings numerous opportunities to render payment and receive forgiveness for spiritual debts incurred. As Euan Cameron has explained, this era's piety was expressive of a desire to improve one's place in the penitential cycle, which drew its meaning and motivation from the sacrament of penance, the place at which the power of the keys touched laypeople most directly.¹⁰

Like their counterparts throughout Christendom, late medieval Nürnbergers had participated in the sacrament of penance from their youth up. They had heard innumerable sermons on how to conduct themselves properly in confession and had likely received further instruction from parents and older siblings. If they were literate, they may have read one of the numerous confession manuals that were available for lay consumption in the later Middle Ages. Most important, they had learned from confessors themselves what the Church and its Lord required from them if they were to be loosed from their sins. The assumptions about God, humanity, and life in a fallen world inherent in the sacrament of penance gradually infiltrated the souls of elites and commoners alike, drawing them together in a common quest to appease the divine.¹¹ The result was a decidedly penitential outlook that gave the piety of this era its distinctive form and appeal. The sacrament of penance lay at the center of the late medieval religious universe, providing the orientation and animation for the countless rituals that orbited around it.¹²

In theory the confession of sins in Nürnberg and other late medieval cities followed the guidelines laid out in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which governed the practice throughout Christendom. According to Canon 21, all Christians who had reached the age of discretion—anywhere from seven to fourteen—had to confess all their sins to their own priest at least once a year.¹³ After performing their assigned penance, absolved penitents were then to receive the Eucharist at Easter. Those who did not were to be barred from entering a church while they were alive and denied Christian burial upon their death. Penitents had to obtain permission from their priest if they wanted to confess to another cleric, but they had to have “good reasons” for doing so. The canon also enjoined strict confidentiality on confessors. Those who broke the seal of confession were to be deposed from their office and confined to a “hard monastery” to do

penance for the rest of their lives. Priests were to read this article aloud in their churches on a frequent basis so that the laity would know what the Church required of them.¹⁴ In 1451 Cardinal-legate Nicholas of Cusa had reiterated this requirement to a diocesan synod in Bamberg. The synod, in turn, sent the Nürnberg Council a copy of Cusa's ruling; it repeated Canon 21 of Lateran IV verbatim.¹⁵

In 1490–1491 a diocesan synod in Bamberg again required penitents within its jurisdiction to confess their sins in accordance with Lateran IV.¹⁶ But in addition to reiterating the traditional requirements, the synod also included a number of stipulations that had become commonplace in late medieval synodal legislation. For example, in order to avoid sexual misconduct in confession, members of the synod required priests to hear confessions in an open place within the church.¹⁷ (The confessional booth was not introduced until the late sixteenth century. In the later Middle Ages confessors sat in a simple chair to hear the confessions of penitents, who would kneel before them.) The synod also mandated that penitents had to confess in person; they could not simply send a servant to their priest bearing a written confession.¹⁸ Finally, members of the synod instructed confessors about cases that had to be referred to the bishop.¹⁹ By the late Middle Ages the Church had compiled a long list of sins that only a bishop or pope could absolve. These “reserved cases” typically included serious sins like murder, heresy, perjury, and all sexual transgressions, but could also encompass less significant offenses like clandestine marriages.²⁰ Diocesan synods throughout late medieval Europe made similar demands on their clergy as they sought to mark out the respective jurisdictions of parish priest and local bishop.²¹

How well did the theory of confession as expressed in diocesan synods translate into actual practice in late medieval cities like Nürnberg? With regard to frequency of confession, a dearth of sources complicates the historian's task considerably. Because there are no contemporary statistics on such practices, it is difficult to determine just how often inhabitants of the imperial city participated in the sacrament of penance.²² As we have seen, the bishop of Bamberg expected at least annual confession in keeping with the stipulations of Lateran IV; there is no evidence that the Council opposed him in this matter—a rare instance of the Nürnberg magistrates submitting to Bamberg's spiritual authority.²³ How nearly, then, did this expectation approximate actual behavior?

Because confession and communion went together in the minds of

both Church officials and the laity, one may assume that frequency of participation in the Eucharist accurately reflects how often laypeople received the sacrament of penance. We are again without hard statistics on exactly how often Nürnbergers communicated, but we do know that the Council anticipated that most would partake of the sacred host during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday.²⁴ (This would suggest that most people confessed on Maundy Thursday, given the widespread belief that one should communicate shortly after one had confessed in order to ensure that one was in good standing with the Church.) The magistrates regularly employed the city's vicars to help meet the demand for confessors during this period.²⁵ Most important, the Council, ever vigilant in its efforts to promote the spiritual health of its city, expressed no concern in the extant sources that its subjects were neglecting their duty to make an annual confession. Writers of confession manuals occasionally complained that the city's inhabitants did not confess frequently enough, but this only means that most did not achieve the monastic ideal of several confessions per year. Based on this collection of indirect evidence we can safely assume that, as was common throughout late medieval Europe,²⁶ most Nürnbergers confessed their sins to a priest at least once a year, usually during Holy Week.

However, we should avoid concluding that confession was an exclusively Lenten affair. There were several non-Lenten occasions upon which penitents might confess their sins. It was standard practice in the later Middle Ages for laypeople to seek out a confessor whenever they were facing the possibility of death owing to sickness, childbirth, or dangerous travel.²⁷ It was also traditional to confess before one participated in any of the other six sacraments. The Church stipulated that couples intending to wed should confess their sins before participating in the sacrament of holy matrimony.²⁸ We know that at least a handful of especially pious Nürnbergers communicated four to six times year, and they almost certainly confessed each time before receiving the sacred host.²⁹ We also know of cases where wealthy Nürnbergers likely confessed outside of Lent. There were several prosperous burghers in the imperial city who had private altars in their homes, where they could have mass celebrated as often as they chose. Sebald Schreyer revealed in his diary that he and his wife had received permission from the bishop of Bamberg "to choose a well-trained priest, spiritual or secular, when and as often as they like, who should hear their confessions and absolve them."³⁰ Schreyer does not

say how often he confessed, though he clearly had access to confessors outside of Lent. Nürnbergers from lower classes also confessed outside of Lent. When Cardinal-legate Raymond Peraudi preached a Jubilee indulgence in Nürnberg during the fall of 1490, forty-three priests were employed to hear the confessions of the imperial city's inhabitants. There is every indication that the Nürnberg faithful kept them busy.³¹

The relationship between confession and indulgences on the eve of the Reformation was by no means a clear one.³² In theory one had to confess one's sins to a priest before one could receive (or purchase) an indulgence. In order to acquire an indulgence from Peraudi, Nürnbergers first had to confess their sins to one of the forty-three priests. However, this does not mean that each of the approximately 150 indulgences that appeared in late medieval Nürnberg required a confession of sins. There was an "inflationary" trend in the indulgence trade on the eve of the Reformation that saw popes and bishops promising ever greater exemptions from purgatorial sufferings for an increasingly smaller amount of penance (and money).³³ On October 1, 1517, Pope Leo X complied with the Council's request for a new indulgence to be preached in the imperial city. Leo granted a plenary indulgence to any inhabitant of Nürnberg, cleric or lay, who donated the equivalent of one day's living expenses or who gave financial assistance to lepers during Holy Week. In order to receive this generous indulgence, one had either to confess one's sins "or have the intention to confess."³⁴ By the later Middle Ages the Church regarded annual confession as sufficient preparation for obtaining an indulgence, though some more zealous Church officials resisted this move toward greater leniency in matters of the soul.

Scholars who maintain that confession was an annual event limited exclusively to Lent have overstated their case.³⁵ As we have seen, there could be exceptions to this rule. Though confession was a traditional part of the Lenten season in late medieval Nürnberg, it certainly was not confined to any one time of year. Inhabitants of the imperial city might participate in the sacrament of penance for reasons of personal piety or desire for divine protection, as much as for reasons of social conformity or sheer habit. The sacrament of penance was not indissolubly linked to annual reception of the Eucharist during Holy Week. It was present in the religious life of late medieval Europe throughout the liturgical year.

Late medieval Europeans went to confession because it made sense to them to do so, not only because the Church required it. In the sacrament of penance they received the grace—the divine credit—they believed they needed and also rendered the payment for sin they felt they owed. These two convictions—about the necessity of grace and the importance of doing penance—were, in turn, continually reinforced by sermons, devotional literature, forms of popular piety, and, especially, participation in sacramental confession. At the heart of this defining ritual lay a certain logic that late medieval Europeans found extremely compelling.

The idea of penance has a very long history in the Christian West. Already in the second century theologians were locked in debate about whether one could obtain forgiveness for serious post-baptismal sin—that is, apostasy, sexual impurity, and bloodshed—through works of expiation.³⁶ Though there were always rigorists who argued against the possibility, the majority of Church leaders came to the conclusion that God would forgive the serious sins of a baptized person, but only once and the penance had to be severe. As Tertullian explained, “although the gate of forgiveness has been shut and fastened up with the bar of baptism, [God] has permitted it still to stand somewhat open. In the vestibule He has stationed the second repentance for opening to such as knock: but now once for all, because now for the second time; but never more because the last time in vain.”³⁷ Tertullian argued that in this second repentance the penitent was to dress in sackcloth and ashes, fast from all but plain food, lament his sins before the Lord, prostrate himself before the feet of the presbyters, and kneel before the faithful, beseeching them to pray for his forgiveness. Tertullian maintained that this self-inflicted punishment would make satisfaction for sin and “expunge eternal punishment.”³⁸ (Tertullian later reversed himself, insisting that there could be no remission for serious post-baptismal sin, but his earlier, more “liberal,” view won the day.)

In general, leaders of the early Church were much more confident in using the binding key than the loosing one. They consistently sought to err on the side of rigor when faced with lapsed Christians, even as they sought to make room for human weakness and divine mercy. Though bishops and priests believed that Christ had given them the power to bind and loose sins, they were very concerned not to abuse this authority, especially when pronouncing forgiveness. There is evidence of the laity being directed to bishops for remission

of their sins,³⁹ but we have no record of a cleric using the indicative form of absolution—*ego te absolvo*—that became commonplace on the eve of the Reformation.⁴⁰ There was something like clerical absolution, but it usually took the form of a prayer for forgiveness and was typically a very public affair.⁴¹ Still, there was nothing approaching a uniform theology of the keys, especially where the loosing key was concerned. As John McNeill and Helena Gamer have observed, “the doctrine of absolution remained unorganized to the scholastic age.”⁴² However, this lack of consensus on absolution did not detract from the widely held conviction that penance was necessary to the forgiveness of sins.

In time what had been a rare occurrence in the early Church (especially in the West)⁴³ became a commonplace in medieval Christendom. Owing largely to Celtic influence, post-baptismal penance became an accepted, frequent, and essential part of medieval Christianity. What is more, both confession and penance, formerly public acts, were now private affairs, as was reconciliation, though there was still no well-developed theology of the keys.⁴⁴ By the seventh and eighth centuries theologians had devised precise formulas for calculating how much payment (that is, penance) God was due for every kind of human moral transgression.⁴⁵ For example, the famous *Penitential of Columban* (ca. 600) specified that a man who committed adultery “shall do penance for three years, abstaining from juicy foods and from his own wife, giving in addition to the husband the price of the violated honor of his wife, and so shall his guilt be wiped off by the priest.” Or again, “Whoever commits homicide . . . shall do penance on bread and water for three years unarmed, in exile, and after three years he shall come back to his own, rendering to the parents of the dead man filial piety and service in his stead, and so the satisfaction being completed, he shall, at the judgment of the priest, be joined to the altar.”⁴⁶ The medieval penitential manuals did a great deal to strengthen the ancient conviction that human beings were obliged to compensate their Maker for serious wrongs committed after baptism.

Most important for the specifically late medieval understanding of penance was the thought of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, as articulated in his *Why God Became Man*.⁴⁷ God, Anselm maintained, had commanded the first human beings to honor him by voluntarily submitting their wills to his will. It was entirely just for God to require this obedience from Adam and Eve because he had given them all they

possessed, including life itself: they belonged to him. When Adam and Eve usurped God's will they effectively robbed him of the honor that was his due. As Anselm explained, "A person who does not render God this honor due Him, takes from God what is His and dishonors God, and this is to commit sin. Now as long as he does not repay what he has plundered, he remains at fault."⁴⁸ But humanity could not repay what it had stolen from God because the booty—God's honor—was of infinite worth. The inevitable result was that humanity became infinitely indebted to its just and righteous Maker. The central message of Anselm's classic work was that Christ, the God-Man, had paid humanity's original debt with its Maker by offering his perfect obedience in its stead. As Anselm put it, "only God can, and only Man ought to make this offering."⁴⁹

Wondrous as Christ's satisfaction for sin was, it did not provide forgiveness for all sin. Here Anselm introduced a crucial distinction that was to have a profound influence on the late medieval sacrament of penance and the piety it inspired. He argued that, in addition to having incurred a debt with their Creator, human beings had also received a divinely imposed punishment for having offended God in the first place. The original debt was forgiven by Christ's sacrifice, but there remained a penalty that still had to be paid. As Anselm explained, "one who harms the health of another does not do enough if he restores his health, unless he makes some compensation for the injury and pain he has inflicted. Similarly, for one who violates the honor of some person, it does not suffice to render honor, if he does not make restitution of something pleasing to the person dishonored, in proportion to the injury of dishonor that has been inflicted."⁵⁰ While Anselm could accept the idea that God had forgiven humanity's debt by an act of sheer mercy, he, along with his contemporaries, balked at the notion of God releasing them from their penalty without demanding something in return. Honor had been restored but restitution for injury still needed to be rendered.

This distinction between the guilt or debt (*culpa*) of sin and the penalty or punishment (*poena*) for sin became a mainstay of late medieval theology and contributed directly to the logic of penance.⁵¹ By the eve of the Reformation most theologians identified the debt humanity had incurred in Eden with original guilt, and the punishment for sin with eternal damnation and the partial tainting of human nature. The majority of theologians held that Christ's death had atoned for original

guilt and eternal damnation, but the tendency toward sinning (*fomes peccati*) remained for humanity to contend with, though having this tendency was not itself considered a sin. In addition to this remnant of the original penalty, human beings daily incurred new debt and punishment when they gave in to their dark side and sinned. Through Christ's meritorious suffering people could be protected from falling into eternal debt and everlasting punishment again, but only if they made continual restitution to God for their habitual plundering of his honor. Because sinning was a fact of life, one never escaped the need to render satisfaction, as there would always be new debt to pay off and new punishments to endure. If one ceased doing penance and perished with unforgiven mortal sin, there was always the danger of winding up in debtor's prison—that is, hell. Or, more likely, one would have to spend an extended period of time in purgatory, enduring the punishment for sin one could have faced on earth and with considerably less pain. Thus it made a great deal of sense to do penance while one still could, and going to confession was the best—though certainly not the only—way to keep one's moral account with God in balance.

Late medieval theologians contributed greatly to the plausibility of penance on the eve of the Reformation by using images from contemporary economic life to justify the practice. Just as Anselm had portrayed the Almighty to his precapitalistic age as a feudal lord,⁵² so late medieval theologians interpreted Him to business-minded urban dwellers as an exacting but merciful merchant to whom they owed a sizable debt. The literature on confession consciously appealed to the "book-keeping" mentality that was so common among burghers, and deliberately encouraged the transfer of this mental outlook to the religious life. For example, the author of the anonymous *Mirror of Confession for the Sinner* (1510), a popular confessional manual in Nürnberg, defined confession as "nothing other than reckoning with God by means of sorrow and suffering in order to pay off one's debt."⁵³ When urging his readers to make frequent confessions, he reasoned, "the one who pays his creditor frequently causes him to be merciful. It is the same with God when one confesses often."⁵⁴ As Berndt Hamm explains, "The God whose righteousness people so wanted to satisfy calculated like a merchant. People offered him their good works as a kind of merchandise."⁵⁵ Many of the terms late medieval confessors used to define humanity's relationship with God—

abtilgen, abzalen, quidt machen, schuld, absolviren—were economic terms with which industrious burghers would have been familiar. The God of the confessional was one with whom they knew how to do business.

The logic of penance had important implications for what was expected of priests and penitents in confession. Confessors were to assess penitents' debts and penalties and then mediate divine credit to them after being assured that they were sufficiently sorrowful for having plundered God. Penitents were to evidence regret for having sinned, acknowledge all their serious offenses, humbly receive God's undeserved mercy, and willingly pay the remainder of what they owed their Maker. Theologians differed as to exactly how confessor and confessant were to fulfill their respective obligations, but all agreed that engaging in this divine transaction was the only way to stay out of debtor's prison and reduce one's time in purgatory.

In order to assess a penitent's spiritual account with God accurately, it was essential for a confessor to learn as much as possible about a confessant's past moral conduct. The model confessor had to be able to assist the laity in making a full or complete confession, that is, one in which the penitent revealed all the mortal sins he had committed since his last confession. Thomas Tentler has argued that of all the assumptions governing the late medieval practice of confession "the most universal is that a good confession must be complete."⁵⁶ In keeping with Lateran IV, the late medieval Church insisted that penitents had to confess *all* their sins in order to obtain forgiveness. It was the responsibility of the confessor to elicit this exhaustive purging of conscience from his confessants.

Armed with the conviction that the only true confession was a complete one, the authors of late medieval confession manuals gave full rein to their predilection for dutiful attention to detail. In an effort to provide confessants with a reliable means of detecting all their moral offenses, late medieval theologians invented a seemingly infinite variety of guides for probing a penitent's conscience. Some of the more common were the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Senses, and the Twelve Articles of Faith.⁵⁷ Penitents were supposed to consult these catalogues of sins in order to see which of the listed offenses corresponded to their own moral transgressions. The author of the *Mirror of Confession* likened his book to an actual mir-

ror that young women might use before going out to meet their prospective suitors:

When women want to . . . please their men they look at themselves in a mirror on the wall to make sure they do not have any kind of mark on their face. If they find one they immediately wash it off. In the same way, the one who wants to please God and go to the holy sacrament should look at himself in this confession mirror. If he finds a mark in the face of his conscience he should wash it off with true sorrow and a full confession [*lauter gantzer peicht*].⁵⁸

Although the author promised to be brief, he went on for over 200 pages offering one catalogue of sins after another!

In order to make a full confession, a penitent had to reveal not only all her sins to her confessor but also the conditions under which she had committed each transgression. Lateran IV required confessors to inquire into “the circumstances both of the sinner and of the sin,” an obligation that lay at the heart of the priest’s role as confessor. The Church had taught for centuries that the conditions of a sin determined its degree of severity. A sin committed on a holy day was a greater offense against God’s honor than one committed on an ordinary work day. Similarly, if one sinned accidentally, regardless of the action itself, it was less serious than if one had acted volitionally. Sin was a matter of the will.⁵⁹ Priests who neglected to inquire into the conditions of a confessant’s transgressions were guilty of a mortal sin.

The author of the *Mirror of Confession* argued throughout his manual that penitents had to confess the circumstances under which they had sinned. After every list of sins the author repeated the refrain, “tell the circumstance” or “say the number of times.”⁶⁰ He reasoned, “an evil offender cannot be properly punished by a judge unless he says and confesses, ‘I have stolen, I have robbed, etc.’ He must tell the circumstances, that is, from whom he had stolen, how much, how often, when, who helped him.”⁶¹ The author then made the same point using the metaphor of a doctor and patient. A sick person must reveal the specific symptoms of his illness to his doctor if he wants to be helped.⁶²

Reformation scholars have disagreed sharply over how demanding late medieval confessors were in eliciting full confessions from penitents. Some, like Steven Ozment, have argued that priests were quite harsh in confession, and encouraged the kind of scrupulosity that

plagued Luther as a young monk.⁶³ Others, like Lawrence Duggan and David Myers, have maintained that a good portion of confessors were either humane in their treatment of penitents, or quite lenient because they lacked either the necessary training or occasion to interrogate them.⁶⁴ The picture of the typical confessor that emerges from the extant Nürnberg sources provides no easy resolution of this scholarly debate but rather reflects the ambiguity present in the official view of the model priest. Confessors were to instill both assurance and anxiety in penitents. They were to be both friend and foe to sinners.

According to Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council, the ideal confessor was a gentle yet thorough doctor who took great care to apply the appropriate remedy to his wounded patient. The canon reads:

As for the priest, he should be discerning and prudent so that like a practiced doctor he can pour wine and oil on the wounds of the injured person, diligently inquiring into the circumstances both of the sinner and of the sin, from which he may intelligently choose what sort of advice he ought to give him and what sort of remedy to apply, using various means for healing the sick person.⁶⁵

The necessary connection that the framers of this canon saw between rigorous interrogation and healing restoration created a tension in the subsequent literature on confession between the confessor's dual roles of judge and doctor.⁶⁶ Late medieval synodal legislation repeated the guidelines of Lateran IV, thus ensuring that this tension would become a permanent feature of the confessor's office.

Many diocesan synods emphasized the more compassionate side of the confessor's responsibilities. The 1490–1491 Bamberg synod required priests to listen to lay penitents “in a spirit of gentleness” (*in spiritu lenitatis*).⁶⁷ A 1447 synod in Eichstätt gave identical instructions to priests, while a 1512 synod in Regensburg included that confessors should instruct penitents in the same spirit of gentleness.⁶⁸ Lawrence Duggan has found similar references in synodal legislation throughout late medieval Germany. He states that all synods concurred in “exhorting him [that is, the confessor] to moderation and even leniency in practice.”⁶⁹ Of course the fact that this legislation contained frequent exhortations to leniency suggests that confessors could act otherwise.

One finds this emphasis on priestly compassion repeated in the ser-

mons of Stephen Fridolin, a popular Nürnberg preacher who was a member of the city's Franciscan monastery.⁷⁰ Fridolin gave sermons during the early 1480s in the St. Clara Convent to which laypeople were also welcome. In one homily, after urging his listeners to be truthful in their confessions, he added, "not so that you may be judged a sinner, but so that you may be justified; not so that you may be imprisoned, but rather set free; not so that you may be condemned to death, but so that the gates of heaven may be opened to you and the gates of hell closed." But Fridolin's sermons also had a certain bite. He concluded his homily by warning his hearers, "If you prefer to be silent and not speak the truth privately to a single human being, [one day] it will serve to your eternal shame before the whole world."⁷¹

Even a more severe manual like the *Mirror of Confession* could urge priests to be humane in confession. The author of this manual wrote of the model confessor, "he has empathy with the sinner, helps him bear his burden and gives him good consolation . . . He is very careful with young people who are given to shame and fear."⁷² Another anonymous confession manual from Nürnberg advised priests to say to their penitents, "speak your sin openly, do not be ashamed. I will gladly and dutifully listen to you and help you bear your sin; therefore, do not be afraid."⁷³

The literature on the sacrament of penance also devoted plenty of attention to the sterner side of the confessor's responsibilities. Synodal legislation frequently required priests to report the names of laypeople who had not made their annual confession to the local bishop.⁷⁴ It also insisted that confessors make searching inquiries of the penitent's conscience.⁷⁵ The most widely read confession manuals emphasized the forensic nature of the confessor's office as much as they did its more pastoral character. The author of the *Mirror of Confession* stated plainly that Christ had made all priests "referees or judges" (*teydings menner oder richt leüt*) in the courtroom of conscience.⁷⁶

Harsh confession manuals could be lenient at times, and lenient preachers might be harsh on occasion. One expects this kind of result from the late medieval effort to balance the confessor's roles of judge and physician of the soul. How successfully Nürnberg confessors coped with the tensions inherent in their office depended largely upon how well trained they were. Most of the city's confessors were either members of the lower clergy—chaplains or vicars—or inhabitants of

the city's Franciscan, Dominican, or Augustinian monasteries.⁷⁷ The latter could have been very well educated, while the former typically were not. Contrary to what Duggan and Myers have argued, inadequate training did not necessarily translate into an easy confession for penitents. As Tentler has noted, an ill-equipped physician of the soul could easily have botched such a delicate operation.⁷⁸ Lay Nürnbergers certainly had reason to fear the scalpels of some spiritual doctors in their city, especially those who took up this office to make a few extra *Pfennige* in lean times.⁷⁹

Having fulfilled his obligation to elicit a full confession from the penitent, a confessor was then formally to exercise the power of the keys in absolving her of her guilt (that is, debt), using a form of the traditional "Ego te absolvo." According to the 1490–1491 Bamberg synod, confessors were to absolve penitents with one of two formulas: "May our Lord Jesus Christ deign to absolve you," or, "I, by the authority I possess, absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."⁸⁰ Following the absolution, the priest was to assign the confessant some work of penance with which she could pay the penalty she had incurred for her sins. As we have seen, whereas only God could forgive a penitent's moral debt, penitents had to atone for the penalty they incurred on their own. Here a priest could be of immense value because he, by virtue of his possession of the keys, could commute eternal punishments to be suffered in purgatory into a temporal penalty that could be endured in the here and now. By performing the assigned penances, a penitent could greatly mitigate the suffering she was bound to endure in purgatory for her remaining penalty for sin. In this way the distinction between the guilt of sin and the penalty for sin assured that priests would play an indispensable role in the penitential process. Failure to perform the imposed work of satisfaction would negate the efficacy of the divine absolution.

John Bossy has noted that there was a clear trend toward leniency in the assigning of penances on the eve of the Reformation.⁸¹ Lateran IV had required the penitent "to try as hard as he can to perform the penance imposed on him," an indication that the Church's attitude toward works of satisfaction had already become fairly liberal by the High Middle Ages.⁸² While later synodal legislation continued to list the harsh requirements of the medieval "Penitential Canons" as an accurate guide to the amount of satisfaction each sin required, no one

expected confessors to employ this ancient system when assigning penances.⁸³ The author of the *Mirror of Confession* listed as one of the marks of a good confessor that “he does not impose more penance than the penitent is either able or willing to bear.”⁸⁴ Later he instructed his reader to ask his confessor for “a small little sacramental penance”—three or four Our Fathers—which he could perform within the hour, or at least by the end of the day.⁸⁵ As was typical of late medieval confession manuals, the author reminded his readers that penances used to be much harder and that the easy penances of the present day did not pay the penalty even for venial sins.⁸⁶

Late medieval confession manuals instructed priests to place penitents in a kind of double-bind. Confessors were to tell confessants that they deserved to suffer a great deal for their sins, but they were then to let them go with a few Our Fathers. Confessors were to demand great spiritual achievement but only give opportunity for nominal performance. Here we see a crucial connection between the late medieval sacrament of penance and the tremendous growth of lay piety on the eve of the Reformation. Pilgrimages, processions, endowments, and especially indulgences were attempts by laypeople to make up the difference between what they believed they owed and what they had been required to pay.⁸⁷ The goal was to do more penance, to render more payment, as much and as often as possible. Late medieval confessors thus played a decisive role in encouraging the growth of a lay piety that derived its character and animation from the sacrament of penance, but which also sought to transcend it. Priests helped produce a penitential mentality that ultimately looked beyond sacerdotal ministrations to satisfy its logic.

In addition to confessing all her mortal sins and their circumstances, humbly receiving divine absolution, and dutifully performing assigned penances, the model confessant had one further obligation that has fascinated and perplexed late medieval and modern scholars alike: she had to express sorrow for having offended God. It was not enough for a penitent to acknowledge her debt to God, along with its accompanying punishment; she also had to feel sorry about having robbed God of his rightful possession, human obedience and love. There had to be some degree of emotional distress about one’s sin; otherwise confession was meaningless and absolution without efficacy. In time sorrow itself became a form of payment that one could render to God to help balance one’s moral account.

Christians have always believed that God forgives only those who are contrite in heart. However, defining exactly how much sorrow God expects has proven a difficult task. The Christian penitential system of late antiquity and the Middle Ages judged the sincerity of a penitent's contrition based on his willingness to perform works of expiation: penance was the heart of the system. Priests absolved penitents only *after* they had completed their assigned works of satisfaction. Although medieval Europeans developed ways to substitute lighter penances for heavier ones,⁸⁸ by the eleventh century there was widespread concern that the penitential system was simply too harsh for most people to endure. Gradually, priests began absolving confessants *before* they performed the assigned works of satisfaction. As we saw in the *Mirror of Confession*, penances themselves became lighter over time and were intended to symbolize the penitent's awareness that his sins deserved far greater punishment than he could ever bear, a direct spur to the growth of penitential piety.

Tentler has shown that the trend toward lighter penances led to a greater emphasis on contrition in the sacrament of penance. True sorrow for one's sins, not the performance of penance, became the necessary prerequisite to forgiveness. But this development raised two very thorny questions for the Church: (1) What degree of sorrow did a penitent have to achieve before he could be assured of obtaining forgiveness for his sin? (2) What role did the priest play in the sacrament of penance if the penitent could receive absolution directly from God by virtue of his contrition? The answer to both questions had important implications for what was expected of confessants.

Three main schools of thought on the respective roles of penitent and confessor in the sacrament of penance emerged in the High Middle Ages. A contritionist school identified with Peter Lombard emphasized that human beings could obtain forgiveness of sin directly from God if they were perfectly sorrowful, or contrite. In this scheme confessors simply "declared" or "showed" to the penitent the divine remission of guilt that had already been granted before the sacramental encounter. An attritionist school associated with Thomas Aquinas maintained that confessors played a necessary role in the sacrament by actually eliciting divine forgiveness of guilt by their words of absolution—they did not simply declare to penitents what they had already appropriated themselves through their contrition. This school also allowed for sacerdotal absolution to transform imperfect sorrow (attrition) into perfect sorrow, thus enabling the penitent to be for-

given, though this was seen as an exception rather than the rule. An absolutionist school affiliated with Duns Scotus sought to shift the focus of the theological debate from sorrow to absolution. Scotus argued that most people were only attrite as they approached the sacrament of penance and therefore relied on the priest's ability to transform their imperfect sorrow into contrition through the pronouncement of absolution, the true essence of the sacrament. Each of the three schools believed that God was the ultimate source of both sorrow for sin and forgiveness of guilt, though they disagreed on how this divine grace was mediated to penitents. Each also maintained that priests were authorized to remit the penalty for sin because they possessed the keys.⁸⁹

These three schools continued to influence theologians on the eve of the Reformation and each attracted important advocates. The famous Strasbourg preacher Johannes Geiler followed Lombard and believed that human beings could achieve perfect sorrow without the assistance of priestly absolution.⁹⁰ A nominalist in the tradition of Gabriel Biel, Geiler taught that God expected human beings to transform their own attrition into contrition through the exercise of their natural powers (*facere quod in se est*), which, despite being infected by the "tinders of sin" (*fomes peccati*), could still achieve great moral heights. (Marsilius of Padua also drew on Lombard's theology of the keys in the *Defender of the Peace*, because of the way it limited the authority of the clergy.) Jean Gerson, perhaps the greatest authority on the cure of souls in the later Middle Ages, was a proponent of Aquinas's moderate position on the sacrament of penance, though he also had sympathies with the more liberal school of Scotus.⁹¹ He concurred with the Angelic Doctor's emphasis on the necessity of priestly absolution for forgiveness of guilt, though he was more willing than Aquinas to make allowance for penitents whose sorrow was incomplete. Though influenced by Geiler's brand of nominalism, Gerson nevertheless held to the Thomistic doctrine that human beings required prevenient grace to become contrite. Johannes Paltz, an Augustinian friar who taught at the University of Erfurt, was an advocate of the absolutionist school and stressed even more so than Scotus that human beings could never achieve true sorrow for sins and therefore depended for forgiveness on the objective working of priestly absolution.⁹² Penitents still had to express sorrow, but God would even accept attrition based solely on fear of punishment, a position Scotus would have found too lax.

One important related issue in the debate about contrition and priestly authority was assurance of forgiveness. Geiler insisted that, short of divine revelation, penitents could not know if they had achieved true sorrow for sins and therefore could not be certain they were forgiven; they simply had to do their best and trust in God's mercy. Gerson agreed with Geiler but also saw the potential for this view to encourage scrupulosity. He therefore taught that penitents could achieve a moral certainty of their status before God based on their knowledge that they had confessed all their mortal sins to their priest and resolved not to commit any more in the future. Gerson hoped that this confidence, coupled with belief in the keys, would provide penitents with the assurance Geiler denied them. Unlike Geiler and, to a lesser extent, Gerson, Paltz sought to ground assurance of forgiveness on the confessor's sacerdotal authority rather than on the penitent's inward piety. True to his Augustinian roots, Paltz had little confidence in human moral capacity.

Scholars generally agree that most late medieval confessors adopted a moderate form of attritionism that combined the positions of Aquinas and Scotus.⁹³ Ozment's view that late medieval confession manuals demanded true sorrow in exchange for forgiveness has seemed extreme to most Reformation historians. But Duggan and Myers's work stressing the laxness of the late medieval confessional errs in the opposite direction. Gerson's *via media* won the most widespread support among the regular (that is, monastic) and secular (that is, nonmonastic) clergy who heard confessions on the eve of the Reformation. Many held that Geiler's contritionism was too harsh and Paltz's absolutionism too lax. The model confessant was to try her best to be contrite, but ultimately she could rely on divine help in rendering payment to God. Still, as Tentler has emphasized, there continued to be considerable differences of opinion among the experts as to exactly how the sacrament of penance conveyed grace.⁹⁴ The theology of the keys had come a long way since the Patristic period, but there was still no consensus on exactly how they worked. Jaroslav Pelikan has stressed that late medieval theology was characterized by a "doctrinal pluralism" that was especially pronounced in theologies of confession.⁹⁵ As we will see, Pelikan's observation is particularly apt for the practice of confession in late medieval Nürnberg.

The 1490–1491 synod in Bamberg stipulated that priests "should instruct the confessant so that he might have contrition for his sins, by which he has offended God, and the intention to abstain from them

[in the future].”⁹⁶ The framers of this legislation reflected the common belief in the necessity of contrition for remission of sins, but they provided confessors with no standards by which to measure a penitent’s sorrow. Priests were left to their own devices to define exactly what contrition meant.

Confessors in Nürnberg had a variety of confession manuals and summas to consult on the matter, and therefore confessants likely heard a number of opinions on their proper role in the sacrament. Anton Koberger, late medieval Nürnberg’s most famous publisher, had produced multiple editions of works on confession by Johannes Nyder, Johannes Herolt, Johannes von Freiburg, and Angelus of Clavasio.⁹⁷ According to Tentler, the latter’s summa, known as the *Angelica*—one of the most popular in late medieval Europe—went through seven editions in Nürnberg alone.⁹⁸ Along with these more formal treatments of confession, which included the *Mirror of Confession*, Nürnberg’s clergy also had recourse to a variety of smaller, less sophisticated discussions of the sacrament of penance that were contained in the libraries of churches, monasteries, and private homes.⁹⁹

While he claimed that his confession manual was a collation of the best sources available on confession, the author of the *Mirror of Confession* was clearly an advocate of Lombard’s conservative position on the working of penance.¹⁰⁰ He asserted that “the power and whole effectiveness of the sacrament of penance . . . consists in a true sorrow for past sins and in a firm resolve with the help of God not to commit further mortal sins.”¹⁰¹ With Lombard and Geiler, he downplayed the role of the keys and, in places, displayed a rather casual attitude toward auricular confession to a priest. He wrote, “if one has the time and opportunity, and if a priest is available, one is obliged to confess all his sins and to accept the verdict, penance, and absolution of his confessor.”¹⁰² Like Geiler, the author held the penitent responsible for making a good confession. A competent priest could be very helpful in assisting one to achieve true sorrow, and the *Mirror of Confession* advised the penitent to choose one wisely, but confessants were not to rely on the ministrations of priests to obtain forgiveness for them. Echoing Geiler’s belief that penitents had to prepare themselves to receive grace, the author of the *Mirror of Confession* wrote, “do as much as is in you [*thust als vil als in dir ist*] . . . then you will have the grace of the almighty God which will help you and not abandon you,

so that you may flee and avoid all mortal sins, have true sorrow for them, make a full confession, do appropriate penance, improve your life, and merit eternal life.”¹⁰³

The author of the *Mirror of Confession* acknowledged that contrition for sin was hard to achieve and even advised the penitent to confess to his priest that his sorrow and confession had been incomplete.¹⁰⁴ He grudgingly accepted that attrition could suffice for obtaining grace from God and sought to console his reader by observing that sinning was a fact of life for human beings. He wrote,

[t]he natural property of being unable to sin belongs to God alone . . . Having the ability to sin and having sinned or done wrong is human. Wanting to better oneself and never sin again is both wise and possible with God's help. But to sin and not to want to cease . . . is devilish . . . The one who often falls into sin should do as a small child who frequently falls to the ground: when he falls he cries, screams, and stretches out his hand to his mother, desiring to stand up again.

The author then exhorted the penitent that as often as he fell into sin, he should stretch out his hand to God “with true sorrow.” “The only thing you must not do is to lie still,” he concluded.¹⁰⁵ Even given this more consoling side of the *Mirror of Confession*, the author had no intention of delivering his readers from the uncertainty inherent in his emphasis on the penitent's responsibility to prepare himself for receiving grace. “Live in the exact middle between hope and fear,” was his advice to the reader, a statement with which many of his contemporaries would have agreed.¹⁰⁶

One can also find the reluctant attritionism of the *Mirror of Confession* in the extant prayer books, tracts, and shorter confession manuals from the library of Nürnberg's St. Clara Convent. Though housed within the protective walls of the city's most prestigious convent, many of these sources were clearly intended for use outside the nunnery. Some might have been brought to the convent by wealthy Nürnberg women who had decided (or had been forced) to become nuns. It is also possible that the nuns authored some of these instructions on confession themselves and shared them with those outside their convent.¹⁰⁷ The author of one anonymous tract wrote that many people invalidated their confessions because they did not have “a sufficiently authentic sorrow that is able to release them from their sin.”¹⁰⁸ The same author insisted that sorrow for sin had to be sincere

“because no one can deceive God and God deceives no one.” When the penitent went to confession, she had to decide between God and herself what true sorrow was.¹⁰⁹ The author of an anonymous prayer book asserted that the marks of a true confession—investigation into the conditions of sin, true sorrow, and intention not to sin in the future—were “gifts of God and are only given to those who have prepared themselves to receive them.”¹¹⁰ Therefore one should ask God for these gifts because “God does not forgive sin without true sorrow.”¹¹¹

While the *Mirror of Confession* and several more informal works on confession stressed the role of the penitent in the sacrament of penance, other sources from late medieval Nürnberg placed greater emphasis on the priest. Their message was more one of hope than of fear. The *Angelica* was clearly in the Scotist tradition. As Tentler has observed, “the assertion that the sacrament can transform an inadequate sorrow into an acceptable one is the foundation of the *Angelica*’s sacramental theory.” The author of this summa wrote, “sins are also remitted if the preceding sorrow was not sufficient to be contrition, and the penitent does not present an obstacle to grace.”¹¹² According to Angelus, there was no “easier” or “more certain” way to forgiveness than the sacrament of penance.¹¹³ Confession was easy because as long as the penitent did not make a conscious decision to sin while he was at confession, he would receive grace, regardless of how sorry he was for his sins. Absolution was certain because the penitent could know without a doubt whether he was actively choosing to sin or not while participating in the sacrament.¹¹⁴ Tentler asserted that Johannes Nyder and Johannes von Freiburg, whose works also appeared in Nürnberg, agreed with the liberal absolutionism of the *Angelica*.¹¹⁵

Stephen Fridolin also emphasized the more consoling side of the sacrament of penance. His model confessant embraced her own moral impotence and trusted deeply in the suffering of Christ in her stead. In one sermon the friar asserted that God had sent his Son to do penance for the whole human race, the benefits of which laypeople could receive by humbly participating in the sacraments.¹¹⁶ In his well-known devotional work, *Treasure Chest or Shrine of the True Riches of Salvation and Eternal Blessedness* (1491), Fridolin again expressed his preference for hope over fear.¹¹⁷ When commenting on Christ’s healing of the sick, he wrote, “I must hold fast the words of mercy, because I truly have need of them . . . almost all the time. Whoever pre-

fers the words of righteousness, let him speak them; he will also find them. I thank God that I have found words of gentleness, words of sweetness, words of goodness. I have shown them to whomever desires them.”¹¹⁸

Nürnberg was home to sermons, summas, manuals, and prayer books that alternately demanded much and little from penitents. Confessors in the imperial city had access to literature on the forgiveness of sins that represented the humane as well as the harsh side of sacramental confession. We know from Sebald Schreyer’s inventory of the St. Sebald library that the church possessed excerpts from a *Summa Confessorum*, probably the one composed by Johannes von Freiburg that Tentler has placed in the Scotist tradition. Unfortunately, there are no similar inventories from the city’s other churches and monasteries. We have precious little information about what went on in confession itself. The laity of late medieval Nürnberg have left us no accounts of their personal experience of the sacrament of penance. Followers of the new evangelical creed would later complain about tyrannical priests who ruthlessly interrogated them during confession, but one should be cautious about taking the experiences of disgruntled converts who had absorbed Luther’s revolutionary ideas on spiritual freedom as representative of how most late medieval Europeans experienced sacramental confession. Protestants would also complain that the sacrament of penance made forgiveness too easy. If the late medieval sacrament of penance is to be accurately understood, it must be studied within its own context, and not through the eyes of Protestants.

The aggregate picture that emerges from the extant Nürnberg sources suggests that a model confessant was one who heeded the advice of the *Mirror of Confession*: she endeavored to live contentedly between the hope of forgiveness and the fear of damnation. Of course not every penitent in late medieval Nürnberg was model, and neither was every priest. One should not imagine a perfect correspondence between the ideals set out for confessors and confessants in the extant sources and the actual conduct of the sacrament itself. Especially during Lent, owing to the large number of people they needed to confess, there was not always enough time for confessors to conduct a proper examination of conscience with each penitent.¹¹⁹ However, there were certainly occasions when theory and practice corresponded more closely, especially outside of Lent, and it is likely that many late medi-

eval burghers experienced at least a few “model” confessions in their lifetimes.¹²⁰ Such encounters, when taken together with the multitude of penitential devotional practices that were so popular in late medieval cities like Nürnberg, confirmed to the laity and the clergy alike the necessity of living between hope and fear. A few years after the *Mirror of Confession* appeared in Germany, burghers would begin reading pamphlets and hearing sermons that told them it was not necessary to live with this tension: they could be certain of forgiveness. It would prove to be a powerful message, one that would entail a complete reformation of the keys and a thorough change in mental outlook.

The Assault on the Keys

The gospel according to Luther already began making its way into Nürnberg in the late 1510s. As inhabitants of the imperial city became familiar with the evangelical version of Christianity, the majority of them—both elites and commoners—found it extremely appealing. Nürnbergers, the very people whom Cochlaeus had described in the early 1510s as model late medieval Christians, came to reject the traditional faith, having been convinced in a matter of years that it was an elaborate hoax. Luther and his followers were able to persuade them that late medieval Christianity was a man-made religion, based on mere human teaching (*Menschenlehre*), whereas evangelical Christianity was a divinely revealed faith, grounded firmly on the Word. The clearest sign of the old faith's mundane—as opposed to supernatural—origins, according to the reformer, was its inability to provide certainty of forgiveness. One had to waver between hope and fear. Luther and his supporters told Nürnbergers that it was not necessary to live in this tension—they could be assured that God had forgiven them. Armed with this new spiritual confidence, Nürnbergers engaged in a concerted effort to stamp out traditional penitential religion in their city, and especially its symbolic center, the sacrament of penance.

But certainty of forgiveness was not the new faith's only source of appeal. Many in Nürnberg also saw in Luther's gospel the hope for a renewal of Christian society: freed from the need to justify themselves

before their Maker, believers would respond to God's overwhelming generosity by renouncing self-centeredness and embracing self-giving love. The Golden Rule would finally govern Christendom. The new version of the gospel also addressed Nürnberg's long-standing political aspirations. Though the imperial city had already won considerable autonomy in ecclesiastical matters, it had never been able to become the sole master of its religious house. The bishop of Bamberg was still Nürnberg's official spiritual overlord and he retained important, if greatly diminished, authority over the imperial city, owing to his possession of the keys. Luther's gospel undermined this authority and in so doing enabled the magistrates finally to achieve complete victory over the *sacerdotium*.

The Reformation appealed to Nürnbergers on several levels: spiritual, social, political, even economic. The common denominator in this appeal was the new faith's thoroughgoing critique of the traditional understanding and practice of the keys. Nürnbergers, like their counterparts throughout Germany, came to object to the way the keys had been used to subject them to a clerical regime that, in their newly enlightened eyes, had only sought to exploit and oppress them, both spiritually and materially. Everything from the alleged burdens of confession to the ongoing intrusion of bishops in Nürnberg's legal affairs to the continued threat of excommunication and interdict stemmed from the power of the keys. The early years of the Reformation in the imperial city were marked by an all-out attempt to remove this influence.

As early as 1516 Luther's friend and spiritual director, Johannes von Staupitz, began (unintentionally) preparing the way for the Reformation in Nürnberg. As part of his duties as Vicar General of the Observant Augustinians, Staupitz made frequent visits to the imperial city's Augustinian monastery, where he frequently preached sermons in the order's church. There lay Nürnbergers, who were welcome in the church, heard the message that Luther had found so consoling: God was the primary agent in salvation, not human beings; grace was a gift to be received by faith, not a reward to be earned through good works.

Staupitz assailed traditional piety for its reliance on human moral effort and the performance of religious rituals to merit divine forgiveness. He was especially critical of abuses associated with confession and the purchasing of indulgences. In a sermon on contrition he criti-

cized preachers who showed penitents their sin without also revealing to them God's mercy. Staupitz told his hearers that any preacher could tell them they had sinned often and grievously, detailing the various filial connections between sins. But such sermons only contributed to "daily confusion" and "a false conscience," leading more to "a miserable soul . . . than to consolation." Staupitz told his listeners that a godly preacher should provide penitents with relief from burdens of conscience and scrupulosity. He should guide them along a road that promised release from sin, one that enabled sinners to receive God's mercy and grace. "It is not a difficult thing to throw someone into the water," Staupitz opined, "[b]ut it is no small accomplishment . . . to keep someone afloat [*lebendig zubehalten*] in the water and to rescue him from it."¹

Staupitz urged his auditors to trust in God's mercy and not in their own good works to obtain absolution. God himself would provide the contrition He required for forgiveness if only they would ask Him.² The penitent who had this true sorrow for sin could be forgiven whether he went to confession or not, although Staupitz thought this a rare event.³ He warned his auditors that indulgences were worthless if not accompanied by a contrite heart. In fact, all papal bulls said as much.⁴ Staupitz also instructed his hearers that the only good works that counted toward salvation were those that God enabled them to perform. If only they did not resist God's grace, it would create good works in them.⁵ Staupitz was especially concerned to dissuade his listeners from counting on their efforts in confession to guarantee them absolution:

Many people have expended great effort to confess their sins in an orderly and proper way . . . They make lists and catalogues of them and enumerate them out of confession manuals. They receive peace and consolation from this as if they had just made amends for the sin and had made no small progress toward salvation. That is a mistake. A person can never gain freedom from presumptuousness [*Vermessenheit*] or arrive at hope by relying upon his confession as a way of making amends or as a meritorious work. A person should place absolutely no trust in his confession, no matter how complete. Rather, he should trust in the completeness of God's grace and mercy through which alone the sinner may be justified.⁶

Staupitz instructed his auditors to confess only those sins that were direct infractions of the Ten Commandments or that burdened their

consciences. “Everything that goes against conscience leads to hell,” he taught.⁷

Staupitz had no intention of dismantling traditional penitential Christianity. Although his rejection of attrition as sufficient for absolution went against a late medieval trend, his contritionist position still fell well within the confines of accepted orthodoxy. In fact, unlike Johannes Geiler, he tempered his stance on sorrow for sin by insisting that human beings could not produce contrition of their own accord; God had to infuse it into the human soul. He also maintained that sacramental absolution was the normal means through which human beings obtained divine forgiveness. With Aquinas, Staupitz believed that priests actually mediated absolution; they did not simply declare what the penitent had already appropriated for himself.

It was Staupitz’s extreme emphasis on faith in divine grace that was so potentially devastating to the sacrament of penance, along with the penitential mentality it had engendered. This emphasis, coupled with his rejection of the necessity for a complete confession, meant that a penitent could contribute even less to his salvation than Johannes Paltz had allowed. There was very little left for the penitent to do except trust in divine mercy. One could not do what was within one without prevenient grace, and even then one could not arrive at perfect love of God.⁸ Staupitz also severely restricted the confessor’s role in the sacrament of penance. Though priests retained the authority to bind and remit sin, they were no longer authorized to act as judges in the courtroom of conscience. They were to save penitents from drowning in a sea of guilt, not plunge them deeper into despair.

Staupitz was well received in the imperial city,⁹ especially by a circle of humanists that met in the city’s Augustinian monastery. Nürnberg was one of the leading cities in the northern Renaissance, being home to great intellectuals like Johann and Willibald Pirckheimer, Konrad Celtis, Hartmann Schedel, and Nürnberg’s most famous son, Albrecht Dürer.¹⁰ The group that welcomed Staupitz included Dürer, along with Nürnberg’s leading jurist, Christoph Scheurl, the secretary to the Council, Lazarus Spengler, and several other prominent magistrates and clergymen.¹¹ In the years to come this circle would play a decisive role in promoting the fledgling evangelical movement in the imperial city. The fraternity of elite Nürnbergers grew so fond of Staupitz that they named their group in his honor, *Sodalitas Staupitziana*. Though not all participants in the *Sodalitas* would embrace the evangelical

faith—Staupitz himself remained loyal to traditional Christianity throughout his life—several became outspoken advocates of Luther's theology.¹² By providing a forum for the discussion and dissemination of evangelical ideas, the *Sodalitas* would give the new faith a firm foothold in the imperial city.¹³

One year after Staupitz visited Nürnberg, he sent a fellow monk named Wenzeslaus Linck to be the preacher at the imperial city's Augustinian monastery. Linck had been the prior of the Wittenberg Augustinian monastery, and was also a colleague of Luther's in the theology faculty at the University of Wittenberg. Shortly after his arrival in the imperial city, Linck became involved in the Nürnberg fraternity of humanists who had welcomed Staupitz so warmly. In Advent 1517 he preached a series of sermons in the Augustinian church that revealed his close association with Luther.

Linck warned his listeners against the dangers of basing their salvation on human teaching rather than on God's Word. He preached,

God's first message to the soul is that it should turn itself from evil to good with heartfelt sincerity. But this is not possible with merely human words, resolve, and exhortations to rely upon; only their divine counterparts can accomplish this. The human word is powerless, deceitful, and imperfect. Therefore, it is only through Christ and the divine Word that one obtains life through conversion . . . and God's will or desire is accomplished.¹⁴

In another sermon he asserted:

Only the truth of God frees one from the heavy burden of sin and servitude to the letter of the law that provokes and multiplies sin . . . A person's salvation will never be certain until he grounds it upon the Word of God, because only in the Word and will of God are found rest for the human heart, certainty, and assurance of salvation, in which heaven and earth also rest.¹⁵

Linck's message of certainty of forgiveness through exclusive reliance on the divine Word captured the hearts of many in Nürnberg. Rather than insisting that one had to waver between hope and fear, this creed promised divine mercy to all who believed, quite apart from their actual moral condition. There was no need to live in tension. In response to popular demand, Nürnberg printer Jobst Gutknecht published an edition of Linck's sermons in 1519.

At the same time that Linck was preaching his Advent sermons in

Nürnberg, inhabitants of the imperial city were gaining exposure to Luther himself. Shortly after Luther posted the *Ninety-Five Theses* (October 31, 1517), Christoph Scheurl, who had been a professor of law at Wittenberg, obtained a copy of them from a friend. Scheurl, who like Staupitz, would later find Luther's reform too radical,¹⁶ shared the *Theses* with his colleagues in the *Sodalitas*, one of whom, Kaspar Nützel,¹⁷ took the liberty of translating them into German and then had them published in Nürnberg. Soon printers all over Germany were churning out vernacular copies of Luther's attack on indulgences, even though the reformer himself had intended them for the careful scrutiny of university theologians.

Though Nürnbergers had heard Staupitz warn about the dangers of substituting indulgences for contrition, they had not heard anyone question the ability of popes and bishops to reduce suffering in purgatory—not until they learned of Luther's argument in the *Ninety-Five Theses*. Luther asserted in this short treatise that indulgences were a man-made form of release from man-made penalties that in no way provided forgiveness for divinely imposed penalties or debt. Only a life marked by ongoing mortification of sinful desires, coupled with complete reliance on God's grace, could obtain remission from the latter. This daily bearing of one's cross was true penance for Luther.¹⁸ Participation in the sacrament of penance and acquisition of indulgences in no way guaranteed release from divine punishment.

Luther conceded that the pope had authority to remit penalties but only those that he himself had imposed in the form of sacramental satisfactions.¹⁹ The pope had no power to affect the divine penalty for sin that remained until human beings entered heaven;²⁰ neither could he affect the condition of souls in purgatory. The pope's ability to bind and loose sins ended when a person died.²¹ Departed souls were in God's hands. Luther's radical distinction between the penalties for sin imposed by God and those levied by the Church, coupled with his restriction of clerical jurisdiction to the latter, posed a serious threat to the late medieval understanding of penance. It deprived priests of the ability to influence the penitent's status before God by assigning or remitting works of satisfaction. Although the young reformer was respectful to the pope in his *Ninety-Five Theses*, his severe curtailment of the pontiff's traditional authority could not help but elicit opposition from Rome.

Two years later, another of Luther's early works on the keys was

printed in Nürnberg, *A Brief Instruction on How One Should Confess* (1519),²² which continued the reformer's assault on the sacrament of penance. The impact of this and subsequent works was no doubt enhanced by the fact that Luther himself visited Nürnberg twice in 1518 on his way to and from the Diet of Augsburg. The reformer stayed in the city's Augustinian monastery and was embraced by the members of *Sodalitas Staupitziana*. So enamored was the group of Luther that they changed their fraternity's name (again) to *Sodalitas Martiniana* to signal their solidarity with him.²³

Staupitz's influence on Luther was unmistakable in *A Brief Instruction*. Rather than counseling penitents to make detailed inventories of their consciences to be shared with their confessors, Luther advised his readers to reveal their sins to God alone. Before a penitent ever went to confession he was to confess his sins secretly to God "as if he were talking with his most trusted friend."²⁴ Because it was impossible to remember all one's mortal sins, one needed to confess to one's priest only those transgressions that clearly went against the Ten Commandments or that burdened one's conscience.²⁵ All other transgressions were a private matter between God and penitent. Following Staupitz, Luther urged his readers to trust in God's mercy and not in their own works to obtain forgiveness.²⁶ The reformer's emphasis on the secret encounter between God and the sinner greatly reduced the importance of the meeting between priest and penitent. The real confession had already occurred before a penitent ever went to confession.

In his *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* (1519), the most thorough of Luther's works on penance to be published in Nürnberg,²⁷ the reformer greatly elaborated his criticisms of the traditional practice of confession. Moving beyond the distinction he had made in earlier treatises between divinely and humanly imposed punishment for sin, Luther now juxtaposed the forgiveness of divinely imposed guilt with the remission of sacramental penances. Referring to the former as "heavenly indulgence," he argued that forgiveness of guilt was far more important than remission of penances because it "removes the fear and timidity of the heart toward God and makes the conscience inwardly light and happy."²⁸ This, for Luther, was true forgiveness because it reconciled one with God, whereas remission of sacramental penances only brought one back into fellowship with the visible Church. Forgiveness of guilt prevented sins from "biting" one's con-

science any longer and gave the penitent “a joyful confidence” that his sins had been completely forgiven.²⁹

According to Luther, the sacrament of penance could offer release from neither the punishment nor the guilt that God laid upon the sinner. In fact, the distinction between the two became meaningless for him. Pardon from eternal punishment occurred at the same time God forgave the penitent’s guilt. Hence there was no need to perform works of satisfaction. This radical devaluing of release from ecclesiastical penalty was part of Luther’s plan to strip priests of their authority over human souls and provide the laity with forgiveness for true guilt. It would prove fatal to traditional penitential religion in Nürnberg.

In spite of his thoroughgoing critique of penance, Luther insisted in his sermon that confession was still a valid and important religious act. He asserted that God had given the sacrament of penance to be “a consolation to all sinners.”³⁰ Discarding the traditional division of the sacrament into contrition, confession, and satisfaction, Luther proffered a new triad: absolution, grace, and faith. Absolution, the actual words of forgiveness spoken by a priest, was the external sign of the sacrament, deriving its authority from Christ’s gift of the keys to Peter (Matthew 16:19). Grace comprised the internal reality of the sacrament that actually forgave sins and freed the penitent’s conscience from guilt. Faith enabled the sacrament’s potential offer of divine absolution to become actual for an individual penitent. It was necessary for a penitent to believe that the priest’s words of absolution were true in order for him to be forgiven. Luther repeated Augustine’s aphorism, “not the sacrament, but the faith that believes the sacrament, removes sin.”³¹

The reformer insisted in the *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* that forgiveness could not be based on the worthiness of either one’s contrition or works of satisfaction. Neither provided the firm assurance of forgiveness that the troubled conscience needed because both were based on human effort.³² Only faith in God’s promise to honor the word of absolution spoken by his priests could furnish sinners with the certainty of forgiveness they required. Luther advised penitents, “your sorrow and works can deceive you and the devil will overcome them quickly in death and in trials. But Christ, your God, will not lie to you or equivocate, and the devil will not annul his word. If you build upon [Christ’s word] with a firm faith, then you stand on

the rock that the gates and all the authority of hell are not able to oppose.”³³ Forgiveness was a gift that could not be earned.³⁴ It was an expression of God’s overwhelming mercy that had only to be received in faith. This faith was not a substitute for sorrow—whether perfect or imperfect—or for satisfaction. It was not a new kind of work that merited absolution. Like forgiveness, faith, too, was a divine gift. It enabled the penitent to receive God’s unmerited favor.³⁵ Whereas Staupitz still envisioned divinely infused contrition earning absolution, Luther abandoned the notion of merit altogether. He maintained more emphatically than his spiritual director had that only by relying on God’s faithfulness and gracious initiative could the penitent find peace for his conscience.

The role of the priest in Luther’s version of the sacrament of penance was greatly diminished in comparison with the duties of a traditional confessor. No longer was he responsible for eliciting a complete confession from penitents by interrogating their consciences. In his *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* Luther discarded the distinction between mortal and venial sins that made the examination of conscience necessary. He insisted that no one could confidently distinguish between more and less serious sins, and therefore the matter was to be left to God’s judgment.³⁶ Luther demoted the confessor from judge to servant (*diener*). The priest no longer possessed divine authority by virtue of his office to remit sins. Authority resided in God’s Word, not in a human being. The confessor’s primary role was to serve his fellow Christians by pronouncing absolution to them. As long as the penitent expressed a desire for forgiveness, the priest was obliged (*schuldig*) to absolve her.³⁷ Luther thus avoided late medieval debates about the role of priestly absolution in confession.³⁸ For him the priest neither declared nor mediated divine forgiveness: he held out the biblical promise of absolution to the penitent and invited her to receive it by faith.³⁹

So concerned was Luther to stress the importance of faith and the divine promise that he allowed laypeople to absolve each other if a priest was not present. The late medieval Church had also allowed lay absolution in emergency cases. In such instances the efficacy of the sacrament depended less on the combination of faith and divine promise than on a temporary extension of priestly authority to a layperson.⁴⁰ Luther’s justification for lay confession was much more radical. He reasoned that any Christian could pronounce absolution

“because where a Christian says to you, ‘God forgives you your sins in the name etc.’ and you can receive the word with a sure faith as if God were speaking to you, then you are certainly absolved by the same faith.”⁴¹ All Christians possessed the keys, all were equally able and obliged to preach the gospel of forgiveness to each other. Luther wrote, “the keys and authority of St. Peter are not a kind of power, but a form of service. The keys were not given to St. Peter alone but also to you and to me, the keys are yours and mine.”⁴²

The reformer did not here envision laypeople supplanting the clergy in the latter’s role as confessor. He discussed the possibility of lay absolution in order to make explicit the kind of reforms he wanted to make to the traditional sacrament. Throughout the *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* Luther had the traditional encounter between priest and penitent in mind. Even in his reformed version of confession the priest played an important, if diminished, role.⁴³ After having declared that laypeople could absolve each other, Luther quickly added, “but of course one should observe and not despise the order of the [ecclesiastical] authorities [*ordnung der ubirkeit*].”⁴⁴

In these three pamphlets Luther, building on the foundation of Staupitz and Linck, assailed the major underpinnings of the penitential mentality that infused traditional Christianity. He objected to the religion’s defining notion: that human beings had a part to play in balancing out their moral accounts with God. In its place he posited faith in Christ’s promise of divine mercy won for humanity at the cross. Luther denounced the theological distinctions that were so important to the late medieval penitential cycle (for example, the guilt of sin versus the penalty for sin, mortal sins versus venial sins, attrition versus contrition, and so on), along with the exalted status it accorded to confessors, most notably, their alleged authority to act as judges in the courtroom of conscience. He then proffered his own distinction between man-made guilt and absolution and their divine counterparts. The reformer argued that human beings need only be concerned about the latter, which the current penitential machinery of the old Church had completely obscured. Most important, he promised what late medieval Christianity never dared—certainty of forgiveness based on faith in the unshakeable promises of God.

Although traditional Christianity had a proven appeal, it also had one glaring vulnerability, at least from the Protestant perspective: it provided no enduring sense of forgiveness. Indeed, such certainty was

considered a sin of presumption. Living between hope and fear, confident in the Church's ongoing sacramental ministrations, was deemed the more appropriate posture. Luther disagreed. He thought it a greater sin of presumption to seek to contribute to one's salvation. God had promised forgiveness to those who believed in Christ—the proper posture was faith, confident repose in the trustworthiness of the divine promise. This was the path to certainty of forgiveness.

One should not underestimate the appeal of certainty to those who have been told there was none.⁴⁵ Although inhabitants of late medieval cities like Nürnberg had grown accustomed to the ongoing spiritual thirst the old faith had taught them was good, necessary, and unavoidable, the promise of enduring satiation disrupted their contentment. Luther's attack on the sacrament of penance salted their souls and then promised to assuage this intensified thirst. In part Luther created the spiritual appetite he sought to fulfill. By exaggerating the abuses of sacramental confession and exploiting its vulnerabilities, he produced a level of discontent with penance-based religion that obscured the old faith's proven ability to console as well as frighten. Those who converted to the new faith came to see the sacrament of penance through Luther's eyes, though their own experience of confession no doubt contributed to the plausibility of his vision.

Behind Luther's radical critique of the sacrament of penance lay his equally radical assessment of late medieval soteriology. While Luther was shaped in important ways by various late medieval theologies of salvation, his own soteriology made a decisive break with the tradition he had inherited. According to late medieval theology, one became righteous over time by cooperating with the continual infusions of grace one received from the sacraments and, finally, by undergoing a painful cleansing in purgatory. Salvation was a gradual process that took place within the individual. It was never complete this side of heaven or, more correctly, purgatory. This was not works righteousness, as Protestants have claimed. It was based on grace. Following Aquinas, most late medieval theologians taught that God planted divinely created habits of virtue in believers via the sacraments, which helped them realize and develop their natural love for the good, God himself. In this way salvation was always a gift, but it still took place within an individual and required human agency, though no one could say how much. Luther was especially critical of those like Gabriel Biel who insisted that human beings contribute a great deal to

their salvation, but he also saw an unbridgeable gulf between himself and more moderate thinkers like Jean Gerson, who placed greater stress on divine agency.

By 1519 Luther had become convinced that salvation was not in any sense a reward for actual growth in righteousness. Human beings were far too sinful to cooperate with grace, and God did not require such human effort anyhow. According to Luther, God wished to relate to human beings as sheer Giver, and human beings to him as mere receivers. Salvation was a gift one received because one had become united with Christ through faith in baptism. There was nothing one could or should contribute to one's salvation. Christ himself became one's righteousness. That is, salvific righteousness was alien righteousness; it was the righteousness of another person, namely Christ. But this righteousness was not alien in the sense of being outside of a person. Luther could speak of God covering human beings with Christ's righteousness, or of God imputing Christ's righteousness to sinners, as in a court of law, but, especially at this stage of his development, he also thought of Christ dwelling within the believer.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Luther, believers were saved by an alien righteousness that dwelt within them. This was the faith that Luther believed God had revealed to him in the Word. It left very little room for the traditional understanding of the keys. In fact, Luther finally concluded in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), which also made its way into Nürnberg,⁴⁷ that penance was not a sacrament but simply a way of returning to one's initial union with Christ in baptism.⁴⁸

While few Nürnbergers likely grasped Luther's soteriology in all its subtlety, many proved quite adept at sorting out the primary differences between the evangelical version of Christianity and the faith on which they had been reared, especially where the keys were concerned. Already in the late 1510s lay inhabitants of the imperial city were adding their own voices to the protest against traditional Christianity begun by Luther and other clerics. In order to rebut the charge of heresy that Johannes Eck, professor of theology at the University of Ingolstadt, had leveled against Luther at the Leipzig Disputation (1518), Lazarus Spengler, who had been in attendance at the debate, wrote a passionate defense of the Wittenberg reformer entitled *Apology for Luther's Teaching* (1519), the first of its kind to be authored by a layperson. The Council secretary argued that in contrast to Lu-

ther's opponents, who based their theology on mere human teaching (*menschenlere*) and self-interest (*aigen nutz*), Luther grounded his doctrine on Christ's teaching, "which alone is true, unchanging, and certain," and urged selflessness as the central virtue of the Christian life.⁴⁹ According to Spengler, the new creed had provided his generation with access to truth, eternal and unchanging, rather than presenting it with mere human opinions, which were ephemeral and mutable. In Luther's teaching he believed he had found solid ground upon which to base his salvation.

Spengler had little positive to say about the sacrament of penance in his pamphlet. He attacked the traditional interpretation of Matthew 8:4—where Christ sends the leper he has healed to a priest—as an example of the "ridiculous" kinds of conclusions theologians had reached by relying on human teaching.⁵⁰ (Late medieval theologians had used this text to justify the necessity of making confession to priests.)⁵¹ Spengler went on in his *Apology* to attack "those preachers of fables" who "have caused uncounted scruples in our hearts alone through the widespread indecent [*ungeschickten*] order of confession." The Council secretary objected strongly to the requirement that penitents must search into "the unknown names, daughters, and conditions of sins." He asserted that clerics based a person's salvation more on the detailing of sins and their circumstances than on biblical repentance, all in an effort to fill their purses with Nürnbergers' money.⁵²

Spengler also criticized late medieval piety as being crassly mercantilist in spirit. He assailed the Church for teaching that human beings had to rely on their own works to pay off their debt with God. The Council secretary was especially critical of indulgences in this respect. Preachers had roamed through the land advertising indulgences like merchants trying to hawk their wares.⁵³ Spengler asserted, "Our Christianity had suffered no little disdain and slander because indulgences have been misused in this way, [namely], that through them purgatory has been presented as a fair [*jarmarck*] or merchant's market [*kauffmansmeß*] at which souls are bought and sold . . . [T]hese same purchased souls are packaged like saffron in bales or pepper in barrels."⁵⁴ The result of this mercantilist approach to religion was that lay consciences had become consumed with trying to balance their moral accounts with God, while priests grew rich off the indulgence trade. Spengler asserted that there was simply no way to find

rest or peace for the human soul in this mercantilist religion because of its reliance on works to pay off humanity's debt to God. The only way to find true relief for one's conscience was to flee all forms of penitential piety and trust in God's abundant provision of merit in Christ.⁵⁵

Spengler confessed in his *Apology* that he had deeply personal reasons for defending the new faith. He wrote, "This I know without doubt, that although I do not consider myself to be a highly-trained scholar, I have never had a teaching or sermon penetrate my mind so powerfully, and have never been able to grasp any more fully, or had any correspond so exactly to my understanding of the Christian order as the teaching and instruction of Luther and his followers."⁵⁶ Albrecht Dürer would go even further and praise Luther as "a Christian man who helped me out of great distress."⁵⁷ The specific cause of his anxiety was his belief that he had to pay off his debt with God through his own sorrow and good works.⁵⁸ Later in the *Apology*, Spengler said of the Wittenberg reformer, "the Almighty God . . . has awakened a Daniel in the midst of the folk in the person of Dr. Luther. [He has done this] to open our eyes to the blindness in which we have lain for a long time due to the deception of our theologians, and to take from us the fog and darkness of such indecency."⁵⁹

Though Spengler intended the *Apology* for discussion in the *Sodalitas*, a printer in Augsburg obtained a copy of it and, according to the Council secretary, published it without his knowledge. The *Apology* became one of the most successful pamphlets of the early Reformation, going through seven editions between the years 1519 and 1520, one of which appeared in Nürnberg.⁶⁰

Unfortunately for Spengler, a copy of his pamphlet made its way into the hands of Johann Eck. The latter was outraged by Spengler's defiant support of Luther. He appended Spengler's name along with that of another prominent Nürnberger, Willibald Pirckheimer, to the papal bull threatening excommunication (*Exsurge Domine*) he had drafted against Luther. (Eck correctly suspected Pirckheimer as the author of an anonymous satire of him entitled *Eccius dedolatus*—"The Corner [*Ecke*] Planed Smooth.") In a letter to the Nürnberg Council, Eck explained that he was threatening Spengler and Pirckheimer with excommunication because they had "praised, furthered, and exaggerated Luther's erroneous and misleading ideas more than was proper."⁶¹ The bull, published on September 30, 1520, stipulated

that the two Nürnbergers had sixty days to seek absolution from Eck as the pope's plenipotentiary or suffer excommunication.

After a series of unsuccessful attempts to elicit support for Spengler and Pirckheimer from the bishop of Bamberg, Duke Wilhelm of Bavaria,⁶² and even Pope Leo X, the Council reluctantly instructed the two prominent Nürnbergers on December 18 to seek absolution from Eck.⁶³ As Spengler explained in a letter to Pirckheimer, "the lords unanimously advise that we should bring ourselves to focus on our own well-being in this matter rather than on our resentment against Eck and not reject this way [of resolving the situation]." ⁶⁴ Working through notaries, the two Nürnbergers asked Eck to absolve them if they had done anything detrimental to the Church and worthy of excommunication by allowing themselves to be influenced by Luther. Although Eck had earlier informed the bishop of Bamberg that he would accept this rather benign statement of guilt (*absolutio ad cautelam*),⁶⁵ he now insisted that he would only absolve the two Nürnbergers if they confessed that they had neither adhered to nor approved of Luther's teaching (*absolutio simplex*). Eck based his reversal on Spengler and Pirckheimer's failure to condemn the forty-one articles he had assembled against Luther after the Leipzig Disputation, along with the support they had voiced in their pamphlets for a national council to address issues of doctrine, something that the pope had expressly forbidden.⁶⁶

Whatever his reasons, Spengler and Pirckheimer interpreted Eck's actions as a deliberate attempt to humiliate them. Though they did finally comply with Eck's demands—he absolved them in February 1521—their decision to do so was based more on a desire to honor the Council's wishes to avoid papal interdict than on any belief in the legitimacy of either Eck or the pope's authority to excommunicate. Spengler certainly put no stock in such claims to control divine grace: he asserted in his *Concerning the Bull of the Roman Pontiff* (1520) that papal excommunication in no way separated one from the grace of God.⁶⁷ Spengler again called for a national council to settle the issues of doctrine that were threatening to divide the empire.⁶⁸

Because the two Nürnbergers did not capitulate to Eck's demands until February of 1521, well after the deadline the pope had officially set, their names were included in the final bull announcing the excommunication of Luther (*Decet pontificem romanum*) that was published in January 1521 and then sent to papal nuncio Girolamo

Aleander at the Diet of Worms in early February. In a final act of spite against Spengler and Pirckheimer, Eck neglected to inform either the pope or Aleander that he had absolved the two Nürnbergers. When Spengler and Pirckheimer learned of this, they appealed their case to Emperor Charles V, who informed Aleander of the situation. (Spengler was at the Diet of Worms at this time.) The nuncio then sought permission from the pope to absolve Spengler and Pirckheimer again and formally struck their names from the bull in August 1521.

Throughout his ordeal with Eck, Spengler's attitude toward the temporal authority of the keys was very similar to the position advocated by Luther in *The Sermon on the Ban*, a treatise that was published in Nürnberg in 1520 that the Council secretary had likely read.⁶⁹ In his previous works on the keys Luther had criticized how the ancient authority to bind and loose sins was employed in the late medieval sacrament of penance; here he attacked how the keys were seen as a source of this-worldly power. Spengler, like his fellow Nürnbergers, was deeply sympathetic to Luther's call for a reformation of the keys at the level of both piety and politics.

Echoing the view first articulated by Marsilius of Padua some two centuries earlier,⁷⁰ Luther argued in *The Sermon on the Ban* that Christ had not authorized the clergy to wield power in the temporal sphere. The reformer maintained that popes and bishops could only use the power of excommunication to restrict access to the Lord's Supper (the so-called small ban), not to influence a layperson's standing in the world (the large ban), which was the jurisdiction of secular authorities alone. A banned person was to suffer no material disadvantage. Luther recognized the legitimacy of excommunication, and instructed laypeople against whom it was used—properly or improperly—to submit to its authority. But the reformer in no way considered a banned person to be automatically severed from fellowship with Christ—only God could accomplish this spiritual excommunication, and he would only do so in response to unbelief.

Similar to his argument in the *Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther maintained that clerical authority was limited to matters concerning the external fellowship of believers with the Church, and in no way touched the internal, spiritual communion of Christians with their Lord. A person under the ban could still be in fellowship with Christ, and a person in good standing with the Church might not be in right relationship with his Lord. Exclusion from the Lord's Supper was to

serve as a sign to the outwardly unrepentant sinner of his (probable) need for inward reconciliation with Christ. For this reason an excommunicated person was not to be turned away from church entirely, for only through hearing the Word could his fellowship with Christ be re-established. Luther warned throughout his sermon about the divine punishment that would await those “tyrants” who abused the power of the keys.⁷¹

Luther would go on to make even stronger arguments against clerical abuses of the keys in subsequent treatises. In his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), the reformer insisted that the keys “were not ordained for doctrine or government, but only for the binding and loosing of sin.”⁷² Basing his argument on the Apostle Paul’s statement that Christians should submit themselves to governing authorities (Romans 13:1), Luther asserted that priests were subject to secular rulers “by divine order.”⁷³ He maintained that the clergy had received its authority from the larger community of Christians, all of whom were priests by virtue of baptism. A cleric was a mere officeholder (*amptman*),⁷⁴ not sacramentally distinct from the laity. The whole purpose of Luther’s treatise was to call upon German princes and magistrates to take back the government of the German Church from the Roman clergy and to begin to work for true reform of Christendom. The reformer asserted, “Every town, council, or governing authority not only has the right, without the knowledge and consent of the pope or bishop, to abolish and resist what is opposed to God and injurious to people’s bodies and souls, but indeed is bound at the risk of the salvation of its soul to resist such things even though popes and bishops, who ought to be the first to do so, do not consent.”⁷⁵

Luther hardly could have preached a more appealing message to people like Lazarus Spengler and the magistrates he served. The reformer provided a theological justification for the Council’s long-term desire to achieve complete control of the imperial city’s religious life. The magistrates had always resented sacerdotal intrusions into the life of Nürnberg and now they had a theological rationale for putting an end to them. Luther’s version of the gospel appealed directly to the civic pride of Nürnbergers, providing a divine sanction for their desire to throw off the last vestiges of episcopal and papal influence in their beloved city. Coupled with the revolutionary promise of certainty of forgiveness, this radical critique of sacerdotalism made the evangeli-

cal version of Christianity very appealing to inhabitants of the imperial city. They, too, wanted the keys to be reformed. In 1520 Christoph Scheurl could write, “the patriciate, the multitude of the other citizens and all scholars stand on Luther’s side.”⁷⁶

Soon the magistrates began exercising their traditional right of presentation to the imperial city’s churches in an effort to promote the fledgling evangelical movement. Ironically, the decision of popes and bishops to sell the Council this privilege wound up benefiting the spread of a new “heresy” that would put an end to episcopal and papal religion in the imperial city. The magistrates would fill Nürnberg’s most important ecclesiastical offices with men who opposed the penitential basis of traditional Christianity.

In June 1520 the Council appointed Hektor Pömer, a young Nürnberg patrician who was then completing his legal studies at the University of Wittenberg, to be the new provost of St. Lorenz Church.⁷⁷ Though a jurist, Pömer had heard both Luther and Melancthon lecture in Wittenberg and was an advocate of their doctrine.⁷⁸ In the same year the Council appointed Dr. Georg Peßler, a jurist who had also studied at Wittenberg, to be provost of St. Sebald Church. Like Pömer, Peßler was an admirer of Luther’s.

One of Peßler’s first actions as provost was to find a suitable person to fill a preachship in St. Sebald Church that had been endowed by Sebald Schreyer. At the recommendation of Luther, Peßler chose Dominikus Schleuppner, a preacher from Breslau who had studied with the reformer at the University of Wittenberg.⁷⁹ An icon of the old order thus became a symbol of the new faith.

By far its most significant ecclesiastical appointment in these years, in March 1522 the Council approved Hektor Pömer’s choice of Andreas Osiander to become the new preacher at St. Lorenz Church. Osiander had studied at the University of Ingolstadt and immediately preceding his appointment as the St. Lorenz preacher, had been teaching Hebrew in Nürnberg’s Augustinian monastery. He also took part in the *Sodalitas Staupitziana*. Owing to his erudition, eloquence, and dominating personality, Osiander was to become the city’s most prominent preacher and the leader of its evangelical movement. He was at the center of all important decisions affecting the religious life of the imperial city and soon emerged as one of the most important reformers in Germany. Over time he would become known for his abso-

lute refusal to compromise on issues of conscience, even when his political betters saw things differently. This would become especially clear where the power of the keys was concerned.

By 1522 evangelically minded clerics occupied Nürnberg's most important ecclesiastical offices. Additionally, the abbot of the St. Egidien monastery, Friedrich Pistorius,⁸⁰ and the abbot of the Carthusian monastery, Blasius Stöckl,⁸¹ were pro-Luther, as was the recently appointed preacher in the Hospital Church, Thomas Geschaf (called Venatorius). But three more years would elapse before the evangelical revolution in Nürnberg would achieve official recognition.

One of the primary reasons for this delay was that from 1522 to 1524 Nürnberg was host to the highest-ranking officials in the empire, many of whom opposed Luther's teaching. At the Diet of Worms in 1521 Emperor Charles V had decided to revitalize the languishing Imperial Governing Council and Imperial Chamber Court, two bodies that had been designed to create permanent structures of government in the empire that could function independently of the emperor himself. As with most other efforts to centralize power in the empire, neither had met with great success.⁸² The emperor had also decided to convene a meeting of the imperial estates in the near future to be presided over by his brother, Archduke Ferdinand, the king of Hungary and Bohemia. All three were to meet in Nürnberg, which had served as a kind of default capital city of the empire so often in the past. The Governing Council and Chamber Court were located in Nürnberg from fall 1521 to spring 1524, while the imperial estates met three times during the same period.⁸³ With so many powerful representatives of the emperor and pope within its walls, the Nürnberg Council was forced to bide its time and remain as conciliatory as possible in religious matters, even as the city's preachers and many of its citizens clamored for reform of the imperial city's religious life.

It was particularly at the second meeting of the imperial diet that the Nürnberg Council, along with the evangelical estates, demonstrated their support for the new faith. At the diet papal nuncio Francesco Chierigati sought to effect unity between the papacy and the German Church by means of a twofold plan. He first called upon the estates to enforce the Edict of Worms, which had declared Luther both a heretic and an outlaw, and had forbidden the sale of his books. Chierigati insisted that the estates put the Edict into effect immediately, beginning in Nürnberg. When the Worms recess was first issued

in the fall of 1521, the Nürnberg Council had dutifully posted it in the town hall but had taken no steps to enforce its measures. Chierigati wanted this to change. He demanded that Nürnberg's pro-Lutheran preachers be arrested and tried for heresy. He also ordered the Nürnberg Council to allow the publishing of only anti-Lutheran materials in the imperial city.

Then, in an unexpected move, Chierigati acknowledged that the grievances that the Germans had against the pope were legitimate. He presented an official confession of ecclesiastical abuses committed by the pope and his representatives in Germany along with a promise to reform the moral failings of the Church. He assured the assembly that Pope Hadrian VI had "perceived the entire world longing for such a reformation" and that he was sincerely committed to effect real moral change in the curia.⁸⁴ Chierigati asked only that the estates realize that reform would take time to implement. He reminded them, "[h]e who scrubs too much draws blood."⁸⁵

The Nürnberg magistrates reluctantly agreed to allow only the printing of anti-Lutheran pamphlets in the imperial city⁸⁶ and also ordered the city's preachers to avoid controversial topics in their sermons.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the Council firmly resisted Chierigati's call for the arrest of Nürnberg's preachers, which it saw as an infringement on the city's liberty. The Council resolved to protect them by force if necessary. Chierigati's actions had forced the Council's hand. While individual magistrates continued to have reservations about the evangelical movement, the Council as a whole had taken a decisive step toward embracing the radical tenets of the Lutheran gospel. Their refusal to embrace Hadrian's confession demonstrates just how far down the road to reform the magistrates already were. Chierigati relented, seeing he had drawn blood.

The estates responded to Chierigati's proposal by pledging to observe the Edict of Worms on the condition that the catalogue of grievances presented at Worms, upon which no action had been taken, be redressed first.⁸⁸ At the top of this list of grievances were complaints associated with the keys: the estates did not want the *sacerdotium* interfering with secular courts of justice, and took great offense at clerics who threatened laypeople and judges who did not recognize their jurisdiction;⁸⁹ the estates also opposed popes and bishops who forced laypeople to purchase absolution from them in so-called reserved cases, again under threat of excommunication.⁹⁰ Finally, the estates objected to indiscriminate use of the keys, and charged:

Notwithstanding the original and true purpose of spiritual censure and excommunication, namely, to aid and direct Christian life and faith, this weapon is now flung at us for the most inconsequential debts—some of them amounting to no more than a few pennies—or for non-payment of court or administrative costs after the principal sum has already been returned. With such procedures the very life blood is sucked out of the poor, untutored laity, who are driven by distraction by the fear of the Church's ban.⁹¹

The estates also called for the pope to convene a “Free Christian Council” on German soil to deal with their grievances, a council open to both lay and ecclesiastical officials. In the meantime they assured Chierigati that Frederick the Elector of Saxony, Luther's prince, would see to it that the reformer published nothing new. The diet concluded with the estates agreeing that they would allow nothing to be preached or published in their jurisdictions “except the true, clear, and pure gospel according to the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture as approved and accepted by the Christian Church” until the religious question was taken up at a future council.⁹² In the eyes of Nürnberg evangelicals, the vague wording of this statement from the 1523 recess provided ample room for them to continue spreading the Lutheran gospel.

Although the imperial governing bodies did not leave Nürnberg until the end of April 1524, the leaders of the evangelical movement in the imperial city continued with their assault on late medieval penitential religion. During Holy Week Andreas Osiander preached two sermons in St. Lorenz Church against the sacrament of penance, arguing it was a human creation. Interestingly, though he was eager to relieve lay-people of the burdens sacramental confession had imposed on them, he was also anxious to retain the power of the keys. Anticipating a position that many of his colleagues would later adopt, he argued that the clergy used the keys properly when they loosed from sin those who had been baptized and professed faith in the new gospel.⁹³ He likely envisioned this use of the keys taking place in a private encounter between penitent and priest free from the traditional interrogation of conscience and mandatory confession of all mortal sins.⁹⁴ His congregation interpreted his sermons to mean that they need not turn up in the confessional at all.

Wolfgang Volprecht, the prior of the Augustinian order in Nürnberg, took similarly radical actions during Holy Week. He reportedly

served communion in both kinds to some three to four thousand laypersons in the Augustinian church.⁹⁵ Following Volprecht's lead, Osiander gave communion in both kinds to Isabella of Denmark, the emperor's sister, who was staying in the Nürnberg fortress.⁹⁶

Preachers like Osiander and Volprecht were not the only inhabitants of the imperial city courageous enough to promote the evangelical revolution while Nürnberg served as temporary capital of the empire. Laypeople continued leveling their own assault on late medieval penitential religion. Throughout this two-year period the Council received a steady stream of reports accusing the city's inhabitants of disrupting masses, conducting mock processions, ridiculing monks, and holding forth on matters of doctrine in sermons and pamphlets. The magistrates made token gestures to reprimand the more boisterous of their subjects, but feared that any wholesale crackdown on lay expressions of discontent would lead to widespread revolt. On one occasion the Council banished an artisan for verbally attacking a monk only to pardon him a few days later.⁹⁷ The magistrates adopted a policy of official opposition to such protests, but avoided carrying out any harsh penalties against those who ignored their decrees.

Lazarus Spengler continued to publish pro-Lutheran pamphlets while Nürnberg played host to the imperial governing bodies.⁹⁸ But there were also lay pamphleteers in the imperial city who, unlike Spengler, were members of Nürnberg's middle class, and thus represented the large number of lesser merchants and self-employed artisans who comprised some 65 percent of the imperial city's population.⁹⁹ During the interim between the second and third meetings of the imperial diet, shoemaker and mastersinger Hans Sachs published his *Wittenberg Nightingale*,¹⁰⁰ the most famous artisan pamphlet of the German Reformation.¹⁰¹ Sachs urged readers in his poem to "wake up" and listen for the voice of the "joyous nightingale" as it heralded the dawning of a new era of truth, justice, and brotherly love. Sachs identified Luther as the angelic nightingale. His grievances similar to those presented at the diets of Worms and Nürnberg, Sachs accused the pope and his servants of using their ecclesiastical authority to exploit and oppress simple Germans. Having deprived the laity of the true gospel, the pope had created his own religion of works righteousness, which he used to establish his tyranny over the consciences and pocketbooks of the common folk. Sachs depicted Luther as a great liberator whose message of salvation through faith in Christ

exposed the pope's diabolical plan. Though the Roman pontiff and his servants railed against it, they would not be able to stop the spread of Luther's gospel.

Similar to Spengler, Sachs severely criticized abuses of the keys in his pamphlet. The shoemaker attacked the pope's efforts to strong-arm laypeople into going to confession by threatening them with excommunication:

For us, the pope's snare plainly stands
In his decretal, laws, commands,
By which the flock of Christ's possession
Is forced by fear to make confession.¹⁰²

Elsewhere he leveled a similar criticism:

Up to confession we must dance
If we have eaten aught, by chance
Like flesh or eggs in the fasting season
This they condemn beyond all reason,
As though we had e'en killed a man.
And how they terrorize with the Ban.¹⁰³

Sachs continued his assault on confession in another evangelical pamphlet that appeared in 1524—*A Disputation between a Canon and a Shoemaker*. In this dialogue a canon asks a shoemaker why Lutherans never confess their sins to a priest, an omission the canon sees as one of the new heresy's most serious deviations from traditional practice.¹⁰⁴ The shoemaker responds that God has not commanded confession to a priest, and there is no mention of it in either the Old or the New Testament. The canon objects and refers his interlocutor to Christ's instructions to the lepers to show themselves to a priest (Matthew 8:4). "Does 'show' mean 'confess'?" the shoemaker asks. "That is strange German to me. You must demonstrate it to me more convincingly from the Scriptures. If auricular confession were such a necessary and holy thing, as you maintain, then it certainly should be more clearly defined in the Scriptures." Frustrated by the shoemaker's stubbornness, the canon finally asks his interlocutor, "Will you do nothing, then, unless God has commanded it and the Scriptures make specific mention of it? That is a deplorable position." The shoemaker responds that he cannot even fulfill what Scripture commands; why

should he burden himself with obligations that have no warrant therein?¹⁰⁵

Other artisans in the imperial city joined Hans Sachs in assailing traditional penitential religion. In 1523 Nürnberg mechanic Conrad Distalmaier wrote a pamphlet in which he accused priests of falsely assuming Christ's role as the one true confessor, and advocated confession to God alone as the true form of penance.¹⁰⁶ In the same year a weaver in the imperial city named Nikolaus Kadolzbürger wrote a pamphlet in which he insisted that he and his fellow artisans be released from the obligation to make annual confession, which he viewed as idolatrous.¹⁰⁷ Still another middle-class Nürnberger, painter Hans Greiffenberger, singled out private confession in his 1524 pamphlet as the primary source of oppression in traditional religion.¹⁰⁸ Together with Sachs, Distalmaier, Kadolzbürger, Greiffenberger, and others made Nürnberg one of the most prolific centers of artisan pamphlets during the early years of the Reformation.

The sacrament of penance, of course, was not the only target of opprobrium in lay evangelical pamphlets, not even in those works that focused primarily on piety.¹⁰⁹ Nürnberg pamphleteers typically listed auricular confession alongside other forms of late medieval devotionality they had come to find burdensome.¹¹⁰ Though frequently singled out for special criticism, confession was but one among several forms of traditional piety to which burghers objected. Converts to the new faith objected to the penitential mentality that lay behind traditional Christianity, not just to the requirement that laypeople confess their sins to priests. The sacramental encounter between confessor and confessant did much to generate this mentality, and so became an important symbol of all that evangelicals rejected in the old faith. It was the place at which the late medieval Church touched the laity most directly.¹¹¹

But confession was simply one of many rituals that nurtured the penitential mentality. Attacks against indulgences, fasting, and a whole host of other devotional acts constituted an assault on the late medieval preoccupation with penance as much as direct references to private confession did. They were all part of a larger offensive against the late medieval belief that God demanded regular payment from human beings for wrongs committed. One must distinguish between the sacrament of penance and the penitential mentality it was so important in creating and sustaining. The latter was the primary target of

lay pamphleteers in Nürnberg as they assessed late medieval piety. And behind this target ultimately lay the power of the keys.

As is clear from the pamphlets produced by Nürnberg artisans, inhabitants of the imperial city seized on Luther's critique of confession, while largely ignoring his comments on the need to retain and reform it. They were more radical in their assessment of the sacrament of penance than Luther, wishing to dispense with it entirely. Nürnbergers were encouraged in this direction by reformers like Jakob Strauss, whose *Confession Booklet* appeared in Nürnberg in 1523.¹¹² Strauss, an evangelical preacher in Eisenach who had studied at the University of Wittenberg,¹¹³ favored a faster-paced reform than Luther, though, unlike some "radical" reformers, he remained "orthodox" in his theology. More utopian in his call for reform than Luther, Strauss envisioned a society free from the pursuit of wealth, which he thought was unchristian.¹¹⁴ Strauss's desire for a more radical version of reform is especially apparent in his treatment of confession.

The Eisenach reformer matched Luther's tirade against the sacrament of penance, calling it "the earthly, godless, and tyrannical confession" that bound people to human laws and doctrines rather than to God's Word.¹¹⁵ Far from cleansing the guilty conscience, traditional confession actually taught penitents about new sins they had never contemplated. This occurred especially when confessors interrogated penitents as to their sexual practices.¹¹⁶ Though Strauss, like Luther, advocated voluntary private confession to a priest,¹¹⁷ he was less interested in extolling the virtues of auricular confession than the Wittenberg reformer. Where Luther had equivocated on the status of penance as a sacrament, finally concluding that, properly speaking, it was not one, Strauss showed none of the Wittenberger's hesitancy in dethroning penance. It was not a sacrament because it lacked the requisite external sign—end of discussion.¹¹⁸ (Strauss joked that the external sign of the traditional sacrament was the *Beichtpfennig!*)¹¹⁹ He sought to replace the practice of periodic confession of specific sins to a pastor with an ongoing awareness of one's sinfulness and utter dependence on divine mercy.¹²⁰ Strauss was also more confident than Luther in the average believer's ability to know he had been forgiven directly by God. He advised the penitent who was confronted with the falsehoods of monks and priests to retreat "in faith into yourself . . . [and flee] to God, the true confessor." The penitent was then to

wait to hear God's word of forgiveness spoken in his soul.¹²¹ For Luther, this was a far too subjective basis for assurance of forgiveness. He believed that most people needed external confirmation of absolution because they did not possess sufficient faith to listen for or believe the divine whisper of forgiveness.

Strauss admitted that it was helpful to hear the words of absolution from another human being, but maintained that lay confession and absolution provided the ideal scenario for the pronouncement of divine forgiveness.¹²² Going beyond Luther, he gave a sample form for both. After a layperson had revealed his "secret, concealed, and sinful conscience" to a trusted and pious Christian, he might say, "Dear brother, as you have understood and observed my great sins which I confessed to you, I ask in Christian love that you would help me pray to God for mercy, forgiveness, and pardon of my sins." The lay confessor could then absolve his brother with the following words: "Dear brother, I observe that your sins have caused you sorrow for God's sake. Therefore, live in the confidence that comes from the Word of God, which can never fail. Go and sin no more, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace, your faith has saved you from your sins."¹²³ For Strauss, such absolution was the most authentic form of forgiveness because it was based exclusively on God's Word and not on a priest's alleged authority to remit sins.

Nürnbergers heard other reformers who filled out the spectrum between the more conservative Luther and the more liberal Strauss in their views on confession, an evangelical parallel to the diversity of opinions about the working of the sacrament of penance in the imperial city on the eve of the Reformation. In 1524 Wenzeslaus Linck authored a short devotional work based on the Lord's Prayer that included brief forms for confession to God after each petition, the implication being that confession to a priest was not necessary.¹²⁴ Inhabitants of the imperial city likely had access as well to works on confession published in Augsburg and Strasbourg. The former city saw important treatises on penance by Johannes Oecolampadius and Urbanus Rhegius during the early years of the Reformation.¹²⁵ Both writers supported Luther's reform of auricular confession, but each balked at the prospect of handing over the keys to the laity. Oecolampadius asserted, "in every way I acknowledge that one should make his confession before a priest and desire absolution from no one else."¹²⁶ Johannes Brenz, the famous preacher in Schwäbisch

Hall, was more willing to release this traditional authority to those outside the clerical estate. In a treatise on the keys that appeared in Strasbourg in 1523, he asserted that Christ had given all Christians the authority to bind and loose sins.¹²⁷ It should be noted, however, that Brenz would later become a staunch supporter of a reformed version of auricular confession.¹²⁸

The impression that Nürnbergers favored Strauss's liberal view of confession receives further confirmation from an incident that occurred in the imperial city during Lent 1524, just before the imperial estates made their final exit. The incident also further illustrates the fact that common artisans were able to grasp the new faith's basic tenets and had become deeply attracted to its promises. Contrary to what some scholars have maintained, average burghers did understand evangelical Christianity, at least well enough to distinguish between its essential beliefs and those of traditional Christianity, especially where the keys were concerned.¹²⁹

On February 25, a Franciscan preacher named Jeremias Müllich delivered a Lenten sermon in Nürnberg on the Atonement that scandalized many of his listeners, the majority of whom were artisans. Some were so offended by the friar's understanding of salvation that they called for the Nürnberg Council to silence him.¹³⁰ News of the controversial sermon spread throughout the imperial city, causing what one burgher called "a great turmoil among the people."¹³¹ Five days later, the Council acted to restore order by commissioning two of its members¹³² to discover exactly what the disgruntled burghers had found so unpalatable in Müllich's sermon.¹³³ However, before they could complete their interviews, Müllich preached a second sermon that elicited further outrage from his auditors—he had insisted that they go to confession. The Council again sent its two members to gather information, this time instructing them to prepare a formal recommendation on how it should deal with the matter.

The two magistrates interviewed a total of eighteen people, twelve after Müllich's first sermon and six after his second. None was a cleric, and all but one were artisans, with most working in Nürnberg's metalwares industry,¹³⁴ the most important part of the imperial city's vigorous trade in handcrafted goods. At least one of the artisan interviewees, knifsmith Michael Ketzmann, who had taken notes on a sermon Müllich had preached on another occasion, possessed vernacular literacy.¹³⁵ The one nonartisan was Sebaldus Heyden, an alumnus

of the University of Ingolstadt, who had served since 1521 as schoolmaster for the Holy Spirit Hospital School.

Although only half of those interviewed after Müllich's first sermon heard the friar's message for themselves,¹³⁶ all twelve relayed nearly identical criticisms of its content: Müllich had severely limited the benefits of Christ's Passion and had greatly exaggerated the ability of human beings to justify themselves before God. Knifsmith Hans Gutschmid reported that, according to Müllich, "Christ suffered only for original sin that comes from Adam but not for the actual sins [*di wirklichen sund*] which we commit. These we must erase [*abtilgen*] and pay for [*quidt machen*] with our own works."¹³⁷ Another burgher named Wolff Hebeysen wryly observed, "if this opinion were true then one would need yet another Christ to suffer for the remaining sins." Hebeysen added that he wished he had never heard "this crude sermon."¹³⁸ Knifsmith Konrad Bruckner and swordsmith Hans Lösel relayed a slightly different account of Müllich's preaching on the Atonement. Christ, the friar had asserted, suffered both for humanity's inherited guilt and for the actual sins it had committed up to the point of the crucifixion, but all sins perpetrated after Christ's Passion had to be atoned for by humanity itself.¹³⁹ The surest way of doing so, as Enderes Schmid reported, was to go to confession and to do penance (*beichten und bussen*).¹⁴⁰

The interviewees attributed Müllich's emphasis on "works" to his naïvely optimistic view of human nature. According to schoolmaster Sebaldus Heyden, the friar had taught, in direct contrast to the evangelical view, that "the nature of man is not so poisoned that even his good deeds bear the stain of corruption."¹⁴¹ Bartholmes Maurer, a needlemaker, and Bruckner were disturbed by Müllich's handling of Romans 7:21–23, a text to which early Lutherans frequently turned to prove the moral impotence of human beings. Müllich, the two artisans alleged, had allegorized the text in such a way that had the Apostle Paul affirming the ability of human beings to live up to God's moral code—exactly the opposite of what they took it to mean.¹⁴² Heyden, Maurer, and Bruckner believed that Müllich expected too much from human beings in terms of moral rectitude. They clung tenaciously to Luther's interpretation of the Romans passage, which saw human beings as subject to the power of a malicious spirit of sin that continually frustrated their efforts to fulfill God's law.

Underlying the burghers' criticism of Müllich's first sermon was

their conviction that his interpretation of the Atonement contradicted Scripture. As Maurer stated, “each informed Christian must determine to what degree that [teaching] is in conformity with the Word of God.”¹⁴³ He and his fellow Nürnbergers obviously thought it was not.

Mülich picked up in his second sermon where he had left off in his first. As metalworker Hans Henss reported, “this Franciscan ordered his whole sermon to prove that God has given command and authority to priests to hear confessions.”¹⁴⁴ Another artisan dubbed Mülich’s second homily “the sermon on confession.”¹⁴⁵ The zealous friar consciously set out to debunk the heterodox views of confession he feared had seduced the vulnerable minds of the Nürnberg laity. According to those interviewed, all six of whom had heard Mülich’s sermon for themselves, he attempted to do so by offering a kind of total history of confession.

From the beginning of Creation up to the Incarnation, Mülich had explained, human beings had confessed their sins to God the Father alone. When God the Son took on human flesh, this signaled an important change in the practice of confession. Now sins were to be confessed to God in human form. The Incarnation played a pivotal role in Mülich’s history of confession because it established the principle that human beings should confess their sins to God via another human being. However, as glassmaker Hans Steynle reported, the friar insisted that “this should not be understood to imply that one may confess his sins to his neighbor. Rather, he must confess to those who have been ordained to this office, namely, to priests.”¹⁴⁶

By allegorizing the Gospel account of Jesus healing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19), Mülich was able to find further proof for his case against lay confession. He saw tacit approval for auricular confession in Christ’s command that the lepers should make the appropriate offerings for their cleansing to the temple priests. (Both Spengler and Sachs had taken issue with this interpretation.) For Mülich, Christian priests, like their Jewish counterparts, served as the only divinely authorized mediators between God and man. As Melchior Rietter reported, a valid confession entailed the enumeration of sins to one of these God-ordained confessors.¹⁴⁷

According to the Nürnberg artisans, Mülich had also argued the merits of the sacrament of penance over confession in the Old Testament owing to the strict confidentiality of the former. Confession under the old dispensation, Mülich had observed, included a very public

component: the sacrificial system. While one confessed one's sins secretly to God, the obligation to make a sacrifice or offering corresponding to the severity of one's offense effectively revealed that sin to the whole community. Müllich reasoned that "a person should much less complain about private confession because what one confesses is revealed to no one."¹⁴⁸

In general, the tone of these six reports was much less condemnatory than that of the accounts recorded after Müllich's first sermon. There were no calls for the Council to reprimand him and, significantly, no protests against Müllich's assertion that human beings must confess their sins to God. Indeed, this seems to have been precisely what his detractors wanted: the freedom to confess their sins either to God alone or to a neighbor without clerical interference.¹⁴⁹ Müllich's aim had been to deny the laity both of these privileges by insisting on private confession to a priest as the only divinely sanctioned form of confession.

After receiving the two magistrates' report,¹⁵⁰ the Council dispatched another team to the prior of the Franciscan monastery in Nürnberg.¹⁵¹ As is evident from its instructions to the delegation, the Council had already sided with Müllich's lay accusers. The magistrates had directed the team to relay to the friar's superior what they had found "inappropriate" in Müllich's sermons and to express to him their "earnest desire" that he suspend Müllich from his preaching duties and await further word from them.¹⁵² The superior himself could take up Müllich's office if he so desired.

When Müllich learned of the Council's decision to remove him from his office, he sent a formal petition to the magistrates, protesting that he had not been allowed to tell his side of the story. The friar complained that the Council had interviewed only those who had objected to his sermons. Müllich urged the magistrates also to listen to the "diligent parishioners, teachers, priests, nobles, and dutiful citizens" who had fully embraced his message.¹⁵³ He asked for a copy of the accusations that his detractors had made against him and also for an opportunity to respond to them. Finally, he requested that the Council allow only those who were both properly educated and sufficiently "non-partisan" (*unpartheyisch*) to determine whether his sermons were orthodox or not. Such fair-minded judges, he wrote, could be found at the imperial diet that Archduke Ferdinand had convened in Nürnberg.¹⁵⁴

The Council had no intention of bringing the “Mülich Affair” to the attention of the imperial estates. It already had its hands full trying to assure Ferdinand that despite the openly evangelical attitude and practices of many Nürnbergers (including several magistrates!), the city remained a loyal subject of the empire.¹⁵⁵ The last thing the Council needed now was to give Ferdinand and the anti-Lutheran princes yet another piece of evidence that demonstrated its sympathy with the new doctrine. The magistrates resolved to handle the situation themselves and reluctantly agreed to share with Mülich the findings of their delegation’s report.

A few weeks later Mülich sent a formal apology to the Council in which he defended the orthodoxy of his sermons. According to Mülich, his detractors had completely misunderstood his teaching on the Atonement. The friar argued that he had never limited the efficacy of Christ’s suffering in the way his accusers reported. Nor had he preached that human beings must atone for their sins through penitential acts. Indeed, he had emphasized against “a hostile doctrine” that Christ’s Passion had provided sufficient satisfaction for all human sins—original and actual.¹⁵⁶ Mülich wrote, “I was amazed at the allegation that I preached only original sin has been taken away through Christ’s suffering.”¹⁵⁷

The burghers’ confusion arose, Mülich explained, from their failure to understand the traditional distinction he had made between the guilt of sin and the penalty for sin.¹⁵⁸ The friar insisted that he had only urged his listeners to do penance for the “leftover” (*verloseten*) penalty for sin, that is, the partial tainting of human nature, not for original or actual sin, which were covered by Christ’s sacrifice.¹⁵⁹ Mülich admitted that he did not spell out this distinction between the guilt of sin and the penalty for sin in any great detail in his sermon.¹⁶⁰ Thus, when his auditors heard him say, “only original sin is taken away,” they mistakenly concluded that he had excluded actual sins from the purview of Christ’s suffering.¹⁶¹ Mülich objected that he never used the term “actual sins” (*wurcklichen sundth*); it was the creation of his accusers. He had simply wanted to exhort his listeners to do penance for the remaining penalty for sin. According to Mülich, it was this latter point about doing penance, more than any misunderstanding of his message, that caused some of his listeners to take offense at his sermon. He explained, “the flesh could not bear it when I began to press for confession and penance.”¹⁶²

By comparison with his defense of his first sermon, Müllich's comments on his second homily were not nearly so aggressive. Because all six interviewees had heard the sermon for themselves, their recollection of its content was relatively uniform and differed only slightly from the friar's own version in his apology. Müllich confirmed that the account given by his detractors accurately represented much of what he had preached. He added only that he had grounded his argument for the necessity of auricular confession primarily on Christ's own institution of it in the Gospels, not on the case from history. He also explained that his views on confession grew out of his theory of the Atonement, a significant comment. His insistence on the unique mediatory role of the priesthood in confession followed logically from his assertion that human beings must do penance for the remaining penalty of sin. For Müllich, confession to a priest was the most effective form of penance; it represented a unique opportunity for a priest to assess the confessant's moral "account" with God. The priest could calculate exactly how much additional penalty the confessant had incurred since his last confession and also how much of this penalty he had paid off through his penance.

Müllich's observation that his detractors had not fully grasped the intricacies of his doctrine was most likely accurate. His distinction between the guilt of sin and the penalty for sin, despite its importance for late medieval theology, appears to have eluded many of his auditors, just as the finer points of Luther's gospel likely did, including his support for private confession. However, Müllich's listeners were certainly correct to hear in his sermons a direct assault on the evangelical creed many of them had recently embraced. His statements about the Atonement, human nature, and confession amounted to a clear rejection of the new creed's central doctrine: justification by faith.¹⁶³ The simple artisans understood all too clearly that the friar expected them to subdue their corrupted nature before they could enter the Kingdom of Heaven. His whole purpose in preaching these sermons had been to exhort his listeners to pay off their remaining penalty for sin with their own moral strivings. He saw confession and other penitential acts as being the primary way to attain the moral purity that, in his mind, was essential to the process of salvation.¹⁶⁴

Unfortunately for Müllich, the Council was unmoved by his apology.¹⁶⁵ Faced with pressure both from within and without, the magistrates decided to expel the beleaguered friar from the city. Though

formal adoption of the Reformation still lay in the future, by the spring of 1524 the new faith had made significant headway in the imperial city, a fact Müllich could well attest.

Over the course of a few years Nürnbergers from all walks of life were exposed to evangelical Christianity and its scathing critique of traditional penitential religion. The majority of the imperial city's inhabitants found the new faith very appealing. It spoke to their long-term desire for total freedom from the *sacerdotium*, and also provided hope for a renewal of Christian society. Most important, Luther's gospel promised satiation of a spiritual appetite many had thought impossible to satisfy. Central to the new faith's appeal was its ability to undermine the traditional power of the keys, which many had come to see as the source of untold material and spiritual oppression. But Luther and his followers did not simply want to tear down; they also wished to build up. Creating a new evangelical version of the keys would prove a challenging undertaking, especially in Nürnberg.

Tentative Beginnings

The majority of Nürnbergers had stopped going to confession by 1524. They had interpreted the assault leveled by evangelical preachers and pamphleteers against the sacrament of penance as a sign that auricular confession had no place in a truly reformed version of Christianity. As we have seen, burghers like those who opposed Jeremias Müllich seized on Luther's negative statements about auricular confession, while largely ignoring his comments about its positive benefits. There were certainly some in the imperial city who were suspicious of the new spiritual freedom in the evangelical creed, and still others who were simply perplexed by it, but the majority embraced Luther's gospel and the liberation it promised from penitential religion. As Jeremias Müllich was leaving Nürnberg in mid-March of 1524, an observer who was still loyal to the old faith lamented,

in these parts the sincere faith in Christ is utterly cancelled; no respect is paid either to the Virgin Mary or to the saints. On the contrary, it is said that those who employ their aid sin mortally. They deride the papal rites, and call the relics of the saints bones of men who have been hanged. In Lent they eat meat openly. Confession is neglected, as they say it should be made only to God, and that auricular confession is buffoonery. They generally communicate under both forms. They make a laughing stock of Pope and cardinals, and other ambassadorial ecclesiastics, by means of paintings and other caricatures. In short, they consider Martin their enlightener, and think that until now they have been in darkness.¹

The evangelical creed had demonstrated an impressive ability to undermine the old faith, but already in the mid-1520s reformers in Nürnberg and other Lutheran strongholds were concerned about their movement's future trajectory. Wishing to protect against potential abuses of the new spiritual freedom, Luther and his followers sought to rein in the evangelical movement without breaking its spirit. Nowhere was this effort more evident than in the reformation of confession that began in Wittenberg and soon spread to Nürnberg and the rest of the emerging evangelical coalition in Germany.

Luther's railing against the sacrament of penance influenced the religious life of Wittenberg in ways he had not intended—people tried to abolish confession entirely.² His resolution of this unexpected consequence demonstrated how passionately he felt about retaining a modified form of the traditional practice. Luther had struggled mightily in confession as a monk, but his experience had not been completely negative. His strong support for a reformed version of confession grew out of the deep consolation he had received from the sacrament of penance, especially while Staupitz was his confessor.³ Behind the reformer's well-known disdain for the sacrament of penance lay a desire to redeem what he took to be the greatest boon God had provided to the troubled conscience: private confession. It alone enabled the gospel to be applied directly to the individual. Better than any other medium, it conveyed the vitally important *pro me* aspect of the gospel.

Despite the reformer's endorsement of confession in *The Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* and other writings, Wittenbergers began clamoring for the right to take communion without first confessing their sins to a priest. During Christmas 1521 Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, archdeacon of the All Saints Collegiate Church at Wittenberg and professor of theology at the city's university, accommodated their wishes: he welcomed unconfessed laypeople to the Eucharist, while Luther remained in seclusion at the Wartburg.⁴ Karlstadt also contributed to an outbreak of iconoclasm in Wittenberg with the publication of his *On the Abolition of Images* (1522).

When Luther received word about the dramatic changes Karlstadt had effected, he made a speedy return to his home city. In his *In-vocavit Sermons* of March 1522, Luther endeavored to slow the pace of reform in Wittenberg, citing his concern that radical change would

cause those with weak faith to stumble. The reformer said he would not force anyone to go to confession, but neither did he want the practice abolished. He insisted, "I will allow no one to take private confession from me and would not give it in exchange for all the wealth of the world. For I know what consolation and strength it has given me. No one knows what it can give unless he has struggled much and frequently with the devil. I would have been strangled by the devil long ago if confession had not sustained me."⁵ Luther acknowledged that confession need not be made to a priest; the important thing was to hear the words of absolution, whether from a layperson or cleric. "We must have much absolution," he argued, "so that we may strengthen our fearful consciences and despondent hearts against the devil. Therefore no one should forbid confession."⁶ Luther conceded that those with strong faith had no need of private confession, but he observed that few, including himself, possessed such unwavering trust in God.

One year later Luther preached a sermon on Green Thursday (that is, Maundy Thursday) in which he again assured his listeners that they could go to communion without confessing their sins to a priest beforehand. (Most had gone unconfessed to the Eucharist during Holy Week of the previous year.)⁷ But he also advised them that measures would have to be taken in the future to curb "the evil abuses" that were threatening the worthy reception of the sacrament.⁸ The prospect of laypeople participating in the Eucharist without sufficient preparation frightened Luther and his colleagues. The Apostle Paul had promised divine reprisal for such negligence (1 Corinthians 11:26–32); the religious leaders of Wittenberg believed him. Luther's proposed measures included an interview with a pastor in which each communicant would be asked about the moral condition of his heart, whether he knew what the Lord's Supper was, and why one should want to partake of it.⁹ The confession of sins was still strictly voluntary. Meanwhile, the reformer instructed members of Wittenberg's clergy to resurrect private confession in their churches.¹⁰

Toward the end of 1523 Luther took formal measures to institute the pre-communion interview he had discussed in his Green Thursday sermon. According to the reformer's *Form for the Mass and Communion*, a priest was to know the names and conduct of those who wanted to receive the Eucharist from him. He was to admit to the Lord's Supper only those who had given an account of their faith and

evidenced adequate understanding of the sacrament.¹¹ This examination was to take place annually for most people, but only once in a person's lifetime, or even never, if he possessed sufficient understanding. Luther reasoned that those who were educated and of high social standing were presumably aware of the rudiments of Christian faith.¹² Priests were to exclude only those who were living in open sin and refused to repent. Immediately before participating in the Lord's Supper, communicants were to stand in front of the congregation to gain its confirmation of their fitness to partake of Christ's body and blood. Private confession continued to be voluntary and was treated separately in the treatise.

The Wittenberg laity could participate in the Lord's Supper according to their own devotion from Christmas 1521 to Easter 1524, when Luther's *Form for the Mass* was formally implemented.¹³ During this period Wittenbergers experienced unprecedented freedom with respect to confession. But liberty without restraint was a foreign concept to leaders of the Reformation in Wittenberg, especially where the common folk were concerned. Luther and his circle of reformers feared that abuses of spiritual freedom would lead to anarchy or divine punishment, or both. Thus, while Wittenbergers were never again subjected to the moral interrogation of conscience typical of late medieval confession, after 1524 most of them were required to undergo an examination of faith and conduct. Like their late medieval predecessors, Wittenberg's new evangelical clergy served as gatekeepers to the Eucharist. The laity had to pass through the Lutheran confessional in order to participate in the Lord's Supper. Nürnbergers would soon embark on the same journey to balance freedom and discipline in the practice of confession. It would take them several decades to reach their intended end.

With the departure of the imperial governing bodies from Nürnberg in late April 1524, the leaders of the evangelical movement in the city took full advantage of the momentum they had gained during Holy Week. In early May, Wolfgang Volprecht, prior of the Nürnberg Augustinian order, celebrated the first German mass in the imperial city. In place of private confession he substituted a general confession and absolution of sin. In this way he hoped to prepare the laity to partake of the sacred mysteries without subjecting them again to the burdens of sacramental confession. The new mass opened with the general

confession of sin read by the priest on behalf of himself and the congregation:

I, a poor, miserable, and sinful human being, acknowledge to God my heavenly Father, to the Lord Jesus Christ my Savior, to you my brothers and sisters, and to the whole Christian community, that I, unfortunately, have sinned frequently and seriously against God my Lord, by disbelief and lack of trust, [and by] not loving him above all things and my neighbor as myself. This is readily apparent to me and causes me great sorrow in the depths of my heart. O Lord God, almighty Father, I, a poor sinner, remind you of your most gracious pledge and promise, where you promise forgiveness of sin through the blood of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us and poured out his blood for our forgiveness. The same Jesus Christ, my Lord, also spoke through his holy mouth that where two or three are gathered in his name he will be in their midst [Matthew 18:20], and, that what they ask from you in his name will be granted them [Matt. 18:19]. Therefore, we ask for forgiveness of our sins in his name.¹⁴

This confession was quite evangelical in tone. It emphasized sins of unbelief and stressed that forgiveness came through placing one's faith in the divine promise of absolution. The wording of the absolution that followed this general confession was even more revolutionary.

After the general confession of sin, the celebrant said to the congregation, "The Lord God says to us, 'according to your faith it will happen to you! Go forth in peace! Sin no more! Your sins are forgiven, pardoned, and remitted.'"¹⁵ He then pronounced a general absolution: "My dear brothers and sisters, God has had mercy on you and has forgiven us all our sins and will give us eternal life. Amen."¹⁶ There was no mention of the keys in the general absolution. Forgiveness for lay and cleric alike depended on personal appropriation of divine absolution through faith in the Savior's promise.

Volprecht did not invent general confession, still less was it the brainchild of the Reformation. It had long been a part of the traditional mass in Germany, a rare inclusion of the vernacular in the Latin liturgy.¹⁷ The extant forms for general confession, or *Offene Schuld*, constitute some of the oldest remnants of the German language we possess, a few even dating back to the Carolingian era.¹⁸ General confession typically took place after the sermon and before the celebration of the Eucharist, providing laypeople with a final opportunity

to prepare themselves for reception of the consecrated host. Though theologians debated its exact nature, by the beginning of the sixteenth century most held that general confession was not a sacrament and, at best, provided forgiveness for venial sins only.¹⁹ Evangelical reformers quickly adopted general confession as a way of confessing and absolving the laity without risking the alleged abuses of the sacrament of penance.²⁰ By removing offensive elements from the traditional formulas (for example, references to the saints and the Virgin Mary, along with the optative wording of the absolution), early Protestants transformed general confession into an acceptable evangelical ritual.

Volprecht's mass contained one additional provision to ensure worthy reception of the Lord's Supper: an exhortation that the celebrant was to read aloud immediately before communion. The exhortation, written by Andreas Osiander,²¹ encouraged those about to communicate to mark well that only a "hungry soul" could properly receive the sacrament. Only the one who acknowledged his sin, feared God's wrath and his own death, and hungered for righteousness could participate worthily. The exhortation then made it clear that no one could achieve such a state of worthiness; the one who examined himself found only sin and death where this holy hunger was to reside. The penitent could do nothing to help himself. But it was for this very reason that Christ had become man: to provide deliverance from humanity's debt of sin. Communicants were to see in the eucharistic bread and wine sure signs that Christ had given himself on their behalf. Those who trusted in Christ's promises of forgiveness and believed that he nourished them with his body and blood remained in eternal life.²²

Though only in use for one year, Volprecht's German mass stimulated an effort to reform the liturgical life of Nürnberg that culminated in the famous 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order. His substitution of general confession for private confession created a precedent in the imperial city that would later prove vexing for some of its leading theologians. At least one would argue that by itself, general confession provided neither the discipline nor the consolation that confessants required.

One month after Volprecht introduced his liturgical innovations, provosts Georg Peßler and Hektor Pömer responded with a more comprehensive series of their own changes that directly influenced the practice of confession. The provosts drew up nineteen articles to

guide them in governing the religious life of Nürnberg,²³ two of which dealt with the fate of confession. These two articles revealed that, as far as Peßler and Pömer were concerned, private confession was still an appropriate, though voluntary, part of their city's religious life. The first article stipulated that only vicars who heard confessions in accordance with the gospel would be allowed to serve as confessors.²⁴ That is, only those who understood their role in confession as servant instead of judge could hear confessions. Echoing Luther's *Form for the Mass* and Green Thursday sermon, both of which were printed in Nürnberg,²⁵ the third article required all who wanted to participate in the Eucharist to announce (*ansagen*) their intention to their pastor one day in advance.²⁶ However, there was no mention of an examination of faith. Other articles provided for communion to be given in both kinds to those who desired it along with the severe curtailment of traditional devotion. Those who insisted on celebrating anniversary masses could do so only in the city's monasteries.²⁷ The Council had already abolished indulgences and the traditional processions in 1523.²⁸ The last article asserted that the provosts were prepared to defend each of the preceding eighteen items should the bishop of Bamberg raise any objections to them.²⁹

The two provosts also approved a new order for worship in the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches.³⁰ Drawing upon Luther's *Form for the Mass*, the new order removed all references to the mass as a sacrifice and allowed the laity to communicate in both kinds. Unlike Volprecht's German mass, the new liturgy employed the vernacular sparingly. Only the gospel, the epistle, and the exhortation before communion, borrowed from Volprecht's order of worship, were to be read in both Latin and German. An earlier version had also included a general confession and absolution similar to Volprecht's,³¹ but both were dropped from the final version, perhaps owing to the influence of Osiander.³² Other clerics in the city's smaller churches retained general confession in their orders for worship.³³ Acting without prior approval from the Council, the two provosts implemented the new order for the two parish churches on June 5, 1524.

Though likely aware of the provosts' actions, the Nürnberg magistrates were nevertheless agitated by this challenge to their authority. After decades of costly negotiations with popes and bishops, the Council had no intentions of bequeathing the control it exercised over the city's religious life to a new class of priests, no matter how honor-

able their motives. The Council's posture toward the recent liturgical innovations was also affected by renewed pressure from Archduke Ferdinand and Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggi to enforce the Edict of Worms. Now residing in Regensburg, both had heard of the changes in Nürnberg and were threatening to rescind the city's historic privileges if it did not comply with their demands. At the end of June the Council sent a delegation to Regensburg to assure Ferdinand and Campeggi, Chieriegati's replacement, that the city's clergy had acted without its approval and that it still intended to observe the stipulations of the 1523 imperial recess until the estates again addressed the religious question at the upcoming diet in Speyer. A few weeks later, the Council sent a delegation with a similar message to the bishop of Bamberg. Meanwhile, it demanded an explanation from the city's clergy for their insubordination.

Osiander responded with a defense of the clergy's actions designed to address specific concerns raised by the Council.³⁴ He dedicated the majority of his apology to addressing the changes the provosts had made in the liturgy and also defended the abolition of masses for the dead,³⁵ changes that would have most affected common burghers. Significantly, the St. Lorenz preacher made no attempt to justify the absence of mandatory auricular confession. The Council had evidently not objected to this innovation.³⁶ Faced with the firm resolve of the clergy to uphold the recent liturgical and doctrinal changes, the Council relented, having accomplished its goal of reasserting its control over Nürnberg's religious life.

The bishop of Bamberg proved far less tolerant of the provosts' recent innovations. He complained to the delegation from the imperial city that Nürnberg's provosts had taught people "not to confess, pray, fast or many other things."³⁷ In September 1524 he summoned Peßler and Pömer, along with Wolfgang Volprecht, to appear before him in Bamberg. The three Nürnbergers reluctantly complied. At their interrogation the bishop voiced his disapproval over their recent practice of allowing the laity to communicate in both kinds. He also opposed the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy and protested the abolition of vigils, anniversary masses for the dead, and certain holy days. When the bishop inquired about the Nürnbergers' current policy on private confession, Volprecht and the two provosts replied, "we exhort no one to auricular confession, rather we have our assistants read a Christian exhortation before the reception of the sacra-

ment regardless of whether anyone has gone to confession or not.”³⁸ When questioned whether they recognized his jurisdiction over them, the clergymen told the bishop that they obeyed God and sought to submit to all people.³⁹ Frustrated by such disregard for his authority, the bishop excommunicated all three. However, as had been true of Lazarus Spengler a few years earlier, by this point neither the Nürnberg Council nor its clergy put much stock in the episcopal ban. The bishop’s attempt to exercise whatever fleeting influence he had over the imperial city only strengthened Nürnberg’s resolve to ignore his claims to spiritual overlordship. Peßler, Pömer, and Volprecht continued in their posts as before.

At the end of December 1524 a confrontation took place between the prior of Nürnberg’s Carthusian monastery, Blasius Stöckl, and several of the order’s monks that led to a significant change in the practice of confession in the imperial city. Stöckl had been accused by members of his order of advocating Lutheran doctrines, including disregard for auricular confession.⁴⁰ One of the monks had even tried to depose him. When the Council learned that the order planned to move Stöckl to another monastery, it objected, claiming that it alone, as the formal guardian of the Carthusians in Nürnberg, had the authority to make such decisions. Seizing the opportunity provided by the confrontation between Stöckl and his order, the Council proposed a public discussion of the issues separating the two parties. It decided to organize a colloquium at which the city’s evangelical preachers would square off against their Catholic counterparts from the Franciscan, Carmelite, and Dominican orders.⁴¹ This colloquium, rigged from the beginning to favor the evangelical cause, was to underscore the magistrates’ conviction that adherence to the scriptural principle—as specified in the 1523 imperial recess—logically led to acceptance of the evangelical creed. It was designed to create a consensus rather than reach a genuine compromise.⁴² The debate would also mark Nürnberg’s official acceptance of the new faith.

The Council formally convened the Nürnberg Colloquium on Religion (*Religionsgespräch*) on March 3, 1525. In addition to the leading magistrates, members of the Great Council and a large number of burghers assembled in the town hall to witness the spectacle. Outside, crowds of Nürnbergers strained to hear news of the discussion’s progress. The Council appointed the provosts of the St. Sebald and St.

Lorenz churches, along with the abbot of the St. Egidien monastery, and Johann Graumann (called Poliander), the cathedral preacher in Würzburg, to preside over the discussion. All were known to be sympathetic to the evangelical faith. Christoph Scheurl, who by now had serious reservations about the new creed, served as moderator.

The Catholic contingency had very little hope for success at the colloquium. The staunchly evangelical Osiander had drawn up the articles⁴³ for the “friendly discussion,”⁴⁴ and it soon became clear that only one perspective would be tolerated.⁴⁵ Though the preachers in the Franciscan, Carmelite, and Dominican orders endeavored to defend their cause, they soon recognized, as did everyone else, that the outcome of the colloquium was already a foregone conclusion. When they declined to proceed further with the debate, burghers waiting outside cried out for someone to throw the monks out of the windows to them—they would “dispute” with the Romanists on their own terms. Lazarus Spengler asserted that if the Council had not provided the monks with an armed escort back to their monasteries, the crowd would have “torn them to pieces.”⁴⁶ Thoroughly disgusted with the whole affair, members of the Catholic party did not even bother showing up for the last day of the debate.⁴⁷ They realized that the evangelical movement had already won Nürnberg. Though we possess no formal record of the Council’s decision at the end of the colloquium, it soon became clear which side had prevailed. Based on the magistrates’ actions immediately after the conference, their resolve to embrace the evangelical creed is quite obvious.

Shortly after the conclusion of the colloquium the magistrates made a series of decisions that had important implications for the practice of confession in Nürnberg.⁴⁸ Acting on the recommendation of Spengler, Osiander, and several jurists, the Council prohibited members of the Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite orders from preaching and hearing confessions in the imperial city until they could support the beliefs they had espoused at the colloquium from Scripture.⁴⁹ Christoph Scheurl had recommended this course of action as punishment for the monks’ refusal to attend the final session of the colloquium. Beyond this, he thought it important for the common folk to hear only one version of the gospel, even if it was not the one he personally favored.⁵⁰ According to Lazarus Spengler, the Council had convened the colloquium at least in part to resolve the burghers’ quandary about whether they should continue to confess their sins to

the city's monks and friars when their parish priests discouraged it.⁵¹ Spengler had been concerned all along to put an end to the spread of "old human errors" in confession, which he maintained were burdening the consciences of the common folk.⁵²

The decision of the Council to deny the three orders their traditional privilege marked the end of a centuries-long rivalry between Nürnberg's secular and regular clergy for jurisdiction over burghers' souls, a contest that had been played out all over the empire since mendicants first won the right to hear confessions in 1221. The new, exclusively secular clergy, firmly under the control of the Council, were the decisive victors.

In addition to forbidding members of the Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite orders from acting as preachers and confessors for the Nürnberg laity, the Council also prohibited them from fulfilling these traditional offices in Nürnberg's convents.⁵³ In their place it appointed evangelical clergy,⁵⁴ a move that many of the city's nuns protested vigorously. Caritas Pirckheimer, the learned abbess of the St. Clara Convent and sister to Willibald, saw it as an unholy intrusion into the very souls of the nuns.⁵⁵ She and her fellow nuns refused to reveal the deepest secrets of their hearts to apostates. What guarantee did they have that what they uncovered in confession by day would not become the topic of their Lutheran confessor's pillow talk with his wife by night?⁵⁶ She concluded that it would be better for her and her nuns to confess to God alone who was "merciful, faithful, and discreet."⁵⁷

Pirckheimer took her case to the Council through Kaspar Nützel, her convent's guardian. The magistrates eventually agreed to allow the nuns to choose their own confessors but reserved the right to reject any who did not meet with their approval.⁵⁸ Several decades later an old nun revealed that a friar from Bamberg had surreptitiously ministered confession and the Eucharist to the nuns throughout the Reformation era.⁵⁹ The Council had suspected this already in 1525.⁶⁰

At the same time it was contending with formidable nuns like Caritas Pirckheimer, the Council also had to respond to complaints from cloistered women who lived outside the city's walls. On April 17, the magistrates wrote a letter to the bishop of Eichstätt defending their decision to install an evangelical confessor in the Pillenreuth convent,⁶¹ a nunnery that lay in the bishop's diocese but was under the control of Nürnberg.⁶² Echoing the protests of their sisters in the imperial city, the Pillenreuth nuns had complained to the bishop that the

Council was trying to force them to convert to the new creed. The magistrates assured the bishop that they had no such intentions. They argued that faith was a gift from God, not something that could be produced through coercive means. Using language reminiscent of Luther's Two-Kingdoms Doctrine, the Council asserted, "We in no way dare to penetrate into [God's] office, divine kingdom, and jurisdiction over the human heart and soul, which [he] has reserved for himself. This would amount to an effort to diminish his glory as our Creator and almighty God."⁶³ The nuns were not obliged to reveal their sins to the new confessor. In fact, they did not have to confess to anyone if they so desired. Nevertheless, as a divinely ordained governing authority the magistrates felt obliged to care for both the material and spiritual needs of their subjects. If they neglected this duty, they could expect divine retribution. Therefore the Council defended its right to provide all its subjects with God's Word "from which the human soul and conscience must live, be governed, ruled, and maintained."⁶⁴ It vowed not to intrude into the nuns' souls but also asserted its divine responsibility to equip the sisters with God's life-giving Word.

This was precisely the stance the Council would soon take on confession in Nürnberg. It would provide its subjects with well-trained confessors from whom they could seek consolation and instruction if they so wished, but none would be forced to do so. As the Council sought to discipline the new spiritual freedom, it was careful not to intrude into lay consciences, nor would it allow its confessors to do so. The conscience was to be left free to embrace or reject the Word, which alone had right of access to it.

Despite its ruling against the three mendicant orders in Nürnberg, the Council still expected that many of the city's inhabitants would go to confession during the upcoming Holy Week. Five days before the beginning of Lent, the magistrates ordered several of the city's religious leaders to inform their congregations that there would be confessors available in their churches during the next several weeks.⁶⁵ The Council also instructed both provosts to examine all their vicars to ensure that they were fit to hear confessions. Those who did not have "a Christian understanding" of confession were to be barred from serving as confessors.⁶⁶

These provisions notwithstanding, many Nürnbergers did not go to

confession during Holy Week 1525. They had taken the actions of the Council against the mendicants and the evangelical preachers' assault on the sacrament of penance to mean that auricular confession no longer had a legitimate role in true Christian piety.⁶⁷ It is also unlikely that those Nürnbergers who went to the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches took the time to inform their pastors of their desire to communicate. Having been freed from the traditional duty to confess, they were hesitant to submit to a new clerical yoke. General confession continued to be the laity's preferred way of preparing for the Lord's Supper.

Nürnbergers were encouraged in this direction by none other than their evangelical pastors. Though most supported private confession on a voluntary basis, nearly all continued to rely on general confession and absolution to prepare their congregations for the Eucharist. In the winter of 1525–1526, Wenzeslaus Linck, now preacher in Nürnberg's New Hospital Church, introduced a new form for general confession to his congregation that soon became very popular in the imperial city.⁶⁸ Immediately after reading out Osiander's exhortation to communicants, a clergyman was to recite the following call to confession:

And because we have all sinned and need God's grace, humble your hearts before God the Lord, confess your sins and transgressions with heartfelt love and desire for his divine grace and help, with firm belief and trust in his gracious promise, and forgive from your hearts your neighbors so that your heavenly Father will also forgive you your sins and transgressions. If you do this, I will then release you from all of your sins on behalf of the holy Christian Church and by the command and promise of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said, "He whose sins you forgive, to him they are forgiven," in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.⁶⁹

Osiander would soon object to the pairing of this form for general confession with his exhortation. But for the time being, the two remained connected.

One year after the Council had adopted the Reformation, it was still concerned about the status of private confession in the imperial city. In mid-February 1526 the Council ordered a joint commission of magistrates and clergymen to investigate the issue.⁷⁰ The Council was aware that there was much confusion among the city's inhabitants regarding confession, and it wanted to remedy the situation as quickly as possible—it was already two days into Lent.⁷¹ Having expelled

the mendicant orders, the Council was also faced with the problem of finding enough suitable confessors for the upcoming holy season. Concerned to ensure that Nürnberg's inhabitants participated worthily in the Lord's Supper, and thus avoided incurring divine wrath on the city, the magistrates wanted advice on how to institute a modified version of private confession that would provide a bulwark against impiety, while also respecting lay consciences.⁷²

The commission informed the Council that, contrary to popular opinion, the city's preachers had never advocated the abolition of private confession; they had only criticized its abuses.⁷³ In order to make it clear to the city's inhabitants that they should still go to confession, the commission recommended that the magistrates again order lower clergy—this time chaplains—to serve as confessors for the upcoming Lenten season. The task of these confessors would be “to console the weak through good instruction.”⁷⁴ As in the previous year the preachers would examine the confessors to make sure that they were fit to carry out their duties. The magistrates and clergy readily admitted that many chaplains needed both instruction in the new faith and serious reformation of character.⁷⁵ The commission further advised the Council that all inhabitants of the city, including common people, should be free to choose their own confessors. Finally, the magistrates and the clergy recommended that no one should be forced to go to confession; the new evangelical version of confession was for those whose hearts moved them to it.⁷⁶

The magistrates followed the commission's recommendations and provided confessors in the city's churches for those who desired instruction and counsel.⁷⁷ As per the requirements of the new church order, those wanting to communicate were required to notify their pastors, although there was still no mandatory examination of faith as in Wittenberg.⁷⁸ The private confession of sins continued to be a strictly voluntary matter. The Council also required all the city's churches to include general confession in their liturgies.⁷⁹ Though the provosts' order for worship, which had become Nürnberg's official liturgy in the meantime,⁸⁰ included no form for general confession, it soon became apparent to the Council that most of the city's churches, including St. Sebald's, had adopted one.⁸¹ Finding nothing objectionable in the custom, the Council, as part of its overall efforts in March 1526 to reform confession, formally recognized the practice, which was quickly becoming a commonplace in evangelical liturgies. Early Lutheran church orders in Nördlingen (1522), Allstedt (1524), Stras-

bourg (1524), Naumburg (1527), Braunschweig (1528), and Hamburg (1529) also had formulas for general confession.⁸² As he had done earlier, Osiander opposed this move, having intended for his exhortation to stand alone. However, his provost, Hektor Pömer, persuaded him to submit to the Council's wishes. Nürnberg's leading preacher held his tongue, but there is good reason to suspect that he did not allow general confession to be practiced in St. Lorenz Church.⁸³

By 1526 the evangelical movement had effected revolutionary changes in Nürnberg. Inspired by Luther's version of the gospel, the imperial city's magistrates, theologians, and common artisans abolished the penitential religion that had been so prominent on the eve of the Reformation. Believing they had been duped by a greedy and diabolical clergy into believing that God reckoned like a merchant, Nürnbergers rejected the whole edifice of late medieval penitential piety in favor of a religion that emphasized simple trust in a generous though hidden divine Father. As Steven Ozment has argued, this belief led to a significant decline in the visible manifestation of religion in the city's life.⁸⁴ Gone were the sacred processions, masses of all kinds, many holy days, the veneration of saints, and the sale of relics and indulgences. Four of the city's monasteries were closed, the monks either transferred to another city, pensioned off, or converted to the new faith. The Council prohibited the remaining two—the Franciscan and Dominican monasteries—from admitting novices or in any way ministering to the laity. The city's two convents remained open, but the magistrates forbade them from admitting new members. The Council also assumed responsibility for poor relief and set up a secular marriage court. All the members of the clergy became tax-paying citizens of the imperial city.⁸⁵ Most important, magistrates and preachers allowed the sacrament of penance, the symbolic center of traditional Christianity, to fall out of use. Laypeople quickly adapted to the new custom of relying on general confession and absolution to prepare them for the Lord's Supper. In the mid-1520s Nürnberg's theologians, under the supervision of the Council, followed Luther's lead and began developing an evangelical version of private confession, one that reflected the imperial city's opposition to penitential forms of Christianity. It proved a challenging endeavor.

In many ways the Council's attitude toward the new version of con-

fession reflected well its understanding of its spiritual obligations in the imperial city. It exerted considerable effort to ensure that its subjects had ample opportunity to hear the divine Word but stopped well short of trespassing into the human soul. Like Luther and the Nürnberg pamphleteers, the Council believed this was God's jurisdiction. Confessors in the new order were to serve penitents by consoling and instructing them with the divine promise of forgiveness; no longer were they allowed to judge the severity of penitents' moral offenses and determine whether they were worthy of temporary pardon. From the beginning the Council made a point of erecting a barrier around the individual conscience in confession that was intended to withstand the efforts of anyone, lay or cleric, Catholic or evangelical, who sought to penetrate it. Magistrates and burghers were united in wanting to avoid new clerical yokes. The Council's involvement in the development of Lutheran private confession provides a striking piece of counterevidence to the thesis that Nürnberg's magistrates adopted the Reformation because it legitimated their desire for enhanced control of burghers' lives and consciences.

Gerald Strauss once attributed the appeal of evangelical Christianity among Nürnberg magistrates to the confirmation they found in Lutheranism for their own frustrated attempts to reform human nature in the imperial city.⁸⁶ The extreme emphasis on human sinfulness in evangelical theology corresponded exactly to how they viewed the wayward subjects whom God had called them to govern. Strauss explained, "this doctrine with its suspicion of human motives and its negation of the natural instincts was the theological counterpart of what municipal politicians assumed . . . about the individual and what may be asked of him as a citizen: denial of the self-seeking drives of his natural proclivities and submission to a larger purpose and greater power than his own. Neither in religion nor in politics could the natural man be justified."⁸⁷ The Lutheran doctrine of human depravity provided the Nürnberg Council with a "comprehensive ideology" that furnished it with divine sanction for its attempts to control its subjects through ever more intrusive laws.⁸⁸

Strauss had no direct evidence for this thesis, no statements from members of the Council on why they adopted the new faith. None exist. It is exceedingly difficult to assess the personal beliefs of Nürnberg's magistrates with respect to the Reformation. Individual members of the Council refrained from articulating their personal views on

the evangelical movement for posterity's sake. None wrote a treatise like Spengler's *Apology* or Sachs's *Wittenberg Nightingale*. Council members were sworn to uphold the view of the majority in all matters; open dissension was both bad form and a breach of faith. It is even difficult to be certain about how many of the twenty-six mayors were firmly evangelical and how many were still loyal to the old faith. Based on testimonies of those who knew the members of the Council, we can assert with confidence that the two most powerful men in Nürnberg, the treasurers, were evangelical, and three of the remaining five Elders were Catholic.⁸⁹ There is similar evidence to suggest that one of the Junior Mayors was definitely Catholic.⁹⁰ One scholar has argued that by 1525 ten of the remaining twenty mayors were evangelical, four were Catholic, and six were somewhere between the two camps. This would mean that twelve of the twenty-six mayors were evangelical, eight were Catholic, and six were undecided. But these figures are only educated guesses and leave a large margin of error, owing to the significant number of magistrates in the "undecided" category, for whom there are virtually no clues as to their position on the Reformation.⁹¹ Depending on where the six alleged fence-sitters came down, and just how conservative the Catholic members were, the makeup of the Council could very well have been overwhelmingly evangelical, with a minority of Catholics who agreed—perhaps grudgingly—to go along with the majority. This seems to have been the scenario by the time of the 1525 colloquium. There were certainly few signs of wavering in the Council's administration of the debate. But the fact remains that we have no statement from the magistrates as to why they adopted the new faith, and we know that at least a portion of them likely opposed the decision.⁹²

Strauss detected a possible link between the Council's frustration at being unable to control the lives of its subjects and the alleged misanthropy of the evangelical creed. In his mind the two corresponded neatly and provided a plausible explanation of the magistrates' decision to adopt the Reformation.⁹³ However, there is a more obvious explanation for the appeal of the Reformation to the Nürnberg Council. As we have seen, when viewed as a collective body, what undoubtedly drew the Nürnberg Council to the Reformation was the justification it provided for the magistrates' long-term quest to become sole master of the imperial city's religious life. The Reformation allowed the Nürnberg Council to achieve full victory over the *sacerdotium*, something both evangelical and Catholic magistrates could celebrate.

This desire to claim further control over the imperial city's religious life need not appear sinister, as Strauss has argued. As the following chapters will make clear, the Nürnberg Council could use its new religious authority to protect those under its care, and not simply to dominate them. There is no clearer evidence for this fact than the magistrates' policy on confession. Just as they had adopted the evangelical movement to counter unwanted clerical intrusions into their city, so Nürnberg's magistrates would use their new religious authority to shield burghers from unsolicited priestly incursions into their consciences. Viewed from the perspective of confession, the Nürnberg Council appears far less interested in controlling its subjects than Strauss has maintained. Inhabitants of the imperial city certainly preferred the rule of "secular bishops" to that of their former spiritual overlord when it came to confession. They were happy the Council had taken the keys under its protective custody. It now remained to be seen what the magistrates would do with them.

An Evangelical Dilemma

Leaders of the evangelical movement created a very thorny problem for themselves: they rejected traditional penitential Christianity but sought to retain private confession, the symbolic center of the old faith. The proposed reformation of the sacrament of penance notwithstanding, this move left Lutherans in a very awkward position, both theologically and politically. It is little wonder that in Lutheran strongholds like Nürnberg it took several years to develop a distinctively evangelical version of private confession—and even longer to sell it to common burghers. Had leaders of the evangelical movement been content, like other Protestants, with simply abolishing private confession, they could have avoided this problem altogether. But evangelical reformers and their rulers were unwilling to take this course of action. With Luther, they saw in private confession an unparalleled source of consolation and also an extremely effective tool for moral discipline. Beyond this, most Lutheran theologians believed the Bible offered support for private confession, if only indirectly. They took Christ's giving of the keys to Peter as proof that God intended for the Church to bind and loose sins, and thought private confession was a legitimate venue in which to exercise this authority, though it was by no means the only one. While Lutheran reformers acknowledged that there was no specific warrant in the Scriptures for private confession, they still maintained that the practice violated neither the spirit nor the letter of the Word, as long as it was properly re-

formed. Whereas Zwinglians and, later, Calvinists would insist that only those practices that had definite biblical support could be retained, Lutherans took a different view of the matter. They argued that only those practices that clearly went against the manifest teaching of the Bible had to be abolished. This difference in hermeneutics goes a long way in explaining why Lutherans kept private confession and Reformed Protestants did not. Leaders of the evangelical movement thus had to find a way of reconciling their antipenitential and antisacerdotal version of Christianity with their desire to retain a modified version of the sacrament of penance. Having taken a few cautious steps in this direction in the mid-1520s, Lutheran reformers and magistrates began taking more serious strides in the latter part of the decade.

One of the main reasons leaders of the evangelical movement began pushing harder for private confession in the late 1520s is that they were becoming convinced that a good portion of the common folk was mired in ignorance and impiety. This perception, along with the need to institutionalize the Reformation, contributed to an increased emphasis on discipline and order. The concern that Luther and his followers had voiced in the early 1520s about abuses of spiritual freedom only deepened as the decade wore on. Lay behavior at the Lord's Supper provided evidence to confirm these heightened anxieties. When evangelical magistrates and theologians observed the casual way many laypeople participated in the Eucharist, they worried that the cancer of antinomianism had infiltrated their movement. Nürnberg and its surrounding environs had their fair share of such reports, compiled primarily by church visitation teams. Before we turn to these sources, it is worth pausing to note that preventing abuse of spiritual freedom was not a purely elite concern. Common laypeople also complained about those who had adopted the new faith for self-fish reasons. They agreed that many wanted gospel without law, liberty without discipline.

Already in 1524 Hans Sachs was producing pamphlets that addressed the apparent lack of moral progress among adherents of the evangelical creed. In one, suggestively entitled "A Conversation of an Evangelical Christian with a Lutheran in Which the Scandalous Conduct of Some Who Call Themselves Lutheran Is Demonstrated and Rebuked in a Brotherly Manner,"¹ the famous shoemaker chas-

tised those who discredited the evangelical faith by attacking the old Church with foul language:

All you who call yourselves Lutheran are seeking in that pious man, Luther, a cloak for your indecency. You do not conduct yourselves according to his teaching. Although Luther revealed Christian liberty for the freeing of the poor imprisoned conscience, he has also frequently warned in his writings and sermons . . . that we should guard ourselves against deceitful, scandalous, and unchristian deeds so that the gospel and Word of God are not discredited by someone's fanatic raving.²

Sachs urged his readers to become true evangelical Christians by following the moral precepts laid out in the gospels, especially the Golden Rule.

In another pamphlet by Sachs, a Catholic priest, Romanus, charges that the new faith has provided no antidote to the driving force behind mercantilism, greed.³ The priest attacks the practice of Lutheran merchants who buy up goods in time of plenty and then sell them at a handsome profit when they are in scarce supply. "Is that being a good evangelical?"⁴ The Lutheran, a merchant named Reichenburger, makes no attempt to refute the priest. "What shall I answer? The truth is open to every eye."⁵ Though he insists that a person can both follow the gospel and be wealthy, Reichenburger agrees that many of his colleagues will be unable to squeeze camel-like through the needle's eye on Judgment Day. Nevertheless, he has not given up on the evangelical movement. He asserts, "I am of good hope that, in time, God's Word will dash greed to the ground along with evil business dealings and openly shameful deeds."⁶

Romanus then presses the merchant harder, maintaining that evangelical preaching has produced no observable improvement at all among Lutherans. Reichenburger counters by insisting that it will take some time to uproot the "deceitful teaching and man-made commands" of the old faith and replace them with God's Word. Only when the latter has been firmly planted in souls will they produce good fruit. Reichenburger concedes that many have converted to the new faith simply to escape the rigors of traditional Christianity (for example, fasting, going on pilgrimages, and confessing), but insists that such acts of penance are not the good works the gospel commands; loving one's neighbor is. Still, Reichenburger admits that very few display this true fruit of the gospel. "Of those who call upon the

gospel only the smallest part are Christians. The saying still holds true: ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matt. 24[:14]).”⁷ Reichenburger argues that abuses of spiritual freedom are inevitable because there are so few true Christians in any generation.

In the concluding section of this dialogue Reichenburger goes on the offensive. Having granted that many who call themselves evangelical are not worthy of the name, he maintains that even those who truly believe the gospel continue to struggle with sin all their lives. “Falling and rising up again occur throughout one’s life . . . The righteous person falls seven times in a day until finally, at his death, the old Adam—his flesh and blood—is completely defeated. Only then comes a perfectly spiritual life. We are not to expect it here in this body of sin.”⁸ He also insists that truly evangelical good works are not like those of traditional penitential religion. They are not readily observable and are far more difficult to bring forth. True works of charity occur without fanfare, in quietness and simplicity. As a parting shot, Reichenburger says that because Catholics know they cannot oppose the teaching of Lutherans, they attack their sinful lives.⁹ But such *ad hominem* arguments in no way threaten the validity of the new faith: it recognizes that sin will continue to plague Christians throughout their earthly lives.

Sachs defended the new faith as best anyone could against charges of antinomianism. By arguing that true growth in virtue took time and that even sincere Christians sinned, he provided a plausible, if not completely satisfying, refutation of anti-Lutheran polemicists. Still, the shoemaker was clearly disappointed that the new faith had not produced more palpable changes in the behavior of his contemporaries. His pamphlets were indictments of Lutheran impiety as well as apologies for the evangelical faith. He warned that God would deal severely with those who made a mockery of the new faith through their ungodly behavior.¹⁰ Sachs was well aware of the need for greater discipline among early Lutherans. Whether or not he thought a modified version of private confession could remedy this situation is another matter. Although he never commented directly on the issue, he almost certainly opposed it. Never an advocate of reform from above, he was likely wary of his city returning to the popish fold.¹¹ Nürnberg’s theologians and magistrates, on the other hand, thought private confession an excellent way to stem the (perceived) growing tide of impiety in the imperial city and its surrounding environs.

During Lent 1527 the Nürnberg Council again required the city's inhabitants to register with their pastors before taking communion, this time for the expressed purpose of demonstrating their knowledge of the new faith.¹² Communicants were to evidence a rudimentary knowledge of the evangelical creed along with an understanding of the sacrament's benefits. The magistrates believed that many Nürnbergers were going to the Lord's Supper simply out of habit, having very little awareness of what they were doing. They feared that such ignorance would lead to unworthy reception of the Eucharist and thus incur divine wrath. In addition to Luther's *Form for the Mass* (1523), evangelical church orders in Hamburg (1529) and Riga (1530) also required a pre-communion examination.¹³ The practice later became a commonplace in Lutheran manuals for worship after it was included in the Augsburg Confession.¹⁴ It is within this context of a growing concern for discipline that the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation took place.

In early summer 1528 the Nürnberg Council joined with its neighbor, George the Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, in a visitation of the churches in their respective regions. George, who had recently taken over control of the margraviate owing to the death of his brother Casimir, was a strong supporter of the Reformation, a fact that earned him the title "George the Pious." For decades the imperial city and the margraves of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach had been at odds with each other, primarily because Nürnberg and its twenty-five-square-mile buffer zone divided the margraviate in two and therefore had always frustrated Hohenzollern hopes for territorial unity. The proposed visitation inaugurated a new era of harmony between the two former enemies that was founded on their shared commitment to the evangelical faith.¹⁵ It also provided an ideal opportunity for civil and religious authorities from both regions to develop their views on confession and church discipline.

Lazarus Spengler had pushed for the visitation as a means of halting the spread of false doctrine among the common folk and of promoting unity between the two regions.¹⁶ Margrave George had officially adopted the Reformation in 1528, and Spengler was hoping to make their common faith the basis for a new alliance against both regional bishops and the Swabian League.¹⁷ Luther and Melancthon had already conducted a similar visitation in Saxony, and the guidebook for their inspection, *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish*

Priests in Electoral Saxony (1528), had recently been published in Nürnberg.¹⁸

Representatives from Nürnberg and Ansbach met in the town of Schwabach on June 14, 1528, to draw up guidelines for the proposed visitation.¹⁹ Together they approved the *Ansbacher Forty Questions*, written by the margrave's theologians, and an explication of key doctrinal issues assembled in its final form by Osiander.²⁰ (The former provided questions pastors and laypeople could be asked during the visitation, the latter a measure by which responses could be judged.)²¹ Both documents bore a clear resemblance to the Saxon *Instructions for the Visitors*, though they were less stern in tone.²² The meeting in Schwabach also produced a provisional church order to provide further guidance for the visitation.²³ The 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order would later serve as the basis for the influential 1533 Franconian guide for doctrine and worship.

Although he received considerable opposition both from nearby bishops and Archduke Ferdinand,²⁴ the margrave commenced the visitation of his lands in August 1528.²⁵ The visitation of Brandenburg-Ansbach lasted from August 15 to November 13, while the examination of pastors from Brandenburg-Kulmbach ran from January to July of 1529.²⁶ The visitation of the towns and villages belonging to Nürnberg lasted from September 3 to October 22, 1528, while an examination of the city itself took place in spring 1529.²⁷

The 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation provided leaders of the Reformation in both territories with an opportunity to define in concrete terms what an evangelical understanding of private confession entailed. The new ritual was already considered a legitimate part of Lutheran Christianity, even though no one had spelled out exactly how it was to be conducted. The Nürnberg and Brandenburg theologians sought to articulate as best they could the emerging consensus on how evangelical Christians should understand and practice private confession. As they endeavored to do so, leaders of the visitation were especially careful to distinguish the new ritual from the sacrament of penance. Keenly aware of the need to discipline the laity, the theologians were nonetheless reluctant to resort to "popish" ways of enforcing conformity. These dual concerns for discipline and freedom were reflected in their statements about confession.

One of the *Ansbacher Forty Questions* asked pastors to define "what a Christian [and] necessary penance, confession, absolution, and satisfaction for sin were."²⁸ In the section of the Nürnberg articles

of faith entitled “Concerning Christian Penance,” Osiander articulated what evangelical pastors were to know about these topics. Contrary to what “papists” taught, Christian penance did not entail making satisfaction for sin through confession and other penitential acts.²⁹ Penance was a means of grace, not a way to earn merit from God.³⁰ Osiander insisted that only “the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ” could atone for human sin.³¹ Luther and Melancthon had argued much the same in their *Instructions for the Visitors*.³²

Osiander maintained that auricular confession was not commanded by God and therefore could not be required of penitents.³³ Elsewhere in the *Articles of Doctrine* he affirmed that communicants should acknowledge their sins before participating in the Lord’s Supper, but said nothing about this confession having to be made to a priest.³⁴ The traditional belief that one had to confess all of one’s sins to a priest in order to be forgiven was an example of the pernicious *Menschenlehre* that had infiltrated Christendom.³⁵ The only confession required in Scripture was an acknowledgment that one’s nature and all its fruit were evil, and that human beings possessed no righteousness apart from Christ himself.³⁶ True penance, accordingly, was “to have sorrow for known sins, to fear God’s wrath, and to seek help.”³⁷ The 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order required only that laypeople register with their pastors before taking communion, demonstrate their knowledge of the new faith to him,³⁸ and articulate why they wanted to participate in the sacrament.³⁹

This emphasis on understanding the new creed was a hallmark of Lutheran private confession from the beginning. It was a logical outgrowth of evangelical soteriology: salvation by faith alone assumed a certain level of familiarity with central Lutheran doctrines, among them, human depravity, the adequacy of Christ’s suffering, and the nature of justifying faith. Similarly, medieval theories of justification, which required works, led naturally to the examination of conscience and conduct that was so integral to the sacrament of penance. Lutherans expected growth in Christian virtue to follow from true faith, but good works were always seen as the fruit of belief in the gospel. Therefore it was essential for evangelical confessors to make sure the laity possessed the necessary theological foundation for this justifying faith.

The first Protestants believed that a basic understanding of the Lutheran faith was essential not only for salvation, but also for worthy participation in the Lord’s Supper, a conviction that would soon initi-

ate an effort of unprecedented scope to educate the simple folk about the basics of evangelical Christianity. Sorrow for sin was also crucial to preparation for communion, but Lutherans insisted it did not merit grace. Furthermore, they categorically denied that the clergy had either the right or responsibility to elicit feelings of remorse from the laity in confession. The human conscience was under God's jurisdiction alone; any intrusion into it was a trespass of divine boundaries. Lutherans thought the examination of faith far less meddlesome than the traditional interrogation of conscience. The former left the laity unmolested in conscience, which for Protestants was at once the most essential and most vulnerable part of the human psyche.

Nevertheless, the *Articles of Doctrine* still insisted that pastors played a crucial role in moving their parishioners to true penance. They did this not by interrogating penitents in confession but by preaching repentance to them in their sermons.⁴⁰ It was the pastor's responsibility to confront his flock with God's law, which, in turn, would produce true sorrow for sin.⁴¹ The evangelical version of private confession thus sought to keep the clergy at an arm's length from lay consciences, even as it promoted moral discipline.

The *Articles of Doctrine* defined the keys of the Church as "the office to bind and loose sins, not to make new laws," and affirmed that all pastors had this authority, which they were to use according to God's Word.⁴² Significantly, there was no indication that the laity also possessed the keys. Proper use of the binding and loosing authority meant pronouncing forgiveness of sin to those "fearful consciences" (*ploden Gewissen*) who could not obtain the certainty of absolution they required through a sermon, baptism, or the Lord's Supper, each of which also offered forgiveness of sins.⁴³ Such persons were to request private absolution from their pastors so that they could receive consolation for their troubled souls.⁴⁴ It was only when a layperson specifically asked his pastor to confess and absolve him privately that an evangelical pastor could employ the power of the keys in its more traditional usage. Osiander made it clear that in such cases pastors were to act as advocates, not judges. The layperson was to decide what sins he revealed to his pastor; it was not necessary for him to enumerate all of them. The pastor needed only inquire after the penitent's faith, making sure that the layperson understood and believed the gospel.⁴⁵ Scriptural use of the keys meant that the clergy absolved only those who had true faith.⁴⁶

Osiander displayed similar restraint in his treatment of the ban. He

maintained that the clergy possessed the authority to bar sinners from the sacrament, but insisted that “one should use the ban in order to improve and not destroy souls.”⁴⁷ Pastors could only ban a layperson if they could prove to him from the Bible exactly how he had transgressed God’s law.⁴⁸ Luther and Melanchthon, although in favor of retaining the ban, had argued in the *Instructions for the Visitors* that pastors should warn someone several times before barring him from the sacrament. In such cases the banned person was still allowed to attend sermons, as Luther had stipulated in his *Sermon on the Ban*.⁴⁹ The 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order further required that pastors had to consult civil authorities before they could bar a layperson from the sacrament.⁵⁰ The imperial city’s clergy had objected to this decision, but the magistrates, acting on the recommendation of their jurists, insisted that they should have final say in matters of ecclesiastical discipline.⁵¹ In other words, the Council now had ultimate possession of the binding key, a position for which Marsilius of Padua had argued two centuries earlier in the *Defender of the Peace*.

The treatment of penance, confession, absolution, and the ban in the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation reflected the central dilemma of the German Reformation itself at this stage in its development: how to enforce moral discipline without damaging spiritual freedom. The visitation itself must be seen as an effort to enforce a stricter adherence to the new faith, especially among those who lived in rural areas. The Reformation expected far more out of common burghers and peasants in terms of religious understanding than the old faith ever had. It sought to achieve a level of doctrinal and moral conformity among the simple folk to which late medieval Christianity never aspired. At the same time, efforts like the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation also promoted a creed that allowed for greater lay autonomy than had been possible under the old Church, especially with regard to confession. The evangelical clergy pushed harder than their Catholic counterparts had for a religiously informed laity, but they also showed greater restraint than their predecessors had in the courtroom of conscience. More beholden to civil magistrates than the old clergy had been, evangelical pastors had to learn to cooperate with lay secular authorities in order to achieve the reforms they desired. The Nürnberg Council made sure that the clergy avoided lording it over lay consciences, even as it sup-

ported its preachers in their endeavor to promote greater religious and moral conformity.

The records of the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation are only partially extant. What remains of the original protocol gives precious few insights into the religious life of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach and Nürnberg, with only a handful of direct references to the practice of confession. The sources for the visitation of the towns and villages that belonged to the imperial city are especially sparse.⁵² By comparison, the sources from the Brandenburg visitation in Ansbach provide better insight into the religious life of the region's towns and villages, though they are still lacking when compared to later visitations.⁵³ As in the Nürnberg visitation, there were several reports of pastors still celebrating the traditional mass,⁵⁴ while only a few seem to have adopted the new order for worship.⁵⁵ The traditional sacrament of penance was also still in use in many communities. Several pastors demanded that laypeople make confession before taking communion, though not all insisted on the traditional *Beichtpfennig*.⁵⁶ The laity in the small town of Buchaym complained that their pastor, Petrus Nobis, refused to absolve those who did not make a complete confession to him of all the sins they had committed that year. They said the pastor had frightened many away from the sacrament when he had preached on Good Friday that those who attempted to communicate unconfessed would eat and drink to their own damnation.⁵⁷ The visitors attempted to curtail such "abuses," though we cannot be sure with what effect.⁵⁸

It was not until spring of the following year that the Nürnberg visitation committee could examine the imperial city's clergy. In May 1529 the chaplains of the St. Sebald, St. Lorenz, and New Hospital churches were summoned to St. Egidien Church to be interviewed. While the extant sources make no specific reference to confession, the comments about the overall competence of the chaplains are important because it was these members of the lower clergy who functioned as the city's confessors after the Reformation. The visitors undoubtedly had this office in mind when they exhorted each of the chaplains to study diligently so that he could provide confessants with sound instruction from God's Word.⁵⁹

The visitation committee was generally pleased with the chaplains in the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches, finding fault with only two of the fourteen it interviewed.⁶⁰ By contrast, it was satisfied with only

two of the five chaplains at the New Hospital Church, and then only moderately so. However, the visitors were not greatly alarmed by this outcome because the chaplains in the New Hospital Church had less contact with the laity than did their counterparts in the city's two main churches.⁶¹ One of the New Hospital chaplains who received a passing grade was Andreas Döber, the author of one of Nürnberg's first guides for an evangelical mass.⁶² That someone so enthusiastic for the Reformation received only a mediocre score suggests how demanding evangelical visitation committees could be.

The visitation revealed what many had expected—the (magisterial) Reformation had made little headway in the countryside. It was still a predominantly urban phenomenon. With respect to confession, there was a discrepancy between urban and rural practices. The sacrament of penance was still in effect in many towns and villages, while chaplains in Nürnberg were growing accustomed to the new version of confession. The extant sources do not reveal how often inhabitants of the imperial city actually sought out these reformed confessors. Based on evidence from a few years later, it is likely the chaplains were rarely busy.⁶³ It would take some time before lay converts to the new faith would become used to the idea of an evangelical private confession.

At the same time leaders of the evangelical movement were conducting church visitations, they were also beginning to produce a whole raft of catechisms designed to educate the common folk in the basics of the new faith. Like the church visitations, the new evangelical catechisms sought to enforce greater discipline among the common folk, without infringing on their spiritual liberty. This balancing act was especially apparent in the catechisms' treatment of confession.

Before the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg church visitation had been concluded, Wenzeslaus Linck, preacher in the New Hospital Church, published a catechism designed to assist lower clergy and house fathers in bringing up children in the new faith. His experience during the visitation had convinced him of the need for such an instruction booklet. Linck's *Instruction for Children Who Want to Go to the Lord's Table* went through two editions, both of which appeared in Nürnberg.⁶⁴ The first was printed in 1528, one year before Luther published his *Small Catechism* and *German Catechism* (more popularly known as the *Large Catechism*), both of which also appeared in the imperial city. Linck's catechism was specifically intended to teach

children how to prepare themselves for communion, the first such manual of its kind in Lutheran Germany.⁶⁵

The Nürnberg preacher opened his catechism by asserting that two things were necessary for worthy participation in the Lord's Supper: faith and self-examination. Communicants must first believe Christ's promise to give them his body and blood in the Eucharist as a testament to his grace and their eternal inheritance. They were to regard the sacrament as a sure sign that they belonged to Christ and through him had access to all the riches of heaven.⁶⁶ Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in order to assure his followers that in baptism they had already received the forgiveness of all their sins. Linck explained that "although the external baptism happens just once and then is over, the work which God accomplishes through it remains forever."⁶⁷ The Eucharist was a confirmation of the grace one had received in baptism. It helped one overcome any doubts about one's status before God. Linck wrote, "because it is difficult to believe such a great thing—namely, that it should happen thus to me, a poor sinner and insignificant human being—for this reason, I receive the external sign together with the word of Christ for the confirming and strengthening of my faith so that I may be sure that it does happen thus to me."⁶⁸

Following the Apostle Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 11, Linck instructed communicants to examine themselves before they participated in the Lord's Supper in order to avoid eating and drinking to their own harm. This proving of oneself entailed embracing one's ongoing need for divine mercy. Linck exhorted communicants to avoid esteeming themselves more highly than was appropriate. They were not to judge or scorn others and should not be factious. Rather, they were to acknowledge how needy and miserable they were, how deeply they were entangled in sin, how weak was their faith, and how inestimable was their moral debt to God.⁶⁹ This kind of self-examination would produce a true hunger for the divine grace available in the Lord's Supper. Linck explained to his young readers that just as the scent of sauerkraut stimulated their desire to eat, so their recognition of their sinfulness and weakness would elicit a longing for God's mercy.⁷⁰ Linck's was a very German catechism!

Significantly, there was no mention of private confession in Linck's catechism. He intended for laypeople to prepare themselves for communion, to act as their own confessors. Confident that they could receive confirmation of divine forgiveness through general confession

and absolution, Linck, who had authored a form for general confession, apparently saw no reason to exhort burghers to private confession. This does not mean that the Nürnberg preacher was opposed to the new ritual. Indeed, as part of the 1526 commission he had strongly recommended it. He would have urged any who required additional instruction or consolation to seek out one of the city's evangelical chaplains whom he had helped train. Linck's catechism reveals that private confession was still a strictly voluntary matter. In the minds of Lutheran preachers, it was distinct from the mandatory examination of faith. The latter represented discipline, the former, liberty and consolation. Together they symbolized the desire of evangelical theologians and magistrates to provide for both as they instituted the Reformation.

In addition to Linck's catechism, Nürnberg clergy also had access to Luther's *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism* from 1529 on.⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that in this period locally produced manuals of religious instruction were often more popular than even those of the Wittenberg reformer. Linck's catechism may well have enjoyed wider use in the imperial city than did Luther's.⁷²

Like the New Hospital preacher, Luther had been moved to write his shorter manual by the "pathetic [and] miserable need" he had recently witnessed as a member of a visitation commission.⁷³ During the Saxon visitation the Wittenberg reformer had found that both clerics and laypeople were ignorant of the faith, owing both to their own negligence and to the lack of a standard catechism. Luther sternly warned readers of the *Small Catechism* that refusing to learn the essentials of the new faith was tantamount to denying Christ. Any who did so were to be barred from the sacrament, forbidden from acting as godparents, and deprived of all Christian freedom. Parents and masters were to refuse food and drink to negligent children or servants, and secular authorities were instructed to expel the negligent from their lands, sending them back to the pope and the devil where they belonged.⁷⁴ Trust in Christ could not be compelled, but all could be expected to understand at least the rudiments of the evangelical creed.

The version of *The Small Catechism* that appeared in Nürnberg included a section on confession entitled "A Brief Form for Confessing to a Priest Intended for Simple Folk."⁷⁵ In comparison with Linck's catechism, Luther's placed much greater emphasis on private confession and absolution. His "Brief Form" consisted of two sample confessions along with questions about the Lord's Supper and its relation-

ship to private absolution. While Luther clearly had the traditional connection between confession and Eucharist in mind, he presented confession first and foremost as a means of consolation for troubled consciences, not primarily as a prerequisite for communion. Thus the first sample confession instructed the penitent to acknowledge his sinfulness and then to seek encouragement from his priest in time of need:

I, a poor human being, confess and lament to you before God my Lord that I am a sinful and vulnerable person. I do not keep God's commands. I do not believe the gospel fully. I do nothing good. I cannot endure adversity. In particular I have committed this or that particular sin which weighs down my conscience. Therefore, I ask that you would speak forgiveness to me on behalf of God and console me with God's Word.⁷⁶

The second sample confession was similarly intended for use by laypeople with troubled souls:

I confess before God and you that I am a poor sinner and that I am full of all the sins of unbelief and blasphemy against God. I sense also that God's Word is not bringing forth fruit in me. I hear it and do not receive it earnestly. I do not show my neighbor the works of love. I am angry, hateful, and jealous toward him. I am impatient, greedy, and disposed to all manner of spite. For this reason my heart and conscience are heavy-laden. I want very much to be set free from my sins. I ask that you would strengthen my small faith and console my weak conscience through the divine Word and promise.⁷⁷

The instructions on confession concluded by asking penitents why they wanted to receive the sacrament. The layperson was to respond, "because I want to strengthen my soul with God's Word and sign, and receive grace."⁷⁸ The catechism then stated, "But you have received forgiveness of sins in confession," to which the penitent was to answer, "What harm can it do? I want to receive God's sign along with the Word, and it is all the better to receive God's Word frequently."⁷⁹ Much as he had argued in the 1522 *Invocavit Sermons*, Luther here stressed that human beings could never have enough absolution.

The Nürnberg clergy had access to a fuller explanation of the Wittenberg reformer's theology of confession in the *Large Catechism*, which included a section entitled "A Brief Exhortation to Confession."⁸⁰ Earlier in the catechism Luther had explained that sin would remain in the Christian until he was clothed with immortality at the resurrection of the dead. He wrote, "we are never without sin on ac-

count of our flesh which we still must drag around with us. Therefore, everything in Christianity is arranged so that we can obtain daily forgiveness of sins through word and sign to console and restore our conscience as long as we live here.”⁸¹ As we have seen, for Luther confession was one of the most important sources of mercy for the troubled conscience.

After assuring readers that they would never again be forced to confess all their sins to a priest—something the reformer considered to be the most burdensome yoke ever laid upon humanity—Luther argued that too many people had been abusing this new freedom:⁸² “They take [it] to mean that they should or may no longer confess.”⁸³ Echoing the *Small Catechism*, the Wittenberg reformer maintained that such “pigs” should be sent back to the papists and not allowed to live under the gospel. Only those who were responsible with the new evangelical liberty were to be allowed to enjoy its benefits. In short, Luther argued for a disciplined freedom.

The catechism spelled out three kinds of confession: confession to God, confession to one’s neighbor, and a “secret confession” (*heimliche Beichte*) to a “brother” in time of particular need. The first two, which could be found in the Lord’s Prayer, were to occur on a daily basis because human beings constantly sinned against God and neighbor. The third had been ordained by God to assist Christians whose consciences were burdened with guilt. Christ himself had given Christendom the ability to speak absolution and had commanded that this office be used to release Christians from sin. Luther explained, “Where there is a heart that feels its sins and desires consolation, it has here a sure refuge where it may find God’s Word and hear that God unbinds and frees it from sin through a human being.”⁸⁴

This secret confession consisted in two parts: the penitent’s work and God’s work. The former entailed a simple sorrow for sins and a desire for consolation. Divine absolution, which was the real essence of confession, comprised the latter.⁸⁵ Luther refused to command such confession but also insisted that, in view of humanity’s great need and God’s abundant mercy, any who abandoned it could not be considered true Christians. Such people despised what no Christian could despise, divine absolution, and therefore were to be denied access to the Lord’s Supper.⁸⁶ Luther concluded, “when I exhort a person to confession, I am doing nothing else than exhorting him to be a Christian.”⁸⁷

The *Large Catechism* did not state explicitly that secret confessions had to be made to a priest. Unlike the *Small Catechism*, it referred to the confessor simply as “a brother.” Still, while leaving open the possibility of lay absolution, Luther clearly had the traditional encounter between penitent and priest in mind. Both catechisms were designed to help laypeople perform better in the examination of faith they had to undergo before communion. Though Luther had been careful in the past to distinguish this interrogation from private confession, the mandatory examination provided the most convenient opportunity for laypeople to confess their sins and receive absolution from their pastors. The argument that the common folk should continue seeking private absolution makes little sense if Luther was thinking primarily of lay absolution. His argument was based on a readily observable event, laypeople not going to their pastors for confession. When Luther fantasized in the *Large Catechism* that a layperson’s hunger for forgiveness would compel “us” to pronounce absolution to him, he clearly had evangelical pastors in mind.⁸⁸ In a later version of the *Small Catechism* Luther included a revised section on confession that also implied confessors should be clerics. In the sample confessions the penitent was to refer to his confessor as “worthy dear sir,” hardly an appellation for use with a fellow layperson.⁸⁹ Lay absolution, while still valid in theory, was soon overshadowed by confession to a pastor.

This was certainly the case in Nürnberg. According to the *Defense of the Reformation* written by Lazarus Spengler in 1528—a treatise designed to encourage the spread of the Reformation elsewhere in Germany by holding up Nürnberg as a model⁹⁰—the imperial city’s preachers had placed “Christian and intelligent confessors” in their parishes to whom laypeople could confess their sins if they so desired.⁹¹ Spengler made no mention of lay confession or absolution. In keeping with evangelical practice, confessors were present to instruct and console troubled consciences, not to interrogate them. Although Spengler was a strong proponent of private confession, he insisted that no one in the imperial city was forced to seek it. “God the Almighty wants only a willing giver and therefore accepts no forced service.”⁹² General confession and the mandatory pre-communion examination of faith and conduct continued to be the primary means of ecclesiastical discipline in Nürnberg. Private confession, though encouraged, remained voluntary, a symbol of early evangelical liberty in the emerging Lutheran order.

The New Rite

The effort to develop a uniquely evangelical version of private confession reached an important milestone in the early 1530s, when cities like Nürnberg began publishing Lutheran church orders, which contained formal statements on the new ritual. The appearance of these evangelical guides for worship and belief, which had the force of law in Lutheran Germany, provided reformers with an opportunity to consolidate their earlier disparate statements about private confession into a uniform policy on how the new ritual was to be understood and practiced. Under the direction of evangelical princes and magistrates, Lutheran theologians produced a version of private confession that sought to balance competing concerns for discipline and consolation, all the while refraining from placing the common laity and, especially, the civil authorities under a new clerical yoke. The Nürnberg Council was especially vigilant in ensuring that the new ritual reflected the current state of affairs in the imperial city with respect to religious authority. The magistrates would insist on their divine right to retain hold of the binding key, even as the city's preachers tried to find ways to recover at least a portion of their former authority. In time one preacher would attempt to seize the binding key from the Council and thus provoke the German Reformation's most important debate about confession and absolution. But first Nürnberg's theologians had to reach a consensus on the new ritual, a task that proved more challenging than any had anticipated.

It soon became clear to Margrave George and the Nürnberg Council that in order to establish the Reformation on a firm footing in their respective territories they needed to provide their clergy with a detailed evangelical guide for worship and doctrine. As we have seen, the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order had been intended for temporary use only. It was far too brief to explain fully the new doctrines and practices the clergy were expected to adopt. In 1529 the Nürnberg magistrates sought to remedy this situation by creating a commission to draw up a new church order for Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach and Nürnberg. The commission was composed of four Nürnberg preachers—Andreas Osiander, Wenzeslaus Linck, Dominikus Schleuppner, and George Koberer, the preacher at the Carthusian Church—who worked closely with Council secretary Lazarus Spengler. The commission's initial drafts would lay the foundation for one of the most influential and enduring church orders in early modern Germany.

Though hesitant at first to take on the project, Osiander soon tackled it with his characteristic zeal. Preferring to work alone, the Nürnberg preacher produced a draft in January 1530. He was particularly concerned in his church order to clarify the concepts of *Menschenlehre* and Christian freedom, believing that a misunderstanding of them had caused much disorder. Osiander explained that abolishing human doctrines in no way excused laypeople from their God-given responsibility to obey worldly authorities. Evangelical reformers wanted to rid the Church of man-made laws that impeded salvation, but they had no desire to liberate the world from either human government or sound ecclesiastical statutes. *Menschenlehre* referred exclusively to beliefs and practices in the spiritual kingdom that bound consciences to human laws for the earning of salvation. An example of such a law was the traditional requirement that one had to confess all of one's sins to a priest in order to be forgiven. Osiander maintained that "God himself has nowhere commanded or ordered it, therefore it is a human teaching that one in no way should accept."¹ Only the Word of God rightly preached could free one from inner bondage to such human doctrines.

Christian freedom, accordingly, was a spiritual liberty that one gained by believing the gospel. It entailed freedom from having to observe *Menschenlehre*—and the Mosaic law—in order to earn salvation. When one trusted in Christ's atoning sacrifice one was released from the requirements of both. In this way Christian freedom and hu-

man doctrines were intimately linked. Where one increased, the other necessarily decreased.² The true Christian continued to obey the Ten Commandments, other legitimate ecclesiastical mandates, and the civil law, but out of love for God and neighbor rather than out of fear of damnation.³

Osiander's treatment of confession reflected his concern to balance Christian discipline and spiritual freedom. He did so by separating his explanation of confession and absolution from his discussion of the mandatory pre-communion registration and examination of faith. Though Osiander likely envisioned confession and the examination of faith taking place at the same time, he wanted to ensure that confession remained voluntary and that laypeople could seek it apart from their preparation for communion. He wished to prevent his evangelical version of private confession from becoming a new kind of Lutheran *Menschenlehre* that laypeople felt compelled to perform in order to obtain forgiveness. Echoing his earlier statements about confession, the Nürnberg preacher instructed pastors to encourage their parishioners to ask for private absolution when they had a troubled conscience. His church order urged laypeople to trust their pastor's declaration of forgiveness because Christ himself had given his ministers authority to pronounce absolution in his name.⁴ There was no need for penitents to confess all their sins because a pastor could forgive hidden sins as well as those the layperson chose to reveal. The important thing was for penitents to believe that Christ forgave them through their pastor's words. Osiander's absolution formula reflected this emphasis on the penitent's faith in Christ's promise:

The Almighty God has had mercy on you and through the most holy suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ he forgives you all your sin. And I as a called servant of the Christian Church by the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ proclaim to you this forgiveness of all your sin in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Go in peace! May it be to you as you believe. [*Dir geschee, wie du glaubst.*]⁵

Osiander also included a section on the ban in his church order. He emphasized that the binding authority of the keys could only be used when a person's sin was well known to everyone in the community. Secret sins against God were not proper grounds for excommunication.⁶ In keeping with the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order, Osiander required pastors to inform the secular authority about

their intentions to ban someone, a concession that must have pained him considerably. Though his version of the ban was significantly weaker than its late medieval counterpart, Osiander maintained that it was still harsher than any worldly punishment because it entailed the retention of sins.⁷

Lazarus Spengler was not happy with Osiander's draft, thinking it placed undue emphasis on Christian freedom.⁸ Therefore the Council secretary passed on the preacher's draft to the other members of the commission and, acting on his own authority, instructed them to produce their own version. Koberer took the lead in this endeavor, and along with Linck and Schleuppner had an alternative church order ready by mid-March. This second draft adopted a preface that Spengler had prepared for the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order, which devoted more time to discussions of law and discipline than Osiander's version had.⁹ Still, when it came to confession, the Nürnberg preachers followed their colleague's prescriptions almost to the letter, including separate treatments of confession and the examination of faith. The only significant difference between the preachers' handling of confession and Osiander's was the inclusion of an additional formula for absolution that emphasized the need for moral improvement in the forgiven penitent's life:

The almighty and eternally merciful God forgives you your sin and I by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of the holy Church pronounce you free, liberated, and released from all of your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Go forth and sin no more, rather seek to improve yourself without end. May God help you! Amen.¹⁰

Spengler urged Osiander to accept his colleagues' church order, but the St. Lorenz preacher, still bitter due to the rejection of his draft, refused. In June 1530 Spengler reluctantly sent both drafts to Margrave George and his theologians in Ansbach for comment, though the Council secretary made it clear that they should focus their efforts on the joint draft, not on Osiander's, which soon fell by the wayside.¹¹

In the same month the Nürnberg Council postponed any further work on the church order owing to the impending Diet of Augsburg. The magistrates initially sent two of their members to Augsburg to represent Nürnberg at the diet and later dispatched Osiander, a jurist, and

two additional members to assist the first envoys.¹² In an effort to assure the emperor of its continued loyalty, the Council refused to grant Luther asylum in Nürnberg during the diet. So important was the diet to the Nürnberg magistrates that they established their own postal system between Augsburg and the imperial city—an early modern “pony express”—that would enable them to receive news of proceedings at the diet within two days.¹³

The diet officially opened on June 20, 1530, with Charles V, fresh from concluding treaties with Pope Clement VII and French King Francis I, presiding. The evangelical contingent came to the diet armed with a confession of faith that had been prepared by Philip Melanchthon. The Augsburg Confession, as Melanchthon’s statement of faith came to be known, was largely an effort to separate the Wittenberg movement from the Swiss and “radical” versions of Protestantism and to present Lutheranism as a valid expression of Christianity that was still part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Melanchthon’s confession clearly articulated many of the important differences between evangelical beliefs and those of the late medieval Church, but it also avoided some of the more divisive issues like universal priesthood and papal supremacy in an effort to obtain the approval of the staunchly Catholic emperor.¹⁴

With regard to private confession, Melanchthon asserted in Article XI that Lutherans “teach that private absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible to do so according to the Psalm [19:12]: ‘Who can understand his errors?’”¹⁵ The Augsburg Confession affirmed in Article XII, “Of Repentance,” that those who fell into sin after baptism could be forgiven by “returning to repentance.” According to Melanchthon, true repentance consisted of two parts: contrition, or “terrors smiting the conscience through knowledge of sin,” and faith, awakened by the gospel or word of absolution “that believes, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven.” It was faith that “comforts the conscience and delivers it from terrors.”¹⁶ The Augsburg Confession insisted that good works were bound to follow from such faith, but maintained that they could not be seen as meriting forgiveness. Melanchthon was also careful to separate out the Lutheran position on repentance from that of the Anabaptists, who believed that a true Christian could never lose the Holy Spirit through sinning.¹⁷ For Lutherans temporary forfeiture of grace was a distinct possibility, one that made private absolution all the more important.

In his discussion of the abuses of the old Church Melanchthon asserted that “confession in the churches is not abolished among us; for it is not usual to give the body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved.” The statement of faith further emphasized that “our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by God’s command. The power of the keys is set forth in its beauty, and they are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences.” Melanchthon again said that an enumeration of sins was neither necessary nor possible in confession and went on to quote Chrysostom to the effect that laypeople should open the deepest recesses of their souls to God alone. Private confession was a human institution, but “on account of the great benefit of absolution, and because it is otherwise useful to the conscience, confession is retained among us.”¹⁸ As with Osiander, Melanchthon presented the mandatory pre-communion interview as a means of discipline, while voluntary confession for him was a source of consolation. The former ensured order, the latter, liberty. Both were essential to Lutheranism in 1530.

Melanchthon nowhere specifically referred to confession or absolution as a sacrament, but he did treat them immediately after the articles on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and just before a general statement about the sacraments. He likely chose not to say how many sacraments he thought there were to avoid provoking further disagreements with the adherents of the traditional faith. In keeping with the evangelical position on confession, Melanchthon insisted that the practice was still in use among Lutherans but primarily owing to the spiritual benefit of absolution. Nürnberg joined the imperial city Reutlingen and the evangelical princes, including Margrave George, in signing Melanchthon’s statement of faith.

The emperor flatly rejected the Augsburg Confession. He informed the Lutherans that they had to accept the *Confutation*—a Catholic response to the Lutheran confession—and return to the old Church or suffer his wrath. Among the requirements of the *Confutation* was that the sacrament of penance be practiced according to the guidelines of Lateran IV.¹⁹ The framers of the *Confutation*, who included Johann Eck, allowed that it was impossible to enumerate all sins but still insisted that laypeople should diligently seek to recall all transgressions they could. They also disagreed strongly with Melanchthon’s bipartite understanding of repentance, and in its place posited the traditional

threefold division of contrition, confession, and satisfaction.²⁰ The authors of the *Confutation* argued that faith necessarily preceded repentance because there could be no sorrow for sin without a firm belief in God's justice and mercy.²¹

Although the irenic Melanchthon made several attempts to reach a compromise with imperial and papal representatives, in the end he achieved no workable settlement. This outcome pleased the Nürnberg Council and especially its outspoken secretary, who feared that the "pious, peace-loving Melanchthon" might sacrifice too much in an effort to appease the enemies of the gospel.²² The Lutherans refused to accept the *Confutation*, asserting that it in no way demonstrated that the Augsburg Confession was unscriptural, as adherents of the traditional faith claimed. For his part, Charles V informed the evangelical estates on September 22 that they had until April 15, 1531, to return to the Catholic fold, at which point a formal Church council would be convened. This decision nullified the recesses of the former imperial diets that Nürnberg and other evangelical strongholds had used so skillfully to protect the new faith.

The Lutherans found the Augsburg recess unacceptable and in order to express their displeasure had Melanchthon prepare a treatise reaffirming their support for the Augsburg Confession. Melanchthon's *Apology* provided an exhaustive critique of those articles in the *Confutation* with which Lutherans took issue. Its treatment of confession and repentance was especially thorough.²³ Melanchthon discussed the whole Catholic penitential system—everything from degrees of sorrow to indulgences to the necessity of making a complete confession—and demonstrated where he found it wanting. He asserted that more than anything else, it had been Luther's doctrine of absolution that had brought the reformer "the highest commendation from all good men, since it shows consciences sure and firm consolation; because previously the entire power of absolution . . . had been kept suppressed by doctrines concerning works, since the sophists and monks taught nothing of faith and free remission."²⁴ The *Apology* refused to sanction "the torture of the Summists," who required laypeople to confess all their sins.²⁵ Melanchthon further argued that "all good men of all ranks, and also of the theological rank, undoubtedly confess that before the writings of Luther appeared, the doctrine of repentance was very much confused." Before Luther, no one, not even the best of the theologians, could explain exactly how the sacrament

of penance mediated forgiveness to human beings.²⁶ After Luther, Christendom finally saw that faith was the only sure means to absolution.

Melanchthon again argued that contrition and faith were the two essential components of repentance. He asserted that “the two chief works of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified.”²⁷ God accomplished the former through the preaching of the law, the latter through the proclamation of the gospel. Melanchthon also made explicit in the *Apology* what had been only implicit in the Augsburg Confession—absolution was a sacrament. He stated, “the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak.”²⁸ The section of the *Apology* dealing with confession and satisfaction concluded by asserting,

if good men will compare our doctrine [of repentance] with the very confused discussions of our adversaries, they will perceive that the adversaries have omitted the doctrine concerning faith justifying and consoling godly hearts. They will also see that the adversaries invent many things concerning the merits of attrition, concerning the endless enumeration of offenses, [and] concerning satisfactions; they say things agreeing neither with human nor divine law, and which not even the adversaries themselves can satisfactorily explain.²⁹

Melanchthon had discarded his penchant for peacemaking, at least for a while.

The Diet of Augsburg concluded on November 19 with the original recess still in force. The *Apology* had been unable to dissuade the emperor from his previous position. He again gave the Lutherans six months to recant their errors or suffer the consequences.³⁰ As it turned out, followers of the new faith would live in relative security for several years after the diet had concluded.

Immediately following the Diet of Augsburg any further progress on the Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order was halted by the desire of evangelical leaders, including Margrave George and the Nürnberg Council, for a single Protestant order of worship. Internal divisions among the members of the newly formed Schmalkald League—most

notably on the Lord's Supper—soon made such a project unfeasible,³¹ though the Nürnberg magistrates maintained an interest in it until the closing months of 1531. George had given up on the idea much earlier.³² Both the margrave and the Nürnberg Council eventually refused to join the Schmalkald League, thinking it unwise to provoke an armed confrontation with the emperor, even though they were fervent devotees of the new faith. As was typical of many cities and principalities in sixteenth-century Germany, concern for local security frequently trumped all other considerations, no matter how pious.

Convinced that there would be no unified evangelical church order, Margrave George began moving ahead with the creation of a new Brandenburg-Nürnberg guide for worship and belief. To this end he instructed his theologians to review the Nürnberg draft. The margrave also invited Johannes Brenz, the well-known reformer from Schwäbisch Hall, to assist them. It was Brenz who made the issue of church discipline a central point of debate in the ongoing endeavor of Brandenburg and Nürnberg to produce a new church order.

The Swabisch reformer persuaded the margrave's theologians to call for the inclusion of a *synodus* in the church order, a quasi-judicial body of theologians and jurists to be appointed by the secular government. Its primary function was to conduct annual visitations of rural parishes during which it would hold court and mete out punishments in the form of fines and excommunication for moral transgressions. Brenz believed that because secular authorities were only interested in punishing sins that caused public offense, many transgressions went unchecked. He maintained that even where there were laws against private sins like envy, hatred, fornication, and gluttony, they were rarely enforced.³³ The *synodus* was intended to address those sins not covered by secular laws and to help enforce those laws that already existed. Brenz had proposed a similar body in Schwäbisch Hall, though his efforts there would eventually come to naught.³⁴

The Schwäbisch reformer also persuaded the margrave's theologians that the secular government should appoint a committee of ten or twelve theologians to administer the new church order. This *senatus presbyterorum* would be charged with handling all questions of doctrine and ceremony. Brenz reasoned that both the margrave and the Nürnberg Council were already burdened with many secular concerns and would welcome the assistance of such a body.³⁵ Given the skeptical attitude of evangelical rulers toward ecclesio-judicial courts in general, this hope was rather naïve.

The Ansbach theologians sent their comments on the Nürnberg draft church order to the imperial city's Council in March 1531. When the Nürnberg theologians responded two months later, they singled out Brenz's proposed institutions of ecclesiastical discipline for criticism.³⁶ They argued that there was no evidence in the Scriptures that the Church could use fines and penalties to punish sinners. The clergy could only employ the ban as defined in the Nürnberg draft to reprimand transgressors (that is, they could only deny sinners access to the Lord's Supper). All other punishment of moral indiscretions was to be left up to the secular authority. The imperial city's theologians maintained that it had been a mistake for the Church to assume the roles of lawgiver and judge in the past, offices that belonged to secular magistrates alone. Now that most rulers were Christian, there was even less reason for clergy to lay claim to this authority. To do so would entail overstepping their divinely ordained jurisdiction.³⁷

As Marsilius of Padua had done in the fourteenth century, the Nürnberg theologians blamed the abuses of the late medieval Church on its pretensions to worldly authority. The heresy of indulgences, along with the belief in works righteousness, had resulted largely from the Church's misuse of its spiritual authority for worldly gain. The Nürnberg theologians expressed the fear so prevalent in the German Reformation that unchecked ecclesiastical authority could have diabolical consequences.³⁸ They also voiced the corollary of this concern, that the Church should not be burdened with enforcing secular justice because this would divert it from its true mission, preaching the gospel.³⁹ In spite of their desire to promote moral discipline, the imperial city's theologians, like its magistrates, were wary of giving too much rein to the likes of Brenz. As with freedom, discipline had to be limited to be of benefit. Both concerns continued to inform the reformation of the keys in Nürnberg.

The imperial city's preachers liked the idea of conducting yearly visitations, but thought such examinations would provide more accurate information on rural parish life if they were unannounced.⁴⁰ Nürnberg's theologians also wanted the emphasis of the visitations to be on correcting false doctrine rather than on punishing moral transgressions. Supervision of the visitations was to be placed in the hands of superintendents who were to report all ethical violations to the Council. These overseers of doctrine and practice had come to replace bishops in the emerging Lutheran ecclesiastical hierarchy and were usu-

ally appointed by secular magistrates.⁴¹ Errors of belief were to be referred by the superintendents to a special commission of theologians that could be called a *senatus presbyterorum*.⁴² A few weeks later, having reviewed this response, the Ansbach theologians again tried to persuade their Nürnberg colleagues to adopt Brenz's position on church discipline, but their efforts met with no success.⁴³ The imperial city's preachers realized that the days of such ecclesiastical courts were gone for good.

Meanwhile, the Nürnberg Council reviewed the proposed church order again and began to have serious questions about the articles that dealt with the ban and the mandatory registration of communicants.⁴⁴ The two issues naturally went together because a primary goal of the pre-communion registration was to provide the clergy with the opportunity to bar the unworthy from the sacrament. The magistrates were concerned that both articles gave the clergy too much authority over lay consciences and also infringed on their own jurisdiction. On May 30, 1531, they asked the city's jurists and provosts for a written opinion on the matter.⁴⁵ This move convinced the city's theologians that they could not afford to yield any more ground to the Council. They feared that their already constricted jurisdiction would soon be nonexistent.

The jurists were divided in their response to the two disputed articles. Though most favored retaining both the registration for communicants and the ban, Christoph Scheurl, Nürnberg's leading jurist, was deeply skeptical about both.⁴⁶ He affirmed his support in principle for the registration of communicants and private confession. Indeed, Scheurl, who remained committed to the old faith, asserted that the whole matter would have been much easier to deal with if the Nürnberg laity had understood "that we are not all priests, that confession is a good and necessary thing, that faith alone does not absolve nor make one worthy to receive the sacrament, and that whores and rogues will not possess the highest place in heaven."⁴⁷ The jurist also agreed that, ideally, the city's theologians should be able to prevent the unworthy from partaking of the Eucharist.

However, Scheurl had grave misgivings about returning the ban to a new class of clerics anxious to reestablish moral discipline in the city. Mindful of past abuses, he argued that if Nürnberg's theologians were granted the authority to exclude sinners from the sacrament,

“they would have the [power of] the ban over us again and we would have to live and believe how and what they wanted.”⁴⁸ Granting clerics the ban would allow them “to establish their own church, jurisdiction, and tribunal.”⁴⁹ Scheurl observed that even if one wanted to give this authority to the city’s clergymen—which he did not—there simply were not enough of them to examine and absolve each communicant individually. (Here Scheurl had in mind the Council’s 1525 decision to prohibit mendicants from hearing confessions.) He therefore advised that laypeople should be exhorted to examine themselves before communicating to ensure they did not eat and drink to their own damnation. They were to register before participating in the Lord’s Supper, but this was not to be an occasion for the clergy to examine and possibly exclude a layperson from the sacrament. The task of the preacher was to explain to his congregation what sin was and then leave it up to the individual conscience to prepare itself for the Eucharist.

Nürnberg’s theologians responded to the jurists’ assault on their authority with several written opinions of their own.⁵⁰ Although eager to oppose extremists like Brenz, the clergy in the imperial city were not willing to renounce the role of disciplinarian entirely, which seemed the desire of the jurists and magistrates. Already in July the city’s leading preachers had asserted in a report on catechetical instruction that the clergy “must not sit there like scarecrows,” but should have the power both to question those who wanted to go to communion and then ban those whom it deemed unworthy.⁵¹ They asserted that, whereas the central problems under the papacy had been fear and legalism, now (evangelical) Christendom was being threatened by the opposite challenge, antinomianism. The theologians complained that “now there is such a freedom of the flesh . . . that each person believes and does whatever he wants.”⁵² The only way to foster “Christian order” in the city was to punish libertines with the ban.⁵³

When the Council asked its theologians for yet another report on catechetical instruction, the clergy again seized the opportunity to press their case for the ban.⁵⁴ This time they responded with a formal statement on the relationship between church and state designed to allay fears about the potential for abuse of clerical authority in the new church order. The theologians’ comments on the teaching of the catechism occupied only the last quarter of the report.

Borrowing directly from Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,

the clergy explained that God had ordained the spiritual and earthly kingdoms to cooperate in promoting Christian belief and behavior. Both kingdoms had their unique roles—the spiritual to save souls, the earthly to ensure worldly peace and security—and each was to respect the purview of the other.⁵⁵ Contrary to Scheurl's opinion, the theologians assured the magistrates that they had nothing to fear from clerics exercising their divinely ordained authority to punish sinners. They insisted that this office "has been so prudently and wisely established that neither the clergy nor any person on the earth . . . could create an [inappropriate] authority out of it." Even the lowliest Christian had the right to confront and punish his pastor if he witnessed him committing an open sin. Magistrates were free to reprimand a theologian's doctrine and conduct if they were in error.⁵⁶

At the same time, the city's preachers insisted that in order to avoid provoking divine wrath, the open sins and blasphemies that plagued the city had to be punished.⁵⁷ The Council must not hinder its clerics from fulfilling their legitimate office of correcting the transgressor in a "Christian and brotherly way" because to do so would risk incurring God's disfavor.⁵⁸ The theologians concluded that only when the spiritual and earthly kingdoms were ordered according to God's mandate could they deal with more specific concerns like teaching the catechism.

In response to the Council's request, the theologians composed a third written opinion in which they responded directly to those jurists who wanted to abolish the mandatory pre-communion examination of faith.⁵⁹ They argued that because the Augsburg Confession stated that laypeople were to be examined before communion, it would be a breach of faith to do away with this practice.⁶⁰ The city's preachers acknowledged that one who truly believed in Christ was already absolved and therefore worthy of participating in the Lord's Supper, but they maintained that most people still needed the external confirmation of the Word to have peace in their consciences. "By itself, the conscience is weak [and] given to doubt," they explained, "therefore, it requires strengthening and consoling so that it may be fortified by trusting in God."⁶¹ It was for this reason that Christ instituted the keys.

In a move intended to diffuse the Council's fears about the dangers of unchecked clerical authority, the theologians conceded that the power to bind and loose sins was available to all Christians, though

they clearly thought it was most properly exercised by the clergy.⁶² Nürnberg's preachers also acknowledged that the examination of faith had been instituted primarily for the benefit of simple folk who needed instruction about the new creed. But they argued that more sophisticated burghers should not despise the pre-communion interview because it was there that they could hear the word of absolution that would give them peace. As Solomon had observed, "where there is much wisdom there is much grief, and whoever has experienced much must also suffer much" (Ecclesiastes 1:18).⁶³

Contrary to what some jurists had said, the clergy insisted they were not interested in forcing laypeople to confess all their sins privately to a priest as in former times.⁶⁴ But there had to be some means of guarding access to the sacrament in order to avoid divine punishment. "We have heard that some rogues who when playing marbles have walked from their game to [the sacrament] and said, 'come, let us drink.'" Such shameful and disorderly behavior could not help but arouse God's wrath and was undoubtedly a primary cause of the rampant godlessness and heresy that gripped the world, especially—and most grievously—those parts that alleged to believe the new gospel. Things would only get worse unless decisive action were taken.⁶⁵

As these comments make clear, although confession and the pre-communion interview continued to serve different purposes, Nürnberg's theologians now clearly expected them to occur at the same time. Clerics in the imperial city combined the examination of faith and pronouncement of private absolution into one ritual, something that had only been implied in their earlier works on the subject.⁶⁶ It represented a concrete solution to the larger discipline-freedom dilemma that confronted leaders of the German Reformation at this time. Nürnberg theologians wanted their rebukes of lay ignorance and impiety to have teeth, but also wished to deliver the laity from the bite of a guilty conscience. They argued that the clergy should have sufficient authority to accomplish both. The magistrates, for their part, continued to have serious questions about the theologians' true motives.

The clergy's concluding remarks did little to allay concerns that they wanted to erect a new papacy. They argued that evangelical Christians had something to learn from papists when it came to honoring the sacrament. Even though Catholics had gone too far in forcing laypeople to confess their sins to a priest before communicating,

they did effectively convey to the laity the reverence one should have for the Eucharist—an impolitic remark, to say the least.⁶⁷

Despite the theologians' best efforts, the imperial city's magistrates continued to balk at the idea of giving the clergy the ban and were hesitant to proceed further with their examination of the proposed church order until the issue had been resolved. Aware of this situation and eager to push the discussion of the church order forward, Lazarus Spengler, a strong supporter of the ban, requested a written opinion from the theologians that dealt specifically with this aspect of ecclesiastical discipline. By early October the preachers had produced two reports—one a joint effort, the other a product of one man, perhaps Osiander—that were in substantial agreement.⁶⁸

Spengler provided an introduction to the first report himself. He argued that those jurists who wanted to deny the ban to the theologians either did not understand how this authority was to be used or had erroneously concluded that the ban was not commanded by God and that it posed a threat to secular authority.⁶⁹ The Council secretary insisted that the ban had been established by Christ himself for the protection of his spiritual kingdom and that no Christian, especially a well-educated one, should seek to abolish it.⁷⁰ To do so was to “intrude upon [God’s] jurisdiction [and] to despise his order, Word, and institution.”⁷¹ Spengler admitted that there had been great abuses of the ban and many other godly ordinances in former times, but this was no reason to do away with them. Rather, the abuses should be abolished and everything ordered according to God’s Word.⁷² He also reminded the magistrates that they had already approved the present version of the ban in the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order and that the Wittenberg theologians had included it in their *Instructions for the Visitors*.⁷³

As one would expect, the theologians argued for the validity of the ban, maintaining in their written opinion that it was instituted by Christ himself. They again sought to reassure the magistrates that the ban posed no threat to the secular authority and that those who exercised it—especially the clergy—had no special lordship or jurisdiction, but were to conduct themselves as a nurse (*spitalknecht*) seeking to serve the sick.⁷⁴ In contrast to Brenz, Nürnberg’s preachers insisted that proper use of the ban required no special ecclesiastical court that mimicked secular juridical processes. Too many abuses had resulted from such institutions in the past.⁷⁵

Nürnberg's preachers were especially concerned to point out that while magistrates could be banned if they sinned as individual persons, the ban could not be used against the secular authority as a whole.⁷⁶ Though the theologians were careful not to offend the Council, they still insisted that God had given them a unique authority that the secular government had to recognize.⁷⁷ Having made ample room for the magistrates to wield their temporal sword, Nürnberg's preachers had then sought to stake out a secure region in which they could exercise their own spiritual form of moral discipline. As we will see, the Council had little sympathy for the theologians' position.

We do not know if the Nürnberg theologians' latter two written opinions ever made it to the Council. At least there is no evidence to suggest that the magistrates formally discussed them.⁷⁸ This does not mean that the examination of faith and the ban had ceased being matters of concern for the Council. It soon became clear to Lazarus Spengler that the magistrates' continued opposition to the latter was threatening to derail the proposed church order. Not wanting to risk this greater evil, the secretary embraced a lesser one and recommended that the article on the ban be stricken from the present draft. The Council followed his suggestion and on November 27, 1531, sent a revised version of the church order to Ansbach for comment.⁷⁹ The margrave's theologians would prove less diplomatic than Spengler.

A couple of weeks later the margrave's theologians delivered their response to the latest version of the church order.⁸⁰ They were especially concerned about the Council's decision to remove the article on the ban. "We regret to hear that many people regard the ban as offensive and harmful to the secular authority, because it is well-known that the ban was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ and was used by the apostles—especially by Paul—in the [early] church."⁸¹ Both Christ and Paul explicitly commanded obedience to governing officials so there was no way for a form of ecclesiastical discipline based on their teaching to threaten secular authority. When properly used, the ban would assist magistrates in enforcing moral discipline. There was no doubt in the theologians' minds that immediate action had to be taken to counteract the widespread abuse of Christian freedom. They complained, "Now . . . Christian liberty [*freiheit*]⁸¹—we would rather call it temerity [*frechheit*]⁸¹—has reached the point that almost no one will register before receiving the sacrament, and private absolution, which the burdened conscience needs, is completely despised. The great majority of people refuse to be exhorted or properly punished

by a clergyman.” No matter how discreetly a pastor sought to discipline someone, the laity would call it a blasphemy and a crime. The margrave’s preachers confessed that now they could appreciate why bishops and priests had had such a difficult time keeping their flocks in line.⁸²

As much as the Ansbach theologians wanted the ban to be reinserted in the church order, they asserted that even if it were, the present condition of ecclesiastical administration would render it meaningless. They argued that both the ban and the entire church order would be nothing but mere words on paper if some form of special overseeing body were not created to enforce and administer ecclesiastical discipline. Under the influence of Brenz, the margrave’s leading preachers offered a revised version of the *synodus* the Schwäbisch reformer had proposed earlier. The Ansbach theologians suggested that the secular authority should appoint a small commission of clerics and laypeople in each district to fulfill this function. These so-called *judices rerum ecclesiasticarum* were a last-ditch effort by Brenz to salvage something of his original design for ecclesiastical discipline. The Ansbach theologians concluded by warning the Nürnberg Council that it would not be able to answer to God if it did not make the requisite provisions for the ban in the proposed church order.⁸³ They strongly suggested that the magistrates send to Wittenberg for an opinion on the matter.

The Ansbachers’ recommendations gained little headway with the Nürnberg Council. Although Osiander and his colleagues also wanted the ban retained in the church order, they did not wish for the issue to prevent the work on the new guide from proceeding further.⁸⁴ The magistrates, for their part, were content to drag out deliberations on the church order as long as possible while they waited to see how further negotiations with the emperor would develop at the upcoming imperial diet in Regensburg.

Eager to gain Protestant support for the impending confrontation with the Turks, Charles V had agreed to address religious issues at the diet, which formally opened in early April 1532. In order to avoid possible disruptions by the Catholic estates of the empire he decided to treat religious matters separately from the actual diet in Regensburg. He met with Protestant and Catholic representatives first in Schweinfurt and then in Nürnberg. A temporary truce between the two sides resulted from these meetings in which the followers of the

Augsburg Confession were granted immunity from legal prosecution, and Protestants and Catholics agreed not to make war on each other for reasons of religion. Anxious to prove their patriotism, the German estates agreed to support Charles against the Turks. Nürnberg sent twice as many troops as the emperor had requested from the imperial city.

The “Peace of Nürnberg,” or “Nürnberg Standstill” as the treaty was also known, was signed on July 23 and was then made public by imperial mandate on August 3. It was to be in effect until a Church council could be convened or until the next imperial diet, whichever came first. The Peace of Nürnberg became an important first step in the long and bloody path that finally led to the 1555 Peace of Augsburg.⁸⁵ Taking advantage of the new peace, the Nürnberg Council complied with the wishes of the Ansbach theologians and a few days before the treaty was formally signed sent the proposed church order to Wittenberg for comment. The Council specifically asked Luther and his colleagues for advice on how they had handled the ban in Saxony.⁸⁶

The magistrates had to wait until the end of August to receive a response from Wittenberg, and when they finally did, it must have given them pause. Luther and his fellow theologians said they believed the church order was in accordance with God’s Word and that it was also in substantial agreement with their own *Instructions for the Visitors*.⁸⁷ Regarding the ban, they informed the Council that the only form of ecclesiastical discipline they practiced was to exclude from the sacrament open sinners who refused to amend their lives. The primary means of exercising this discipline was the mandatory examination of faith and conduct that the laity had to undergo before taking communion. Ideally, the secular authority would recognize and uphold the clergy’s decision to ban a person, but, in keeping with Luther’s argument in the *Sermon on the Ban*, the Wittenbergers insisted that this form of ecclesiastical censure was to have no impact on the excommunicant’s worldly dealings. If a preacher thought his magistrates were being negligent in punishing sins, he was simply to exhort his parishioners to avoid godlessness; he was not to infringe on the magistrates’ jurisdiction. The Wittenberg theologians conceded that it would be good if a special commission could look into the ban more fully, but this would have to wait for a more opportune time.⁸⁸

Luther and his colleagues had also recommended to the Council

that it should ask one or two theologians to produce the final version of the church order because the present draft bore clear traces of having been cobbled together by several hands. To this task the magistrates appointed Osiander and Brenz, who worked together for several weeks in Nürnberg to produce a more uniform text.⁸⁹ The two theologians included no formal section on the ban, well aware that it would have been immediately stricken from the order by the magistrates.⁹⁰ However, Osiander and Brenz did include the pre-communion examination of faith and conduct in their church order and, with it, the *de facto* right of the clergy to bar the unworthy from communion. They gave up the ban in name, but sought to retain its most significant prerogative in fact.⁹¹ The Council would soon approve this arrangement, having learned that Luther supported it. Its inclusion in the Augsburg Confession also made it difficult for the Council to oppose the pre-communion interview.

Owing likely to the Council's initial resistance, Osiander and Brenz decided to integrate both the pre-communion interview and private confession into the section of the church order that dealt with the Lord's Supper. They sought to submerge these more controversial elements within the less contested article on communion. Together the pre-communion examination and voluntary private confession became the new Lutheran rite of private confession. The lengthy explanation that Osiander and Brenz gave for the new practice attested their concern both to differentiate it from papal confession and to provide justification for its inclusion in an evangelical church order.⁹²

In keeping with the provisional 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order and the Augsburg Confession, the 1533 church order required communicants to register with their pastors and undergo an examination of faith and conduct before they could go to the Lord's Supper. Communicants were to know and understand the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. They were also expected to know what the sacrament was and how one could receive it worthily.⁹³ Pastors faced with parishioners who complained about this requirement were to remind them of "how great a burden they previously had to bear in the days of mandatory confession, from which they are now free, and that it is an insignificant thing in comparison that now they must only announce when they want to receive the holy sacrament."⁹⁴ Pastors were to examine communicants "with

all the understanding appropriate to each case” (*mit aller beschaidenheit nach gelegenheit*), and if they discovered any inadequacies in a communicant’s knowledge of the catechism, they were to instruct him in an amicable (*gütlich*) and friendly (*freundlich*) manner. Clerics were to avoid shaming laypeople in the examination of faith—especially the very young and the very old—lest they give them cause to avoid the sacrament. Those whose knowledge of the faith and life conduct were well known to the pastor did not have to be examined each time.⁹⁵

For those “contrary spirits” who considered the pre-communion examination inherently popish, Osiander and Brenz responded that no one was to be forced to enumerate his sins to a priest, which had been the defining sign of papal confession.⁹⁶ Elsewhere in the church order the two theologians declared the belief that one must confess all of one’s sins to a priest in order to receive absolution to be “a human doctrine which one should in no way accept.”⁹⁷ Confessants had to acknowledge their depravity, but the only transgressions they were required to confess to their pastors were those that threatened the unity of the community and thus militated against the harmony among Christians presupposed in the Lord’s Supper. The church order mentioned only enmity (*feindschaft*) and wrath (*zorn*).⁹⁸ Beyond these, confessants were free to confess or not to confess whatever specific sins they chose. As long as they trusted that Christ had given authority to the Church to forgive sins in his name, they could be certain that even their unrevealed sins had been remitted through their pastor’s word of absolution.⁹⁹

Because of its great value for troubled consciences, pastors were to exhort their parishioners to seek out private absolution, especially before communicating. Clerics were to teach their congregations how to examine their consciences so that laypeople could know when they required instruction or consolation. Pastors were also to warn their parishioners about the dangers of not asking for the encouragement of clerical absolution when they needed it. Satan could easily tempt them to believe that their sins were too great to be forgiven by God and thus lead them into despair. Osiander and Brenz portrayed the devil as a master of deception who possessed a full arsenal of weapons with which to tempt, discourage, and frighten human beings. Private absolution was the believer’s most effective defense against “the great storm winds” of Satan.¹⁰⁰ It was for this reason that Christ had insti-

tuted the keys. “He knew for certain that we would sorely need such consolation,” the theologians observed. “Therefore, one should not despise this source of consolation that is so rich in mercy. What could be more shameful and unchristian than to abolish this ordinance of God in Christendom and to allow it to fall completely out of use?”¹⁰¹

Osiander and Brenz expected private absolution to follow the pre-communion examination of faith and conduct; it was the second element in a two-part ritual. Nevertheless, they still hoped laypeople would also seek it on other occasions. In their minds private absolution was not permanently wedded to the mandatory interview. Laypeople could still receive it whenever they desired peace for their troubled consciences. In such cases they were free to confess any sins they wanted; there was no interrogation of conscience. They had simply to ask their pastor to pronounce forgiveness, and then believe he spoke in Christ’s stead. It was pure consolation. The church order’s two formulas for absolution were identical with those in the Nürnberg theologians’ draft.

The new church order was not all comfort and mercy. As one would expect from Osiander and Brenz, there was also plenty of emphasis on discipline and contrition. In an earlier section on repentance pastors were exhorted to persist in condemning the sins of their parishioners “until the people both recognize their sins and feel them in their consciences” and thus learn to “fear God’s wrath and earnestly seek to flee from it.” The order explained that “where this happens, the people will be well-prepared to receive the gospel and by it to better themselves. Otherwise, when one preaches the gospel to impudent, unrepentant, crude people they will only become worse.”¹⁰² In the section on the Lord’s Supper the order asserted that Christ had instituted the keys not only for consoling the afflicted but also for giving sinners a way back to God. Osiander and Brenz explained that Christ had established baptism for those who wanted to become Christians, the Lord’s Supper to nourish those who were Christians, and absolution for those who had fallen out of faith through sin. Since no one could deny that he sinned often and grievously—and in so doing severed himself from Christ’s body, the Church—all had need of the keys. They were the only way for a sinner to be restored to faith.¹⁰³ Still, despite this strong emphasis on the keys as a means of grace, Osiander and Brenz did not refer to absolution as a sacrament.

Because of the evangelical belief in the full sufficiency of the Atonement,

ment, the church order prohibited pastors from imposing penances on the laity. Such an act would detract from Christ's sacrifice. Osiander and Brenz insisted that laypeople should seek to improve their lives after receiving absolution but not in order to atone for their sins. Rather, they should do so in order to protect themselves against more serious sin and subsequent divine wrath in the future.¹⁰⁴

The Nürnberg Council reviewed the church order one last time and called for a few minor changes. Regarding the examination of faith and private absolution, it required two emendations. The magistrates wanted those who lived in the countryside to be able to register with their pastors on Sunday morning if it was more convenient than Saturday afternoon, which had been the time appointed by Osiander and Brenz. They also objected to pastors laying their hands on a penitent as they pronounced absolution over him. The practice reminded them too much of popish sacerdotalism.¹⁰⁵ Osiander and Brenz complied with the Council's orders. On December 5, the Nürnberg magistrates informed Margrave George that they had read the church order "from article to article" and were prepared to adopt it.¹⁰⁶ On the same day they ordered Nürnberg printer Jobst Gutknecht to print 800 copies for the margraviate and 400 for Nürnberg and its surrounding environs.¹⁰⁷ The new guide for worship and belief was officially put into effect in the imperial city itself on January 1, 1533, and in the surrounding countryside on February 9. The margrave enforced the new order in March.¹⁰⁸ In May the Nürnberg Council created a commission of clerics and laypeople to administer the church order, though the body had no authority to exercise formal discipline.¹⁰⁹

The bishops of Bamberg, Eichstätt, and Würzburg, along with Johann Eck, protested against the new church order,¹¹⁰ seeing it as a direct infringement on their authority to regulate the doctrine and worship of Franconia. Closer to home, the Nürnberg branch of the Knights of St. John refused to recognize the new order and eventually won the right from the Council to continue celebrating the traditional mass.¹¹¹

Those sympathetic to the Lutheran faith hailed the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order as a gift from God. The new guide for worship and belief became one of the most famous evangelical church orders in sixteenth-century Germany. Most of the major Franconian cities, towns, and principalities adopted it, and it stayed in force there until well into the eighteenth century. It also influenced church orders

in Swabia, Württemberg, northern Bavaria, Mecklenburg, and Saxony. Owing to the widespread influence of Osiander and Brenz's guide for worship and doctrine, one German scholar has aptly dubbed it the *Stammutter* of a whole family of Lutheran church orders.¹¹²

As the Reformation evolved from protest movement to state religion, its leaders sought to preserve its emphasis on spiritual freedom while also trying to provide the order and discipline that magistrates and theologians alike deemed so important. This dilemma manifested itself in many ways, one of the most practical being the need to ensure worthy reception of the Lord's Supper without returning to the alleged abuses of sacramental confession. In keeping with a trend throughout Lutheran Germany, religious leaders in Nürnberg sought to resolve this dilemma by creating a new, distinctively evangelical version of confession. It consisted of two parts, one intended to promote discipline, the other to protect freedom and offer consolation. The mandatory examination of faith and conduct permitted a pastor to assess a layperson's knowledge of the new faith and outward moral demeanor, while preventing him from penetrating into the confessant's conscience, a domain that belonged to God alone. If the pastor detected any glaring deficiencies, he could bar the layperson from the Lord's Supper until she demonstrated improvement. This was the full extent of the clergy's authority to discipline, and even it had to be exercised under the supervision of the Council. The second part of evangelical preparation for communion was private confession and absolution. Here a communicant could reveal whatever sin she chose in the confident expectation that she would receive absolution. She was not required to confess all her sins, still less to render satisfaction for them. Leaders of the Reformation in Nürnberg saw confession and absolution as means of consolation and encouragement. Control had no place in this part of the new ritual. As had been true of the late medieval sacrament of penance, both discipline and consolation were essential to the evangelical version of private confession, though, as we have seen, the theological basis for both had been significantly altered. Every major Lutheran church order in the sixteenth century contained a section on private confession that was in substantial agreement with the stipulations found in the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order.¹¹³

This was the official position on confession, the ideal that religious

leaders throughout Lutheran Germany hoped would help resolve their freedom-discipline dilemma. Soon this ideal would be put to the test in Nürnberg. As nowhere else in Lutheran Germany, confession and absolution became matters of intense strife in the imperial city, owing primarily to the influence of one man, Osiander. It would take some fifteen years for the new version of private confession to become a reality in Nürnberg. By this time lay Nürnbergers would have made an important addition to the reformation of the keys in their city, one that resolved the freedom-discipline dilemma in a way more to their liking.

Resisting the Old Jurisdiction

With the approval of the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order, the Nürnberg Council effectively completed its takeover of episcopal duties in the imperial city.¹ Divine-right rule of secular magistrates had finally won out over the temporal claims of the apostles' successors. Though the Council frequently turned to the city's theologians for advice, it now had final say in all matters of doctrine and practice. The Reformation had provided the magistrates with the final check on clerical authority they had been seeking for years. Convinced that unrestrained clerics had caused innumerable abuses in the old Church, the magistrates would keep a tight rein on evangelical ministers in the future. The Council would always err on the side of caution when responding to the Lutheran clergy's claims to religious authority.

The new policy on confession reflected this concern to limit clerical authority. Evangelical clerics were now servants in confession, no longer judges. Though the city's theologians had sponsored this reform, they soon came to regret the direction it took under the supervision of the Council: the clergy was deprived of nearly all responsibility for disciplining sinners. Osiander and Brenz had managed to include a provision in the church order that allowed clerics to bar the unworthy from the sacrament, but the magistrates had been extremely reluctant to grant this concession, and they still retained substantial control of the binding key. Although the Council shared the

theologians' zeal for curtailing the spread of antinomianism in Nürnberg, it opposed any measures that either challenged its own authority or rendered lay consciences vulnerable to clerical manipulation.

Osiander and Brenz responded directly to the Council's anticlerical sentiment in their treatment of confession in the new church order. By making one seemingly innocent omission, they acted to prevent any further loss of their authority. When the magistrates realized this, they immediately sought to counter the theologians' move. The resulting confrontation evolved into the Reformation's most important debate about the power of the keys, one that would delay the actual implementation of evangelical confession in Nürnberg for some fifteen years.

A few months after the Nürnberg Council formally implemented the 1533 church order, it began receiving complaints from burghers about what many considered a serious deficiency in the new guide for worship. They protested that it contained no form for general confession and absolution.² As we have seen, evangelical reformers in Nürnberg had included the *Offene Schuld* in many of their early liturgies, and the city's magistrates had approved the practice in 1526. Wenzeslaus Linck's formula had become especially popular. The decision of Osiander and Brenz to omit general confession and absolution from their church order thus constituted a breach with current liturgical practice.

It is something of a mystery why the Council approved a church order that did not include general confession and absolution.³ Although the magistrates maintained that they had carefully studied the order before adopting it,⁴ they would later claim that the practice had been abolished without their knowledge.⁵ One possibility is that the Council simply assumed that general confession and absolution would continue to be an accepted, if unofficial, part of the Nürnberg liturgy, much as it had been both before and after the city had turned Protestant. The Council members realized the new church order contained no form for the practice, but in no way thought this meant it would cease being a customary part of the imperial city's religious life. Whatever their reasoning, the magistrates would soon come to regret their oversight. The city fathers had failed to appreciate just how important the abolition of general confession had become for their city's leading preacher.

In response to the displeasure voiced by its subjects, the Nürnberg Council asked the city's leading theologians for an explanation of why general confession and absolution had not been included in the new church order. The Council members also inquired whether or not it would be appropriate to reintroduce the practice into the Sunday liturgy. On April 3, 1533, three days before Palm Sunday, Nürnberg's preachers met with magistrates Christoph Koler and Leonhard Schürstab to discuss the matter. A minority group led by Osiander held that general confession and absolution were "completely useless and unscriptural" and should be abolished in all the city's churches.⁶ The St. Lorenz preacher had already done away with them in his church. The majority, however, wanted to return to the customary practice of general absolution in the Sunday liturgy and private absolution for communicants and those with a troubled conscience.⁷ They conceded that "it would be good if the people were exhorted more often to receive private absolution,"⁸ but they also argued for the validity of general absolution. The preachers maintained that general absolution was a legitimate expression of the gospel in that it announced forgiveness of sin to all who repented of their misdeeds and believed in Christ. To those who received the general proclamation of forgiveness with penitent and believing hearts, God would grant remission of sin, quite apart from private absolution.⁹

Osiander agreed that communicants should be exhorted to seek private absolution, but insisted that none would do so if general absolution were retained. Laypeople would think private absolution redundant if the public announcement of forgiveness were held to be valid.¹⁰ Osiander also attacked the notion that a pastor could absolve someone without first knowing whether or not she had sorrow for her sins and genuine faith, something that was impossible in a crowd.¹¹ Finally, he asserted that because general absolution made forgiveness conditional on a layperson's faith, it was no absolution at all. True absolution was always certain and reliable because it was based on a divine promise, which could never be doubted.¹²

Osiander's opposition to general absolution was motivated, at least in part, by deeply pastoral concerns. He thought the practice posed a serious threat to private absolution and thus robbed the laity of the consolation that could only be found therein. For the St. Lorenz preacher, general absolution was a source of "cheap grace" that made a mockery of true forgiveness of sins. As we will see, in order to pro-

mote the spiritual welfare of the laity, Osiander thought it necessary to bolster his authority as a priest. This is where he would run into trouble.

Despite the efforts of the majority group to win over Osiander,¹³ they were unable to dissuade their colleague from his opinion that general absolution was a fraud. He insisted that he would sooner “walk through fire” than recant his position and informed the two magistrates that he possessed superior theological vision in the matter and therefore should be trusted. St. Sebald preacher Dominikus Schleuppner responded sarcastically, “so that means the rest of us are blind.”¹⁴

In a revealing statement, Osiander told Koler and Schürstab that the Council had already taken the binding key away from him; they were not now going to seize the loosing key as well.¹⁵ Coupled with Osiander’s pastoral concerns was a firm resolve to protect what remained of the evangelical clergy’s jurisdiction over Nürnberg’s religious life. He refused to suffer another incursion of the secular into what he took to be a sacred office. Much to the St. Lorenz preacher’s chagrin, the Council resolved on the following day to reintroduce general absolution, while still requiring communicants to register with their pastors before participating in the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶ The magistrates presumably intended for the clergy also to examine and absolve communicants privately as per the church order, though there is no mention of either in the relevant sources.

As it had done in the earlier dispute about the ban, the Council turned to leaders of the Reformation outside of the imperial city to obtain further confirmation for its decision. The magistrates wrote to both Schwäbisch Hall and Wittenberg asking for written statements from Brenz and Luther on the validity of general absolution.¹⁷ They explained to the reformers that many lay Nürnbergers had suffered “not a little doubt and unrest in their consciences” as a result of the abolition of general absolution.¹⁸ According to the Council, there were many pious Christians among the city’s inhabitants who were not always able to attend church when private absolution was available. (The church order called for private absolution to be offered on the Saturday afternoon before a Sunday morning celebration of the Lord’s Supper, but, owing to the intervention of the Council, it also permitted the laity to receive private absolution shortly before the Eucharist on Sunday morning. The magistrates apparently thought that

even given this latter provision, many Nürnbergers could not make it to confession.) For these pious burghers, general absolution was a great source of consolation and the primary means through which they heard the divine word of forgiveness. The Council also defended its support for general absolution by arguing that the sheer size of Nürnberg—some 40,000 inhabitants at this time—made it impossible for the city’s pastors to absolve all would-be communicants individually. Reformation Nürnberg had a severe shortage of confessors owing to the Council’s decision in 1525 to expel the city’s mendicant orders, a problem that would not be resolved until the middle of the century. Finally, the magistrates also observed that general absolution was an accepted part of evangelical liturgies in Electoral Saxony.¹⁹ Therefore, they argued, it should not be abolished in Nürnberg.²⁰

As coauthor of the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order, Johannes Brenz was bound to agree with his colleague, though he and Osiander did part company on some matters related to absolution. In his written opinion from April 12, 1533, he argued that the Nürnberg preacher was completely justified in wanting to abolish general absolution; it detracted from both the preaching of the gospel and from private absolution. The Schwäbisch Hall reformer admitted that the keys could be used with either individuals or crowds, and in both cases forgiveness was contingent upon individual faith, a statement with which Osiander disagreed. But Brenz maintained that pronouncing general absolution after the sermon—its usual place in the liturgy—was an abuse of the clerical authority to bind and loose sins because it suggested to the laity that the sermon itself was not a valid form of forgiveness.²¹ Such a practice would inevitably lead to a demphasis on the sermon as a means of absolution.²² The fact that many thought they needed general absolution in addition to the sermon, as the Council had reported, provided evidence that Nürnbergers were already guilty of this error.²³ Brenz further argued that because the keys entailed binding as well as loosing sins, it was imperative that they be exercised in a private encounter between pastor and communicant, where the former could assess the latter’s faith and conduct. Again diverging from Osiander, the Schwäbisch Hall reformer conceded that if it were made clear in the general absolution that the sins of those who did not believe would be retained, the requirements for the proper use of the keys could be met.²⁴ But Brenz, like Osiander, clearly thought this arrangement less than ideal.

Absolution was a sacrament for the Schwäbisch Hall reformer, and like the other divinely instituted means of grace, it was meant for individuals.²⁵ He knew of no examples in the Bible where the apostles poured baptismal water over several people at once or simply tossed eucharistic bread to the multitudes. The keys could be most effective in relieving the burdens of a troubled conscience only when used in a one-on-one encounter. Brenz played down the difficulties the Council had raised about examining each communicant individually, arguing that priests in the old Church had been able to do it even before friars could assist them, and much more could now be expected from pastors who were stewards of the true faith.²⁶

After dealing with the specifically theological difficulties of general absolution, Brenz addressed what he took to be the real, if unspoken, concern of the Nürnberg magistrates. He insisted that the preachers who wanted to abolish general absolution were not interested in becoming “lords” (*Herren*) again; they simply wanted to ensure that troubled consciences would not be deprived of the consolation they needed. Far from being a bid to enhance their own authority, this pastoral concern showed that the clergy wanted to become servants, not lords. As Bernhard Klaus has observed, “Brenz appears here to have grabbed the bull by the horns.”²⁷ The Nürnberg Council feared that Osiander and his like wanted to abolish general absolution in order to restrict forgiveness of sins to a private encounter between priest and penitent, all in an effort to enhance their own authority. The magistrates wanted a more modest clergy, one that made no pretensions to being the sole mediators of divine mercy, and one that posed no threat to their own hegemony over Nürnberg’s religious life.

The imperial city’s magistrates were much more pleased with the response they received from Wittenberg.²⁸ In a letter dated April 18, 1533, Luther, along with Melanchthon, advised that the imperial city should retain both forms of absolution. Much as the majority party in Nürnberg had done, the two Wittenbergers equated absolution with the preaching of the gospel.²⁹ (The Augsburg Confession suggested the same.)³⁰ Because it was appropriate to proclaim the good news to both crowds and individuals, Luther and Melanchthon reasoned that it was fitting for evangelical churches to practice both general and private absolution. The fact that some who heard general absolution would not receive it in faith provided no grounds for abolishing it. Absolution in whatever form was always dependent on faith for its

efficacy.³¹ Forgiveness in Christ still had to be preached, regardless of whether it was received by a believing heart.

Like Osiander, the Wittenberg reformers were anxious to protect private absolution. As in Nürnberg, private absolution was part of the mandatory preparation for communion in their churches,³² the only difference being that the Wittenberg laity actually went to confession.³³ Luther and Melancthon argued that it was especially in this personal application of the gospel that the conscience burdened with guilt and doubt gained freedom and confidence. For the Wittenberg reformers, general absolution without private absolution was unthinkable. It was the experience of the latter that taught the laity how to receive the former properly. They maintained that laypeople should accept general absolution as if it were spoken to them privately.³⁴ The reformers preferred private absolution because it applied the gospel directly to individuals, but realized that laypeople were not always able to receive it when in need of consolation, as the Nürnberg Council had reported. For them general absolution was a valid, if less desirable, medium of divine forgiveness.

Though the two Wittenbergers were sympathetic to Osiander's concerns about general absolution, they were more optimistic than the Nürnberg preacher about the ability of evangelical churches to retain both forms of absolution without detracting from the *pro me* aspect of the gospel. They were also more willing than Osiander to allow laypeople to appropriate forgiveness for themselves through their own exercise of faith. Whether spoken privately to an individual or publicly to a crowd, absolution always required faith to effect what it offered. As we will see, Osiander had quite a different view of the matter. Finally, Luther and Melancthon were much more hesitant than Osiander about using absolution to make a statement about the proper balance of power between clerics and magistrates. They knew their movement's survival was still too dependent on the good will of secular authorities to risk alienating them through a direct confrontation about religious jurisdiction.

On April 30, some two weeks after Easter, the Nürnberg Council summoned the city's preachers to its chambers and read out to them the Wittenberg opinion. It then ordered them (again) to return to the customary practice of pronouncing general absolution to their parishioners and to avoid further discussion of the matter.³⁵ In the minds of

the magistrates, the issue was now settled. For Osiander, however, the Council's decision was a call to arms.³⁶

Less than a week later, Osiander preached a fiery sermon against general absolution from his St. Lorenz pulpit.³⁷ As per the Council's request, schoolmaster Michael Roting, who had heard the sermon, prepared a report on the homily.³⁸ According to Roting, the goal of Osiander's diatribe had been "to prove and demonstrate that general and—as it is called—public absolution is not only unnecessary, but also destructive and devilish."³⁹ Contrary to Brenz and the other Nürnberg preachers, Osiander had insisted that even where laypeople had true sorrow for their sin and were prepared to receive the word of forgiveness in faith, general absolution was still a "false delusion." He had argued in his sermon that there were three levels of faith found in the Bible, which required two different kinds of keys. The first level entailed hearing and understanding the gospel through the public preaching of the Word. Osiander dubbed such preaching "the teaching key" because it instructed hearers in God's law and plan of salvation without actually offering forgiveness of sin. This level of faith could not obtain salvation, and if one did not proceed beyond it, damnation was certain. A person reached the second level of faith when God produced within him a desire for righteousness. This degree of belief was also elicited by the teaching key and, like the first level, was insufficient to obtain salvation. In the third and final level of faith, a person accepted the forgiveness promised in the gospel by being baptized and subsequently receiving private absolution through the loosing key. Salvation occurred at this level only. Preaching forgiveness to a crowd was inappropriate, according to Osiander, because it entailed using the wrong key in the wrong situation. For his part, Roting thought Osiander's sermon offensive and unscriptural.⁴⁰

Upon receiving the schoolmaster's report, the Council dispatched three of its members to confront Osiander. The defiant preacher informed the magistrates that he had intentionally treated general absolution in his sermon so that it would become a topic of discussion. He further asserted that during his twelve years of service in Nürnberg he had never preached falsehoods and proclaimed he was ready to be burned alive if anyone could demonstrate otherwise. Osiander also declared to the magistrates, rather self-righteously, that while many of

the city's other pastors neglected their clerical duties, "he studies diligently day and night at great expense to his body and life so that he can instruct the people faithfully." Only after his death would the Council see how correct he had been all along.⁴¹ Although the magistrates were of a different opinion, Osiander insisted that Luther and Melancthon's statement on absolution supported his position. Still, in submission to the magistrates' wishes, he pledged not to preach on the topic again.⁴² For the time being, Osiander could afford to grant the magistrates what they wanted: his design to challenge the Council's position on general absolution—and religious authority—was proceeding according to plan.

A few days later, on May 16, the St. Lorenz preacher sent the Council his unsolicited recommendations for how the conflict between himself and the city's other preachers could be resolved. Before giving specific proposals, Osiander first charged that the magistrates had become "lords and judges" in matters of doctrine, offices that they were not equipped to carry out.⁴³ He admonished the Council to adopt the position on absolution that was true to God's Word, not the one that was based on majority opinion or precedents in other cities and regions.⁴⁴ He also challenged the Council to have the city's other theologians respond to two questions: (1) Did general absolution constitute a proper use of the loosing key, one that was equivalent to private absolution? (2) Given the obvious benefits of private absolution over general absolution, would it not be better to do away with the latter, even if it were held to be valid, so that the laity could be urged to receive the more certain form of forgiveness? Osiander warned that the Council had to decide between private and general absolution; it could not attempt to walk the fence on this issue. To do so would constitute a *de facto* rejection of private absolution. Osiander remained convinced that, in spite of its obvious benefits, no one would seek private absolution if the general proclamation of forgiveness were held to be valid. Simple people in need of private absolution would mistakenly believe that general absolution was sufficient, and thus remain mired in sin and guilt.⁴⁵

Lazarus Spengler once again felt obliged to put Osiander in his place and responded to the preacher's recommendation with his own written opinion.⁴⁶ He began by insisting that the current struggle over absolution could not be attributed to the magistrates' having overstepped their jurisdiction; it was their God-given responsibility to

oversee the religious life of the city,⁴⁷ though they had never used this authority in a heavy-handed way. Spengler charged that Osiander himself had publicly assailed the Council for not taking a more active role in implementing the 1533 church order.⁴⁸ The only reason the Council had intervened in the present case was that it had become convinced by both Wittenberg and the majority of Nürnberg's other theologians that Osiander's position was contrary to God's Word. The main problem, as Spengler saw it, was that Osiander was simply arrogant, a character trait he had clearly displayed when composing the church order. Even though nearly every other theologian disagreed with his position on absolution, Osiander insisted that he alone was right.⁴⁹

The Council secretary sided with the magistrates' understanding of the Wittenberg opinion and argued that it in no way supported Osiander's position.⁵⁰ He continued to insist that Osiander had completely avoided the real source of the present conflict: he had openly preached against general absolution, even though the Council had sanctioned it, and had then stated that any who proclaimed or received it were fools and sinners.⁵¹ Spengler asserted that Osiander's proposed questions were completely inappropriate because no one wanted to abolish private absolution. He also took issue with the Nürnberg preacher's threefold division of faith and his corresponding bipartite understanding of the keys, maintaining that both were foreign to Scripture.⁵² The Council secretary concluded, "if Osiander could set aside his ambition and not trust in himself so much, but instead recognize that he is a fallible human being; if he would honor God's Word by allowing himself to be mastered and led by it, rather than seeking to master it . . . he would be regarded [by the folk] as a great [and] important man . . . I pray that God may give him his grace to this end."⁵³

Spengler was an intelligent and courageous man who had a very deep and sincere commitment to the evangelical faith. He also possessed complete allegiance to the Council. As we have seen, when the magistrates proved unreceptive to his suggestions regarding the ban, he had recommended that the issue be dropped from the proposed church order. Spengler now expected the same kind of deference from Osiander. What outraged the Council secretary most was that Osiander had openly defied and even maligned the magistrates as they carried out their God-given responsibility to ensure conformity to the

divine Word. The St. Lorenz preacher had yet to accept the religious authority of the Council. He still wanted veto power over any decisions he deemed unbiblical. Both Spengler and the Council had a different view of how sacerdotal and magisterial authority were to be related in evangelical Christendom.

The Council was content to have the debate about absolution confined to written opinions. Keeping the conflict out of the public eye remained a central concern of the magistrates throughout the Nürnberg absolution controversy. Like their counterparts throughout Germany, the magistrates considered open chaos an affront to God as well as a precursor to greater calamity. They viewed life as something that constantly had to be redeemed from confusion in order to be of any use to God or human beings. Maintaining Nürnberg's bulwark against the perpetual threat of chaos was a task the imperial city's magistrates embraced with particular diligence. Osiander shared the magistrates' fear of chaos, but his notion of proper order differed from theirs in important ways. His was based on a distinction between the laity and the clergy that had lost its appeal for the majority of his colleagues and fellow burghers. In their eyes there was no longer an essential difference between the two: Osiander was out of step with the times.

Two months later, on July 13, 1533, the St. Lorenz preacher again disobeyed the Council and held forth on absolution from his pulpit. After listening to this sermon Spengler informed a friend in Wittenberg that he had never witnessed such a spectacle in a Nürnberg church.⁵⁴ Osiander had preached with such an embittered spirit that "not only my lords, but also a large part of the people were deeply troubled [by it]."⁵⁵ Without revealing the actual content of the sermon, the Council secretary expressed his fear that Osiander's comments would cause a civil revolt, the likes of which Nürnberg had never seen.⁵⁶ Spengler affirmed his respect for the St. Lorenz preacher as a man of great learning, but confessed that Osiander's "arrogant [and] disdainful spirit has always offended me and has always given me cause to worry that he would one day incite a great uproar, which is exactly what we are now experiencing."⁵⁷ Spengler thought that only Luther would be able to break Nürnberg's wild stallion at this point, though the secretary feared he would need sharp spurs.⁵⁸

The Council rebuked Osiander again and exhorted him to honor his earlier promise not to preach on absolution. The magistrates also

instructed him to provide them with a written explanation of his position on the contested issue. Though the St. Lorenz preacher remained defiant, insisting that he was simply fulfilling the duties of his preaching office, he finally agreed to obey the Council but on one condition: the city's other preachers also had to submit their own statements on absolution. By this point Osiander's colleagues were threatening to attack him from their own pulpits, but the Council finally prevailed on them to confine their vengeance to written opinions.⁵⁹ Modifying Osiander's recommended questions to suit their own tastes, the magistrates required both parties in the controversy to respond to the following two questions: (1) Was private absolution a third sacrament? (2) How should one regard general absolution?⁶⁰

In their written statements of August 6, Osiander's opponents said that they had no quarrel with their colleague over the status of private absolution; it was a sacrament.⁶¹ All ascribed to the reformation of the traditional practice set out in the Augsburg Confession. They affirmed that evangelical pastors, as servants of the Word, had authority to absolve sinners privately and agreed with Osiander that they should exercise this office especially with communicants. Their point of disagreement with their colleague continued to be over general absolution. They again asserted that it was simply a public preaching of the gospel whose validity depended on the faith of the recipient.⁶² Osiander's opponents warned the Council that if it could not restrain the boisterous preacher in the future, they would ignore their oath of silence and attack him in their sermons.

Before Osiander submitted his own written statement, he preached two more times on absolution.⁶³ According to witnesses, the St. Lorenz preacher asserted in these homilies that no one who sinned after baptism could be restored to grace through either a sermon or general absolution. Only private absolution spoken by a pastor offered penitents the forgiveness they needed. Osiander also reportedly labeled those who disagreed with him as "demons" (*Teuffels Schuppen*) from whom laypeople should protect themselves.⁶⁴ When asked by the Council to defend his actions, Osiander claimed he had been forced to break his promise because certain persons in his congregation had told him they would not be able to regard him as an honest preacher of God's Word unless he stood his ground on this issue. The magistrates found this excuse "completely childish" (*ganz kindisch*) and again insisted that he submit his written statement to them.⁶⁵

They also urged Osiander's colleagues again to turn the other cheek and refrain from attacking their brother in public.⁶⁶

On September 23, Osiander finally obeyed the Council's orders. But rather than responding in brief to the assigned questions, as his colleagues had done, the St. Lorenz preacher submitted a treatise on the power of the keys that was ninety folios in length.⁶⁷ It is one of the most important and certainly most extensive statements we have on the topic in the German Reformation. Osiander sought to uphold his version of evangelical private confession throughout his treatise. Negatively, he opposed priestly interrogation of consciences, the detailing of sins, mandatory auricular confession, and the assigning or performance of penances. With his colleagues, Osiander believed there was nothing a penitent could do to merit divine forgiveness. Indeed, he accused his opponents of reintroducing a subtle form of works righteousness into Lutheran private confession. He sought to reveal in his treatise what he believed to be a serious and widespread misunderstanding of clerical absolution that was causing intolerable abuses of the keys in Lutheran Germany. Positively, the St. Lorenz preacher stressed the importance of the examination of faith and conduct, while extolling the great benefits of private absolution. In Osiander's mind, his version of the keys was more evangelical than that of his opponents.

Osiander's primary goal in *On the Power of the Keys* was to present his case for the uniqueness and indispensability of private absolution. He set out to do so first by defining the different means by which God communicated grace to human beings and then by demonstrating why these avenues of mercy were not interchangeable. The St. Lorenz preacher attributed the conflict between himself and his opponents to the latter's failure to appreciate the distinctive character and function of each of the five means of grace: the preaching of the law, the preaching of the gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the keys.⁶⁸

Much as he had argued in his first sermon on absolution, Osiander referred to the first two avenues of divine mercy as the "teaching key" (*lehrschlüssel*).⁶⁹ The St. Lorenz preacher again explained that this key provided human beings with information about God's wrath and mercy and was intended for use with both believers and nonbelievers until Christ returned. It was not a means of absolution. By contrast, the loosing key actually mediated divine mercy to the individual

rather than simply advising him of its existence. It enabled a personal appropriation of God's forgiveness, something that was essential to salvation.⁷⁰ Osiander explained,

There is a great difference between the one who preaches that God forgives sin—which is the teaching key—and the one who, by the authority God has given him, forgives sin, which is what the loosing key does. It is similar to the difference between a middleman [*unterkeuffel*] who says, “You can buy these goods from this merchant,” and his manager [*factor*] . . . who has full authority to sell, exchange, or lend the same goods, knowing that his lord will honor whatever he does.⁷¹

Osiander wanted his fellow clerics in Nürnberg to understand that if they played the middleman, they could not presume to transfer goods themselves; only when they assumed the role of manager were they authorized to do so. Preaching about forgiveness was quite different from actually mediating it.

Osiander went on to make another important distinction between the teaching key and the loosing and binding keys. Whereas the former was intended for use with all human beings, both Christians and pagans, the authority to bind and loose sins was for use with Christians only, albeit lapsed ones. Echoing his argument in the 1533 church order, Osiander insisted that the loosing and binding keys were to be used only for believers who had fallen from the grace they had received in baptism.⁷² For him, as for other evangelical reformers, baptism never lost its efficacy but provided sufficient grace to forgive a lifetime of sin.⁷³ Therefore, in conscious opposition to Catholic teaching, the Nürnberg preacher envisioned the keys not as a “second plank” to which Christians could turn when in danger of being overwhelmed by post-baptismal sin, but as a return to the original means of preservation itself, baptism.⁷⁴ The authority to bind and loose sins provided believers with an opportunity to be reunited with Christ. Through the preaching of the gospel and the Lord's Supper believers were encouraged to trust in God's mercy and to remain vigilant in their struggle against sin. Both provided forgiveness for common sins, or, more accurately, they reminded a person that his sins had already been remitted in baptism.⁷⁵ When, in spite of these two means of grace, a Christian squandered his spiritual inheritance by committing a serious sin, the keys provided the only road back to the kingdom.

According to Osiander, believers could forfeit their eternal inheri-

tance by either doubting that a particular sin had been forgiven in baptism—the sin of sins for Lutherans—or by ceasing to cooperate with baptismal grace in their lifelong struggle against sin.⁷⁶ Both instances represented for Osiander examples of how a Christian could allow a common sin that had been forgiven in baptism to evolve into a more serious offense that placed him outside the kingdom of heaven. Like his late medieval predecessors, Osiander divided moral transgressions into more (*todtsund*) and less serious sins (*leßliche sund*). Unlike the traditional Catholic distinction, which used the relative gravity of a specific offense to determine whether it was mortal or venial, Osiander based his differentiation on a more evangelical standard. What distinguished common transgressions from more serious ones was the degree to which a believer trusted in the divine forgiveness he had received in baptism and then, assisted by that same grace, continued to subdue the desires of his flesh.⁷⁷ The unique role of the keys in the divine economy of salvation was to restore those who had either fallen into doubt or become negligent in combating their sinful nature. It was his concern to protect this role that motivated Osiander to leave general confession and absolution out of the church order.

The Nürnberg preacher again argued in his treatise that people rarely came to receive private absolution because they believed general absolution was sufficient, a blatant case of the clergy and the laity alike not appreciating the unique office of each of the five means of grace. The result was that Nürnberg's churches failed to comply with the Augsburg Confession, which specifically required private absolution.⁷⁸ For Osiander there could be no happy coexistence of general and private absolution. Those who wanted one might as well wish for “the sun to rise while insisting that it remain night.”⁷⁹

Aside from his concern to observe the proper differentiation of both the scriptural means of grace and the canons of the Augsburg Confession, Osiander had another reason for wanting to abolish general absolution: he saw it as a major cause of impiety in Nürnberg. Because it dissuaded the laity from attending private absolution, the public forgiveness of sins frustrated the attempts of pastors to discipline their flocks. For Osiander the keys represented the primary means by which the clergy punished godlessness and rewarded piety. He referred to them as the “proper domestic discipline” (*rechte haußzucht*) to be used with those in the household of faith who had fallen into sin.⁸⁰ Anything that hindered their proper exercise necessarily detracted from the progress of Christian virtue in the city.

In a final assault on general absolution, Osiander again maintained that forgiveness had to be certain to be legitimate, this time linking his assertion with his understanding of the sacraments. He compared the emphasis on faith in Linck's form for general absolution to the old Church's teaching that contrition was necessary to make the priest's word of forgiveness efficacious. Both made absolution conditional upon a human work when it should be based on God's Word alone, the true source of faith. Osiander asserted,

When the pope and those who belong to him absolve someone they say, "Are you contrite? Then you are also absolved. If not, then the key has not set you free." It is the same and even worse with this alleged absolution [*vermainte absolutio*]. It requires humility, sorrow, heartfelt desire for God's grace and help, [and] a firm faith and trust in his promises. These are the highest and most difficult works and virtues one can wish or require from a human being . . . The pope and those who belong to him make everything depend upon sorrow. This absolution expects even more. Who can believe that he has been absolved [according to this teaching]? Truly, no one, unless he believes and knows beforehand that he possesses all the above-mentioned virtues.⁸¹

For Osiander a pastor's word of absolution was valid regardless of the faith or moral condition of the penitent. It reliably conveyed what it signified, God's judgment or forgiveness.⁸² It was a sacrament.⁸³ In Osiander's mind, this meant that God not only offered grace to the penitent through clerical absolution, as the St. Lorenz preacher's opponents maintained; he actually infused it into the individual, quite apart from her preparation or desire to receive forgiveness.⁸⁴ The confessor had tremendous power in this scheme and, with it, a heavy responsibility to exercise his office properly.⁸⁵ Therefore, Osiander concluded, a pastor should only pronounce absolution to those whom God wanted to set free from their sins. The only way to determine this was to examine penitents privately. Those who pronounced or received absolution lightly would be punished by God for their abuse of his sacrament. As the St. Lorenz preacher explained, "if the person who is absolved does not have sufficient sorrow or faith, the keys do not for this reason lie or deceive. What is loosed on earth is certainly loosed in heaven. If the absolved person remains without sorrow or faith . . . he will be damned on account of his hardness and unbelief. But the sin from which he has been released is truly forgiven him."⁸⁶ The risk for abuse of the keys posed by general absolution was simply

too great for a pastor to assume. The penalty for falsely applying or receiving grace was too severe.

For Osiander faith and sorrow did not merit forgiveness; God remitted sins when summoned by a confessor's words, quite apart from considerations of the penitent's worth. But once a penitent had received divine absolution, God would then belatedly determine whether she had been worthy of the forgiveness she had already received. In Osiander's scheme a penitent could actually incur guilt while being absolved. His insistence that laypeople were utterly passive in sacramental absolution made this awkward conclusion inevitable.

Throughout his treatise on the keys Osiander maintained that his understanding of absolution was in substantial agreement with Luther's. The St. Lorenz preacher referred time and again to the Wittenberg reformer's *The Keys* (1530) to support his own argument.⁸⁷ There was much to Osiander's claim. Luther distinguished between the "teaching keys" and the authority to bind and loose sins. Like Osiander, he insisted that the former be used with both believers and unbelievers, while the latter were intended for fallen Christians only. More important, Luther also argued in his treatise that the keys worked by "pure grace" and were in no way dependent on the sorrow of the penitent for their efficacy.⁸⁸ The Wittenberg reformer assailed the Romanists for robbing the laity of the immense consolation the keys offered by making absolution contingent upon the penitent's degree of sorrow, something that was impossible to measure. Like Osiander, Luther asserted that "an uncertain absolution is the same as no absolution at all."⁸⁹

Luther even maintained in his treatise that penitents could be bound or loosed apart from faith. When arguing against certain "factious spirits and sophists"—that is, Anabaptists and Spiritualists—who believed that the Spirit forgave sins directly, Luther insisted that forgiveness was always conveyed through the spoken word alone; not even faith affected the efficacy of the keys. The Wittenberg reformer asserted,

Do you believe that he is not bound who does not believe in the key which binds? Indeed, he shall learn, in due time, that his unbelief did not make the binding vain, nor did it fail in its purpose. Even he who does

not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it. St. Paul says in Romans 3[:3], “God will not fail on account of our unbelief.”⁹⁰

Osiander cited this passage in his own treatise on the keys to demonstrate that Luther supported his understanding of absolution.⁹¹ This claim, however, was problematic.

Throughout his treatise on the keys, Luther repeatedly called for faith to receive absolution. Immediately following his assertion that people could be bound or loosed from their sins apart from faith, the Wittenberg reformer explained,

We are not talking here about whether people believe in the efficacy of the keys or not. We fully realize that few believe. We are speaking of what the keys accomplish and give [*thun und geben*]. The one who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But the keys do not fail on this account. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel fails or lies. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it the king has not failed or lied. Rather, you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.⁹²

Despite what Luther asserted about a person being bound or loosed apart from faith, here he clearly maintained that the keys gave nothing (*nichts*) to the person who lacked faith.⁹³ His point was that the objective working of the keys was in no way dependent on faith, or any other subjective foundation, but the actual appropriation by an individual Christian of what the keys offered absolutely required faith. Luther was unclear, even inconsistent, but Osiander also ignored the numerous statements in the Wittenberg reformer’s treatise that contradicted his own embattled position. As we have seen, Luther had also clearly stated in his letters to the Nürnberg Council—which Osiander had read—that faith was essential to reception of absolution, a position he had championed over a decade earlier in his *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance*.⁹⁴

Like Osiander, Luther maintained that because the promise of the keys was based on the Word, it could always be trusted to offer divine forgiveness (or punishment), regardless of the penitent’s moral disposition. But, unlike Osiander, the Wittenberg reformer insisted that a layperson could only receive the divine offer of forgiveness if he had faith. Luther declared in his treatise on the keys, “[f]or [the keys] de-

mand faith in our hearts, and without faith you cannot use them with profit. But if you believe in their judgment they recover for you the innocence you received in baptism.”⁹⁵ Or again, “the one who believes [in the loosing key] has done enough to satisfy this key before and apart from all works. [This key] requires no work, though afterward such faith will produce works.”⁹⁶ And finally, “the keys require no work, only faith.”⁹⁷ Far from demanding perfect faith from penitents, the keys called for simple trust that God would honor the pastor’s word of forgiveness. Though Osiander also wanted laypeople to receive absolution in faith, he did not think such belief was necessary to the sacrament’s efficacy for the individual. For Osiander the contention that absolution was an offer that had to be received by faith posed a direct threat to the integrity of the keys. Luther was aware of this threat but did not consider it particularly serious. To those who charged that his version of the keys rendered absolution uncertain, the Wittenberg reformer responded, “Well, friend, if you call this a failure [that is, that the keys do not accomplish their purpose unless met with faith], then God fails in all his words and works. After all, very few people believe or accept what he constantly speaks and does for everyone.”⁹⁸ The point, again, was that God’s offer of grace endured quite apart from human responses to it, but only those who received the divine mercy in faith benefited from it. This faith was not a human work—on this point Osiander and Luther were agreed. It was a gift of God created in individuals by the Word.⁹⁹ But only the St. Lorenz preacher thought this implied complete passivity on the part of the confessant; Luther believed it implied receptivity.¹⁰⁰ Neither man wanted to ascribe agency to confessants, but whereas Luther could still allow—even require—a divinely caused human response in confession, Osiander permitted nothing of the sort.

Luther disagreed with Osiander’s sacramental theology of the keys. Indeed, although the Wittenberg reformer clearly regarded absolution as a means of grace, he was still very reluctant to refer to the keys as a sacrament, and never did so directly in his 1530 treatise. Absolution was still a pseudo-sacrament in his mind. He would not place it on the same level with baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Osiander, by contrast, saw the keys as a third sacrament, and maintained that just as communicants received the body and blood of Christ regardless of their worthiness, so too confessants were bound or loosed apart from considerations of faith or sorrow. In both cases the sacrament conveyed

what it promised, bringing grace to those who believed and spiritual poison to those who did not.¹⁰¹ As we have seen, Luther could say that the keys worked apart from faith,¹⁰² but he never spoke of confessants incurring divine wrath for receiving absolution unworthily, something he openly asserted of the Lord's Supper.¹⁰³

Luther conceived of absolution as a return to baptism; it was this sacrament that governed the reformer's thinking on the keys. The baptizan required faith to receive grace from the consecrated waters, though the promise of grace was not dependent on this faith and could even benefit the person who came to belief years after his actual baptism.¹⁰⁴ The same was true of the keys. Osiander also related the keys to baptism, but his understanding of how they worked was based on the model of the Lord's Supper: grace was conveyed to the worthy and the unworthy alike, in the latter case with harmful consequences. Thus Luther and Osiander disagreed both on the sacramental status of absolution and on its relationship to the undisputed sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

There was another important difference between Luther and Osiander on the keys. The Wittenberg reformer showed little of the Nürnberger's confidence in the ability of human confessors to determine with certainty whom God wanted to forgive. Though Luther was a strong advocate of the pre-communion interview, he thought there were limits to what a confessor could discern in such an encounter. His thinking here was governed by his view of the so-called key of knowledge. Luther rejected the traditional belief that Christ had given a third key to the disciples that enabled them to use the binding and loosing keys properly by granting them supernatural knowledge of a penitent's inward moral condition.¹⁰⁵ He asserted, "It is certainly true that one must know and be certain whom and what one should bind and loose. For one should not play blind-man's buff with God's order . . . But the knowledge to which they refer in this key—namely, that one should know how a person stands before God—is impossible [*das ist nichts*] . . . Therefore we do not wish to possess or to endure such a key of knowledge."¹⁰⁶

Luther opposed clerical claims to epistemological privilege in both the sacrament of penance and the new version of private confession; neither the Catholic confessor nor his evangelical counterpart possessed divine insight into a penitent's soul. Osiander held a different view—he appeared to promote an evangelical version of the key of

knowledge. To be sure, the St. Lorenz preacher did not wish to return to the late medieval interrogation of conscience; he simply wanted confessants to exhibit adequate knowledge of the evangelical faith and a measure of sorrow for their sins.¹⁰⁷ He had nothing more in mind than the examination of faith and conduct prescribed in the church order. Still, owing to his unique theology of the keys, Osiander placed greater stress on the role of the confessor in the pre-communion interview than Luther did: pastors were not simply offering absolution to confessants, they were mediating it, and Osiander believed they could discern the divine will accurately in each case; indeed, they were responsible before God for doing so.¹⁰⁸

Osiander advocated a kind of evangelical sacerdotalism in his treatise on the keys; this is what set him off most clearly from Luther. For Osiander there was something distinctive, even necessary, about the priesthood, whereas for Luther and other evangelical reformers it always remained provisional. Not surprisingly, the St. Lorenz preacher would later argue for a modified version of ordination.¹⁰⁹ Though Osiander insisted that he was not interested in reestablishing the old order of things,¹¹⁰ his detractors—both lay and clerical—had reason to see in his theology of the keys remnants of the sacerdotal religion they had rejected. Regardless of the more evangelical aspects of his thought, Osiander's extreme absolutionism,¹¹¹ coupled with his belief that the keys provided the only means of forgiveness for serious sins, sounded to many like an attempt to return to the "popish" past.

Nürnberg's zealous Council secretary once again felt compelled to refute Osiander.¹¹² As in his earlier opinions, Spengler opposed Osiander's argument that general absolution would lead to the decline of private absolution by insisting that no one in Nürnberg wanted to abolish the latter means of forgiveness. In his mind, the two forms of absolution were still quite similar, regardless of Osiander's argument to the contrary. "They are both a divine promise which offer us forgiveness of sins [and] which require genuine faith."¹¹³ According to Spengler, the clergy's role was simply to make this offer. He thought that both forms of absolution presented forgiveness, each in its unique way, though Spengler admitted that private absolution was the more potent of the two.¹¹⁴ General absolution and private absolution were simply two applications of the same divine grace. If everyone involved in the present controversy could simply accept this position, the crisis would be over.

Spengler was particularly disturbed by Osiander's assertion that private absolution was efficacious regardless of a penitent's faith. He asserted, "in my opinion this is a strange theology which I am unable to grasp with either my reason or the Scripture. In all my days I have never heard or read [anything like it]."¹¹⁵ The Council secretary thought it dangerous to tie salvation so closely to clerical absolution, especially when there was so little emphasis on faith. Spengler also berated Osiander for preaching about the keys in open defiance of the Council's order. He advised the magistrates to prevent Osiander from doing so again in the future because, as he put it, "I truly worry that these wounds which have only just begun to heal would be renewed and made even wider."¹¹⁶

The Nürnberg Council chose to delay its ruling on the absolution controversy until the theologians in Wittenberg had read and responded to the opinions of the imperial city's clergy.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, it ordered Osiander and his opponents to refrain from airing their views on absolution in public. On October 8, 1533, the Wittenberg theologians responded with a rather diplomatic recommendation.¹¹⁸ Although clearly opposed to Osiander's view of the keys,¹¹⁹ Luther and his colleagues advised the Council to allow the St. Lorenz preacher to use only private absolution in his church, while the city's other clergymen could continue to use both forms in their churches. In this way no one would be forced to act against his conscience and unity would be preserved.¹²⁰ This recommendation demonstrated the importance that the Wittenbergers attached to promoting harmony among the adherents of the new faith, especially in a city as strategic as Nürnberg. Having already suffered a split over differing interpretations of the Lord's Supper, the evangelical movement could not now afford a new schism over absolution. The Wittenbergers themselves never placed great value on general absolution, but they knew the Nürnberg Council did. Unlike Osiander, they had no fundamental theological opposition to the practice, but clearly thought it inferior to private absolution. At least part of the reason they appeared so supportive of general absolution must be attributed to their concern to promote unity in the evangelical movement during a period when its future was still uncertain.

Ten days later, the Council ordered Nürnberg's preachers to follow the Wittenberg recommendation. The magistrates underscored that the city's preachers were not to treat the topic of absolution in their sermons, citing their concern to avoid further agitation of the com-

mon folk.¹²¹ To ensure this mandate would be observed, the Council ordered the sermons of the city's preachers to be monitored.¹²² In an effort to promote conformity of practice in Nürnberg's churches, the magistrates also requested Osiander to allow general absolution in his church as a special favor to them.¹²³ There is no indication that he obliged them, though he did promise to refrain from treating the issue in public. A few weeks later, Spengler wrote to a friend in Wittenberg that the absolution controversy in Nürnberg had finally settled down "because Osiander is now silent."¹²⁴

Osiander held his tongue for three years, though there is evidence that he continued to press his case against general absolution behind closed doors.¹²⁵ In July 1535 he preached a sermon on the three sacraments in which he argued strenuously for the importance of private absolution. He warned his listeners that the only way they could participate worthily in the Lord's Supper was to acknowledge their sinfulness to a pastor beforehand and receive sacramental absolution from him.¹²⁶ Though the temptation to speak out against general absolution must have been nearly unbearable for Osiander, he honored his pledge to the Council. One year later, the St. Lorenz preacher could resist no longer.

In the summer of 1536 Osiander again preached against general absolution as part of a series of sermons on the gospel of John. As in the 1535 sermon, he had been treating private absolution, this time while commenting on John 20:21–23. In the three sermons that preceded his tirade against general absolution, Osiander again emphasized the indispensable role that the clergy played in mediating absolution.¹²⁷ Unlike common sermons, in which a preacher simply acted as a messenger announcing God's work of forgiving penitent sinners, pronouncing absolution was a task that belonged to clerics themselves, one for which they had to give account to God. In the former case, God took the general proclamation of forgiveness and applied it to individual sinners as he saw fit. In the latter case, the confessor himself bound or loosed sins, knowing that his decision would have an impact in heaven.¹²⁸

Osiander's statement that God forgave sinners outside of private absolution provides important clarification of the preacher's understanding of priestly forgiveness. The point he had been trying to make all along was a very specific one. He had no quarrel with those who

wanted to seek divine forgiveness through means other than the keys, though he thought this advisable only for less serious sins. In his sermon against general absolution he advised that laypeople who disliked their confessors should not be forced to go to them, but should seek forgiveness directly from God.¹²⁹ Osiander wanted to stress that when a pastor pronounced absolution he had to be aware that his words were sacramental; they would effect forgiveness regardless of the penitent's spiritual condition. Therefore pastors should use the keys only when they could be sure that God himself wanted to bind or loose a person. This was what the Scriptures demanded. Unfortunately for Osiander, many of his contemporaries viewed his emphasis on the importance of examining penitents as a return to the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church. Such stress on clerical authority made Nürnbergers skittish as they called to mind the abuses of priestly power under the old regime.

In his sermon on general absolution Osiander again raged against the *Offene Schuld* and those who supported it. He preached from the St. Lorenz pulpit, "I have judged this alleged absolution . . . to be an abuse and neither can nor may ever judge it for anything but an abuse, because it has no origin or witness in the Scriptures, but instead has been established and made mandatory through [worldly] power." The St. Lorenz preacher named the Council itself as the primary culprit (*haubtursacher*) in this crime against the divine Word.¹³⁰ Osiander argued that if a cow could speak, even it could proclaim general absolution according to current usage. It would simply mouth the words and then leave it up to individual consciences to decide whether they had enough faith or sorrow to know they were forgiven.¹³¹ The St. Lorenz preacher so detested general absolution because it made impossible the very thing the keys were supposed to convey, certainty of one's status before God.¹³² In his mind, clerical authority and certainty of salvation went hand in hand, the former being a necessary condition for the latter. His parishioners took a different view of the matter.

Even before the St. Lorenz worship service ended, burghers were protesting the content of Osiander's sermon to Hektor Pömer, the provost of St. Lorenz Church. Pömer, in turn, wrote to councilman Hieronymus Baumgartner, who in 1532 had been entrusted with the administrative oversight of Nürnberg's churches, an office he held until 1560.¹³³ The provost warned Baumgartner that if the magistrates did not take some action against Osiander, "a fire would arise out of

these sparks.”¹³⁴ The Council responded as it had in the past by ordering Osiander not to preach against general absolution and exhorted his colleagues to refrain from responding in their own sermons.¹³⁵ The magistrates also decided to postpone the church visitation they had planned for that year until the absolution controversy could be put to rest once and for all, a sign of how serious the Council took the threat it posed to civil harmony. Margrave George of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach went ahead with the visitation in his own lands.¹³⁶

As per the magistrates’ request, Osiander prepared a copy of his sermon and submitted it to Baumgartner. Before the latter passed it on to his fellow councilmen, he first asked one of Nürnberg’s newest preachers to inspect it. In 1535, following the death of Dominikus Schleuppner, Veit Dietrich, a native Nürnberger, returned home to take over the St. Sebald preachership. Prior to his homecoming, Dietrich had worked as the dean of the arts faculty at the University of Wittenberg. He had a particularly strong relationship with Luther, living in the former Black Cloister, which had become Luther’s home, and serving as the reformer’s personal amanuensis. He had also accompanied Luther to the Marburg Colloquy and to Coburg Castle during the Diet of Augsburg. Dietrich was well aware of Nürnberg’s absolution controversy before taking up his post at St. Sebald Church. He had been in regular correspondence with Lazarus Spengler about the matter since 1533. The Council had offered the vacant preachership to Dietrich, at least in part because it felt he would be able to contend with Osiander.¹³⁷

In early September 1536 Dietrich sent his written opinion to Baumgartner, outlining his points of agreement and disagreement with Osiander’s sermon.¹³⁸ The St. Sebald preacher concurred with his colleague that it would be impossible to reestablish moral discipline in Nürnberg if general absolution were retained. Dietrich urged Baumgartner to require all the city’s clerics to follow the 1533 church order, which included no form for the disputed practice. In spite of his support for Osiander’s position, Dietrich did not subscribe to his colleague’s theological justification for it. He emphasized that whether preaching the gospel from the pulpit or speaking absolution privately to a penitent, pastors were simply messengers (*sumus nuncii*). There was nothing necessary—in any absolute sense—about their office as confessor for conveying forgiveness of sin. The most the clergy could

do was to offer the promise of divine forgiveness to laypeople, who then had to accept it in faith for themselves. Like his colleagues in Wittenberg and Nürnberg, Dietrich maintained that absolution in whatever form always had to be received by a trusting heart to effect what it offered. In other words, it was conditional,¹³⁹ thus making the confessor's office an important, though provisional, clerical function.

Baumgartner sent along Osiander's sermon to the other magistrates and likely included Dietrich's written opinion. The Council ordered the sermon to be compared with the record of Osiander's 1533 sermons to determine if the St. Lorenz preacher had changed his position in any way, a process that took several weeks.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Philip Melanchthon paid an unexpected and, for the Council, providential visit to the imperial city in mid-October. Nürnberg provided a convenient resting place for the reformer, who was on his way back to Wittenberg from Tübingen. The magistrates received the eminent theologian warmly and spared no expense to ensure his comfort.¹⁴¹ Soon enough, though, Melanchthon learned that the Council was again fighting the fire of theological controversy that Osiander's sermon had reignited, an effort in which the magistrates were hoping to enlist his help. Melanchthon wrote to Joachim Camerarius, a colleague at Tübingen, "We have been lovingly received by Nürnberg, but I have fallen into the flames of contention which are burning again among the demagogues."¹⁴²

In response to the Council's request, Melanchthon met with Osiander to discuss the absolution controversy. He summarized the result of this session along with his own recommendations for how best to resolve the current crisis in a brief tract entitled "Concerning Absolution in Nürnberg."¹⁴³ As was to be expected, he agreed with Osiander that private absolution was extremely important and that it could help reduce the level of impiety in the city.¹⁴⁴ But Melanchthon opposed Osiander's assertion that general absolution was a fraud (*gaucklereij*). Siding with the majority opinion in Nürnberg, he affirmed that general absolution constituted a valid form of forgiveness. Certainly the best news contained in Melanchthon's tract, at least from the Council's perspective, was that Osiander had clearly affirmed that the laity could obtain forgiveness through the public preaching of the gospel.¹⁴⁵ The St. Lorenz preacher had admitted as much in his sermon, but it must have heartened the magistrates to learn that he had formally acknowledged this to Melanchthon.

Rather than offering any further guidance, the reformer presented the magistrates with a list of questions to guide their own discussion of the matter and recommended that they write to Luther to seek further advice.¹⁴⁶ He also recommended that Osiander should be silenced because of the obvious turmoil his sermon had caused in the city.¹⁴⁷ The Council took Melanchthon's advice and on November 6, three days after the reformer left the city,¹⁴⁸ sent Osiander's sermon to the Wittenberg theological faculty asking for guidance.¹⁴⁹ The wording of their request made it clear that they were simply looking for assistance in bringing their unbridled preacher under rein.¹⁵⁰ The Council's patience with its recalcitrant preacher was growing thin.

Because Luther and his colleagues were then preparing for upcoming negotiations with papal representatives at Mantua, they could only respond to the Nürnberg request in brief.¹⁵¹ After affirming the value of private absolution they repeated their previous position that forgiveness could be obtained by believing hearts through either private absolution or a sermon. Both owed their authority to God's promise to be present with his Word, and both required faith. According to the Wittenbergers, it was the latter point that lay at the heart of the Nürnberg absolution controversy.¹⁵² Unable to provide more detailed guidance, Luther and his colleagues promised a fuller explanation of their position in the near future.

The Nürnberg magistrates waited in vain for this longer reply from Wittenberg.¹⁵³ In the meantime they continued to uphold the status quo with respect to the practice of absolution in the imperial city. The Council sought to arrange a meeting between Luther, Melanchthon, Osiander, and Dietrich at Schmalkalden in February 1537, but was unsuccessful in this endeavor.¹⁵⁴ The absolution controversy continued to smolder, but now it was confined to strictly private exchanges.¹⁵⁵ Osiander's 1536 sermon marked the last time he aired his views on general absolution in public. Spengler would have been relieved had he lived to witness it. (He died on September 7, 1534.)

In February 1539 lay inhabitants of Nürnberg finally had an opportunity to express their opinion publicly on the use of the keys in their city. Their means of expression fulfilled the Council's worst fears about Nürnberg being overwhelmed by chaos. It also demonstrated how committed Lutheran laypeople were to protecting their own reli-

gious and cultural practices from unwanted clerical influence, a continuation of a trend reaching back to the later Middle Ages.

The Council had recently given permission for burghers to hold a *Schembartlauf*, something it had not allowed since 1524. The *Schembartlauf* was a pre-Lenten parade that had been a traditional part of late medieval Nürnberg culture at least since the fourteenth century. Such carnivalesque practices had a long history in the empire.¹⁵⁶ Protestant reformers, including Osiander, had succeeded in having the *Schembartlauf* abolished in the early years of the Reformation, arguing that it was a pagan ritual.¹⁵⁷

Social historians have argued that traditions like the *Schembartlauf* provided late medieval communities with an opportunity for collective moral catharsis before they entered into Lent. For a short time carnality had free rein, only to be ceremonially purged from the community by the customary burning or execution of a symbolic scapegoat. As John Bossy has observed, during carnival “[t]he world was turned upside-down to see what was crawling about underneath.”¹⁵⁸

Social historians have also maintained that carnivals provided common laypeople with a socially acceptable way of expressing discontent, a kind of safety valve through which nonelites could let off potentially destructive steam. Carnival was a time of institutionalized rebellion designed to protect against actual revolution.¹⁵⁹ Commoners could express their grievances to their leaders in graphic language, usually without suffering penalty or censure. This explanation accounts well for the specific character of the 1539 *Schembartlauf*.¹⁶⁰ Nürnbergers wanted to send a very clear message to their leaders about what they perceived as a dire threat to their spiritual freedom as evangelical Christians.

Under the leadership of several young patricians, Nürnberg artisans constructed a float known as *die Hölle* (hell) on which the city’s inhabitants had traditionally depicted what they found particularly worthy of damnation. After an interim of fifteen years, Nürnbergers chose Osiander as their object of wrath.¹⁶¹ The designers of the float placed an actor resembling the St. Lorenz preacher on a ship of fools, accompanied by a physician examining a urine glass, an astrologer reading a sextant—both in the crow’s nest—and two demons, one of whom tempted the infamous preacher with a backgammon board.¹⁶² Osiander had inveighed against such games as frivolous distractions

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the print version of this title.]

The 1539 *Schembartlauf* hell-float. *Schembartbuch*, Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg,
Nor. K. 444, fol. 68r.

from true religion.¹⁶³ During the plague of 1533 he had warned Nürnbergers against placing too much faith in medicine and astrology, which in his mind amounted to “spiritual adultery” (*gaistliche hurerey*).¹⁶⁴ To Osiander’s left hung a large key that symbolized his commitment to priestly power. It was something Nürnbergers wanted to consign to eternal flames.¹⁶⁵ Though Osiander had refrained from publishing his treatise on the keys, burghers had heard him expound his views on clerical authority and confession several times from the St. Lorenz pulpit.¹⁶⁶

The 1539 *Schembartlauf* was not the first time Nürnbergers had used the traditional parade to protest against abuses in the city’s religious life. During the early years of the Reformation, inhabitants of the imperial city satirized the pope and the sale of indulgences during carnival.¹⁶⁷ Laypeople in other evangelical strongholds, including Wittenberg, did the same.¹⁶⁸ In the 1539 parade Nürnbergers effectively placed Osiander in the same category with medieval popes and priests, who, in their minds, had oppressed lay consciences through abuses of religious authority. Whether fairly or not, Osiander came to be seen by many of his contemporaries as an evangelical Gregory VII, who was just as committed to the superiority of the clergy over the laity as the medieval pope had been. In keeping with the spirit of the early evangelical pamphleteers, Nürnbergers living under officially established Lutheranism continued to show little tolerance for clerics who overreached their bounds, a fact Osiander could well attest by the end of the 1539 *Schembartlauf*.

As participants in the parade towed the hell-float through the imperial city, they stopped and rioted near the St. Lorenz preacher’s house, shooting off their fireworks into its windows. According to Osiander, had the house not been barricaded, they would have broken into it.¹⁶⁹ Thus deterred, the rowdy throng made its way to the main market, where, as was customary, it stormed and burned the float. Osiander immediately took his case to the Council, which had little choice but to abolish the *Schembartlauf* permanently and severely punish the magistrates who had overseen it.¹⁷⁰ Still, if the Council took issue with the way Nürnbergers expressed their frustration with Osiander, it shared their sentiment. Throughout the Council’s struggle with the St. Lorenz preacher it had demonstrated great sympathy with the concerns of ordinary burghers. For patricians and artisans alike general absolution had become a symbol of opposition to Osiander’s sacerdo-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

The storming of the hell-float. *Schembartbuch*, Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, Nor. K. 444, double-folio II.

talism. Though the Council was concerned about promoting moral discipline in the imperial city, there were limits to how far it would go in pursuing this goal. It would obviously not adopt a policy that infringed on its own religious authority, but neither would it approve of one that threatened the spiritual liberty of the city's inhabitants. The two concerns went hand in hand during the Nürnberg absolution controversy, much as they had in the early years of the Reformation in the imperial city. Secular bishops continued to protect lay consciences even as they sought to discipline them.

Confession Established

Nürnberg's preachers continued to quibble about general absolution on into the early 1540s, though, much to the Council's relief, not in public.¹ In spite of this ongoing discord, the imperial city's theologians were united by a growing concern about the spiritual condition of Nürnberg, especially with regard to reception of the Lord's Supper. The preachers feared divine reprisal for the abuses of the sacrament they witnessed and became more convinced than ever that private confession had to be established in the imperial city. Their parishioners, however, saw things differently.

The 1539 *Schembartlauf* well reflected popular attitudes toward private confession in Nürnberg. As reports from the imperial city's pastors make clear, the laity rarely went to confession in the 1530s and early 1540s, regardless of what the church order stipulated.² Osiander's heavy-handed tactics had only strengthened the lay bias against private confession that reached back to the late 1510s. For its part the Council refused to intervene until it could be sure that Osiander would renounce his evangelical sacerdotalism and submit to the magistrates' authority—a vain hope, as we will see. The result was that Nürnberg developed a policy on private confession that was atypical for Lutheran Germany in the mid-sixteenth century.³

The magistrates continued to share the preachers' concern about the moral condition of Nürnberg, especially after the tumultuous events of the recent *Schembartlauf*. Though the Council understood

the burghers' frustration with Osiander, it did not approve of the way they expressed their displeasure. A couple of months after the *Schembartlauf* the magistrates sent word to Hektor Pömer, provost of St. Lorenz Church, calling upon him to instruct Nürnberg's pastors to examine laypeople before allowing them to communicate.⁴ The private examination of faith and conduct seemed a good way to stem the perceived growing tide of impiety in the city, a perception created at least in part by the heightened expectations for spiritual improvement created by the Reformation. Still, if the Council was beginning to accede to the wishes of the clergy, it remained hesitant to take the final steps required to implement Lutheran private confession in Nürnberg. As we will see, clerical pressure and concern for moral reform would not be enough to persuade the magistrates to mandate private confession. A much more dire threat would be required to accomplish this feat.

When Veit Dietrich learned of the magistrates' directions to Hektor Pömer, he responded by sending a recommendation to councilman Hieronymus Baumgartner that raised a number of concerns. While clearly in favor of the Council's decision to enforce the pre-communication examination, the St. Sebald preacher advised Nürnberg's lay church administrator that the clergy was simply not able to comply with the magistrates' wishes. He explained, "if we are to establish the discipline of the pre-communication examination among the people, it is certain . . . that the clergy would be completely overwhelmed." Dietrich reported that most of his potential confessors were old men who were already overworked. He further observed that in former times clerics had relied on mendicants to help them examine communicants, something that was no longer an option in the imperial city.⁵ The Council would have to hire a new crew of chaplains if the clergy was to conduct the examination of faith and conduct. For their part the magistrates elected to maintain the status quo, while holding the St. Sebald preacher's recommendations under consideration.

Four years later the Council again expressed concern about the moral condition of its city. Frightened by advances of the Turks in Hungary, the magistrates anxiously looked for scapegoats to blame for the empire's dire situation, even though Nürnberg itself was never directly threatened by Turkish aggression.⁶ Widespread intemperance in eating and drinking along with a general lack of discipline among

burghers had long given magistrates and preachers an excuse for censure in such times.⁷ In July 1543 the Council ordered the city's preachers to read out an official exhortation to their congregations that warned them against the perils of ungodliness.⁸ The magistrates also called upon the clergy to preach against the vices they believed were increasing every day in their city.⁹ However, the Council soon regretted this decision and later reprimanded several preachers for being too harsh in their sermons, among them Osiander.¹⁰ Despite their fear of the Turk, the magistrates remained committed to protecting lay consciences from overbearing clerics.

Osiander and his colleagues seized the opportunity provided by the Council's impatience to call for immediate changes in the present church order, changes they believed would reestablish proper discipline in the city. Though their recommendation is not extant, inclusion of an article on the ban and rejection of general absolution were almost certainly among their suggestions.¹¹ Osiander preached in support of the ban four weeks later when he thought the Council was taking too much time to implement his suggestions, a move that resulted in the magistrates' placing his future sermons under surveillance.¹² In a reversal of their early position, the city's other preachers would soon join Osiander in calling for the abolition of general absolution. True to form, the magistrates again refused to return the binding key to the clergy and maintained their support for general absolution.¹³

By this point many of the city's preachers had become frustrated with the Council's inaction. Although the magistrates had sought their opinion about how best to ensure proper reception of the sacrament, they had not moved on the preachers' recommendations. The clergy continued to feel hamstrung in matters of church discipline and had grown suspicious of the Council's commitment to reform. The Council, though always supportive of private confession in principle, continued to have misgivings about implementing the practice. As in the past, the magistrates would move toward establishing it, and then quickly retreat. They knew that Nürnbergers had grown accustomed to general confession and that it would be difficult to introduce private confession, even in its reformed guise. More important, they were also concerned to restrain preachers like Osiander who were eager to promote clerical authority. Granting such theologians more influence over the laity was the last thing the Council wanted to do. The magistrates shared the theologians' concern to combat impiety,

but they preferred exhortations and ordinances as their weapons of choice over the clerical discipline favored by Osiander. When hard-pressed by external events, like the plague of 1533 or the Turkish threat of the early 1540s, the Council would threaten to enforce evangelical private confession, only to back down when it came time to establish the new ritual. Just a few months before the 1543 decision to turn the preachers loose, Nürnberg had hosted two imperial diets (July 24–August 26, 1542; January–April 1543), both of which saw King Ferdinand demand money and troops from the estates in order to stop the advance of the dreaded Turk.¹⁴ Calling for widespread repentance seemed the best way to win divine protection for imperial troops in their impending confrontation. But the Council quickly called off its preachers after observing that they had become too aggressive.

The magistrates again sought advice from the theologians on how to promote worthy reception of the sacrament just three days before Palm Sunday 1545.¹⁵ In keeping with the 1533 church order, the members of the clergy all agreed that communicants should be required to register with their pastors and undergo an examination of faith and conduct. Wenzeslaus Linck argued that because neither individual examination nor private absolution was practiced in the city's churches, laypeople went to the Lord's Supper "like cows." He asserted that if the Council did not institute a more disciplined practice of catechization and absolution soon, no one would be able to prevent the present disorder from spiraling out of control.¹⁶ Osiander thought there was not enough time to make any significant changes in the upcoming Easter celebration—a fact the Council may have counted on—but he had a plan for the following year: after registering and examining laypeople, pastors would write communicants' names in a book. Anyone whose name was not found in the book would be denied access to the sacrament. The St. Lorenz preacher explained, "this would create such a fear and impression that no one would attempt to approach unregistered and without permission, because he would always be worried that he would be found out and put to shame before everyone."¹⁷ The other clerics were supportive of Osiander's proposal and also called for the magistrates to provide more confessors in the future.¹⁸

The Council again failed to act. However, shortly before Christmas of the same year, the magistrates took a tentative first step in the direc-

tion the theologians had been urging. On December 12, 1545, the Council instructed the city's preachers and chaplains to tell communicants that "those who had occasion" (*wölcher gelegenheit haben*) might receive instruction after Saturday evening vespers or early on Sunday morning, if it was more convenient.¹⁹ Though hardly the kind of tough position Osiander and his colleagues had been looking for, this decision at least indicated that the Council was beginning to respond to their pressure.

As the preceding series of events suggest, Nürnberg's clergymen had gradually come to agree with Osiander about the indispensability of private absolution. Though already supportive of it in theory, they now wanted to put it into practice. Some had also come to share Osiander's view of general absolution. Following the St. Lorenz preacher's lead, Veit Dietrich chose not to include general absolution in his 1543 *Liturgy Booklet for the Pastors in the Countryside*.²⁰ Though none of the Nürnberg theologians agreed with Osiander's theology of the keys, many did consider a private encounter between pastor and communicant essential for reestablishing proper moral discipline. As the members of the clergy later made clear, most thought general confession was hindering progress in this direction. The magistrates continued to believe that both forms of absolution had their proper role in Nürnberg's religious life. Concerned to avoid granting clerics too much authority over lay consciences, the magistrates elected to bide their time, waiting for an opportunity to enforce private confession without having to abolish general confession. In their minds, the examination of faith and conduct would help restrain lay impiety, while general absolution placed a check on clerical zeal. The Council wanted both safeguards. The opportunity they had been waiting for would soon appear in an unexpected guise.

Though the Nürnberg absolution controversy would not be resolved for another eight years, it is important to note that by the mid-1540s it had already influenced religious policy beyond the walls of the imperial city. It was not a merely intra-Nürnberg event. As evangelical strongholds throughout Germany adopted the imperial city's church orders, they spread Osiander and Dietrich's conviction that the evangelical version of private confession was a necessary prerequisite to worthy participation in the sacrament. The Nürnberg church orders encouraged a strict observance of the Augsburg Confession in matters

of confession and absolution, even though practice in the imperial city itself suggested otherwise.

Nürnberg clergymen took the same message with them as they helped establish the Reformation elsewhere in Germany, as the case of Johannes Forster in Regensburg illustrates. Shortly after Regensburg became Protestant in 1541, its city council asked Nürnberg for advice on how to celebrate the Lord's Supper properly.²¹ The Nürnberg magistrates responded by sending Johannes Forster to the Bavarian imperial city. Forster had been employed by the Nürnberg Council to take over the duties of Hektor Pömer, who had recently passed away.²² A learned theologian who had studied with the likes of Reuchlin and Luther, Forster had held a professorship at the University of Tübingen before coming to Nürnberg. After his brief tenure in the imperial city, he would play a decisive role in the Hennenberg Reformation and eventually become rector of the University of Wittenberg.²³ The Nürnberg Council had hired him in hopes of finding someone who could rein in Osiander.²⁴ The two seem to have gotten on quite well: Osiander consented to Forster's taking over his office when he went to Palatine-Neuburg to help establish the Reformation there.²⁵ It also seems clear that Forster and Osiander had discussed absolution, as the early shape of the Reformation in Regensburg attests.

Owing primarily to Forster's influence, the evangelical version of private confession became an early and permanent feature of the Reformation in Regensburg. Perhaps determined to prevent another absolution controversy, Forster integrated specific instructions for private confession into Regensburg's new church order. Though he drew directly upon the 1533 Nürnberg order for his theology of confession, Forster went beyond the imperial city's guide for worship by specifying that the new ritual was to take place at a special Saturday afternoon vesper service dedicated to the examination and absolution of communicants. (Osiander and Brenz had neglected to include such explicit provisions for the practice of confession and absolution in their church order. Nürnbergers were encouraged but not required to go to confession on Saturday afternoons; they could also confess on Sunday mornings, though few went at either time.) The first formal evangelical worship service in Regensburg was one of these vesper services at which Forster and two other Lutheran pastors confessed thirty-two lay penitents, all of whom received communion in both kinds the next morning.²⁶ Forster also prepared an exhortation to

confession that contained specific instructions on how evangelical Christians were to confess,²⁷ something that the 1533 Nürnberg church order also lacked.²⁸ The Regensburg reformers still allowed general confession and absolution in the Sunday liturgy,²⁹ but owing to their strong support for private absolution, the new ritual never became a matter of serious dispute in Regensburg.³⁰ From the beginning lay Regensburgers understood that they had to go to confession in order to communicate, an important difference with Nürnberg.³¹

By the mid-1540s the Nürnberg absolution controversy had achieved considerable notoriety in Lutheran Germany. When asked by Prince George von Anhalt how best to handle the forgiveness of sins in his territory's churches, Melanchthon cited Nürnberg as a case study of what not to do. In a letter dated October 20, 1545, Melanchthon, along with George Major, wrote, "we think it best to exhort listeners often to ask for private [absolution]. We see Nürnberg as an example: few ask for private [absolution] because there is public [absolution]."³² Melanchthon exhorted the prince to practice what Nürnberg's theologians preached, even though they did not. Judging by the extant church orders, Prince George took Melanchthon's advice to heart: he allowed only private absolution and confession in his churches.³³ Many later evangelical church orders followed this pattern, including those in Wittenberg.³⁴ A 1540 order from electoral Brandenburg specifically referred to general confession as an "abuse" (*misbrauch*).³⁵ It should be noted, however, that there were also plenty of later Lutheran church orders that provided formulas for either general absolution only³⁶ or, more commonly, for both private and general absolution.³⁷ One must also remember that church orders only described religious practice in theory. As we have seen in Nürnberg, there could be a significant discrepancy between official expectations and actual practice with regard to confession and absolution in the German Reformation. Soon the gap between theory and practice in Nürnberg would be closed by the most unlikely series of events.

In the summer of 1546 efforts to resolve the mounting religious tensions in the empire by diplomacy finally failed, and war broke out between Lutherans and Catholics. After the disappointing outcome of the Diet of Regensburg (1546),³⁸ Charles V led his imperial forces, accompanied by troops sent by Pope Paul III, in a victorious campaign against the poorly organized armies of the Schmalkaldic League. As-

sisted by the turncoat Protestant Duke Moritz of Saxony, the emperor won a decisive battle at Mühlberg in April 1547, where he captured Elector John Frederick of Saxony. Two months later Philip of Hesse, the other leader of the Lutheran alliance, surrendered and was imprisoned along with John Frederick. Charles V's victory in the so-called Schmalkaldic War, coupled with the recent deaths of his enemies Henry VIII and Francis I in early 1547, and a new peace treaty with the Turks, placed him in an excellent position to settle the religious question in the empire once and for all. Ironically, the resolution of this imperial crisis would also offer Nürnberg's Council the opportunity it had been looking for to settle its controversy over confession and complete the reformation of the keys in the imperial city.

In keeping with its earlier decision not to join the Schmalkaldic League, Nürnberg held fast to its policy of "enlightened self-interest" and remained neutral in the 1546–1547 conflict. While many of its neighbors, including Weißenburg, Dinkelsbühl, and Windsheim, were occupied by imperial troops, as were the larger evangelical strongholds to the south, Ulm and Augsburg, Nürnberg was able to maintain its autonomy. Still, in the events to come, the imperial city had to reckon constantly with the possibility of losing its liberty and having its merchants' trade routes cut off.³⁹ Retaining both of these, along with the city's evangelical creed, would require all the diplomatic skill the Council could muster.

On September 1, 1547, Charles V convened an imperial diet in Augsburg where he hoped to take a decisive first step toward resolving the religious conflicts that had splintered the empire. Nürnberg magistrates Erasmus Ebner and Jakob Muffel were present at the diet to keep the Council abreast of its proceedings. The evangelical estates immediately called for a free German council to solve the religious problem, the same position they had taken in the early 1520s. Charles would hear none of this and instead informed the Protestants that all matters of faith and practice would be treated at the Council of Trent. Many Lutherans saw in this statement a very real threat to the Reformation's continued existence. The emperor further mandated that, in the meantime, all the estates were to adopt a provisional church order until theologians at Trent could develop a new, more permanent, one. Nürnberg's magistrates feared that the so-called Augsburg Interim meant a forced return to the old faith.⁴⁰

In fact, Charles had something short of the reestablishment of

papal religion in mind. He had promised Duke Moritz, along with other Lutheran princes, that he would not reinstate Catholicism, and Charles was not on the best of terms with the pope anyhow.⁴¹ The latter directly opposed the emperor's alleged ability to make binding laws in matters of doctrine, a position that led the Catholic estates to reject the Interim and insist it be valid for Protestants only. Even before formal approval, the Interim was intended only for those German cities and territories that had abandoned the traditional faith. Charles also had to reckon with the fact that although he had defeated the Schmalkaldic League, the Lutheran creed still had strong support in the empire, and its adherents would likely be willing to fight again if they were not granted real concessions in the new church order.

After several months of negotiations, imperially appointed theologians, including the emperor's personal confessor and preacher, had a draft of the Interim ready in mid-March 1548. Johann Agricola, palace preacher from electoral Brandenburg, had been the only Lutheran to collaborate on the effort.⁴² The new order contained a hybrid theory of justification, so-called "double justification" (*duplex iustificatio*), which based salvation both on the merits of Christ (*iustitia Christi*) and good works that were infused in the believer by the Holy Spirit (*iustitia inhaerens*). It also allowed for clerical marriage and communion in both kinds to continue until Trent promulgated an official position. Otherwise, the new order sought to reimpose Catholicism, including both the mass and the sacrament of penance.⁴³ The Interim specifically referred to auricular confession as "a second plank" to which penitents could repair after committing post-baptismal sin,⁴⁴ a direct assault on Luther's (and Osiander's) understanding of absolution. It placed more emphasis on faith than had the late medieval sacrament,⁴⁵ but priests still possessed "authority to judge" (*gewalt zu richten, potestatem iudicandi*).⁴⁶ The framers of the Interim reasoned that the only way for a priest to know whether he should bind or loose a penitent was if the layperson confessed his known sins in detail. In response to evangelical charges that it was impossible for a penitent to remember all of his mortal sins, the new order allowed for forgotten sins to be included in the general statement of guilt with which a layperson began his confession. The Interim required penitents to perform works of satisfaction, though it insisted that Christ's satisfaction was efficacious for sin's guilt and eternal penalty.

The Nürnberg Council had serious reservations about accepting the new church order and, before consulting its own theologians, first turned for advice to Melancthon, who had become the *de facto* leader of the German Reformation since Luther's death in 1546. The magistrates received the Wittenberg reformer's written opinion on April 3. He conceded that the article on justification, the most important part of the Interim, was weakly worded, but advised that it could still be accepted. With regard to penance, he affirmed his support for private confession and absolution, but also expressed a desire to avoid confusing pious consciences by requiring the detailing of sins to a priest.⁴⁷ Johannes Brenz, whose opinion the Council also sought, similarly recommended that the Council should not tolerate the provisions in the Interim that granted priests jurisdiction over lay consciences.⁴⁸

On the same day the Council also asked Osiander for his opinion of the Interim. Less than two weeks later the St. Lorenz preacher advised the magistrates that because the new order was unclear on certain issues, they should wait for further clarification before taking any action. He expressed a deep concern about the pope regaining the keys and using them as an earthly authority in Germany, and flatly rejected mandatory auricular confession. Lutherans had to oppose the Interim where it insisted they acknowledge that "popish auricular confession was commanded and instituted by Christ, in which they [that is, confessors] may know all a person's secrets and imprison, martyr, and exploit his conscience as it pleases them."⁴⁹ Though a strong supporter of the evangelical pre-communion examination, Osiander thought it bore little resemblance to the interrogation of conscience that was integral to the sacrament of penance. In his mind the two versions of confession were quite different, though he had given many cause to suspect otherwise. The Council would soon act to ensure that this distinction remained clear in the imperial city; it would tolerate evangelical private confession only.

Just as the Nürnberg magistrates were about to reject the Interim, Charles V decided on May 15, 1548, to impose it as a binding imperial law. Charles had allowed no vote on the issue; he had simply used his imperial prerogative to impose the new church order. A few days later Nürnberg's Council assured the city's theologians that it would seek a way by which they could retain their current ceremonies with as little change as possible. If necessary, only those things that would cause minimal difficulties would be altered.⁵⁰ As per imperial decree,

the magistrates commanded the clergy not to preach against the Interim, a mandate that Osiander, true to form, disobeyed.⁵¹

In early June Friedrich II of the Palatinate and Joachim II of Brandenburg began pressuring their fellow Lutherans to adopt the Interim. Charles had earlier ordered the two evangelical electors to see to it that the Lutheran estates accepted the new church order. Friedrich and Joachim asked their evangelical brethren to consider “what they could do according to their consciences in order to show themselves obedient [to the emperor].”⁵² The Nürnberg magistrates still feared that accepting the Interim would lead to a complete restoration of popish religion in their city,⁵³ but when in mid-June the emperor threatened to take over their beloved polis, they had little choice but to comply with his wishes, if only outwardly. As soon as the Council received news of the emperor’s intentions, it asked the city’s theologians for written opinions about what could be accepted in the Interim “without disadvantage to consciences” or, if certain questionable articles had to be adopted, how they could best be tolerated.⁵⁴ A few days later an imperial commission arrived in Nürnberg and forced the Council to adopt the new church order.⁵⁵ Veit Dietrich, who already in 1547 had been suspended from his preaching office,⁵⁶ wrote to a Lutheran count, “thus was made of Nürnberg a Samaria.”⁵⁷

Though they opposed the Interim in principle, the imperial city’s preachers understood that they might have to make some small concessions in order to buy time for their magistrates. They all agreed they could accept three articles in the Interim without doing serious harm to lay consciences: the celebration of more holidays, fasting from meat more frequently during the year, and private confession.⁵⁸ The theologians reasoned that they could hold sermons and celebrate the Lord’s Supper on the additional holidays, and fasting from meat was an external act that would not harm the soul as long as the laity understood it was not necessary for salvation. In fact, neither the Council nor the clergy was ever serious about enforcing this latter article. Justifying the adoption of private confession was another matter entirely. Though in the coming months the Council would refer to the proposed concessions collectively as “insignificant articles” or “external matters,”⁵⁹ in the minds of both Nürnberg’s theologians and magistrates, private confession was hardly inconsequential.

From the beginning the magistrates made it clear that they had no

intentions of reinstating the sacrament of penance. The preachers concurred. They advised the Council that seeking to institute private absolution in their churches “would be not only bearable, but also good, as long as it would not promote the reestablishment of popish confession with all its abominations, which,” they added, “must not be allowed.”⁶⁰ Here the Nürnberg preachers specifically had in mind the detailing of sins and assigning of penances, but also the concomitant insistence on synergism and sacerdotalism that was crucial to late medieval penitential religion.⁶¹ The theologians wanted evangelical private confession, no more. This was all the magistrates would allow. Both the clergy and the Council saw in the Augsburg Interim an opportunity to restore the pre-communion interview and private absolution, both legitimately evangelical practices, and to protect their city from imperial invasion. It was a fortuitous coincidence. The emperor would think Nürnberg was taking real steps toward embracing the new Catholic church order, but they would know better.⁶²

The next step for the Council was to determine exactly how to implement private absolution along with the other articles. On August 6, 1548, it asked the city’s theologians for another written opinion so that, in the words of the Council’s emissary, “a beginning can be made in the matter and my lords will always be able to say [to the emperor] that they are working on it.”⁶³ The magistrates did not ask Osiander for his opinion because he had again preached against the Interim and had thus fallen into disfavor with them. Four days later the city’s other theologians gave their opinions.⁶⁴

Unfortunately for the Council, Osiander had persuaded many of his colleagues in the meantime to oppose the Interim, regardless of their previous commitment to tolerate it.⁶⁵ Two of the five respondents were still willing to accept the suggested concessions for the sake of peace, but the other three could no longer go along with the proposed compromise. The two peacemakers, Leonhard Culmann, the new St. Sebald preacher, and George Löffelat, a chaplain at St. Egidien Church, expressed strong support for private absolution.⁶⁶ The former observed that it was already in use in many other evangelical towns and cities, while Löffelat indicated that he had examined and absolved communicants in his previous post. Neither gave specific advice about how the Council could implement the concessions; Culmann simply noted that laypeople should not have to detail their

sins to their pastors, while Löffelat wrote that he had only examined the very young and strangers in his former church.⁶⁷ Hieronymus Besold, a preacher in the New Hospital Church, who was also Osiander's son-in-law,⁶⁸ warned the Council to avoid all compromises with the emperor. If it was not vigilant in defending the true faith, Nürnberg would find itself again in spiritual captivity, and "the poor imprisoned consciences" that had been freed from "the shackles of human doctrines" through the gospel would again be subjected to tyranny. He agreed with Culmann and Löffelat that private absolution was good, but he had serious concerns about reestablishing it under the present circumstances. The Interim called for much more than an examination of faith and private absolution, and it did not seem right to Besold for the Council to use the occasion of a popish church order to reinstitute even the evangelical ritual. Still, he conceded that if the preachers explained to their parishioners that they were establishing private absolution out of obedience to God, and that laypeople would not have to enumerate their sins to their pastors, Lutheran private confession could be put into effect.⁶⁹ Both Blasius Stöckl, the preacher in St. Jacob Church,⁷⁰ and Thomas Venatorius, the preacher at the Hospital Church,⁷¹ also opposed making any concessions to the emperor and advised the Council to hold firmly to the Augsburg Confession.⁷²

Having received such an unhelpful response from their theologians, the magistrates resolved to take the matter of the Interim into their own hands. They decided on August 10 to draw up a document announcing the proposed changes to Nürnberg's church order that the preachers could read out to their congregations from their pulpits.⁷³ On August 30, the magistrates summoned the city's preachers to their chambers and presented the proclamation to them.⁷⁴

The document first assured its hearers that the Council would allow no changes to the evangelical understanding of justification, and then informed the laity that certain additions would occur in the existing church order that were not harmful to consciences. The first addition was the reintroduction of private absolution. The Council's proclamation explained that up to this point many simple people and servants in the city had been communicating unworthily; the problem was even worse among peasants in the countryside. Such people went to the Lord's Supper regardless of their conduct and frequently had little understanding of the sacrament's true meaning. In light of the

disorder and scandal that had resulted, the Council had decided that something needed to be done. From this point on it would require all would-be communicants to appear individually before their pastors either on the evening before or morning of the Lord's Supper, whichever was more convenient, and evidence an adequate understanding of the Lutheran faith coupled with a pious lifestyle. They were also to acknowledge themselves as sinners before God, share any burdens of conscience, receiving instruction for the same, and, finally, ask for and receive private absolution from their pastors. In a revealing statement, the magistrates reminded their subjects that there was nothing new about these requirements; they had always been included in Nürnberg's church orders and those of other evangelical cities and territories. Conscious of the conflict that had gripped their city in the 1530s, the magistrates also insisted that they would retain general absolution, owing to its inherent worth. General absolution along with the other recommended measures was beneficial to the penitent and necessary for the proper observance of the Lord's Supper.⁷⁵

The Council's proclamation also included two brief statements about the introduction of additional holidays and fast days. The former were to be used for additional sermons and could be easily integrated into the present church order. The latter, however, were more difficult for the magistrates to explain. Their proclamation admitted that fasting from meat should be a matter of individual conscience but, aside from suggesting that it would help preserve the city's food supply, the magistrates concluded that Nürnbergers would simply have to accept this unfortunate article for the sake of maintaining the peace. Securing the imperial city against foreign occupation was worth giving up sausages a few days a year.⁷⁶

The Council depicted its decision to require private absolution simply as an attempt finally to match Nürnberg's religious practice with the theory outlined in its church order. This was true, at least in part. As we have seen, over the preceding five years the magistrates, along with the city's preachers, had become increasingly concerned about abuses of the Lord's Supper in Nürnberg and its environs. The Council had already begun moving toward requiring private confession and when confronted with the emperor's new church order, skillfully manipulated the situation to implement the evangelical version of the practice, nothing more. Still, it is doubtful whether the Council would have taken these steps had it not been under considerable pressure to

do so from the emperor. Clerical pressure alone certainly had proven insufficient to secure this outcome, as Osiander knew only too well. Nevertheless, the Council continued to present its decision to require private confession as soundly evangelical. This was also the position it took when advising other Lutheran cities on the Interim.

On October 29, 1548, a messenger from the nearby city of Windsheim arrived in Nürnberg with a letter from his city's magistrates expressing their deep concerns about the Interim, including the demand for private confession. Like many of the smaller evangelical cities in Franconia, Windsheim looked to Nürnberg for guidance on how to cope with the Interim.⁷⁷ After having read the letter, the Nürnberg magistrates said they disagreed with their colleagues' policy of allowing their clergy to preach against private confession. A Council secretary wrote to Windsheim, "Concerning the fact that your preachers have assailed confession, my Lords have observed . . . that they would put a stop to it, because the main emphasis is not on auricular confession, as under the papacy, but on private absolution, which would be Christian and necessary."⁷⁸ The Council believed that Lutherans who had not yet introduced evangelical private confession could use the Interim as an opportunity to do so without violating their consciences. Adherents of the new faith could kill two birds with one stone: they could conform their religious practices to those of most other Lutheran strongholds and appease the emperor by adopting part of the Interim, though with significant modifications. The Council insisted that it was establishing a legitimately evangelical practice.

Philip Melancthon expressed a similar sentiment when explaining Nürnberg's policy on the Interim to King Christian III of Denmark and Norway. The reformer wrote to the Lutheran ruler:

Although the Council has accepted the Interim, no change has taken place in Nürnberg. The Council has allowed only three articles to be proclaimed, namely, the observance of a few more holidays, some fast days, and the introduction of private confession and absolution, which had completely fallen out of use in Nürnberg, and which the preachers [there] had previously been laboring with a good Christian intention to reestablish, just as it is in our churches.⁷⁹

Melancthon's comments to Christian III are significant because they confirm that Nürnberg's practice of confession was out of step with

Wittenberg's. Melanchthon, like his colleagues in the imperial city, was happy to see such a bastion of Lutheranism returning to a more conservative and orthodox policy regarding the ritual. The Wittenberg reformer's letter also attests his desire to ensure that King Christian III, who had officially converted his realm to the evangelical faith in 1537, saw private confession and absolution as a valid institution of the new church. For Melanchthon his city's practice was normative for all Lutherans.

On September 2, three days after the Council had met with members of the clergy, Nürnberg's preachers read out the Council's proclamation to their congregations. Thanks to a report prepared by Jacob Fining, an undersecretary from Braunschweig who was in Nürnberg to observe its attitude toward the Interim, we have a detailed account of how Osiander and his assistants introduced the new changes to their parishioners in St. Lorenz Church.⁸⁰ According to Fining, after the reading of the Council's proclamation, one of the chaplains assured the congregation that the magistrates had made no concessions on the crucial matter of salvation by faith in Christ. The chaplain then repeated that private absolution had been reestablished owing to the disorder that had plagued the reception of the sacrament in Nürnberg up to this point. A primary cause of this disorder, according to Osiander's assistant, was the customary general confession and absolution of sins before the Lord's Supper. The St. Lorenz preacher and his chaplains had obviously disagreed with the Council's decision to retain general absolution and were again hoping to abolish it. The chaplain continued that from this point on each layperson would be required to appear individually before his pastor, confess his sins, and receive absolution.⁸¹ This statement was much more direct than was the Council's proclamation, especially with regard to the confession of sins, which the magistrates had not mentioned.

After the chaplain concluded his brief remarks, Osiander added his own comments on the Council's proclamation. He frankly stated that the increase of holidays and fast days was unbiblical, but urged his parishioners to endure them in deference to the magistrates' wishes; the Council would have to answer to God for its actions. As might be expected, he was much more enthusiastic about the reintroduction of private absolution. The St. Lorenz preacher exclaimed, "Dear friends . . . for a long time I have wanted to see private confession and absolution accepted in Nürnberg because they were instituted by Christ."

Expressing the view he had articulated at length in his treatise on the keys, Osiander insisted that a pastor had to know his confessant's "intention" (*intentionem confitentis*)—whether she had true faith and sorrow for her sins—before he absolved or bound her. The best way for a confessor to assess a penitent's spiritual condition was through private confession.⁸² Osiander's listeners could not be blamed for hearing in his words an attempt to reestablish the sacrament of penance. They would soon be assured this would not happen.

As members of the lower clergy in Nürnberg's various churches listened to the Council's proclamation, they quickly realized that the plans to reinstitute private absolution were completely unrealistic. Since they would be called upon to act as confessors, the chaplains, more than anyone else in the imperial city, were interested in achieving a workable plan for the new ritual, one that would not overburden them. Nürnberg's leading chaplains met together in St. Egidien Church to discuss their concerns and then presented them in writing to the Council.⁸³

Following Veit Dietrich's earlier report, the chaplains informed the Council that there simply was not enough of them to confess and absolve all communicants individually. Fulfilling such a task was now doubly difficult in comparison with earlier days under the pope. Not only were there far fewer confessors owing to the dissolution of the mendicant orders, but Nürnbergers also communicated much more frequently than they had before the Reformation. The chaplains reported that even on ordinary Sundays the number of communicants was far too large to examine and absolve each person individually.⁸⁴ Attempting to do so on holidays would be impossible.

The chaplains' other concerns had primarily to do with problems they anticipated in actually implementing Lutheran private confession. They feared that laypeople would stop coming to the Lord's Supper if private absolution became mandatory. Nürnbergers would assume that they were being forced to go to auricular confession again and would certainly protest.⁸⁵ The chaplains also anticipated that many laypersons would refuse to discuss their sins with them. As we have seen, Nürnbergers had grown accustomed to probing their own consciences and obtaining forgiveness via general absolution. To them any form of mandatory private confession smacked of popery. For this reason the chaplains suggested that it might be more productive

simply to exhort the laity from the pulpit and to confront privately those who lived in open sin.⁸⁶ Finally, the chaplains recommended that general confession, because it was intended primarily for communicants, should be abolished now that private absolution would be taking its place. General confession would only hinder people from seeking private absolution, and it was not included in the city's church order anyway.⁸⁷ The chaplains should have known better than to attempt to remove such a symbolic practice from Nürnberg's religious life.

After receiving the chaplains' list of concerns, the magistrates commissioned two of their members, Leonhard Schürstab and Erasmus Ebner, to look into the matter and report back to them.⁸⁸ A couple of weeks later, on October 2, the two councilors presented their recommendations. They agreed with the chaplains that the city's churches needed more confessors, although they rightly observed that the 1533 church order only required pastors to examine those whose conduct and knowledge of the evangelical faith were questionable. Those who lived piously and understood the catechism simply had to acknowledge that they were sinners and ask for absolution. Like the rest of the magistrates, Schürstab and Ebner interpreted the introduction of private absolution simply as a more faithful observance of the existing church order rather than as an acceptance of a new, anti-evangelical practice. The councilmen recommended that the magistrates should provide the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches each with three or four additional chaplains, while they considered the present staff in the smaller New Hospital and St. Egidien churches to be sufficient.⁸⁹ Schürstab and Ebner argued that the Council was not interested in reimposing auricular confession; the clergy should not allow laypeople to use this excuse for avoiding private absolution. As per the 1533 church order, clerics were to deny the sacrament to those who lived in open sin and exhort them to repentance, but this was not to take the place of a private examination of faith and conduct. Regarding general absolution, the councilors insisted it was not just for communicants; it offered forgiveness to all who confessed their sins to God and received the words of forgiveness in faith. Laypeople would come to private absolution if their preachers exhorted them to do so, even if the *Offene Schuld* were retained.

The Council was in substantial agreement with Schürstab and Ebner's recommendations.⁹⁰ It only included that pastors should be

instructed to have patience with their flocks and treat them gently until they became accustomed to private absolution. If there were people who absolutely refused to comply with the Council's wishes, chaplains were to make such cases known to their preachers who would know what to do.⁹¹ After reaffirming its support for general absolution, the Council pledged to stand behind its preachers when they would again exhort their parishioners to private absolution. By the end of October the magistrates had made the necessary adjustments to implement the "new" practice,⁹² including the hiring of additional chaplains, and on November 4, 1548, Nürnberg's preachers were to announce the formal beginning of private absolution in the city. Lutheran private confession would finally be established in Nürnberg.

Unfortunately for the Nürnberg Council, many of the city's preachers remained opposed to the Interim and refused to announce the introduction of private absolution, even though they all supported it in principle. Only Leonhard Culmann, the St. Sebald preacher, complied with the Council's mandate.⁹³ Given his well-known desire to institute private confession in Nürnberg, it is significant that Osiander did not seize this opportunity. In spite of his long struggle to achieve full control of the keys in the imperial city, the St. Lorenz preacher simply could not bring himself to take what he saw as the first step down a slippery slope to popery. Instead of risking the whole evangelical edifice for the sake of his most passionate cause, Osiander and his son-in-law tendered their resignations to the Council on November 6. Though Besold later changed his mind, Osiander stood by his decision. This time the magistrates accepted his resignation and ordered a new preacher, Johann Fabri, to take over his post. It then required Fabri and the city's other preachers to announce the beginning of private absolution in their weekly sermons.⁹⁴ On November 11, the Nürnberg clergy, now less defiant, celebrated its first worship service under the new church order.⁹⁵ Osiander left the imperial city a frustrated man in late November and eventually found a new preacher-ship in Königsberg. There he would soon become embroiled in another theological controversy that continued after his death in 1552.⁹⁶ Only one other Nürnberg clergyman left the imperial city in protest against the Interim. Not surprisingly, he had been a chaplain under Osiander in St. Lorenz Church.⁹⁷

Protest against the Interim in Nürnberg was not limited to preachers. Throughout its negotiations with the emperor, the Council had worried about moving ahead too quickly with the new church order

for fear of causing a popular uprising.⁹⁸ In August 1548 Nürnberg's shoemaker-poet Hans Sachs composed a poem against the Interim that voiced the opinion of many lay Lutherans, both within the imperial city and beyond.⁹⁹ The poem tells of a dream the shoemaker had in which he found himself inside a temple standing before a beautiful and stately woman who was seated on a throne. She was clothed in silk, and her face gave off a radiance that illuminated the whole temple. Upon her lap was an open book, presumably the Book of Life. The shoemaker then notices that the handsome woman is chained by the foot. He asks his guide, Genius, who the woman is and why she is chained. It is Lady Truth (*Frau Veritas*), Sachs learns, whom God had sent to Germany. Her captor, the evil Saturn, could not bear her brilliant light and had thus chained her to avoid losing his place of prominence in the night sky. Owing to the intercessions of Minerva, Jove begins taking counsel with Mercury about Lady Truth's fate. All the devotees of truth, gathered around her throne, implore the gods to release their dear lady so that she may be free to spread her radiance as before.

At this point Hipocrisis flies over Lady Truth on a dragon and wraps her in a wretched garment made of old rags that were knit together by Lady Vileness (*Frau Nequicia*). The garment smells of tar and sulfur, and causes Lady Truth to grow pale beyond recognition. Sachs then reveals the garment's name: Interim. Lady Penitence appears on the scene and informs those gathered around the throne that because they have driven her from their midst and preferred to live in the darkness of sin, God has allowed truth's light to be hidden from them. Only true repentance will free Lady Truth from her miserable state. The shoemaker awakes from his dream and implores God to preserve his Word in Germany.

Sachs's poem revealed his fears about the fate of the Reformation now that the Interim had been imposed. Some twenty-five years after writing *The Wittenberg Nightingale*, the shoemaker-poet still viewed the evangelical movement as a beacon of divine light that was now being threatened by demonic worldly authorities and widespread impiety. Although he had accused many Lutherans of hypocrisy,¹⁰⁰ he still considered the new faith a closer approximation of true Christianity than the religion that had preceded it. He believed the Interim was depriving Germans of Lady Truth's divine visitations and prayed fervently that she would soon be set free again.

Lay protest against the Interim could also take less artistic form in

Nürnberg. Despite the magistrates' and clerics' enthusiasm for private absolution, at least a portion of the imperial city's lay populace remained opposed to it. On November 26, the Council received a report from the city's chaplains in which they complained about the behavior of "the loose riff raff" who were making it difficult for them to examine and absolve communicants, especially during matins.¹⁰¹ The magistrates resolved for the following holidays to post three guards at each of the city's churches during the morning services. The guards were to turn away troublemakers, though with modesty, and bring those who remained defiant before the magistrates. The Council also ordered that the churches should be better illuminated during matins, no doubt to discourage mischief in shadowy corners.

The Interim was a relatively short-lived affair in Germany. In the spring of 1552 Duke Moritz of Saxony, who never did adopt the new church order, and a new Protestant coalition nearly succeeded in cornering the emperor in Innsbruck; Charles narrowly escaped to the south through the Brenner Pass. The southern Lutheran cities, including Nürnberg, remained neutral in the ensuing battles, unsure whether life under German princes would be any more desirable than carrying on in subjection to the emperor. This time Nürnberg's equivocation cost the city dearly. Claiming that he wanted to marshal support for an attack against imperial forces, Margrave Albrecht Alcibiades of Brandenburg-Kulmbach demanded that the imperial city join him.¹⁰² When the Council refused, Albrecht laid siege to Nürnberg for several weeks. Forced to surrender lands it had taken from Kulmbach in earlier skirmishes, which had been Albrecht's goal all along, Nürnberg tried to recover from its humiliating defeat. Then, less than one year later, Albrecht again appeared outside of Nürnberg's walls, this time claiming to be in league with the emperor, and again demanded that the imperial city join him. Though Nürnberg was finally able to repel Albrecht, ironically with the help of episcopal forces, the cost of doing so devastated its economy. The imperial city fell into a recession that lasted throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. Nürnberg's golden age had come to an end.¹⁰³

In August 1552 Duke Moritz successfully negotiated a treaty with King Ferdinand in Passau that provided, among other things, for the revocation of the Interim until another imperial diet could be convened. Three years later the imperial estates met again in Augsburg and hammered out the now famous Peace of Augsburg, which al-

lowed German magistrates and princes to determine the religion of their subjects. The Interim was now officially dead, though many Lutheran strongholds had already abolished it after the signing of the Treaty of Passau.¹⁰⁴ Thus ended the era of religious colloquies in the empire that were designed to solve the political and religious problems created by the Reformation. The Lutheran faith now had legal standing in the empire, though this new situation was far from stable. A great deal more blood would be spilled before early modern Europeans would begin seriously to consider the advantages of religious tolerance. For the time being, Protestants and Catholics decided to turn their energies toward planting their respective versions of Christianity more firmly within their territories. The era of confessionalization had begun.

The Nürnberg Council was slow to abolish the Interim. One year after the Treaty of Passau, the new church order was still in effect in the imperial city. The primary reason for this delay was that Charles V had refused to recognize the treaty with King Ferdinand, and the Council was loath to offend its overlord and protector. In the emperor's mind, the Interim continued to be valid. He would later oppose the Peace of Augsburg, preferring to let his brother Ferdinand make bargains with heretics.¹⁰⁵

Still, the Interim's days in Nürnberg were numbered. On May 5, 1553, at a conference the magistrates had convened on combating immorality in the city, Nürnberg's preachers insisted that God would not answer their prayers for increased piety among burghers until the Council abolished the Interim.¹⁰⁶ The next day several of the imperial city's chaplains brought word to the magistrates that their preachers were demanding the reestablishment of the 1533 church order. As proof of their resolve, the preachers had threatened to forbid the chaplains from carrying out their normal duties of administering the sacrament and visiting the sick. (These duties were also prescribed in the 1533 church order.)¹⁰⁷ If the magistrates did not accede to their wishes, the preachers said they would have no choice but to attack them in their sermons. The chaplains were not sure what to do and so had turned to the Council for advice.

Obviously taken aback by the preachers' actions, the magistrates instructed the chaplains to continue with their duties as before. The Council then summoned the preachers to its chambers and informed them that it was not their place to make changes in the city's church order "without the foreknowledge and approval of the honorable

Council, which was their appointed overlord.”¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, seeing the handwriting on the wall, two days later the magistrates decided to reintroduce the 1533 church order and abolish all practices not found therein, including fast and feast days.¹⁰⁹

Significantly, neither the Council nor the clergy attempted to abolish private absolution. They felt there was no reason to do so. Unlike the other patently Catholic practices the city had temporarily adopted, Nürnberg’s present version of private confession was a thoroughly evangelical ritual, one that many other Lutheran cities had been practicing for years. Twenty years after the conflict over absolution had first erupted in Nürnberg, the Council had finally resolved it. Ironically, it took pressure from a Catholic emperor for the magistrates to achieve this resolution. The Augsburg Interim provided the final motivation the Council needed to implement Lutheran private confession in Nürnberg, something it had always managed to avoid doing in the past, even though it supported the practice.¹¹⁰ Had it not been for the Interim, the magistrates may have continued to drag their feet, but once they made the decision to establish private confession, the city fathers showed no signs of remorse.

Doing away with the practice would have made little sense at this point. Nürnberg was finally in step with the majority of Lutheran Germans on confession, and the gap between the stipulations of the 1533 church order and the actual practice of confession in the imperial city had finally been bridged. Beyond this, Nürnberg’s preachers and magistrates continued to be deeply concerned about shoring up the faith and piety of the imperial city’s inhabitants,¹¹¹ and the pre-communion examination offered an important means of educating and disciplining the common folk. As the city struggled to recover from its recent bad fortune, embracing Lady Penitence was of first importance. Only in this way could Nürnberg regain the divine favor it had obviously lost.¹¹² Finally, Osiander was no longer on the scene, and thus the threat that private confession had posed to the Council’s religious authority was greatly diminished. Still, even as the Council acted to promote greater moral discipline in the imperial city, it continued to protect spiritual freedom. The magistrates retained general confession as a check on clerical zeal and instructed the city’s confessors to be gentle and patient with laypeople who found the “new” practice difficult. This balance was essential to the reformation of the keys in Nürnberg.

Propaganda and Practice

During the two decades in which Nürnbergers were not going to confession, the imperial city's preachers and teachers continued to instruct the laity about the practice in their sermons and catechisms. Ever hopeful that burghers would change their ways, pastors and schoolmasters persisted in arguing for the merits of evangelical private confession, even though they were well aware of the fierce opposition to it in the imperial city. The catechetical literature on confession that emerged in this period reflects well how committed members of the Nürnberg clergy were to the practice and how badly they wanted private confession to become a reality in the imperial city. This literature also reveals a side of the Lutheran catechetical effort that has received very little attention from Reformation scholars. Though written at a time when few Nürnbergers attended private confession, the didactic literature on the practice sheds important light on the underlying intentions of evangelical catechists as they sought to form the imperial city's youth into good Lutherans.

No one has been more skeptical about these intentions than Gerald Strauss. In his influential book, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation*, he charged the purveyors of the Lutheran faith—pastors and schoolteachers—with consciously imposing a religion on Germany's youth that robbed them of their autonomy and dignity. Strauss described the ideal Lutheran catechumen in the following terms: "Heard from only when spoken

to, tractable to a fault, gratefully receptive of good advice, betraying no trace of boldness, erudite on holy subjects and conversing on them like a book, the responding children of Lutheran catechisms are the very models of Christian youth mindful and observant of its duty.”¹ Nowhere, according to Strauss, were the deleterious effects of the evangelical indoctrination campaign more evident than in Nürnberg.

A more balanced reading of the relevant sources from the imperial city, especially those dealing with private confession, reveals quite a different set of intentions informing the Lutheran catechetical effort. Far from seeking to infantilize burghers and their children, the didactic literature on confession was intended to promote two defining marks of Lutheran devotion: a new sense of confidence based on assurance of divine forgiveness and a predilection for modesty in matters of the soul. As we have seen throughout, the desire to discipline and control, clearly an important part of sixteenth-century Lutheranism, did not preclude the movement’s leaders from seeking to console and protect lay consciences. Nowhere was this more clear than in the literature on confession.

By the early 1530s Lutheran strongholds throughout Germany had launched a massive campaign to instruct children in the evangelical faith. Reports from church visitations had persuaded clerics and magistrates alike of the need for such an effort. As one of the earliest catechisms to appear in Nürnberg observed, most adults, especially the elderly, were like inflexible old dogs who could not be taught new tricks.² The author exhorted house fathers and members of the lower clergy, the intended audience for the catechism, to focus their efforts on the young, who, he believed, would be more receptive to the new faith. In cities like Nürnberg, church and school worked hand in hand to instruct Lutheran children in the essentials of the evangelical faith, thus hoping to secure the survival of the Reformation into the next generation. Nürnberg’s preachers held weekly catechism classes, while schoolteachers exercised their students in the articles of the new faith in their daily lessons. Like their counterparts in other evangelical cities, Nürnbergers grew up reading and hearing catechisms nearly every day.³ These manuals of religious instruction thus played a crucial role in shaping the faith of Lutheran children.

A key component of the Lutheran catechism was instruction on pri-

vate confession. Central to lessons about confession were treatments of sin and its consequences. Gerald Strauss has criticized Lutheran catechists for consciously trying to strip youth of all inner confidence by imbuing them with a deep sense of guilt for their moral transgressions. A favorite target for Strauss was Andreas Osiander's 1533 *Children's Sermons*, one of the most popular Lutheran catechisms in the sixteenth century.⁴ In keeping with the Nürnberg Council's concern to promote the teaching of the new faith, it had instructed Osiander to append a catechism to the 1533 church order. The Nürnberg preacher complied by producing a collection of children's sermons based on Luther's *Small Catechism*. Osiander's catechism enjoyed the same widespread success as the 1533 church order, with separate versions appearing as far off as Poland, Iceland, Holland, and England.⁵ When Anglican reformer Thomas Cranmer translated the sermons into English, he referred to them as "the Catechism of Germany."⁶

Strauss thought Osiander's catechism illustrated well the evangelical attempt to create pliable citizens for the new Lutheran state by emphasizing to children their utter depravity.⁷ To prove his point, he cited an excerpt from the *Children's Sermons* that warned young Lutherans about the terrors of conscience they would experience if they disobeyed God's commandments. The catechism asserted, "a person who feels these sensations [of conscience] cannot live long. He declines from day to day, eating his heart out as he ponders his depraved nature." According to Osiander, the sinner's despondency then increased, rendering him vulnerable to the devil's temptations to ever more heinous transgressions like robbery, slander, deceit, lying, and even murder. The St. Lorenz preacher warned, "Such atrocious sins cannot go unpunished by God . . . Some men are led to madness by the devil, others are possessed by him. He breaks their necks, drowns them, lets them burn or plunge to their deaths, and causes them to fall into despair so that they will be eternally damned. And all these evils we suffer because we have sinned."⁸

Strauss was correct to note how direct the *Children's Sermons* was about sin and its consequences. Children were warned that God was present everywhere and therefore saw and heard all that they did. Osiander reminded his young auditors that those people in the Old Testament who trusted in other gods or who disobeyed their parents were put to death. The sermons also minced no words about the real-

ity of hell as the inevitable destination of those who did not trust and obey God. The catechism maintained, “if [Christ] had not saved us, then we all would have been damned and after death would have all gone to hell and remained there forever.”⁹ Regarding such direct statements about sin and hell, Strauss asserted, “one cannot today read these passages without wincing.”¹⁰ For him such misanthropic statements could not help but stifle the innate potential of Lutheran youth, rendering them broken and receptive to outside suggestion.

While it is true that Lutheran catechisms spoke to their hearers very pointedly about sin and judgment, their primary intention in doing so was not to engender perpetual self-doubt. Rather, their overarching goal was to instill in catechumens a new sense of confidence based on trust in divine grace. The *Children’s Sermons* contains strong words about human depravity, but it was by no means intended to leave children mired in self-accusation and guilt. Osiander preached the law in order to prepare the way for the gospel. His goal was to persuade his young listeners of God’s deep desire to forgive them, thus assuring them it was safe to acknowledge their sinfulness before him. As Euan Cameron has argued, this emphasis on total depravity in the evangelical catechism was intended “to show how dazzling . . . divine mercy [was].”¹¹

Lutheran catechists believed the presence of sin in people was undeniable, its consequences inescapable. In keeping with their desire to present youth with an honest and realistic portrait of life, they spoke to them about sin and its dire consequences in a very straightforward manner. In so doing, they established for catechumens one of the most important givens of life as they knew it: human beings were sinful. Human nature needed to be reformed if it was to be of any use to God or society, and external discipline could only do just so much. The best way to deliver human beings from their innate self-centeredness, catechists like Osiander believed, was to release them from their perceived need to justify themselves before God and man. Grant human beings the divine pardon Christ had provided for them and they would be free to serve others. It was a plausible vision, though a lofty one.

Strauss presented a one-sided interpretation of Lutheran catechisms, one that largely ignored the central argument of the catechists. There was a positive, constructive side to evangelical catechisms that was far more prominent than Strauss appreciated. By

overemphasizing the catechists' statements about sin, he effectively obscured from view the true intention of Osiander and his fellow catechists.

Osiander's central goal in his *Children's Sermons* was to expose and refute a lie that he believed had been concocted by the devil himself. He maintained that the devil had deceived human beings into believing that God did not care about them and that he was not good. While the devil did not play a dominant role in Osiander's sermons, his lie did. On nearly every page the preacher sought to expose the fallacy that God hates humanity and to replace it with the truth. He employed his strongest polemics in attempting to refute this diabolical deception, not in seeking to convince children that they were sinners. These polemics can be clearly seen in the second sermon on the Creed, which dealt with Adam and Eve's fall from grace.

The catechism explained that God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden "as a gracious God and a friendly father." He gave them everything they needed for life and happiness as a free gift. The only prohibition he laid upon them was that they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon pain of death. "Therefore," Osiander argued, "they should have loved him and trusted him from their hearts as a gracious God and a faithful Father. They should have been obedient to him and gladly followed and kept his commandment." But the "evil adversary" deceived them by telling them that God had lied to them: they would not die by eating from the forbidden tree, but would become like gods, knowing good from evil. Thus humanity's parents believed the serpent's lie and ate. Osiander explained that the result of this deception and sin was that Adam and Eve "neither trusted nor believed God any longer, but began to think that he was actually a veiled adversary [*ein heimlich feind*] who wanted to keep them from knowing good and evil." The catechism then immediately interjected, "in truth, however, it was not so."

Osiander continued exposing the devastating effects of the demonic lie, asserting, "therefore, [Adam and Eve] began to place all of their trust in themselves, thinking that they must now provide for themselves and . . . that our Lord God would no longer help them." Again, the catechumens were told, "but that was also not correct." Osiander showed how Adam and Eve, having lost their trust in God, continued in their downward spiral into sin and began to believe that "they had no better friend in heaven or on earth than themselves." The St.

Lorenz preacher broke in a third and final time, insisting, “but that was also false and very far from the truth.” The end result of this diabolical deception was that Adam and Eve began to fear for their bodily existence and became subject to death. For Osiander the belief that God withheld good from his children was the source out of which “every evil work springs forth.” He urged his listeners, “mark this well!”¹²

In order to counteract the effects of the devil’s lie, the *Children’s Sermons* provided Lutheran youth with example after example of God’s goodness and benevolent care. In his sermon on the Third Commandment (Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy), Osiander contrasted God with a greedy tyrant and a tightfisted employer who wanted to get everything out of their subjects and employees they possibly could, having no regard for their well-being. God, on the other hand, invited his servants to rest and to celebrate a festival day to him. Osiander reasoned, “[i]s this not a friendly and splendid Lord who gives his servants who serve him willingly no other work than that they should observe and consecrate a festival day to him?” He then explained that God was able to provide the Sabbath rest because “he is such a rich and powerful God that he has no need of our service and good deeds. Rather, he is so friendly and gracious that he himself does good to everyone so that he might be honored and praised.”¹³ The sermon concluded by urging children to hear God saying to them, “You can do me no greater service than that you come to me and allow me to do good for you, so that you may know that I am your gracious Father, and so that you may trust and love me as children do their own father.”¹⁴

Osiander’s polemics for God’s benevolence were especially strong when advising his young listeners how they should respond in times of trouble or need. The Nürnberg preacher exhorted catechumens not to look to themselves or to anyone else for deliverance or provision. They must resist their strong inner compulsion, inherited from Adam and Eve, to turn away from God, believing him to be of no help, and to trust in themselves. In his sermon on the First Commandment (I am the Lord, your God; you shall have no other gods beside me), Osiander explained, “first, when a person fears something other than the Lord God, he begins to think, ‘when I am confronted with calamity and adversity and cannot flee it, then all is lost. Then I will not know where I can stand because no one can help me.’” The St. Lorenz preacher then asserted,

But it should not be like that; rather, we should think, “when I am confronted with this or that calamity or adversity, or when I cannot escape some misfortune, I will not despair or, out of fear, behave unrighteously. It is certainly no god, and it cannot damn me. It cannot even remove one hair from my head without the permission of the Lord, the only real and true God. The same is also my God! I will fear him more than any mortal thing and will do what is right [*tut recht*].”¹⁵

In the same sermon Osiander encouraged his listeners that when God said, “I am your God,” it is as if he were saying to them, “I desire to do nothing but good for you. Bring before me whatever burdens you have and I will help you. Ask and desire from me what you need and I will give it to you.”¹⁶

Implicit in each of these examples was the assumption that, given the harsh realities of life, the innate human tendency was to doubt God’s kindness and benevolence. Osiander readily admitted, “we must acknowledge that in this life we will have no tranquillity or peace on account of the trials [*anfechtungen*] which occur one after the other. When we have victory over one, another takes its place that is greater than the first.”¹⁷ However, Osiander and his fellow catechists were convinced that God understood how difficult it was for people to trust him and to believe that he was good. It was for this reason, they maintained, that God provided the keys, a tangible sign of his desire to forgive humanity.

As part of their efforts to instruct Nürnberg’s youth in the essentials of the evangelical faith, the city’s pastors and teachers taught them about the keys. Their primary goal in doing so was to present Lutheran children with personal and direct confirmation of God’s desire to show them mercy—and also to persuade them to go to confession. Osiander and his colleagues wanted the city’s youth to view Lutheran private confession as a positive and consoling experience that would provide them with inner assurance and hope. As might be expected, the St. Lorenz preacher made an especially strong case in his catechism for both the legitimacy of the keys and the certainty of the forgiveness they provided.¹⁸ Nowhere may one see more clearly the deeply pastoral concerns that motivated Osiander’s campaign for private confession.

Using Romans 10:14–15 as his text, Osiander explained that the only way for human beings to know what God’s intentions were toward them was if God himself sent them a trustworthy messenger

who knew his heart. Human beings could not trust in their own powers of reason for this knowledge; it had to come from the Almighty himself.¹⁹ Fortunately, God had sent such messengers to impart this knowledge to Nürnberg's children. These divinely chosen prophets were evangelical preachers like Osiander who, as opposed to Anabaptist preachers, had been duly called by God and therefore could teach children his Word, the only sure foundation for the fragile hu-

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Woodcut from Osiander's children's sermon on the keys. The sermon begins, "My dear little children, St. Paul says to the Romans, 'Whoever calls on the name of the Lord' Rom. 10[:13]." AOGA, vol. 5, p. 320.

man conscience. Osiander explained, “Therefore, my dear children, it should encourage you and strengthen your faith that you can say, ‘God the Lord has sent me his servant who has preached to me the forgiveness of sin in his name and has baptized me for the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, I am certain that my sins are forgiven me and that I have become a child of God.’”²⁰ The great benefit of the keys was that they applied the gospel to each child individually, so he could be sure he was forgiven.

Osiander warned his young listeners that when a person sinned he dared not rely on inner self-assurances that he would be forgiven. Such a subjective foundation for one’s peace of mind was far too weak a defense against the trials and temptations with which Satan would afflict him. “Rather, one must have God’s Word and work which demonstrate and attest that our sins have been forgiven. That is, one should seek forgiveness and obtain it from the servants of the Church to whom Christ has given the keys and said, ‘the sins of one you forgive on earth shall also be forgiven in heaven.’” The Nürnberg preacher explained, “God no longer speaks to us from heaven, but has left to the servants of the Church the keys to heaven and has invested them with the power to forgive sins. Therefore, one should go to his pastor and ask him to proclaim to him the forgiveness of his sins according to the command of Christ.” Osiander encouraged his young auditors that if they did this they could always be sure “to find peace and rest for their consciences.”²¹

Other Nürnberg catechisms similarly emphasized the legitimacy of the keys and certainty of absolution. Like Osiander, Veit Dietrich referred to absolution as a sacrament in his own *Children’s Sermons*.²² In this work he instructed children that when their sins pressed in on them they should seek comfort from the clergy, whom Christ had commanded to proclaim forgiveness in his name.²³ Leonhard Culmann, Dietrich’s replacement, included the keys as one of the defining marks of evangelical faith in a book of religious instruction that he prepared for Nürnberg’s German schools.²⁴ As we have seen, Culmann had been a strong supporter of reintroducing private absolution during the Interim owing to its benefit for troubled consciences; when other Nürnberg preachers balked, he announced its formal implementation in the fall of 1548.

Students in Nürnberg’s five Latin schools were also urged to revere the keys.²⁵ By 1531 Thomas Venatorius, the preacher at the Hospital

Church, had translated Luther's *Small Catechism* into Latin. As we have seen, the Wittenberg reformer had included two sample formulas for private confession in his catechism that portrayed the keys as a sure source of forgiveness for troubled consciences. Local teachers also produced their own summaries of the faith in which they advocated private absolution. In 1538, fourteen years after lodging his protest against Jeremias Müllich, schoolmaster Sebaldus Heyden publicized his own views on the keys. His treatment of the subject is especially interesting, given his earlier opposition to Müllich. (See Chapter 3.) Heyden had come full circle: now it was his turn to declare the truth about confession.

In his *Brief Catechetical Summary of the Christian Faith* the schoolmaster made a strong case for private absolution.²⁶ He defined the keys as “a divine jurisdiction which Christ has given to his Church by which Christians . . . may remit sins of penitents or retain those of the obstinate through the name of Christ.”²⁷ Unlike Osiander and Dietrich, Heyden did not refer to the keys as a sacrament but only as a *iurisdictio*—a spiritual authority that God extended to his Church for binding and loosing sins. The keys deserved mention in a discussion of evangelical essentials, yet were not on par with baptism and the Lord's Supper.²⁸ Melancthon had adopted the same ambiguous stance on the keys in the Augsburg Confession, as had Luther in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: Heyden was in good company. The schoolmaster also emphasized that God had given the keys to the Church, not just to the clergy. Like the Wittenbergers, he wanted to retain private absolution without the late medieval sacerdotal baggage.

Having made his point that, theoretically, all Christians could employ the authority to bind and loose sins, Heyden then argued that the Church had entrusted the keys exclusively to its ministers. The schoolmaster did not advocate lay absolution in his catechism. He urged his students when overwhelmed by guilt to seek out the duly called ministers of the Church who “have authority [from Christ] to remit and retain sins.”²⁹ Because the human heart was so depraved and inscrutable, no human being could know just how often he had offended others, but he should expect the worst. Therefore, Heyden concluded, “private absolution is a necessary thing in the Church.” Only fools would avoid the consolation it provided.³⁰

In the epilogue to the catechism he urged his young readers that

whenever they felt sick in their hearts owing to the awareness of sins, they should take refuge in private absolution as they would in the best instruction of a pharmacist or the most effective of medicines.³¹ The keys provided sure relief from spiritual maladies because Christ himself stood behind them. Heyden still wanted nothing to do with the penitential religion Jeremias Müllich had preached, but he, like many who felt responsible for the spiritual formation of Lutheran youth, believed the keys had a rightful place in a properly reformed church.

Evangelical catechists like Osiander, Dietrich, and Heyden maintained that the keys played a crucial role in securing the inner confidence they wished to instill in Lutheran children. This was a religious certainty based on the belief that the present generation, unlike the previous one, had access to *the* truth about God; namely, that his intentions toward human beings were for the good and that he had forgiven them through the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Time and again the catechists urged their young listeners to realize they were living in the new era of the gospel.

In a sermon on the Seventh Commandment (You shall not steal), Osiander explained to his young auditors that they had to behave more piously than the previous generation because “our Lord God has allowed you to be shown his Word and to be instructed in his divine will, which the older people did not hear or learn.”³² As Steven Ozment has argued, “Instead of being the tools by which church authority undermined the confidence of generations of children, Protestant catechisms may have had the reverse effect: to cast doubt on traditional religious belief and institutions by making children all too confident and sure where truth lay in ultimate matters.”³³ The conviction that they knew the truth about God may well have influenced Lutheran youth far more than the emphasis on human depravity that was integral to the new creed. This was what catechists hoped. They wished to provide the next generation of Lutherans with a deep sense of inner assurance that would supply them with the confidence they needed to live out their lives securely in the world. Urging youth to private absolution lay at the heart of this endeavor.

One of the most striking differences between the Lutheran practice of private confession and its Catholic counterpart was the former’s rejection of the need to reveal *all* serious sins to a confessor. As we have seen, Lutherans consistently denied both the necessity and the possi-

bility of making full or complete confessions. They thought it placed an unnecessary burden on confessants and gave too much power to confessors. According to evangelical Christians, the duty to make a complete confession was one of the worst manifestations of works righteousness to be found. As Nürnberg's religious leaders taught the city's youth how to confess, they urged on them a certain spiritual modesty that was foreign to late medieval piety.

In his *Children's Sermons*, Veit Dietrich assailed the traditional insistence on complete confessions. Rather than urging laypeople to acknowledge their sinfulness and then trust in Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice, the "papists" taught that "you must confess all that you have knowingly done in your life against God." Along with contrition and penance, they taught that this confession merited forgiveness.³⁴ The St. Sebald preacher exclaimed, "but this is a human creation through and through, of which there is not a single letter in God's Word. Therefore, [it] is falsely praised as meritorious." Dietrich then set out the evangelical view of the matter:

God commands you to recognize your sins and confess . . . them to him, acknowledging your guilt. When you console yourself with the holy gospel and the promise of Christ, your sins are forgiven you on account of Christ's death. He nowhere commands that you must tell your vileness [*unlust*] to another person, except where you require advice or instruction. From time to time a situation occurs in which one does not know whether he has done right or not. In these cases you may seek advice from people who are wise and blessed by God. But this is not confessing.³⁵

Dietrich wished to teach young Nürnbergers that humanity's primary confessor was God. They were to reveal themselves fully to him alone.

These emphases on spiritual confidence and modesty in Nürnberg's catechetical literature corresponded precisely with official instructions for Lutheran confessors contained in the imperial city's church orders. The model Lutheran confessor was interested first and foremost in consoling and instructing confessants, not in prying into their souls or making sure they knew they were sinners. He took his authority to remit and bind sins seriously but also understood the limits of his jurisdiction. He examined the confessant's knowledge of the Lutheran catechism thoroughly but was careful to avoid trespassing into his conscience. As one church order insisted, "the exploration—the account of faith which everyone must give to his pastor before he may

go to the sacrament—is no confession, but an instruction, which one may not make into auricular confession where all sins must be confessed.”³⁶ The evangelical confessor helped deliver laypeople from “the great storm winds” of Satan by offering them divine absolution,³⁷ but resisted the temptation to stir up the confessant’s soul himself, leaving the proclamation of the law to the city’s preachers.

We have already seen that the 1533 church order urged confessors to exercise great restraint and compassion when dealing with confessants. In 1543 Veit Dietrich produced a new church order that stressed even more the limits of the confessor’s office. The Council had commissioned Dietrich to draw up a new guide for doctrine and worship when Nürnberg acquired three towns from the Palatine-Neuburg in 1542.³⁸ The magistrates seized this opportunity to commission a revised and enlarged version of the 1533 church order for use in Nürnberg’s rural parishes, something they had been wanting to do for some time.³⁹ The Count Palatine Ottheinrich had already introduced the Reformation into his lands but had done little to establish the evangelical faith on a firm footing. Dietrich’s *Liturgy Booklet for the Pastors in the Countryside* was intended to remedy this situation. The new order soon became extremely popular, going through eleven editions before 1570. Though intended for use in the countryside, it influenced church orders in the imperial cities Schweinfurt, Nördlingen, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, and Schwäbisch Hall, with the last edition appearing in 1755.⁴⁰

Dietrich argued for the validity of private confession, citing the Augsburg Confession, but then quickly distinguished the evangelical confessor from his late medieval predecessor. The former never presumed to probe a confessant’s conscience in search of secret sins, because he lacked both the right and the ability to do so. Dietrich allowed for nothing like Osiander’s evangelical key of knowledge. He insisted, “here one must defer to God’s jurisdiction [*man lasse da Got sein gericht*].” Dietrich explained, “No one can lie to God or deceive him as one can us human beings, who can neither believe nor know anymore than the tongue reveals. We cannot see into the heart; here only God judges and sees whether what the mouth confesses—a desire for forgiveness of sins and divine grace, and a declaration of proper sorrow for sin—is truly said in earnest.”⁴¹ The *Liturgy Booklet* emphasized what Protestants had declared from the beginning: the human conscience was God’s turf. In fact, the order encouraged laypeople to become their own confessors, to explore their own con-

sciences aided by the Word, and then to come to their pastors for further instruction and the assurance of forgiveness. Pastors were instructed several times to exhort laypeople to examine their own hearts (*prüfe dein herz*) before coming to the Lord's Supper.⁴² Dietrich had recommended the same in his summary of the Christian faith for Nürnberg's German schools.

The model Lutheran confessor was to have great reverence for the human conscience. As we have seen throughout, this preoccupation with protecting and consoling consciences occupied a central role in the evolution of evangelical private confession. Lutheran pastors, teachers, and magistrates regarded the conscience as the single most important human faculty. Conscience was the essential self, the place where one felt either justified or condemned before God and humanity. The verdict of conscience was a judgment about the individual's fundamental right to be. Though located deep within the human person, the conscience was extremely vulnerable to external suggestion. It was at once the most important and most delicate part of the human psyche.

Though evangelical confessors were not required (nor likely able) to understand the intricacies of Luther's theology of conscience, they were nonetheless expected to grasp the basic Lutheran conviction that human beings dared not trespass into God's jurisdiction. Preachers and catechists sought to shape consciences from afar by confronting them with the law, but the job of the confessor was confined to instruction and consolation. As we have seen, the mandatory pre-communion examination of faith was not an interrogation of conscience. Though it undoubtedly caused its own brand of anxiety,⁴³ Lutheran religious leaders considered this test of knowledge far less intrusive than its late medieval counterpart. The examination of faith was not to penetrate to the core of the person; confessants were to be left unmolested in conscience. Confessors were not to treat knowledge of the catechism as a good work laypeople had to exhibit in order to justify themselves before God. The catechism itself denounced all forms of works righteousness. The model evangelical confessor was to free consciences from their innate belief that they had to merit absolution through works of the law. His central task was to assure troubled consciences that forgiveness was a gift.

The catechisms and church orders we have examined thus far provide valuable access to the intentions of Nürnberg's religious leaders as

they sought to mold the opinions and personalities of the imperial city's inhabitants, especially its youth. But these sources tell only part of the story. Lutheran preachers and teachers utilized other means to teach the evangelical faith to the laity, one of the most interesting of which was plays.

Drama had always been an important part of the pre-Lenten season in German cities. Many plays, like those of Hans Sachs, were quite humorous, even risqué, while others urged their audiences to assume the moral high ground in preparation for a holy season. Among the more popular of the latter category was Leonhard Culmann's *How a Sinner Is Converted to Repentance* (1539),⁴⁴ a play in which the rector of the New Hospital School openly promoted private absolution.⁴⁵ The *Sinner* went through three editions and was also reprinted in Augsburg and Strasbourg.⁴⁶ The play was probably performed in Nürnberg around the same time that the *Schembartlauf* made its way through the streets of the imperial city for the last time. The *Sinner* apparently did not have its intended effect on those in the Lenten parade who were hell-bent on "converting" Osiander!

The play provided an ideal opportunity for Culmann's students—the actors in his play—to practice speaking proper German in front of parents and friends, but also for actors and audience alike to ponder the course of their lives. Wenzeslaus Linck wrote a letter commending the play in which he argued that, owing to the present moral decay, it was important for the Word of God to be preached in every way possible so that "the simple people, and especially the young, may be converted to God and their morals improved."⁴⁷ For Linck, as for Culmann, the *Sinner* was a sermon in disguise.

A variation on the Prodigal Son, a favorite theme for such productions, the play tells the familiar story of a young man, simply called "Sinner," who after the death of his parents decides to spend his inheritance satisfying his every carnal desire. Though his servant, Contz, warns him that he is headed for trouble, Sinner will not listen; he is too drunk to understand such admonitions anyway. Contz attributes Sinner's foolishness to negligent parenting. When father and mother spared the rod—and gave their child too much wine to drink—they inevitably spoiled him. Sinner's guardian concurs: a child given too much rein never learns self-control and eventually destroys himself and those around him. We have heard the same message in Osiander's *Children's Sermons*.

After several futile attempts at turning Sinner from his evil ways,

the guardian urges him to marry, a measure he hopes will save Sinner from the sin of adultery and subsequent judgment. But the young rebel refuses, protesting that married men must wear homely clothing (*geflickt Hosen*), always look sour, never betray an interest in attractive women, and do whatever their wives tell them (*im hauß muß er sein herr Simon*).⁴⁸ Thus rebuffed, Sinner's guardian washes his hands of him, wishing him well on his journey to hell.⁴⁹

During one of his drunken stupors Sinner feels a terrible pain in his side and sends his servant to fetch a doctor. The doctor arrives and, after examining Sinner, informs him that his liver is rotten and that he is badly in need of water. Sinner confesses that he has never tasted any, only wine! Judging his patient to be beyond hope, the doctor sends for a pastor. Meanwhile, Sinner receives a visit from Satan and Moses: the latter to render judgment, the former to execute it.

Discovering that Sinner does not know his catechism, Moses warns that he will not be able to stand before God. Moses then examines Sinner's life, using the Ten Commandments as his guide. At every turn Satan, accompanied by personifications of sin and death, reveals Sinner's negligence and disobedience. The Old Testament saint then renders judgment: "Cursed be anyone who does not fulfill every word of this law."⁵⁰ Sinner is left in despair as his impending death and doom draw near.

Then, from the depths of his soul, Sinner cries out to God, "O dear God, have mercy on me; O God, release me from this penalty."⁵¹ This turn of events greatly disturbs Satan; he knows he will have to depart should the Enemy appear. The young penitent cries out again to Christ for mercy and deliverance. A priest (*Priester*) then appears on the scene to grant him absolution in the name of Christ:⁵²

Who is the one who cries so, who is it who so suffers? My dear son, be consoled; You are released from your sins . . . I will speak to you of Jesus Christ who bore the sins of the world, and before whose name death and the devil must flee. His gospel does not deceive: the one who hears it and believes it is released from hell's fire.⁵³

As Satan flees to his fiery home, the young man asks the priest to explain to him what has happened. How could it be that God has delivered him from sin and death? The priest reveals to him that God heard his cry for mercy, and this is all that is required for him to grant his grace, no matter how great one's sin. The priest then instructs the

young man to improve his life, attend sermons regularly, learn his catechism, take up a responsible job, and, finally, to get married.

The play's final act finds the priest making plans for the young man's upcoming wedding to a local burgher's daughter. He relates to the burgher the story of his future son-in-law's conversion, explaining how God used the law and bodily suffering to bring the young man to the brink of utter despair and then forgave him when he cried out for mercy. This is the normal pattern of things with sinners, the priest observes. Those who recognize in suffering their Maker's loving attempts to convert them are spared; those who persist in evil are not. Having made its point, the play ends with the joyous celebration of the young man's wedding, a uniquely evangelical symbol of his repentance and conversion.

Culmann's *Sinner* presented Lutheran private confession in dramatic form to sixteenth-century Nürnbergers. It stressed the importance of knowing the catechism, examining one's conscience before the law, and seeing a merciful God hidden in suffering, a prominent theme in Lutheran piety. The play also endorsed private absolution at a time when the practice was under fire in Nürnberg. God responded to Sinner's plea for forgiveness by sending to him a pastor who was to console him with the promise of the gospel. The Almighty chose to absolve through the medium of a divinely called human being. Almost a full decade would pass before this fantasy would become reality in the imperial city.

The *Sinner* revealed to Nürnbergers the same holy, yet merciful God we have seen in the church orders and catechisms. As in these more formal works, Culmann's play preached both law and gospel. There were hard words about sin and its consequences, but even stronger statements of grace and compassion. For Culmann, God was philanthropos, not misanthropos. It was the unique task of the priest to ensure that Sinner understood this.

The fact that Nürnberg's pastors and teachers spilled so much ink about private confession during a time when few Nürnbergers actually confessed attests to their strong support for the practice. It also demonstrates their desire to produce catechetical literature for Lutherans who lived outside of Nürnberg, where private confession was likely enforced. But Nürnbergers eventually followed suit and started going to confession. After a rocky start in the late 1540s, the evangeli-

cal ritual gradually became an accepted part of the imperial city's religious life, much as it was in other Lutheran strongholds. At least there are no reports in the relevant sources of further lay protests against the practice, and the Council was now clearly committed to enforcing it.⁵⁴ As inhabitants of the imperial city began making their way to confession, they undoubtedly called to mind the instruction they had received about the practice from their youth up. After private confession was firmly established, Nürnbergers continued to hear about it through hymns, devotional works, and annual catechetical sermons.⁵⁵ How well did all this preaching and teaching translate into actual practice once private confession was enforced in Nürnberg? Did the intention of the catechists to promote spiritual confidence and modesty have any bearing on the way the laity actually experienced confession? Or did Nürnbergers remain opposed to the practice and simply go through the motions once they could no longer avoid it? As we will see, these are exceedingly difficult questions to answer.

Although we can establish that Lutheran private confession eventually became a regular part of Nürnberg's religious life, it is very difficult to say much more about how laypeople regarded the new ritual. As with the late medieval sacrament of penance, a dearth of sources frustrates the historian's task. At present, we have no contemporary lay reports on the Lutheran practice of private confession, an unfortunate situation that may be remedied as scholars continue to mine the rich cache of sources in Germany's family archives. Neither do we have records on how frequently the laity went to confession, or even to communion. There was no Lutheran parallel to the late medieval requirement of annual confession. Osiander and Brenz's church order linked confession and communion, but it specified neither how often the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated nor how frequently laypeople were to communicate. As we have seen, according to the testimony of the Nürnberg clergy, laypeople in the imperial city participated in the Lord's Supper quite frequently. It is therefore possible that once private confession was enforced, laypeople also confessed frequently, though we cannot establish this with certainty.

It is worth noting that by the 1550s, regardless of how often burghers were going to confession or how they viewed it, the practice had become a recognized part of Nürnberg popular culture. In 1553 Hans Sachs produced a carnival play entitled *The Jealous Man Who Heard His Wife's Confession*, in which private confession was taken as an

accepted part of everyday life in the imperial city.⁵⁶ The play tells the comical story of a young woman who has resolved to put an end to her elderly husband's insatiable jealousy. Though ordinarily confined to their house, the woman obtains her husband's permission to go to confession, refusing to reveal her sin to him. Knowing that her husband has followed her to the church and disguised himself as a priest, she acts none the wiser when he presents himself to hear her confession. When asked if she is true to her husband, she says she is, but adds that a priest comes to her every night while her husband is asleep. She believes he has bewitched her, for she cannot help but love him. When her "confessor" demands the adulterer's name, she says she dares not reveal it, for he would certainly know the man. After commanding her to abstain from her life of sin, her husband dismisses her without absolution, eager to discover who the adulterer is. The following night he tells their servant that he will be staying at a friend's house, but in fact hides in the cellar to capture his wife and her lover in the act. After failing to apprehend his rival, and nearly freezing himself to the bone, he finally confronts his wife, who then confesses that he is her secret lover. She chides him for doubting her fidelity and for passing himself off as her confessor. The old man accepts her rebuke and promises greater trust and leniency in the future. Though confession is only incidental to the drama's main plot, the fact that Sachs could refer to the practice in a play intended for Lutheran Nürnbergers is significant. He expected that his hearers would understand confession and find nothing unusual about a Lutheran woman seeking it out.

Significant as Sachs's treatment of confession may be, it still does not reveal a great deal about how lay Nürnbergers experienced the ritual. In seeking to learn about the actual practice of private confession in Lutheran cities like Nürnberg, the most promising source is extant records from church visitations. In the case of the imperial city itself, however, there are no such records. It seems that the Council had come to see the regular examination and absolution of communicants within Nürnberg as a substitute for a formal municipal church visitation. In many ways the evangelical version of private confession was a small-scale visitation: it tested the communicant's knowledge of the catechism and assessed his public moral conduct, the most important aspects of a Lutheran ecclesiastical inspection. It may be for this reason, coupled with simple burgher pride, that the 1560–1561

Nürnberg church visitation took place in the countryside only. The actual practice of private confession in the imperial city thus remains shrouded in mystery, although the reports from the countryside reveal a good deal about the Council's expectations concerning the ritual, and also something of how peasants and rural artisans experienced it.

As the records of the visitation make clear, the Council expected each of the towns or villages that belonged to Nürnberg to practice private confession.⁵⁷ Though several were not,⁵⁸ many more were observing the instructions for confession in either Osiander's or Dietrich's church order.⁵⁹ Some people were still given to "superstition,"⁶⁰ but in comparison with the 1528 visitation, rural religious practices had become more identifiably Lutheran, especially with respect to confession. Unlike the earlier inspection, there is no evidence to suggest that village pastors were practicing the sacrament of penance or that laypeople desired it. The clergy preached the law from the pulpit, and then examined and absolved parishioners in confession.

Of course, those communities that practiced Lutheran private confession did not always observe the church orders perfectly. As was true before the Reformation, laypeople frequently chose not to conform to the rules about confession handed down by their leaders. Pastors complained that parishioners rarely came to the Saturday vesper service, the appointed time for confession, but instead showed up in droves on Sunday morning expecting to be examined so they could communicate. In such cases there was not enough time to examine and instruct each communicant properly. One pastor told the visitation committee that his parishioners intentionally came on Sunday mornings in order to avoid a lengthy examination of their faith.⁶¹ In another Franconian visitation, pastors complained that some people had not communicated for years, at least in part because they did not want to undergo an examination of their faith.⁶² Visitors responded to these situations by exhorting laypeople to attend vesper services and by ordering the clergy not to examine or absolve communicants in groups, a measure several had been forced to take.⁶³

Private confession represented for the visitation commission an essential part of the overall effort to educate the laity in the evangelical faith. The connection between catechesis and confession was very close in the visitors' minds. The mandatory examination of faith represented the best opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the Lutheran educational endeavor and to give further instruction when nec-

essary. Wherever the commission found people ignorant of the new faith, it urged regular catechism classes and stricter observance of private confession.⁶⁴ The new ritual continued to include both examination and absolution, but the former received far more attention than the latter.⁶⁵ Like their counterparts throughout Germany, Nürnberg's religious and political leaders were concerned to establish a distinct confessional identity among the common folk. Evangelical private confession was crucial to this process of confessionalization.

While it is true that church visitations were designed to encourage conformity and discipline, they were not without their more humane side. Although visitors urged rural clerics to preach against sin, and even compiled lists of notorious offenders that they submitted to the Nürnberg Council, they frequently admonished pastors to be gentle with their flocks. When it became clear that Altdorf's preacher had been excessive in his condemnation of parishioners' vices, the commission concluded:

He should not preach in such a heated manner from the pulpit, nor should he rebuke his subjects either privately or publicly in the church, as is sometimes his custom. Rather, he should show himself to be more humane [*humanius*] when dealing with the citizenry, his chaplains, and his parishioners. He should also lower his voice somewhat when he preaches from the pulpit.⁶⁶

In keeping with the church orders, the visitors similarly instructed confessors to examine confessants with understanding (*beschaidenheit*).⁶⁷ They prohibited any interrogation of conscience and permitted censure of public sins only. As in the 1528 visitation, visitors had to receive approval from the Council before placing anyone under the ban.⁶⁸ Respect for lay consciences continued to be a value among Lutherans during the confessional battles of the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Based on records from church visitations we can safely assume that the evangelical version of private confession had become an accepted part of rural religious experience by the closing decades of the sixteenth century. We know it was not always practiced as designed and that local pastors occasionally had difficulties in attempting to do so. But most towns and villages managed to offer an approximate version of the prescribed ritual. Beyond this, visitation records can tell us very little about how laypeople actually regarded confession—whether

they found it consoling, overly demanding, or simply perfunctory. Based on these sources we cannot know whether Lutheran private confession had its intended effect of promoting spiritual confidence and modesty among either the urban or rural laity. Visitations were designed to look for problems, not to observe the overall cultural impact of Lutheran rituals like private confession. They were concerned with measuring external conformity, not inward spiritual and emotional development. Finally, these sources examine rural Lutheranism only, the least developed form of the evangelical faith. It is no wonder that visitors emphasized the more didactic side of private confession.

In cities, where laypeople likely had a better grasp of the catechism, having been trained in it from youth up, burghers may well have regarded private confession primarily as a source of absolution. Once they had proven their knowledge of the evangelical creed to their confessors, urban Lutherans would no longer have been subject to examinations of their faith. Confession would have become for them pure consolation, as the early reformers had intended. Whether this is how Nürnbergers experienced confession is impossible to discern. As we have seen, the available sources are silent on the actual practice of private confession in the imperial city. As John Bossy once observed, “the confessional keeps its secrets, as it is entitled to do.”⁶⁹ The evangelical version of private confession was as tight-lipped as its Catholic counterpart.

Conclusion

The reformation of the keys in sixteenth-century Nürnberg was in many respects a unique phenomenon. No other evangelical city or territory experienced the same kind of intense conflict about the keys, and most, no doubt, took measures to avoid similar controversy, having witnessed the toll it took on Nürnberg. At least this was the case with Anhalt after its prince consulted with Melanchthon. We do not know how widespread knowledge of the Nürnberg conflict was, though we can assume it was fairly broad. News of such a prolonged and visible conflict in one of the empire's leading cities surely would have been of interest to many, especially given Nürnberg's important role in the Reformation. We know that the king of Denmark and Norway had heard of the controversy, again owing to the efforts of Melanchthon. It is plausible to assume that reformers like Brenz and Forster took news of the conflict with them to Schwäbisch Hall and Regensburg, and Nürnberg's own preachers, Osiander and Dietrich, certainly informed others of the controversy as they sought to promote the evangelical cause throughout Germany. We also know that concerned burghers like Lazarus Spengler were in contact with those outside the imperial city, keeping them abreast of the battle over the keys in their beloved polis. But the fact remains that the Nürnberg conflict was unique, at least in terms of scope and notoriety.

The primary reason the keys became such a divisive issue in Nürnberg is that the city was home to Andreas Osiander. He was a passion-

ate and uncompromising figure who was deeply committed to planting his version of evangelical Christianity in Nürnberg. Osiander was also a difficult person who seems to have been drawn to conflict by his very constitution. Melanchthon once wrote of him, “I understand the melancholic nature, how contentious [*streitsuchtig*] it is and how it seeks an opportunity to quarrel.”¹ Osiander spent the better part of his adult years engaged in one conflict or another, the controversy over the keys being one of the most visible and important.²

But Osiander was not simply stirring up trouble to satiate his appetite for conflict. He was addressing a real problem. Christian theologians had struggled for centuries to articulate how human words of forgiveness could convey divine grace. We have seen that there was no clear consensus in the later Middle Ages about the working of the sacrament of penance. As Tentler observed, “theories of forgiveness could not proclaim certain solutions to all problems because they had to deal with intangible substances—the sorrow of the penitent, the power of the keys, and the grace of Christ.”³ Luther rejected the various late medieval attempts to contend with these mysteries but was not able to extricate himself and his followers from a similar predicament. Evangelical Christians had to deal with equally sublime issues as they sought to reform private confession. Substituting faith for sorrow and the authority of the Word for the authority of the ordained priest solved some problems, but it created others.

Luther provided a plausible argument for private confession as a voluntary rite but ran into difficulties when he attempted to define its status relative to the uncontested sacraments of baptism and communion. The reformer’s famous waffling on the sacramental status of private absolution in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* introduced a lack of theological precision into the reform of confession that tainted the entire process. Despite his strong support for private confession, Luther did not furnish an adequate theological basis for it, at least not as a mandatory practice. In many ways the reformation of private confession took place too quickly. Luther’s version of private confession became institutionalized before it had been subjected to rigorous theological inspection.

Osiander saw Luther’s difficulties and attempted to respond to them. The theological controversy that erupted between Osiander and his colleagues in Nürnberg was in no way a purely local event. The fact that so many important reformers participated in the debate

demonstrates just the opposite. The St. Lorenz preacher addressed tensions and problems in Lutheranism that others had either not noticed or simply ignored. Osiander, owing both to his temperament and intelligence, forced issues surrounding confession and absolution out into the open that otherwise would have remained concealed. He raised a number of important questions: Was absolution a sacrament or not? If it was, as most of Osiander's colleagues believed, what did this mean for its proper use? Could it be applied with equal validity and efficacy to crowds and to individuals? Given that most believed the individual encounter between pastor and confessant was to be preferred, how could one compel attendance at private confession if forgiveness could also be obtained through general absolution, a sermon, or a simple word of encouragement from a fellow Christian? Were the latter two also in some way sacramental? If so, what was unique about private absolution? Finally, what was the relationship between divine and human agency in confession, between God's Word and the confessor's words, between God's Word and the confessant's faith? These questions were hardly unique to the Reformation in Nürnberg.

Osiander also raised a number of questions about the more decidedly political aspects of the proposed reform of confession. As everyone involved in the debate soon came to understand, the larger issue at stake was the nature of religious authority in the new evangelical order. Who would have ultimate say in issues concerning moral discipline, who would possess the binding key? Pastors or magistrates? If the latter, what would this mean for the clergy? Would they still retain the authority necessary to carry out the tasks to which they had been called, most notably, the proper administration of the Lord's Supper and censuring of sinners? Again, owing to Osiander's unique personality and gifts, Nürnberg became a public stage on which leaders of the German Reformation—both lay and clerical—were required to ponder the relationship between magisterial and clerical authority in ways that would not have been otherwise possible or necessary.

Osiander lost the debate on both the theological and political fronts. Following Luther and the other Wittenberg reformers, Osiander's colleagues in Nürnberg rejected his theology of the keys and voted to retain general confession along with private confession, viewing them as two equally valid ways of applying the Word—the ultimate sacrament—to troubled consciences. Even though all shared

his support for private confession and, later, most shared his disdain for general confession, none could accept Osiander's evangelical sacerdotalism. It smacked of popery to them. The Nürnberg magistrates similarly rejected Osiander's bid to recover control of the binding key, fearing the implications of the preacher's clericalism both for their own authority and for lay consciences. According to his detractors, the St. Lorenz preacher's central problem was that he advocated a view of religious authority that was passé and, more to the point, unbiblical. His understanding of the keys belonged to another era, even to another faith—the wrong one. Where his views on confession accorded with the majority they were allowed to stand and had a tremendous influence on the evangelical movement through his church orders and catechetical sermons. Where Osiander's opinions were more suspect, they were (eventually) silenced.

It was an alternative view of religious authority that prevailed in the first several decades of the German Reformation, one that divested the clergy of much of its traditional authority and invested this authority elsewhere—in the Word, lay consciences, and temporal rulers. The new version of private confession reflected this shift: confessors were no longer judges or doctors but simply servants of the Word; confessants decided what they would reveal in confession—they were no longer compelled by sacerdotal authority to open their consciences to a priestly inquisitor; civil magistrates, as new secular bishops, had ultimate control of the binding key. The view of authority implicit in Lutheran private confession was quite different from the one that informed the sacrament of penance. This difference, in turn, signaled a larger change in the understanding and locus of religious authority in Christendom: sacred authority was secularized, secular authority sacralized. Though in cities like Nürnberg this process had been underway for some time, the Reformation played an indispensable role in bringing it to fruition. The new version of private confession both symbolized and facilitated this important shift in religious authority.

The new version of confession also reflected how religious authority was actually employed in the German Reformation. From the mid-1520s on, leaders of the evangelical movement were faced with a dilemma: how to balance competing concerns for spiritual freedom and moral discipline. The story of evangelical private confession demonstrates that reformers and civic rulers were much more successful in

achieving this balance than many scholars appreciate. Despite the persistent and growing concerns about order and discipline, leaders of the evangelical movement continued to promote freedom and consolation. They used their authority both to control those entrusted to their care and to protect them from what appeared to evangelical eyes as spiritual oppression. There was continuity between the evangelical ideals of spiritual liberty in the early 1520s and the mature Lutheran institutions and practices of the 1530s, '40s, and '50s, though it was by no means perfect. This continuity may be seen most clearly in the provisions for protecting lay consciences from clerical intrusions, provisions that were a regular feature of evangelical private confession. As Veit Dietrich admonished confessors in his *Liturgy Booklet*, “here [that is, in the conscience] one must defer to God’s jurisdiction [*man lasse da Got sein gericht*].”⁴ As we have seen throughout, Lutheran magistrates and theologians alike were very careful to respect the divine turf.

Among the common folk there were surely some, perhaps many, who objected to the new evangelical ritual, wishing that lay confession had become the norm. This was certainly the case in Nürnberg, where burghers continued to equate spiritual liberty with freedom from auricular confession, especially while Osiander was in town. Whether laypeople in other Lutheran strongholds shared Nürnbergers’ sentiments remains unclear; much archival research remains to be done before we can answer this question. Even in Nürnberg, however, burghers could be confident that the decision to implement evangelical private confession did not signal an attempt to resurrect the clericalism of former days: discipline had not eclipsed freedom. The Lutheran version of the traditional ritual was but a shadow of its former self. Beyond this, burghers had only to call to mind the Council’s treatment of Osiander in the extended and very public debate about the keys that their city had witnessed, something they had occasion to do each time they participated in general confession.

As their late medieval forebears had done before them, evangelical Christians of all stations struggled to find creative ways of living with the tensions and dilemmas that were unique to their version of Christianity. They were at least as successful in this endeavor as their Catholic predecessors, certainly no worse.

Notes

Abbreviations

- AOGA Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebaß, eds., *Andreas Osiander d.A., Gesamtausgabe*, 10 vols. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus (Gerd Mohn), 1975–1997.
- ARG *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*
- BSLK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 3rd ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956.
- CG J. F. Schannat, ed., *Concilia Germaniae*, 11 vols. Cologne, 1759–1790.
- CR C. G. Bretschneider, ed., *Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformatorum*, 28 vols. Halle, 1834–1860.
- DMA Joseph R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols. New York: Scribner, 1982–1989.
- ER Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- GNM Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg
- Houghton The Houghton Library, Harvard University
- Köhler, Bib. Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica, 1991–.
- Köhler I Hans-Joachim Köhler, Hildegard Hebenstreit-Wilfert, Christoph Weismann, eds., *Flugschriften des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts, 1501–1530*, microfiche collection. Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Co., 1978–1987.
- Köhler II Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften des späteren 16. Jahrhunderts, 1531–1600*, microfiche collection. Leiden: Inter Documentation Co., 1990–1998.

LW	J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, eds., <i>Luther's Works</i> , American Edition, 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–.
MVGN	<i>Mitteilungen des Vereins für die Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg</i>
NGL	Georg Andreas Will, <i>Nürnbergisches Gelehrten-Lexicon</i> , 4 vols. Nürnberg, 1755–1758.
NLKA	Nürnberg Landeskirchliches Archiv
NSB	Nürnberg Stadtbibliothek
Hs. Abt.	Handschriften Abteilung
NStaatsA	Nürnberg Staatsarchiv
ARA	Ansbacher Religionsakten
BB	Briefbücher
HS	Handschriften
RB	Ratsbücher
RsB	Ratschlagbücher
RV	Ratsverlässe
NStadtA	Nürnberg Stadtarchiv
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
Sehling	Emil Sehling, ed., <i>Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> , 17 vols. Leipzig: O. R. Riesland; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1902–1913, 1955–1963.
StadtANö	Stadtarchiv Nördlingen
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , 127 vols. (to date). Weimar, 1883–.
WABr	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke, Briefwechsel</i> . Weimar, 1930–1948.
Widener	Widener Library, Harvard University
Will	Georg Andreas Will, <i>Bibliotheca norica Williana</i> , 8 vols. Altdorff, 1772–1793.
ZbKg	<i>Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte</i>

In citations from archival materials a folio number without the prime symbol—for example, fol. 1—indicates either the right-hand page of a book or the front side of a leaf. A folio number with a prime symbol—for example, fol. 1'—indicates the back side of either a page or leaf.

Introduction

1. The early followers of Luther referred to themselves as “evangelicals”—i.e., those who followed the *Evangelium*, or gospel. The term is used here and throughout as a synonym for Lutherans.
2. For a treatment of Protestant origins that places great stress on the sacrament of penance, see Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 22–32, 49–56. See also Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 182–222. For an opposing view, see Lawrence G.

- Duggan, "Fear and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation," ARG 75 (1984): 153–175. See also Duggan, "The Unresponsiveness of the Late Medieval Church: A Reconsideration," SCJ 9, no. 1 (1978): 3–26.
3. Although Calvin was in favor of voluntary private confession, the Reformed churches never practiced it. They did, however, develop the Consistory, which, according to Robert M. Kingdon, could perform functions similar to the sacrament of penance. See Kingdon, "A New View of Calvin in the Light of the Registers of the Geneva Consistory," in Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong, eds., *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), p. 27. The 1549 edition of the Book of Common Prayer encouraged private confession for those "whose conscience is troubled and greued in any thing," but it never became a prominent feature of the English Reformation. See Frank Senn, "The Confession of Sins in the Reformation Churches," in Mary Collins and David Power, eds., *The Fate of Confession* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 105–116 (quotation, p. 109); and Geoffrey Rowell, "The Anglican Tradition from the Reformation to the Oxford Movement," in Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell, eds., *Confession and Absolution* (London: SPCK, 1990), pp. 91–119. Anabaptists also rejected auricular confession, opting instead for a kind of communal self-examination before communion. See Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 194–196.
 4. On confession in Lutheran church orders, see ER, vol. 1, pp. 401–404, and Senn, pp. 107–108. For a treatment of confession in Lutheran catechetical sermons, see Mary Jane Haemig, "Communication, Consolation, and Discipline: Two Early Lutheran Preachers on Confession," in Katharine Jackson Lualdi and Anne T. Thayer, eds., *Penitence in the Age of Reformations*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 30–48. For a discussion of opposition to confession in a small seventeenth-century German city, see J. C. Wolfart, "Why Was Private Confession So Contentious in Early Seventeenth-Century Lindau?" in Bob Scribner and Trevor Johnson, eds., *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400–1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 140–165. For a brief discussion of Lutheran private confession in light of the confessionalization thesis, see Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 91–107. See also Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 132–133 and 261; Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500–1598* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 42, 167, 199–200, and 222.
 5. I list here only the more recent and valuable ones: Kurt Aland, "Die Privatbeichte im Lutherthum von ihrem Anfängen bis zu ihrer Auflösung," *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1960), pp. 452–

- 519; Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständis: Geschichte und Praxis der evangelischen Einzelbeichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1982); Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Beichte: Lehre und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1961).
6. More recently an attempt has been made to assess the social impact of Lutheran private confession on late sixteenth-century evangelical society. See Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Lutherische Beichte und Sozialdisziplinierung," *ARG* 84 (1993): 127–155. See pp. 288–289 n.63. for a brief discussion of Rublack's argument.
 7. See, e.g., Cameron; Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1992); Paul Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany, 1521–1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform: German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519–1530* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996).
 8. Gerald Strauss, "Protestant Dogma and City Government: The Case of Nuremberg," *Past and Present* 36 (1967): 38–58. See also Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 209–212.

1. Allegiance to the Regnum

1. See Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R. F. Bennett (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1940), p. 1.
2. The extant sources first mention "Nuorembec" by name in 1050. Karl Schlemmer, *Gottesdienst und Frömmigkeit in der Reichsstadt Nürnberg am Vorabend der Reformation* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1980), p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
4. Karl Bosl, "Die Anfänge der Stadt unter den Saliern," in Gerhard Pfeiffer, ed., *Nürnberg—Geschichte einer europäischen Stadt* (Munich: Beck, 1971), p. 4.
5. These rights had previously belonged to the town of Fürth, which was under the control of the bishop of Bamberg. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
6. See Hanns Hubert Hofmann, "Nürnberg: Gründung und Frühgeschichte," *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 10 (1950): 19.
7. Hofmann suggests that Henry required a candidate for the bishopric of Bamberg (Suidger) in 1040 to agree to the transfer of Bamberg's market, minting, and toll rights to Nürnberg before the emperor would grant him the episcopal office. Hofmann, pp. 20–21.
8. In 1062 Bishop Gunther of Bamberg, who had had a falling out with the emperor's widow, conspired with Archbishop Anno of Cologne and other princes to kidnap the young king. Many rulers in the empire believed that Empress Agnes had fallen under the sway—both politically and sexually—

- of Bishop Henry of Augsburg, which gave them cause to worry about their own role in imperial politics and also the quality of the juvenile king's upbringing. Gunther and Anno then sought to use their influence over Henry to enhance their own political power and prestige. See Johann Looshorn, *Geschichte des Bistums Bamberg*, vol. 1 (1007–1102) (Neustadt: Ph. C. W. Schmidt, 1980), pp. 373–374; Schlemmer, p. 4; and I. S. Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 30–31.
9. Schlemmer, p. 4. See also Hofmann, p. 27, and Hektor Amman, *Die wirtschaftliche Stellung der Reichsstadt Nürnberg im Spätmittelalter. Nürnberger Forschungen*, vol. 13 (Nürnberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg, 1970), p. 15.
 10. Josef Kraus, "Die Stadt Nürnberg in ihren Beziehungen zur Römischen Kurie während des Mittelalters," *MVGN* 41 (1950): 3.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. Schlemmer, p. 6.
 13. Karl Bosl, "Das staufische Nürnberg, Pfalzort und Königstadt," in Pfeiffer, *Nürnberg*, p. 21.
 14. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–23, and Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), p. 42.
 15. Bosl, "Das staufische Nürnberg," p. 22. See also DMA, vol. 9, p. 201.
 16. Since the mid-thirteenth century a handful of leading German princes had secured the right to elect the emperor. See Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), pp. 249–251.
 17. Werner Schultheiss, "Politische und kulturelle Entwicklung, 1298–1347," in Pfeiffer, *Nürnberg*, p. 40.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
 19. "Ludewici Appellatio Tertia Contra Processum Pontificis," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Legum Sectio IV. Constitutiones et Acta Publica Imperatorum et Regum, Tomus V* (Hanover-Leipzig: Hahn, 1909–1913), p. 724. For an English translation of the entire text, see "Ludwig the Bavarian's Appeal to a General Council," in Julius Kirschner and Karl F. Morrison, eds., *Readings in Western Civilization: Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 393–402. I have followed the translation of the Latin given on p. 395.
 20. Schultheiss, p. 42.
 21. Alan Gewirth, trans. and intro., *Marsilius of Padua: The Defender of the Peace*, vol. 2: *The Defensor Pacis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 95.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
 25. Marsilius asserted, "For this reason . . . is the priest's office required for the

- penitent, namely in order to show, in the eyes of the church, whose sins God has retained or cancelled.” Ibid., p. 145. Marsilius followed Peter Lombard in his treatment of the keys. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Chapter 2.
26. Marsilius explained, “The end of the priesthood . . . is to teach and educate men in those things which, according to the evangelical law, it is necessary to believe, do, and omit in order to attain eternal salvation and avoid misery.” Gewirth, p. 23.
 27. Ibid., p. 124.
 28. Ibid., p. 125.
 29. Ibid., p. 148.
 30. Ibid., p. 293.
 31. Ibid., p. 186.
 32. On the influence of the *Defender of the Peace* on the Reformation, see Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 155, and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 37.
 33. Barraclough, p. 312.
 34. Ibid., pp. 316–319, and Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 47.
 35. Schlemmer, p. 8. The prominent place given to Nürnberg in the Golden Bull was in part a way for Charles IV to reward the city for its decision to support his bid for the emperorship against Louis of Bavaria, who had fallen out of favor with the German princes.
 36. See Ozment, *Age of Reform*, pp. 182–190, and Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 71–79.
 37. See F. R. H. Du Boulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Athlone Press, 1983), pp. 196–197; Cameron, pp. 54–55; and DMA, vol. 9, p. 489.
 38. Many of Germany’s leading princes were able to obtain significant control over ecclesiastical appointments in their lands in exchange for pledges of obedience to the pope. See Cameron, p. 55.
 39. Frederick also created the office of the *Butigler*, who was responsible for administering the imperial possessions and court in the surrounding countryside. The count of the fortress gradually took over these duties and the office disappeared by 1282. Schlemmer, p. 19.
 40. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 43–45.
 41. Ibid., p. 7.
 42. Nürnberg obtained the money for this purchase from the most unwilling of donors. In 1385 Nürnberg and several other cities persuaded Emperor Wenceslaus, who had been born in the Franconian city, to issue a decree allowing them to assume possession of all wealth and property belonging to Jews, and to cancel whatever debts the city owed them. (Nürnbergers were anticipating a war of attrition with the *Burggraf* and were seeking to pre-

- pare themselves financially for it.) Already in 1349 Nürnbergers had obtained permission from Wenceslaus's father, Emperor Charles IV, to expel the Jews so they could construct a larger market area for the recently joined northern and southern parts of the city. Inhabitants of the city killed 562 Jews and, according to the custom of the time, built a church dedicated to the Virgin on the site of the former synagogue. The Jews who had managed to survive the attack were then dispossessed in 1385, and their descendants driven out of the city in 1498. There was no Jewish quarter in sixteenth-century Nürnberg, an ominous portent of the city's darkest hour. See Schlemmer, pp. 8–9; Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 118–121; and DMA, vol. 9, p. 202.
43. On imperial cities, see Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 5–6, and Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. H. C. E. Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 41–54. On Nürnberg's population, see Rudolf Endres, "Sozialstruktur Nürnbergs," in Pfeiffer, *Nürnberg*, p. 195.
 44. Endres, p. 199.
 45. Günter Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25: Studien zur Geschichte der reformatorischen und sozialen Bewegung in der Reichsstadt* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1982), p. 26.
 46. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 98; Vogler, p. 14.
 47. Members of the Great Council were typically great merchants, doctors, master artisans, high public officials, lawyers, and others who earned a significant income in respectable ways (i.e., not with their hands). Schlemmer, p. 16; Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 59. On the size of the Great Council, see Gunter Zimmermann, "Das Nürnberger Religionsgespräch," *MVGN* 71 (1984): 132, n. 21.
 48. Schlemmer, p. 22; Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 59–60.
 49. Schlemmer, p. 22.
 50. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 98.
 51. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 54. There was also an older division of the twenty-six mayors between Jurors (*Schöffen*) and Mayors proper that became antiquated as the Council gradually assumed increasing control of Nürnberg, thus giving way to a more practical partitioning of the ruling magistrates. Originally assigned to work under the imperial bailiff, the Jurors eventually found their duties limited to condemning guilty men and taking down the confessions of prisoners during torture. (There was actually an opening in the floor of the Council chambers through which the Jurors could hear tortures being carried out below in the prison.) In fact, the Jurors typically rendered verdicts that agreed with the decisions previously made by the Council as a whole. The latter group of Mayors functioned as representatives of Nürnberg's citizens

- and was originally involved in assessing the city's yearly contribution to the emperor. See Strauss, pp. 63 and 75.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
 56. Schlemmer, p. 23.
 57. Christoph Scheurl, *Concerning the Polity and Government of the Praiseworthy City of Nuremberg* (1516). Cited in Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 61.
 58. Schlemmer, p. 23, and Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 79.
 59. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 113.
 60. *Ibid.*, pp. 190 and 108.
 61. St. Sebald Church was already in existence before 1255, though renovations and expansions continued until the last decades of the fifteenth century. It was the parish church for those Nürnbergers who lived on the north side of the Pegnitz, the older and wealthier portion of Nürnberg. The first church mentioned on the south side of the Pegnitz was St. Jacob Church, which soon became the property of the Knights of St. John (*Deutschherren*). Construction on the second parish church, St. Lorenz's, also on the south side of the Pegnitz, began at the end of the thirteenth century and was completed some 200 years later. The city's other churches—St. Egidien (or St. Giles), the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, St. Martha (also called the New Hospital of the Holy Spirit), and the Church of Our Lady—were all built between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. During the same period Nürnberg became home to monasteries of Benedictines, Carthusians, Minorite Friars, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians. The two convents, St. Clara's and St. Catherine's, were established in the latter half of the thirteenth century. The imperial city also contained several charitable establishments for lepers, the poor, and the diseased. See Schlemmer, pp. 24–35.
 62. Elisabeth Caesar, "Sebald Schreyer: Ein Lebensbild aus dem vorreformatorischen Nürnberg," *MVGN* 56 (1969): 80–82, and Schlemmer, pp. 109–112.
 63. Schlemmer, p. 137.
 64. See Kraus, pp. 84–85, and Schlemmer, pp. 45–47.
 65. For treatments of late medieval Nürnberg's relationship with the bishop of Bamberg, see Schlemmer, pp. 75–91; Adolf Engelhardt, "Die Reformation in Nürnberg," *MVGN* 33 (1936): 13–22; Irmgard Höss, "Das religiöse Leben vor der Reformation," in Pfeiffer, *Nürnberg*, pp. 137–146; and Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 154–159.
 66. Kraus, p. 9.
 67. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 68. See Höss, "Das religiöse Leben," p. 138, and Kraus, p. 50. Already in the 1360s the pope had granted similar rights to Vienna, Würzburg, Braunschweig, and Quedlinburg. See Kraus, p. 9.
 69. In 1487, at the insistence of the bishop of Bamberg, Pope Innocent VIII annulled the privileges granted to the Nürnberg Council by Sixtus IV in 1474 and 1477. However, the Council was able to persuade Innocent VIII to reinstate these privileges in 1492. See Schlemmer, pp. 76–77.

70. Ibid., p. 78.
71. Ibid., p. 86, and Kraus, pp. 48, 87.
72. Kraus, p. 89.
73. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 159; Adolf Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), p. 8; and Martin Weigel, “Nürnberger Ablassbriefe und Ablassprediger,” *ZbKg* 3 (1928): 13.
74. See Gerald Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent in Germany on the Eve of the Reformation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 35–63.
75. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 159.
76. Irmgard Höss, “Das religiös-geistige Leben in Nürnberg am Ende des 15. und am Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts,” *Bibliothèque de la Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique, Fascicule 44: Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1967), p. 21.
77. Cameron, pp. 59–60.
78. Sehling, vol. 13, p. 365.
79. See Moeller, *Imperial Cities*, p. 49.

2. *Between Hope and Fear*

1. Johannes Cochlaeus, *Brevis Germaniae descriptio*, ed. Karl Langosch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), chap. 4, para. 24 (p. 86).
2. Ibid. Cochlaeus maintained that preaching was so popular in Nürnberg that on many days one could find as many as thirteen different sermons being preached at various locations in the imperial city. While the humanist was likely overstating the case, we do know that late medieval Nürnberg possessed more preacherhips than most southern German cities. See Schlemmer, p. 255.
3. Cochlaeus, chap. 4, paras. 25–26 (p. 86).
4. See Bernd Moeller, “Piety in Germany around 1500,” in Steven Ozment, ed., *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pp. 50–75; Cameron, p. 14; Ozment, *Cities*, p. 21; Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 205; and Richard Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,” in Jill Raitt, ed., *History of Christian Spirituality*, vol. 2: *High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York: Continuum, 1987), pp. 75–108.
5. Moeller, “Piety in Germany,” p. 52.
6. Ibid., p. 54.
7. Ibid., pp. 60 and 64.
8. See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 31–32, 60–61; William Bouwsma, “Anxiety and the Formation of Early Modern Culture,” in Barbara C. Malament, ed., *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), p. 237; and Berndt Hamm, *Bürgertum und Glaube: Konturen der städtischen Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck

- & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 33. See also Schlemmer, p. 295; Caesar, p. 165; and Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 203.
9. See Schlemmer, pp. 306–307. On Sebald Schreyer, see Caesar.
 10. Cameron, p. 14.
 11. On the substantial common ground between so-called elites and commoners with respect to piety, see Caesar, pp. 140–141, and Schlemmer, p. 330. Robert Scribner urged Reformation historians to avoid making facile distinctions between elite and popular culture. He argued that historians should view early modern society “in terms of a total, unified culture, rather than some kind of ‘two-tiered’ entity.” Scribner, “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?” *History of European Ideas*, 10, no. 2 (1989): 175–191 (quotation, p. 181).
 12. W. David Myers refers to the “gravitational pull” that the sacrament of penance exercised upon the myriad religious practices that revolved around it, though he downplays the importance of confession itself. See “*Poor Sinning Folk*”: *Confession and Conscience in Counter-Reformation Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 60.
 13. Myers notes that by requiring only annual confession, Lateran IV set a more realistic expectation for lay participation in the sacrament of penance than earlier ecclesiastical councils had. Prior to Lateran IV some councils and synods had mandated three or four confessions per year. There were still those like Jean Gerson who called for more frequent lay confession after Lateran IV, but the minimalistic requirements of Canon 21 continued to define both clerical and lay expectations about confession throughout the later Middle Ages. See Myers, p. 32.
 14. David C. Douglas, gen. ed., *English Historical Documents*, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 654–655.
 15. NStaatsA, Rep. 18b, Register zu den D-Akten, Nr. 1799. For a discussion of the synod's ruling on the sacrament of penance, see Schlemmer, pp. 246–248.
 16. *Synodus Bambergensis* (1490), CG, vol. 4, p. 629.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 630.
 18. *Ibid.* Lea claims this was a common practice in the later Middle Ages. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 362–367.
 19. CG, vol. 4, p. 630.
 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 630–631.
 21. Lists of reserved cases appeared in the vast majority of late medieval synodal legislation. For two examples of such lists from the vicinity of Nürnberg, see the 1447 Eichstätt synod (CG, vol. 4, p. 369) and the 1512 Regensburg synod (CG, vol. 6, pp. 109–112).
 22. Sources of this kind do not appear for Nürnberg until later in the sixteenth

- century. See Matthäus Simon, “Zur Geschichte der Kirchenbücher,” *ZbKg*, 33 (1964): 169–174. Schlemmer has also commented on the difficulty of discovering a great deal about the actual practice of confession in pre-Reformation Nürnberg owing to the paucity of sources. See Schlemmer, p. 248.
23. It should be noted that the Council did attempt to control the practice of confession by drafting an Ordinance for Confession in April 1475. (See NStaatsA, RB 2, fol. 3'.) Unfortunately, we do not know what this proposal entailed or if it was passed. Schlemmer suggests, in keeping with its desire to oversee the imperial city's other religious practices, “one can safely assume that the Council ensured an orderly administration of the sacrament of penance ‘in foro externo.’” See Schlemmer, p. 248.
 24. Schlemmer, pp. 216–217.
 25. *Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 453 (n. 140).
 26. For an older though still valuable treatment of the issue, see Peter Browe's “Die Pflichtbeichte im Mittelalter,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 57 (1933): 335–383, espec. pp. 344–345.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. In 1523 Johannes Cochlaeus observed, “I have seen some very devout people in Nürnberg who go to the sacrament four or six times per year. But the common laity, men and women, come daily to mass not to receive the sacrament, but rather to make sure they are included [*sich teilhaftig zu machen*] in the mass, the sacrifice, and the intercession which the priest offers on behalf of all those who are present.” Schlemmer, p. 240.
 30. Caesar, p. 137. This freedom was officially extended to all Christians in 1516 by Pope Leo X, although the battle between secular and regular clergy for control of the “confession-market” continued throughout the early modern period. See Myers, p. 31.
 31. See Schlemmer, p. 308, and Weigel, p. 11.
 32. See Nikolaus Paulus, *Indulgences as a Social Factor in the Middle Ages*, trans. J. Elliot Ross (New York: Devin-Adair, 1922).
 33. This is the argument of Weigel's article.
 34. For a copy of this indulgence, see Lea, vol. 3, p. 76.
 35. Myers acknowledges that late medieval Europeans confessed outside of Lent, but he nonetheless depicts participation in the sacrament of penance as being tied to Lenten communion, except in a few rare cases. See Meyers, pp. 33–39.
 36. Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920). See vol. 1, pp. 466–496.
 37. Tertullian, “On Repentance,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 663.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 664.
 39. During the Novatian Schism in the mid-third century, Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, enjoined those who had lapsed under the Decian persecution

- (250) to seek remission of their sins from the bishops after performing hard penance. See John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 7.
40. Watkins asserts, “No indicative form of absolution, as *Ego te absolvo*, is known to come down from the early centuries.” See vol. 1, p. 494.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 493.
 42. McNeill and Gamer, p. 17.
 43. Watkins, vol. 1, pp. 480–481.
 44. See Watkins, vol. 2, pp. 755–766, and McNeill and Gamer, pp. 28–30.
 45. See Lea, vol. 2, pp. 102–120.
 46. McNeill and Gamer, p. 254.
 47. See John Bossy’s treatment of Anselm in *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3–13.
 48. Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man and the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, trans. and intro. Joseph M. Colleran (Albany: Magi Books, 1969), 1:11, p. 84.
 49. R. W. Southern, *St. Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 93.
 50. Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 1:11, pp. 84–85.
 51. See Lea, vol. 1, chap. 7, *passim*.
 52. See Southern, pp. 108ff.
 53. *Peycht Spiegel der Sünder* (Nürnberg, 1510), fol. N6 (quotations are from the edition of this work in the Houghton Rare Books Library at Harvard University, Typ. 520.10.210).
 54. *Ibid.*, fol. M6’.
 55. Hamm, *Bürgertum*, p. 67.
 56. Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 109.
 57. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
 58. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. A2.
 59. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 151.
 60. See, e.g., *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. D1.
 61. Most manuals prohibited penitents from naming anyone else in their confessions. The mention here of the need to identify accomplices is unusual and is probably not meant to be taken literally.
 62. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. C7.
 63. Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 222.
 64. Duggan, “Fear and Confession,” pp. 157–162, and Myers, pp. 33–57.
 65. Douglas, *Documents*, p. 655.
 66. For an interesting treatment of the dual roles of the late medieval confessor, see Anne T. Thayer, “Judge and Doctor: Images of the Confessor in Printed Model Sermon Collections, 1450–1520,” in Lualdi and Thayer, pp. 10–29.

67. CG, vol. 4, p. 630. A 1512 synod in Regensburg gave identical instructions to its priests. See CG, vol. 6, p. 108.
68. CG, vol. 4, p. 368, and vol. 6, p. 108.
69. Duggan, “Fear and Confession,” p. 164.
70. On Fridolin, see Petra Seegets, *Passionstheologie und Passionsfrömmigkeit im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Der Nürnberger Franziskaner Stephan Fridolin zwischen Kloster und Stadt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).
71. P. Ulrich Schmidt, *P. Stephan Fridolin, ein Franziskanerprediger des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Munich: Verlag der J. J. Lentner’schen Buchhandlung, 1911), p. 43.
72. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. C2.
73. “Anweisungen zum Beichthören” (1518), NSB Hs. Abt., Theol. 240, 4o, fol. 231.
74. Duggan, “Fear and Confession,” p. 163. No such stipulation occurs in the legislation from the 1490 Bamberg synod.
75. CG, vol. 6, p. 108.
76. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. B7’.
77. The Nürnberg Council was never happy about mendicants’ being able to hear confessions in the imperial city because they represented the presence of a foreign element over which it had no control. Even in 1451 when Nicholas of Cusa repeated the official position first promulgated by Pope Honorius III in 1221 that allowed mendicants to hear confessions, the Nürnberg Council balked. In 1475 the Council attempted to remedy this situation by establishing its own order for confession. (See n.23 above.) Nevertheless, mendicants continued hearing confessions in Nürnberg until the magistrates finally prohibited them from doing so in 1525, when the city formally adopted the Reformation.
78. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 99–104.
79. The Council’s yearly decision to hire members of the lower clergy during Lent to hear confessions had an economic as well as religious motivation. This was one way the magistrates sought to compensate common priests and monks who had been forbidden from competing with burghers economically. In 1475 Pope Sixtus IV responded favorably to an appeal from the Nürnberg Council to forbid the city’s secular and regular clergy from distributing beer and wine and from offering medical and legal services to Nürnbergers. The Council had requested this action because it had received ongoing complaints from Nürnbergers about members of the clergy who were moving in on the burghers’ economic turf. See Schlemmer, pp. 85–86, 433 (n. 140).
80. CG, vol. 4, p. 630.
81. Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 49.
82. Douglas, *Documents*, pp. 654–655.
83. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 318–340.
84. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. C2’.

85. Ibid., fol. L2.
86. Ibid. See also NSB Hs. Abt., Theol. 240, 4o, fol. 233'.
87. Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 55.
88. See Pierre J. Payer, "Penance and Penitentials," DMA, vol. 9, pp. 487–493.
89. See Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 18–27, 233–273; Tentler, "The Summa for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control," in Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman, eds., *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 101–126, espec. pp. 109–113; and Myers, pp. 15–26.
90. E. Jane Dempsey Douglas, *Justification in Late Medieval Preaching: A Study of John Geiler of Kaisersberg* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). See chaps. 4 and 5.
91. D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 56–72.
92. Berndt Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982). See chap. 5. Paltz and Luther were both at the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt in 1505 and probably knew each other.
93. Cameron, p. 81.
94. Tentler has argued, "theories of forgiveness could not proclaim certain solutions to all problems because they had to deal with intangible substances—the sorrow of the penitent, the power of the keys, and the grace of Christ." See Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 300.
95. Pelikan writes, "the casuistry of penance was notorious for producing differences of opinion [among late medieval theologians]." Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 11.
96. CG, vol. 4, p. 630.
97. Between 1480 and 1502 Anton Koberger printed nine editions of Herolt's *Sermones discipuli de tempore et de sanctis*, three editions of Angelus of Clavasio's *Angelica*, and one edition of Johannes von Freiburg's *Summa confessorum*. An additional edition of Johannes Nyder's *Manuale confessorum* appeared in the imperial city in 1471, perhaps printed by Anton Koberger. See the section on Anton Koberger in Oscar Hase, *Die Koberger: Eine Darstellung des Buchhändlerischen Geschäftsbetriebes in der Zeit des Überganges vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit* (Leipzig, 1885).
98. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 35.
99. See comments below on the confessional manuals from the St. Clara Convent.
100. *Peycht Spiegel*, fol. A3'.
101. Ibid., fol. B1'.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid., fol. L6'.

104. Ibid., fols. L1'–L2.
105. Ibid., fols. L5–L5'.
106. Ibid., fol. L6'. See also Lindberg, p. 63.
107. See Karin Schneider and Otto Harrassowitz, eds., *Die Handschriften der Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg*, vol. 1: *Die deutschen mittelalterlichen Handschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965), pp. xi–xv.
108. “Beichtraktat” (ca. 1454), NSB Hs. Abt., Cent. VI, 43e, 9, fol. 169'.
109. Ibid., fols. 169'–170.
110. “Von der Beichte” (second half of fifteenth century), NSB Hs. Abt., Cent. VII, 62, 12, fol. 70'.
111. Ibid., fol. 77.
112. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 269.
113. Ibid., p. 270.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid., p. 285.
116. Schmidt, pp. 26–28.
117. The *Schatzbehälter oder Schrein der wahren Reichtümer des Heils und ewiger Seligkeit* was a collection of sermons Fridolin had preached at the St. Clara Convent and was dedicated to the nuns who lived there. It was published by Anton Koberger in 1491. Though a gift for nuns, the work was clearly intended for lay use, having been richly illustrated with woodcuts by Michel Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff. The former was one of Albrecht Dürer's teachers.
118. Quoted in Schmidt, p. 88.
119. See Myers, pp. 33–60.
120. See the discussion of Hermann von Weinsberg in Myers, p. 47, and Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 185.

3. *The Assault on the Keys*

1. J. F. Knaake, ed., *Johann von Staupitzens sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1: *Deutsche Schriften* (Potsdam, 1867), pp. 27–28.
2. Staupitz insisted that contrition was a necessary prerequisite to obtaining divine forgiveness. He discounted attrition entirely. But he also taught that God would give this true sorrow to those who asked him for it. Knaake, pp. 16–17. David Steinmetz asserts that for Staupitz, “the origin of genuine contrition is not the love of the soul for God—an act which in any case the human will under the power of sinful concupiscence is incapable of producing—but rather the love of God for the soul. All human love for God, and therefore all contrition, is a response to the prior love of God, which evokes this devotion and makes it possible.” David Curtis Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in Its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. 101.

3. Knaake, p. 17. Steinmetz maintains that Staupitz had a thoroughly traditional view of the keys. Priests actually mediated forgiveness and did not simply declare what God had already done. Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 103–104.
4. Knaake, p. 19.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
8. Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 96–97.
9. Jurist Christoph Scheurl said of Staupitz's reception in the imperial city, "In the five years I have spent in Nürnberg, I have not seen anyone honored with such distinction." See Friedrich Roth, *Die Einführung der Reformation in Nürnberg, 1517–1528* (Würzburg, 1885), p. 53.
10. See Strauss, *Nuremberg*, chap. 6, "Learning and the Arts," pp. 231–283.
11. The group's other members included the imperial city's two treasurers, Anton Tucher and Hieronymus Ebner; three of its Elders, Kaspar Nützel, Hieronymus Holzschuher, and Andreas Tucher; a Senior Mayor, Martin Tucher; a Junior Mayor, Sigmund Fürer; a Senior Designated Man, Christoph Fürer; and Georg Behaim, the provost of St. Lorenz Church. See Harold Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler: A Lay Leader of the Reformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), p. 25, and Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 160.
12. Gunter Zimmermann argues that at least three of the magistrate members of the *Sodalitas* remained loyal to the old Church: Christoph Fürer, Hieronymus Holzschuher, and Andreas Tucher. See Zimmermann, "Das Nürnberger Religionsgespräch," pp. 136–144.
13. On the role that humanist fraternities played during the early years of the Reformation, see Bernd Moeller, "The German Humanists and the Reformation," in Moeller, *Imperial Cities*, p. 25.
14. Wilhelm Reindell, ed., *Wenzel Lincks Werke, Erste Hälfte: Eigene Schriften bis zur zweiten Nürnberger Wirksamkeit* (Marburg, 1894), p. 29.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
16. On Scheurl's uneasy relationship with the evangelical movement, see Steven Ozment, *Flesh and Spirit: Private Life in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Viking, 1999), pp. 56–60.
17. Strauss notes that Nützel had a special interest in the indulgence trade in Nürnberg that may well have influenced his decision to translate and publish Luther's *Theses*. Nützel had been representing the Council in negotiations with the bishop of Bamberg and the pope regarding the preaching of an indulgence in Nürnberg for the building of St. Peter's in Rome. Both Nützel and the Council opposed the idea, and Luther's *Theses* gave them further justification for their position. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 161.
18. WA, vol. 1, p. 233, theses 1 and 2.

19. Ibid., pp. 233 and 235, theses 5 and 34.
20. Ibid., p. 233, thesis 4.
21. Ibid., p. 233, thesis 8.
22. Nürnberg printer Jobst Gutknecht published two editions of this pamphlet in 1519. WA, vol. 2, p. 57.
23. Phillip Norton Bebb, “The Lawyers, Dr. Christoph Scheurl, and the Reformation in Nürnberg,” in Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathon W. Zophy, eds., *The Social History of the Reformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 60.
24. WA, vol. 2, p. 59, art. 2.
25. WA, vol. 2, p. 60, arts. 5 and 6.
26. Luther concluded the treatise, “the sum of the matter is this: those who place their trust in God and not in their own work or any creature will be blessed.” Ibid., p. 64, ll. 18–20.
27. It was published twice by Jobst Gutknecht in 1520. WA, vol. 2, p. 711.
28. Luther had made the same argument already in *Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientis consolandis* (1518), where he asserted, “The remission of guilt calms the heart and takes away the greatest of all punishments, namely, the consciousness of sin.” WA, vol. 1, p. 630, art. 2.
29. WA, vol. 2, p. 714, ll. 12–20.
30. Ibid., p. 715, l. 12.
31. Ibid., p. 715, ll. 36–37.
32. Already in the *Ninety-Five Theses* Luther had asserted that contrition could not be the basis for forgiveness because no one could ever be sure of the integrity of his sorrow (WA, vol. 1, p. 234, thesis 30). In *Pro veritate* he had referred to the founding of absolution on the penitent’s contrition as a “machine of despair” (*desperationis machina*) (WA, vol. 1, p. 631, art. 19). In his *Sermo de Poenitentia* (1518), he had insisted that true contrition was a gift from God that was completely beyond the natural powers of human beings (WA, vol. 1, p. 322, ll. 9–10).
33. WA, vol. 2, p. 716, ll. 7–12.
34. Throughout this sermon Luther emphasized that God’s forgiveness was “utterly free” (*lauter unsunst* or *umb sunst*). See, e.g., p. 718, l. 15, and p. 720, l. 2.
35. See Bernhard Lohse, “Die Privatbeichte bei Luther,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 14, no. 3 (1968): 217, 219.
36. WA, vol. 2, p. 721, ll. 24–32. Luther admitted already in his *Sermo de Poenitentia* that it was difficult to discern between mortal and venial sins with any confidence. WA, vol. 1, p. 322, ll. 34–35.
37. WA, vol. 2, p. 718, art. 8. See Luther’s comment to the same effect in *Pro veritate*. WA, vol. 1, p. 631, art. 25.
38. Tentler argues that while Luther agreed with the Lombardist position on penance, his emphasis on contrition as a divine gift that no human being

- could achieve on her own subverted the contritionist school. Luther “used contritionist language to undermine contritionism itself and to build a new institution of forgiveness.” See Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 354.
39. See Lohse, “Privatbeichte,” p. 217. Luther did instruct confessors to make sure that penitents were capable of receiving the word of forgiveness, but this responsibility did not entail moral interrogation. It likely meant a brief assessment of the confessant’s understanding of the gospel, a premonition of the examination of faith (*Glaubensverhör*) Luther would later require of penitents. See the discussion of the examination of faith in Chapter 4.
 40. See Lea, vol. 1, pp. 219–226.
 41. WA, vol. 2, p. 716, ll. 28–31.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 719, ll. 16–18.
 43. Luther made this point explicitly in *Pro veritate*, where he argued that because the priest ministers the Word that calls forth faith from the penitent, his role is necessary. WA, vol. 1, p. 632, art. 33.
 44. WA, vol. 2, p. 716, l. 36.
 45. For a rather unsympathetic assessment of Luther’s appeal to Nürnbergers, see Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 166–172. Strauss places the promise of certainty in the face of death and judgment at the center of the reformer’s appeal but laments the success of this “fundamentalist creed.”
 46. See Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Though the Finns go too far in seeking to find in Luther an Orthodox doctrine of theosis, they are certainly correct to stress the importance of the indwelling Christ in the reformer’s soteriology.
 47. Though there is no record of a Nürnberg printer having published an edition of this treatise, we know that Albrecht Dürer obtained a copy of it while on his journey to the Netherlands, and likely brought it back with him to the imperial city. J. A. Goris and G. Marlier, eds., *Albrecht Dürer: Diary of His Journey to the Netherlands, 1520–1521* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971), p. 98.
 48. Luther argued in the conclusion to *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae*, “it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them. The remainder, not being bound to signs, are bare promises. Hence, there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread. For only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins. The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism.” WA, vol. 6, p. 572, ll. 10–34. (I have followed the LW translation. See vol. 36, p. 124.) Luther wished to rehabilitate baptism in this treatise because he felt it had been overshadowed by penance, something late medieval theologians saw as a “second plank” to which penitents could repair when in need of forgiveness for post-baptismal sin. Against the

- traditional view Luther maintained that baptismal grace remained efficacious throughout a believer's life.
49. Berndt Hamm and Wolfgang Huber, eds., *Lazarus Spengler Schriften*, vol. 1: *Schriften der Jahre 1509 bis Juni 1525* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995), p. 86, l. 8.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 87, l. 13.
 51. See discussion of Jeremias Milich below.
 52. Hamm and Huber, pp. 90, l. 15–91, l. 6.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 91, ll. 10–11.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 92, ll. 1–8.
 55. *Ibid.*, p. 95, ll. 8–19.
 56. *Ibid.*, p. 89, ll. 5–11.
 57. Early in 1520 Dürer wrote a letter to George Spalatin, chaplain to Elector Frederick of Saxony, in which he exclaimed, “I pray your worthiness to beseech his Electoral Grace to take the praiseworthy Doctor Martin Luther under his protection, for the sake of Christian truth, for that is of more importance to us than all the power and riches of this world; because all things pass away with time; truth alone endureth for ever. God helping me, if ever I meet Dr. Martin Luther, I intend to draw his portrait carefully from life and engrave it on copper, to be a lasting remembrance of a Christian man, who helped me out of great distress. And I beg your worthiness to send me, for my money, anything new that Doctor Martin may write.” William Martin Conway, trans. and ed., *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), pp. 155–156.
 58. Also in 1520 Dürer wrote down on a scrap of paper the following confession of faith: “Seeing that through disobedience of sin we have fallen into everlasting Death, no help could have reached us save through the incarnation of the Son of God, whereby He through His innocent suffering might abundantly pay the Father all our guilt, so that the Justice of God might be satisfied. For He has repented of and made atonement for the sins of the whole world, and has obtained of the Father Everlasting Life. Therefore Christ Jesus is the Son of God, the highest power, who can do all things, and He is the Eternal Life. Into whomever Christ comes he lives, and himself lives in Christ. Therefore all things are in Christ good things. There is nothing good in us except it becomes good in Christ. Whosoever therefore will altogether justify himself is unjust. If we will what is good, Christ wills it in us. No human repentance is enough to equalise deadly sin and be fruitful.” *Ibid.*, p. 155.
 59. Hamm and Huber, p. 100, ll. 2–6.
 60. *Ibid.*, pp. 79–81.
 61. Grimm, p. 39.
 62. The Council had learned that the bishops of Würzburg and Augsburg along with Duke Wilhelm had successfully interceded with Eck and the pope for Bernhard Adelman, a canon in Augsburg, whose name was also on the

- bull. They sought a similar course of action to exonerate Spengler and Pirckheimer. Hamm and Huber, p. 135.
63. The Council mistakenly thought it had until December 19 to respond because it had received the bull from the bishop of Bamberg on October 17. In fact, the sixty days had expired over two weeks earlier. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), p. 45.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
65. Eck had absolved Bernhard Adelman under similar circumstances. Grimm, p. 42. Hamm suggests that it was Adelman who had Spengler’s *Schutzrede* printed in Augsburg. See Hamm and Huber, p. 135.
66. See Grimm, pp. 41–43.
67. Hamm and Huber, pp. 137, l. 1–138, l. 7.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 143, l. 22–144, l. 6.
69. *Ein Sermon von dem Bann*, WA, vol. 6, pp. 62–75. Luther preached the sermon in 1519, but it was not published until 1520. On Spengler’s probable familiarity with the sermon, see Hamm and Huber, pp. 136–137.
70. There is no evidence that Luther had actually read *The Defender of the Peace*. Still, as Lohse explains, “elements of views developed in the late Middle Ages had more or less penetrated the politics of the local princes and to that extent became known to a wider circle. In any case, as early as in his composition of the treatise on nobility [i.e., *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520)], Luther was aware to a considerable extent of the problems relating to the questions up for debate.” Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 317.
71. Luther wrote, “The ban should be nothing other than a well-intentioned, maternal punishment or a temporary, kindly judgment, that places no one in hell, but rather pulls him out of it and drives him from damnation to salvation. Therefore, we should not only endure it patiently but even receive it with joy and all honor. But for the tyrants, who seek nothing more than their own power, honor, and advantage, there will be dreadful consequences. For they pervert the ban and its work, making poison out of medicine, seeking only material gain—something that would be appalling to God-fearing folk—and never thinking that they will have to give a full account of themselves: woe to them!” WA, vol. 6, p. 68, art. 10.
72. *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, WA, vol. 6, p. 412, ll. 1–3.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 410, l. 11.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 408, l. 19.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 446, ll. 14–18.
76. Quoted in Gottfried Seebaß, “The Reformation in Nürnberg,” in Buck and Zophy, *The Social History of the Reformation*, p. 22.
77. Pömer was allowed to complete his studies before taking up his new office on January 6, 1521.

78. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), p. 88.
79. The Schreyer preachery had not been the primary preaching office in St. Sebald’s: the recently deceased Church Master had stipulated that the holder of this office should preach only on certain high feast days. However, when the occupant of the church’s main preachery died a few years later, Peßler and the Council decided to combine the two offices into one position, which they gave to Schleuppner. From February 1524 on, the Council assumed the responsibility for Schleuppner’s financial support. Engelhardt, *ibid.*, p. 90.
80. In a unique development, the Council permitted Pistorius to retain his living accommodations and his honorary title as abbot of St. Egidien even after his monastery was dissolved and he had taken a wife. The Council also provided a salary for him throughout his life in Nürnberg, looking to him on several occasions for advice on religious matters. His abbotship was dissolved after his death. NGL, vol. 3, pp. 201–203.
81. Stöckl became the preacher in Nürnberg’s St. Jacob Church after his monastery was dissolved. He married and had a son, Andreas, who served as jurist to the Council. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 780–781.
82. The Imperial Chamber Court was created at the 1495 Diet of Worms, the Imperial Governing Council at the 1500 Diet of Augsburg. On these two imperial governing bodies, see Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany: The Reformation* (New York: Knopf, 1964), pp. 43–46.
83. The first diet was convened in the spring of 1522. The second one met from November 17, 1522, to March 6, 1523; the third from January to April 1524. For discussions of the three Nürnberg imperial diets, see Cameron, p. 340, and Grimm, pp. 58–71.
84. John C. Olin, *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola, Reform in the Church, 1495–1540* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 125.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
86. The Council retained the right to inspect all books published in the city. Because Spengler was the official censor at this time, it is likely that few works attacking Luther made it to press. Grimm, p. 62.
87. The Council sent several of its members to the city’s churches to make sure the preachers complied. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 165.
88. See Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent*, p. 52.
89. *Ibid.*, nos. 1–3, pp. 53–54, and no. 85, p. 62. (The numbers cited here and in note 91 refer to the numbered grievances.)
90. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
91. *Ibid.*, no. 43, p. 43. See also nos. 95 and 97, p. 63.
92. Grimm, p. 63.
93. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 139, ll. 8–13.
94. See the discussion of Osiander’s *Von schlusseln Bekanntnus* (1533) in Chapter 7, pp. 150–154.

95. Roth, *Die Einführung der Reformation in Nürnberg*, p. 143. Volprecht had given communion in both kinds to the *Sodalitas Staupitziana* and to several members of the Augustinian monastery during Holy Week 1523.
96. *Ibid.*
97. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 165.
98. See, e.g., *Die Hauptartikel, durch welche gemeine Christianheit bisher verführt worden ist*, in Hamm and Huber, pp. 298–339.
99. Approximately one-half of the city's households at this time belonged to artisans of one kind or another. Endres, p. 197.
100. *Die Wittenbergisch Nachtigall*, in A. von Keller and E. Goetze, eds., *Hans Sachs Werke*, vol. 6 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), pp. 368–386. For an older English translation, see Hans Sachs, *The Wittenberg Nightingale*, trans. C. W. Schaeffer (Allentown, 1883).
101. The *Wittenberg Nightingale*, first published in July 1523, went through five editions in the same year alone. One of these appeared in Bamberg. Köhler, *Bib.*, pt. 1 (1501–1530), vol. 3, pp. 380–382. Engelhardt asserts that the pamphlet also appeared in Nürnberg. See “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), pp. 124–125.
102. *Wittenberg Nightingale*, trans. Schaeffer, pp. 11–12.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
104. The canon tells the shoemaker that not confessing is much more heretical than not observing fast days. *Disputation zwischen einem chorherren und schuhmacher, darinn das wort gottes und ein recht Christlich wesen verfochten wirt* (1524), in Keller and Goetze, vol. 22, p. 19.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ain gesprechbuechlein von ain Xodtschneyder und ain Holtzbauer* (1523). Having been persuaded by a Lutheran sawyer that he need not confess to his priest, the Catholic interlocutor in this pamphlet—a woodcutter—concludes, “It follows from this then that the priests cause the consciences of the poor people to despair more than they console them, because they presume to sit in the place of God . . . Therefore, dear friend, we should confess to Christ, as our own true priest, for Christ himself says to us, ‘Come to me all who are burdened and I will refresh you and in me your souls will find rest.’” Köhler I, 1828/4687, fol. B. The pamphlet was published in Augsburg. Also cited in Chrisman, pp. 167–168.
107. The title of Kadolzburger's pamphlet was *Ain missiue (oder Sendbrief) Nicolai Cattelspurger darinn klarlich durch hailig geschriefft angezaygt wirt von den falschen leeren auch Abgötterey byßher gehalten wie sy aufgericht und verstanden werden sollen seiner Schwester zu Bamberg wonend vmb rechtes glaubens verstand geschriben*. In this work the weaver attacked auricular confession as a form of idolatry that diverted people away from the only true source of salvation, faith in Christ. He asserted that confession to a priest was “simple hypocrisy because one does it so that he might be saved through it.” Kadolzburger's pamphlet, actually a letter sent to his sister to

persuade her to leave her convent, was published in Augsburg in 1524. Though Kadolzburger's pamphlet likely appeared before early June of 1524, it may not have been published until after the imperial governing bodies had left Nürnberg in April. See Martin Arnold, *Handwerker als theologische Schriftsteller: Studien zu Flugschriften der frühen Reformation, 1523–1525* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), pp. 321 and 325 (quotation). Two years earlier the Nürnberg Council had voted to expel Kadolzburger from the city for three years after it learned he had openly criticized the preaching of a local friar, Johann Winzler. Elector Frederick III of Saxony, who was attending the imperial diet in the city, interceded for the artisan and he was allowed to return four days later. The Council then expelled the friar for life. See n.133 below.

108. Greiffenberger authored an apocalyptic pamphlet in which he charged, "the Antichrist has removed from us the most sweet yoke of Christ and in exchange has laid upon us heavy burdens which all serve his greed and the imprisonment of our miserable conscience." Greiffenberger singled out private confession as the source of these burdens. Hans Greiffenberger, *Dieses Büchlein zeigt die falschen Propheten an* (1524), in Russell, p. 256, n. 49. The Nürnberg Council later ordered Andreas Osiander to examine Greiffenberger and several other painters to determine whether they had been influenced by the radical teachings of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, both of whom had recently been in the imperial city. Because Greiffenberger agreed to receive instruction from Osiander, the Council dropped its charges against him. It expelled the other painters from the city along with the schoolmaster of St. Sebald, whom the painters had identified as the source of their spiritualist leanings. Nine months later, the painters were allowed to return to Nürnberg. In 1525 Greiffenberger again incurred the disfavor of the Council after he allegedly served communion to his wife. This time the magistrates banned the painter from the city for life. He went to Pforzheim and published subsequent editions of his works. Russell, *ibid.*, pp. 156–165.
109. On this point, see Russell, pp. 144 and 183; Chrisman, p. 172; and Cameron, pp. 307–308.
110. See Spengler's *Schutzrede* in Hamm and Huber, pp. 90, l. 5–91, l. 6.
111. On this point, see Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 49.
112. This edition, the only one to appear in the imperial city, was published by Nürnberg printer Hieronymus Höltzel. Steven Ozment referred to Strauss's *Beichtbüchlein* as "one of the great unrecognized tours de force of the early Reformation." Ozment, *Cities*, p. 52. Cameron counters that Strauss "is a fairly minor and in other ways somewhat eccentric figure who seems to have influenced few others." See Cameron, p. 308.
113. See "Jakob Strauß," ER, vol. 4, pp. 118–119.
114. Strauss was especially concerned to abolish both ecclesiastical tithes and the widespread practice of usury, which he saw as forms of oppression against

- the poor. Rebellious peasants in southwestern Germany chose him along with Melanchthon and Luther to adjudicate the legitimacy of their claims. ER, *ibid.*, pp. 118–119.
115. *Eyn neues wunderbarlichs Beychtbüchlein / in dem die warhaffte gerecht beycht und peußfertigkeit Christenlichen gelert und angezeygt wirt / und kürzlichen alle Tyranny ertichter menschlicher beycht auffgehoben / zu seliger rew, frid / und frewd / der armen betrübtten und gefangen gewissen*, in Köhler I, 999/2534, fols. Aii', Ci.
 116. *Ibid.*, fol. Bii.
 117. Strauss gave the following sample formula for confession to a priest: "I find that in all my thoughts, words, and deeds I am a poor sinner, as I can always recognize, and there is nothing good or righteous in me." Following this acknowledgment of sinfulness, the penitent could confess any specific sins to his confessor if he so desired. *Beychtbüchlein*, fol. Ciiii'.
 118. *Ibid.*, fol. Ci.
 119. *Ibid.*
 120. Strauss asserted, "the whole of repentance and confession . . . is that a person should recognize himself before God at all times as a poor sinner in his whole life, [including] all he does and leaves undone." *Beychtbüchlein*, fol. Aiiii.
 121. *Ibid.*, fol. Di'.
 122. Chrisman argues that Strauss took lay confession/absolution much more seriously than any other reformer, including Luther. See Chrisman, p. 93.
 123. *Beychtbüchlein*, fol. Ciii.
 124. Reindell, pp. 287–291.
 125. An edition of Oecolampadius's *Ein sonderliche Lehre und Bewehrung, daß die Beicht einem Christenmensch nit burdlich oder schwer sei* appeared in Augsburg in 1521 (Köhler I, 529–530/1350). Two of Rhegius's works, *Unterricht, wie ein Christenmensch Gott teglich beichten soll* (Köhler I, 1094/2776) and *Von Reuw, Beicht, Buß: Kurzer beschluß auß gergrünter schrift nit auß menschenleer* (Köhler I, 693/1796), appeared in 1521 and 1523, respectively.
 126. *Ein sonderliche Lehre*, fol. Oiii. Rhegius similarly took the references in the gospels to Christ giving the keys to his disciples as implying only priests could bind and loose sins. *Von Reuw*, fol. Bii.
 127. Commenting on Christ's giving of the keys to Peter in Matthew 16, Brenz argued that the apostle was an example of all who believe in the true "rock," Christ. Brenz considered the giving of the keys in John 20 in light of the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1) along with the reference in I Peter 2 to Christians being a "royal priesthood," and concluded, "the keys of the church have been commanded to these priests, who are all right-believing Christians." *Ein Sermon zu allen Christen: Von der kirchen / und von irem schlüssel unnd gewalt / auch von dem ampt der priester*. Köhler I, 1096/2787, fols. Aiiii, Aiiii'.

128. See Chapter 7.
129. Euan Cameron argues, “the inner logic of the reformers’ critique [of late medieval soteriology] was evident only to the highly educated . . . [N]o movement was in its essence *less* [his emphasis] easy to impart to the masses.” Later in the same work he asserts, “Ordinary lay people may sometimes have understood and approved of the new message of justification, but many certainly did not.” See Cameron, pp. 135 and 193.
130. Several of those who heard Müllich’s sermon called for the Council to intervene. Schoolmaster Sebalduß Heyden relayed that owing to the offensive content of Müllich’s sermon, he “was not a little amazed . . . that my lords have tolerated and endured it for so long.” The report of knifemaker Michael Ketzmann’s response concluded, “It is a great surprise that the honorable Council allows its subjects to be misled in this manner [and that] it tolerates this man for so long.” See Gunter Zimmermann, “Die Rezeption der reformatorischen Botschaft: Laienaussagen zu Predigten des Franziskanerpaters Jeremias Müllich in der Fastenzeit 1524,” *ZbK*, 58 (1989): 67, 68, respectively.
131. See the report of Fritz Nusser. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
132. The Council sent Bernhard Baumgartner and Christoph Koler, both strong supporters of the evangelical movement in Nürnberg, to look into the matter.
133. This course of action was in marked contrast to the one taken by the Council eighteen months earlier when faced with a similar situation. On August 31 and September 1, 1522, Johannes Winzler, also a Franciscan, had preached two very controversial sermons on the theological problem of the law. In this case the Council made no attempt to involve the ordinary burghers in the proceedings against the friar. The city fathers consulted Andreas Osiander and subsequently decided to expel Winzler from the city. Zimmermann, “Müllich,” pp. 51–52.
134. We know the vocations of the following nine artisan interviewees: Georg Bechtoldt (potter), Hans Henss (metalworker), Hans Lösel (swordsmith), Bartholmes Maurer (needlemaker), Hans Messerer (armorer), Hans Steynle (glassmaker), and three knifemiths: Hans Gutschmid, Konrad Bruckner, and Michael Ketzmann. Zimmermann, *ibid.*, pp. 54–56.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 68. Scholars like Cameron and Robert Scribner estimate that between 10 and 30 percent of early sixteenth-century Germany’s urban population possessed some degree of literacy. The figure drops to just 10 or 5 percent for Germany as a whole. See Cameron, p. 227, and Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 2. Gerald Strauss has argued for much higher levels of literacy. While he does not give definite percentages, Strauss asserts, “one who has spent much time with the sources cannot suppress the conclusion that reading was a common rather than an uncommon pursuit for a large number of people in

- nearly all walks of German society in the sixteenth century. The pedagogical endeavor of the Reformation presupposed a society whose members were, or were being trained to be, readers. The evidence suggests that they were not wrong in this supposition.” See *Luther’s House*, p. 202.
136. Of the twelve interviewed after Müllich’s first sermon, six admitted that they had only heard from others what the friar had preached. See the testimonies of Hans Gutschmid, Hans Messerer, Bartholmes Maurer, Sebaldus Heyden, Michael Ketzmann, and Contz Pruckner. The other six do not comment on whether they heard the sermon for themselves or not. Zimmermann, “Müllich,” pp. 66–68.
 137. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
 138. *Ibid.*
 139. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
 140. Zimmermann discusses the possibility that Enderes Schmid was the father of Andreas Osiander. Zimmermann suggests this because Osiander’s father had been a blacksmith (*Schmid*) and the reformer had been given his father’s first name. However, he concludes that because “Enderes Schmid” was such a common name in early modern Nürnberg, it is impossible to determine whether this man was the reformer’s father. Zimmermann, “Müllich,” pp. 56 (discussion), 66 (quotation).
 141. According to Heyden, Müllich had also taught that “human nature is not so poisoned that a person is unable to do good without sinning.” Zimmermann, “Müllich,” p. 67.
 142. *Ibid.*, pp. 67 and 68, respectively.
 143. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 144. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 145. See the testimony of Sebaldus Wagner, *ibid.*, p. 70.
 146. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 147. See also the testimony of Sebaldus Wagner, *ibid.*, p. 70.
 148. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 149. One detects a latent protest against Müllich’s view of confession in the choice of words his detractors made when they were interviewed by Baumgartner and Koler. Five out of six have the friar saying “one must [*mus/must*] confess to another human being.” This use of the verb *müssen* conveys the sense of compulsion Müllich’s listeners felt while listening to his homily.
 150. The report is not extant.
 151. This time the two-man team consisted of Christoph Koler and Leonhard Schürstab.
 152. Zimmermann, “Müllich,” p. 53.
 153. NStaatsA, A-Laden Akten, SIL 78, Nr. 2, fol. 8.
 154. This was the third of three imperial diets to meet in Nürnberg in the early 1520s.
 155. The Archduke Ferdinand had recently summoned the Council’s seven Elders to appear before him to answer charges that they had, in open defiance

of the Edict of Worms, permitted the spread of heretical and seditious ideas in Nürnberg. (The Council, fearing that Ferdinand might arrest and imprison the Elders, decided to send only four of the seven leading patricians.) On March 5, one day after Müllich's second sermon, Lazarus Spengler drafted a response to the charges leveled by Ferdinand against the Council. Spengler illustrated the magistrates' loyalty to the emperor by citing the Council's faithful adherence to the recess of the 1523 imperial diet. This document required that nothing should be preached or published in the empire "except the true, clear, and pure gospel according to the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture as approved and accepted by the Christian Church." However, Spengler also asserted that the Council's primary concern was to serve God, which entailed honoring his Word and ensuring the salvation of those people whom God had placed under its care. The diet ended unsuccessfully with Lorenzo Campeggio, the papal nuncio, refusing to honor the estates' request for a German council made up of both lay and ecclesiastical officials to address the religious problem (i.e., the growing Lutheran movement) that was currently perplexing the empire. See Grimm, pp. 63, 66–67.

156. Müllich argued in his apology that followers of Luther diminished the efficacy of Christ's suffering by teaching that original sin remained in human beings after baptism. The implication of this position, Müllich maintained, was that Christ's suffering was inadequate to atone for human sin. He, on the other hand, asserted that baptism washed away all sin. NStaatsA, A-Laden Akten, S.I.L. 78, Nr. 2, fol. 9a. (Two pages of text with no page numbers follow folio 9. I have designated the three pages 9a, 9b, and 9c.)
157. *Ibid.*, fol. 9a, ll. 32–33.
158. See Chapter 2.
159. NStaatsA, A-Laden Akten, fol. 9b, l. 15.
160. *Ibid.*, fol. 9b, ll. 4–5.
161. *Ibid.*, fol. 9b, l. 13.
162. *Ibid.*, fol. 9b, l. 43.
163. So confident was Müllich of having demolished the foundations for the new soteriology that, according to the needlemaker Bartholmes Maurer, he taunted his listeners, saying, "Come tomorrow again and say that faith alone justifies." Zimmermann, "Müllich," p. 67.
164. Müllich asserted that "the purification of the gracious work of God in us . . . is included in the work of salvation." NStaatsA, A-Laden Akten, fol. 9a, ll. 10–12.
165. Zimmermann questions whether the Council even listened to Müllich's apology. See "Müllich," p. 54.

4. *Tentative Beginnings*

1. The quotation is taken from a letter written by Friar Paolo Ziani, who was part of Cardinal Campeggio's entourage in Nürnberg. The letter is dated

- March 29, 1524, and may be found in translation in B. J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), pp. 134–135. Also cited in Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 174.
2. At the forefront of this movement to abolish private confession was one of Luther's colleagues in Wittenberg, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Luther was in part responsible for the conflict that ensued between Karlstadt and himself over confession. In *Von der Beicht, ob die der Bapst macht habe zu gepieten* (1521), his most acerbic critique of the sacrament of penance, Luther referred to the pope as the Antichrist, who in confession “breaks open the bridal chamber of Christ and makes all Christian souls into whores.” Far more one-sided than in his earlier works, Luther argued throughout this treatise that the sacrament of penance represented the penetration of *Menschenlehre* into the very depths of the human psyche. In his most radical statement yet, Luther maintained that the reception of private absolution should be a strictly voluntary matter. See WA, vol. 8, pp. 138–185 (quotation, p. 152, ll. 6–8).
 3. See Lohse, “Die Privatbeichte bei Luther,” p. 224.
 4. See Emil Fischer, “Zur Geschichte der evangelischen Beichte, vol. I : Die katolische Beichtpraxis bei Beginn der Reformation und Luthers Stellung dazu in den Anfängen seiner Wirksamkeit,” *Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche*, 8, no. 2 (1902), pp. 126–156.
 5. WA, vol. 10, pt. 3, p. 62, ll. 1–2.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 62, ll. 9–10.
 7. One visitor to Wittenberg in 1522 remarked that private confession had “almost completely fallen out of use” (*schier gar gefallen*). Aland, p. 462.
 8. WA, vol. 12, p. 478a, ll. 1–2.
 9. WA, vol. 12, pp. 477a, l. 11–478a, l. 1; pp. 479a, l. 5–480a, l. 1.
 10. In 1523 Sebastian Fröschel reported that Luther commissioned him and Johannes Bugenhagen to resurrect “auricular confession and private absolution . . . in which the people will be properly instructed and questioned or examined concerning their faith, life, and conduct.” Aland, p. 465.
 11. WA, vol. 12, p. 215, ll. 18–23. By “adequate” Luther meant that the would-be communicant should know what the Lord's Supper was and what benefit he could obtain from it. The person should be able to recite from memory the words of blessing and explain them. Finally, he should express a desire for grace.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 215, ll. 29–31.
 13. Bezzel, p. 11.
 14. Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 39b–40a. (Here and throughout, when citing Sehling, “a” refers to the left-hand column on the page, while “b” refers to the right-hand column.)
 15. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 40a.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. Bernhard Klaus, “Die Rüstgebete,” *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen*

- Gottesdienstes*, vol. 2, ed. Karl Ferdinand Müller and Walter Blankenburg (Kassel: J. Stauda-Verlag, 1955), p. 533. The *Offene Schuld* was the lay complement to the Latin *confiteor*, which priests would recite to each other before the beginning of the mass. Before a priest commenced with the celebration of the mass, he would confess to his fellow clerics that he was unworthy to celebrate the Eucharist. This took place at the altar, usually out of earshot of the congregation. See Bezzel, p. 89. For a sample formula of the *confiteor* from a 1514 Magdeburg breviary that was published in Nürnberg, see Klaus, “Rüstgebete,” p. 544. It should be noted that by 1000, German priests also repeated the *confiteor* in the vernacular either before or after the sermon. DMA, vol. 8, pp. 184–185, 188.
18. Klaus, “Rüstgebete,” p. 533.
 19. *Ibid.*, pp. 534–535.
 20. Evangelical versions of general confession could be based on either the traditional *Offene Schuld* or on the *confiteor*. See Bezzel, p. 86. Volprecht’s formula was designed to replace the latter.
 21. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 143.
 22. Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 48a–49a. Osiander’s exhortation became a commonplace in liturgies in Franconia and beyond.
 23. The articles were not intended for publication. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 166.
 24. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 169, ll. 3–4.
 25. Osiander had translated the *Formula Missae et Communionis* into German for use in Nürnberg. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 143. Both Hieronymus Höltzel and Friedrich Peypus published German editions of the liturgy in 1523 and 1524, respectively. WA, vol. 12, p. 203. In 1523 Jobst Gutknecht published an edition of the Green Thursday sermon. WA, vol. 12, p. 472.
 26. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 169, ll. 7–9.
 27. See articles 2 and 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 169, ll. 5–6, and 172, ll. 5–7.
 28. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), p. 119.
 29. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 174, ll. 4–6.
 30. The provosts did not author the new church order. Dominikus Schleuppner, the preacher at St. Sebald’s, likely drew it up, not Osiander, as some have suggested. Osiander wanted a vernacular liturgy and strongly opposed general confession. The new order was mostly in Latin and initially contained a general confession and absolution. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 146.
 31. Seebaß, coeditor of Osiander’s collected works, maintains that the form for general confession and absolution was based on a similar formula written by Kaspar Kantz in Nördlingen. He also suggests that Schleuppner had been using general confession and absolution in St. Sebald Church since the beginning of 1524. AOGA, vol. 1, pp. 145, 146–147.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
 33. Andreas Döber, a chaplain at the Holy Spirit Hospital Church, drew up an order in 1525 that included a general confession and absolution. See Sehling, vol. 11, p. 51.
 34. See Osiander’s *Grund und Ursach*, AOGA, vol. 1, pp. 175–254.

35. Osiander dealt especially with the giving of communion in both kinds to the laity and the rejection of the mass as sacrifice. He also flatly denied the existence of purgatory. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 178.
36. In January 1525 the Council criticized the magistrates in Regensburg for not abolishing private confession. Gerhard Pfeiffer, ed., *Quellen zur Nürnberger Reformationsgeschichte* (Nürnberg: Verein für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1968), Br. no. 110, p. 341.
37. Ibid., Br. no. 31, p. 276.
38. Ibid., Br. no. 45, p. 286, art. 4.
39. Ibid., Br. no. 45, p. 287, art. 14.
40. One brother later complained to the Council that Stöckl “thinks nothing of confession” (*halt nicht von der beicht*). Therefore the monk said he “could not obey him because it would mean the loss of his soul.” Ibid., Br. no. 109a, p. 332.
41. The Carthusians—or at least their leader—had apparently been won over to the evangelical faith in the meantime. Strauss reports that they had been sent an Augustinian preacher following the quarrel with Stöckl. Strauss, *Nuremberg*, p. 175.
42. One study has suggested that the magistrates were still divided on the religious question and were seeking a workable compromise. See Zimmermann, “Nürnberger Religionsgespräch.” Zimmermann provides a helpful corrective to Seebaß regarding the religious plurality of the councilors, but he does not supply convincing evidence for his argument that the Council was seeking genuine compromise in the colloquium. I follow Seebaß’s interpretation that the Council had reached a position on the religious question before the colloquium and was trying to use it to effect conformity. This is the best way to account for the Council’s clear support of the new faith since the early 1520s and the decidedly evangelical tone of the rules governing the 1525 colloquium. See Gottfried Seebaß, “Der Nürnberger Rat und das Religionsgespräch von März 1525 (mit den Akten Christoph Scheurls und anderen unbekanntenen Quellen),” *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 34–35 (1975): 467–500.
43. On February 20, the Council summoned the preachers of the city’s churches and monasteries and instructed them to submit a list of articles they believed were essential for belief and practice. The preachers from the St. Lorenz, St. Sebald, St. Egidien, New Hospital, St. Jakob, and Augustinian churches each prepared their own lists, while their counterparts in the Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite monasteries submitted a joint list of articles. After receiving these lists, the Council employed Osiander to reduce them to a series of central questions for discussion: “(1) What is sin and its punishment? (2) Why was God’s law given and how should it be used? (3) What is righteousness that is valid before God? (4) What is the gospel out of which grow faith, love, and hope? (5) What baptism is, what it means and

- what are its effects? (6) In what way must the old Adam be killed? (A question that has produced so many sects.) (7) What is the sacrament of the altar and what should it effect in us? (8) What are proper good works and whether one may achieve righteousness through them or if works flow out of righteousness? (9) What are human commands or teaching and to what extent should one observe or not observe them? (10) What power do divinely-ordained temporal authorities possess to command, and to what extent is one obliged to obey them? (11) What is scandal [*Aergeernis*] and to what extent must it be avoided? (12) May servants of the church marry, and, in the case of a breach of the marriage covenant, whether the innocent party may remarry while the guilty party is still alive?” Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), pp. 170–171.
44. The leaders of the city’s Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite monasteries initially refused to participate, citing the emperor’s decision in the fall of the previous year to prohibit all religious disputations in the empire, part of the Edict of Burgos. When the Council explained to the three orders that it had no intention of holding a disputation but only a “friendly discussion” to effect unity in the city, the three orders agreed to participate.
 45. In addition to the decidedly Lutheran tone of Osiander’s twelve articles, participants were instructed to base their answers on Scripture alone. The Council would allow no references to popes, councils, holy fathers, tradition, decretals, etc. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, p. 448.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
 47. By the end of the event members of the Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite orders complained that it had been impossible for them to get a fair hearing from the judges the Council had appointed. They refused to appear in the town hall for the final session on March 14. They also charged that regardless of what the Council maintained, it had held a disputation in direct defiance of the emperor’s orders. The monks were right on both counts.
 48. According to the official transcription of the colloquium, there was no discussion of the sacrament of penance during the conference itself. See “Handlung eynes ersamen weysen rats zu Nürnberg mit iren predicanten neulich geschehen etc.,” in Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, pp. 448–462.
 49. The Council reached this decision on March 17, 1525. *Ibid.*, RV no. 395, pp. 57–58.
 50. *Ibid.*, Rschl. no. 37, pp. 220–221.
 51. AOGA, vol. 1, p. 507.
 52. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, Rschl. no. 33, p. 211.
 53. The Dominicans had traditionally served as confessors for the St. Catherine Convent, the Franciscans for St. Clara’s.
 54. Christoph Scheurl supported this decision. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, Rschl. no. 37, p. 221. The Council appointed Johannes Graumann to serve as preacher and confessor to the St. Clara Convent and Johann Schwanhäußer, an evan-

- gical preacher from Bamberg, to minister to the St. Catherine Convent. The Council also sent the convent in nearby Pillenreuth an evangelical confessor. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), p. 220.
55. See Caritas’s comments to this effect in her letter to her brother Willibald from April 16, 1525. Josef Pfanner, ed., *Briefe von, an und über Caritas Pirckheimer, 1498–1530, Caritas Pirckheimer-Quellensammlung*, Drittes Heft (Landshut: Solanus-Druck, 1966), p. 212.
 56. See Joseph Pfanner, ed., *Die “Denkwürdigkeiten” der Caritas Pirckheimer (aus den Jahren 1524–28, Caritas Pirckheimer-Quellensammlung*, Zweites Heft (Landshut: Solanus-Druck, 1962), p. 64.
 57. *Ibid.*, Drittes Heft, p. 213. See also Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, RV no. 410, p. 60.
 58. Pfeiffer, *ibid.*, RV no. 487, p. 68.
 59. See Paula S. Datsko Barker, “Caritas Pirckheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation,” *SCJ* 26, no. 2 (1995): 217, n. 71. See also NStaatsA, A Laden, SIL 39, Nr. 63, fol. 2’.
 60. Already in 1525 Pirckheimer had invited the Council to inspect the convent’s confessional to put to rest rumors it had a secret entrance for Franciscan confessors. Pfanner, “*Denkwürdigkeiten*,” Zweites Heft, no. 16, pp. 34–37.
 61. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, Br. no. 190, p. 395.
 62. Schlemmer, p. 32.
 63. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, p. 395.
 64. *Ibid.*
 65. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, RV no. 409, p. 60.
 66. *Ibid.*, Br. no. 164, p. 376. The preachers had called for this action. *Ibid.*, RV no. 406, p. 60. The provosts had already stipulated as much in their 1524 articles.
 67. Those burghers still loyal to the old faith were able to confess and communicate according to traditional usage both in the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches as well as in the various monastery churches. AOGA, vol. 2, p. 101.
 68. Jürgen Lorz concedes that Linck may well have been the redactor of this formula but likely did not compose it himself. Lorz provides convincing evidence that Linck drew on a formula that was popular in Nördlingen, which he rearranged to suit his own theological tastes. Jürgen Lorz, *Das reformatorische Wirken Dr. Wenzeslaus Lincks in Altenburg und Nürnberg (1523–1547). Nürnberger Werkstücke zur Stadt- und Landesgeschichte*, vol. 25 (Erlangen, 1978), pp. 163–165.
 69. Max Herold, *Alt-Nürnberg in seinem Gottesdiensten* (Gütersloh, 1890), pp. 135–136.
 70. The commission included councilors Sigmund Fürer, Nikolaus Groland, and Leo Schürstab along with clergymen Georg Peßler, Wenzeslaus Linck, Dominikus Schleuppner, and Andreas Osiander. AOGA, vol. 2, pp. 298–299.

71. The commission's opinion acknowledged that the "common person" at this time did not know if confession was "necessary" (*vonnoten*) or not. AOGA, vol. 2, p. 300.
72. The Council favored a voluntary private confession that emphasized instruction of the laity. See AOGA, vol. 2, p. 298, n. 18.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 300, ll. 22–23.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 301, ll. 2–3.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 300, ll. 14–20.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 301, ll. 9–11.
77. The Council had, in fact, already carried out some of the measures outlined in the commission's opinion. See *ibid.*, p. 298, n. 18.
78. The sources do not specify how this pre-communion registration was to take place. It is interesting that the Nürnberg Council did not require a mandatory pre-communion examination of faith, as was stipulated in Luther's *Formula Missae et Communionis*. The magistrates had also received a letter from Melanchthon in 1525 urging them to hire more pastors to ensure that everyone who desired to take communion would be examined beforehand, especially the young. CR, vol. 3, p. 719, n. 315.
79. AOGA, vol. 2, p. 299, n. 21.
80. On April 21, 1525, the Council ordered all churches in Nürnberg to adopt the provosts' new liturgy. Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, Rschl. no. 41, pp. 229–231.
81. In 1527 Lazarus Spengler described the conduct of general confession as it had been practiced at St. Sebald Church since the Reformation. He wrote that after the Lord's Prayer "the priest steps in front of the altar and delivers in German a general exhortation in which he explains what one should consider regarding the Lord's Supper, how one should use the word and sign of this supper properly and also prepare oneself for it properly. He also reads a general confession or acknowledgement of sin, along with a word of consolation and absolution from the Word of God." See "Verzeichnus der genderten mißpreuch und ceremonien, so in kraft des wort Gottes zu Nurmberg abgestelt und gepessert seyen," in Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, p. 443. (Grimm has identified Spengler as the author of this letter and states that it was written in 1528, not 1527, to the Goslar city council. See Grimm, p. 87.)
82. See Sehling, vol. 12, p. 285; vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 499; vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 60a; vol. 6, pp. 443–444; vol. 5, p. 530; and Klaus, "Rüstgebete," p. 551. Frieder Schulz discusses the widespread use of the Strasbourg form for general confession, emphasizing its replacement of the optative absolution formula with a general prayer of the whole community for forgiveness. The priest then read out an appropriate verse from the Bible that promised forgiveness to all who believed the gospel. See Schulz's article, "Die Offene Schuld als Rüstgebet der Gemeinde," *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 4 (1958–1959): 87.
83. See AOGA, vol. 2, p. 299, and AOGA, vol. 5, p. 350. It should be noted that Luther was also hesitant at this time to adopt general confession. He fa-

- vored an exhortation to worthy participation in the Eucharist instead of general confession. He believed the latter had gradually taken the place of the former in the medieval church. See Klaus, “Rüstgebete,” p. 541.
84. Ozment, *Cities*, pp. 118–119.
 85. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), pp. 213–229. See also Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 176–178.
 86. Strauss, “Protestant Dogma,” pp. 38–58.
 87. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 88. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 89. The evangelical scholar Joachim Camerarius, who served as rector of Nürnberg’s new gymnasium from 1526 to 1535, confirmed that both Hieronymus Ebner and Kaspar Nützel were strong supporters of the evangelical movement. See Zimmermann, “Nürnberger Religionsgespräch,” p. 135. Caritas Pirckheimer referred to three Elders—Martin Geuder, Hieronymus Holzschuher, and Jakob Muffel—as “those who are on our side.” AOGA, vol. 2, p. 148, n. 54. See also Zimmermann, “Nürnberger Religionsgespräch,” p. 136.
 90. See Zimmermann’s comments on Christoph Fürer (1479–1533), *ibid.*, pp. 138 and 142.
 91. See *ibid.*, pp. 136–144. Zimmermann bases these figures on the assumption that a magistrate’s involvement in either pro-evangelical (e.g., organizing the 1525 colloquium, having frequent interaction with the city’s evangelical ministers, announcing pro-evangelical changes to Nürnberg’s religious life, and removing one’s daughter from the city’s convents) or anti-evangelical activities (e.g., not seeking to remove daughters from the city’s convents, having close financial connections with the Hapsburgs, and resigning from the Council after 1525) is a good indicator of his position on the Reformation. Because the extant record of the Council’s daily decisions almost always lists the names of the magistrates who were to carry out the Council’s judgments, Zimmermann has been able to assess which of the members were repeatedly involved in activities that suggest sympathy with the Reformation, and which were engaged in acts that convey animosity to it. This evidence is suggestive but not very helpful in establishing motives for embracing or rejecting the evangelical faith.
 92. For a discussion of Senior Mayor Christoph Kress’s misgivings about the Reformation, see Jonathan W. Zophy, *Patriarchal Politics and Christoph Kress (1484–1535) of Nuremberg* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 101–107.
 93. For another critical assessment of Strauss’s argument, see Cameron, pp. 300–301.

5. An Evangelical Dilemma

1. *Eyn gesprech eynes evangelischen Christen mit einem Lutherischen, darin der ergerlich wandel etlicher, die sich lutherisch nennen, angezigt, und*

- brüderlich gestrafft wirt* (1524), in Keller and Goetze, vol. 22 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), pp. 69–84.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 3. *Ein dialogus des inhalt ein argument der Römischen wider das christlich heüfflein, den geytz, auch ander offentlich laster u.s.w. betreffend*, in Keller and Goetze, vol. 22, pp. 51–68.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 11. See Hamm, *Bürgertum und Glaube*, pp. 214–223. Later in life Sachs wrote a poem about the origins of auricular confession that expressed very clearly his preference for confession to God alone. See “Der ohrenbeicht anfang und end (December 23, 1562),” in A. von Keller and E. Goetze, eds., *Hans Sachs*, Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, vol. 173 (Tübingen, 1885), pp. 504–507.
 12. Several older treatments of the Reformation in Nürnberg assert that private confession was abolished in 1527 with the aid of Andreas Osiander. See Günther Petsch, *Das Nürnberger protestantische Kirchenrecht der reichsstädtischen Zeit: Eine kirchenrechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Düren-Rhld.: Max Danielewski, 1933), p. 4; Friedrich Roth, p. 270; Georg Ernst Waldau, *Vermischte Beyträge zur Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, vol. 1 (Nürnberg, 1786), p. 12; Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1936), pp. 240–241; and Klein, p. 168. There is no reference in either the RV or RB of the NStaatsA that this took place. The same sources record the abolition of other traditional religious practices. As Gottfried Seebaß explains, “auricular confession was never officially abolished; it gradually fell out of practice. Even more unfounded is the claim . . . that Osiander abolished private confession.” See AOGA, vol. 2, p. 296, n. 1. Older treatments of the Reformation in Nürnberg may have followed a popular seventeenth-century chronicle of the imperial city that misinterpreted the Council’s decision to implement a pre-communion interview (see NStaatsA, HS 414, fol. 48’) to mean that it had formally abolished private confession in 1527. See Johannes Müllner, *Annalen der Reichsstadt Nürnberg*, NStadtA, Repertorium F1, no. 3, vol. 5, pp. 136–137.
 13. See Sehling, vol. 5, pp. 508a and 16b–17a.
 14. See Chapter 6.
 15. C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbaach-Kulmbach, 1528–1603* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8.
 16. Karl Schornbaum, *Aktenstücke zur ersten Brandenburgischen Kirchenvisitation 1528* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1928), p. 3.

17. Dixon, p. 27.
18. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 113. Margrave George had also received a copy of the *Instructions for the Visitors* from one of his theologians. Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 113–114.
19. In attendance at the meeting were Nürnbergers Lazarus Spengler, Dominikus Schleuppner, Andreas Osiander, and Councilmen Christoph Kress, Kaspar Nützel, and Martin Tucher. Representing Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach were Georg Vogler, Andreas Althamer, Johann Rurer, Adam Weiß, and Wolf Christian von Weisenthau. Vogler was a secretary in the margrave's court, Althamer and Rurer were preachers in Ansbach, while Weiß pastored the church in Crailsheim. Wolf Christian was the margrave's bailiff in Schwabach. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 114, and Dixon, pp. 27–28. See also AOGA, vol. 3, pp. 123–146.
20. See AOGA, vol. 3, pp. 147–167. See also Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 126–134.
21. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 113.
22. Luther and Melancthon seemed much more concerned with the problem of “cheap grace” in their visitation manual than the Brandenburg and Nürnberg theologians were in theirs. The Wittenbergers wrote, for example, “many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance.” Both groups emphasized the importance of repentance in the Christian life, but the former spent more time pushing for it. WA, vol. 26, p. 202, ll. 8–9; LW, vol. 40, p. 274. (I have followed the LW here and in the following notes dealing with the *Instructions for the Visitors*.)
23. See AOGA, vol. 3, pp. 214–224. See also Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 135–139. Dixon argues that “[t]he real significance of the 1528 church ordinance lies less in its role as a blueprint for the new church than the guidance it provided for the first church visitation in the principality.” See Dixon, pp. 28–29.
24. Dixon, p. 29. The Nürnberg Council received similar complaints from the bishop of Bamberg and the Swabian League. See Grimm, pp. 111–113.
25. The Brandenburg visitation committee included Johann Rurer, Andreas Althamer, two members of the Ansbach Council, and a jurist. Schornbaum, p. 12. Pastors were to appear in Ansbach or Kulmbach along with a few members of their congregations for examination.
26. Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 115–116.
27. See Klaus Leder, *Kirche und Jugend in Nürnberg und seinem Landgebiet, 1400 bis 1800* (Neustadt a.d. Aisch: Degener, 1973), p. 35, and Georg Andreas Will, *Historischdiplomatisches Magazin für das Vaterland und angrenzende Gegenden*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Nürnberg, 1782), pp. 375–386. Pastors who lived near Nürnberg were summoned along with representatives from their congregations to appear before the visitation committee in the St. Egidien monastery. Those pastors who lived farther removed from Nürnberg were examined in their parishes. The Nürnberg visitation com-

- mittee included Wenzeslaus Linck, Andreas Osiander, Dominikus Schleppner, George Koberer, preacher at the Carthusian Church, Sebastian Schild, preacher at the St. Egidien Church, Councilmen Christoph Coler and Hieronymus Baumgartner, Bernhard Tucher, head of the alms office, and Lucas Sitzinger, head of the common chest. Grimm, p. 110. Only Linck, Osiander, Schleppner, Coler, and Baumgartner visited those pastors who could not report to Nürnberg. Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg,” *MVGN* 34 (1937): 73.
28. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 165, art. 9, ll. 15–16.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 150, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 1, ll. 24–26.
 30. In the introduction to the section of the *Instruction for the Visitors* entitled “True Christian Penance,” Luther and Melanchthon asserted, “Penance also is to be reckoned as a sacrament—all sacraments are a kind of penance. There are other reasons, too, for calling it a sacrament, but they need not be recounted here.” WA, vol. 26, p. 217, ll. 29–30; LW, vol. 40, p. 293. Osiander likely agreed with his Wittenberg colleagues on the sacramental status of confession as he listed the keys along with sermons, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper as a means of grace and later argued strenuously that clerical absolution was a sacrament. See Chapter 7.
 31. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 151, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 6, ll. 8–10.
 32. They asserted that “[i]t is not in us to make satisfaction for our sins, for Christ alone has made satisfaction for our sins.” WA, vol. 26, p. 220, ll. 21–22; LW, vol. 40, p. 297. It should be noted that while both Luther and Melanchthon contributed to the *Instructions for the Visitors*, it was the latter who bore most of the burden for composing it. Luther was primarily responsible for the foreword and some additional comments on the Lord’s Supper.
 33. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 151, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 3, l. 3.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 155, “Vom abentmal des Herrn,” art. 16, ll. 7–9.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 162, “Menschenleer, -satzung und -funde wider den glauben, hie hernach volgen,” art. 6, ll. 11–12. Luther and Melanchthon similarly asserted, “[t]he papal kind of confession is not commanded, namely, the recounting of sins.” WA, vol. 26, p. 220, l. 2; LW, vol. 40, p. 296.
 36. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 151, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 5, ll. 5–7.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 151, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 2, ll. 1–2. Luther and Melanchthon had argued similarly that “true penance is nothing but an acknowledgment of sin.” Later in the same work they defined it as “sincere contrition and sorrow over one’s sins and sincere fear of the wrath and judgment of God.” WA, vol. 26, p. 203, l. 20, and p. 218, ll. 26–27; LW, vol. 40, pp. 276, 294.
 38. The church order did not specify exactly how communicants were to demonstrate knowledge of the new faith to their pastors. It likely entailed answering several questions taken from one of the catechisms that would soon appear in Franconia. See discussion below.

39. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 219, l. 13. The Saxon *Instructions for the Visitors* had similarly stipulated that “no one shall be admitted to the sacrament unless he has previously been to the pastor who shall inquire if he rightly understands the sacrament, or is in need of further counsel, etc.” WA, vol. 26, p. 216, ll. 20–22; LW, vol. 40, p. 292.
40. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 151, “Vom evangelio,” art. 1, ll. 15–16.
41. The Wittenberg reformers similarly observed, “[i]t is true that God works true contrition, but he works it through the Word and preaching.” WA, vol. 26, p. 219, ll. 18–19; LW, vol. 40, p. 295.
42. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 155, “Von den schluesseln der kirchn,” arts. 1, 2, and 4.
43. Osiander did not limit the use of the keys to confession. In his statement of doctrine he explicitly stated, “the use of the keys is not tied to auricular confession.” AOGA, vol. 3, p. 151, “Von der christlichen pues,” art. 4, l. 4. For Osiander, the primary function of these four means of grace (sermons, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the keys) was to strengthen faith. He wrote elsewhere in his statement of doctrine, “in addition to the sermon, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the keys have been established for the encouragement and strengthening of such [i.e., saving] faith.” AOGA, vol. 3, p. 152, “Vom glauben,” art. 5, ll. 6–7. Luther and Melancthon similarly observed, “there are many reasons why we should exhort the people to confession, especially in those cases where they need counsel and wherein they are most troubled.” WA, vol. 26, p. 220, ll. 4–6; LW, vol. 40, p. 296.
44. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 155, “Von den schluesseln der kirchn,” art. 5, ll. 19–21.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 155, l. 24–156, l. 2, “Von den schluesseln der kirchn,” art. 7.
46. Osiander defined the proper use of the keys in the following way: “to bind no one who believes and to loose no one who does not believe.” *Ibid.*, p. 155, “Von den schluesseln der kirchn,” art. 3, ll. 16–17.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 160, “Von christlichem bann,” art. 4, ll. 3–4.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 160, “Von christlichem bann,” art. 5, ll. 5–6.
49. WA, vol. 26, p. 233, ll. 25–35; LW, vol. 40, p. 311.
50. AOGA, vol. 3, pp. 221, l. 16–222, l. 3.
51. Schornbaum, p. 8.
52. See Matthias Simon, “Zur Visitation der Nürnberger Landpfarreien im Jahre 1528,” *ZbKg*, 35 (1966): 7–41. We know only that of the seventy-two pastors, preachers, and chaplains who were examined, eight tested extremely well (11 percent), thirty well (42 percent), and twenty needed improvement (28 percent). Fourteen out of the seventy-two were found to be unsuitable for their offices (19 percent). *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17. There are occasional references in the extant sources to pastors or chaplains who were still celebrating the traditional mass, though such details are rare. See, e.g., the reports concerning Conrad Erkenprecht, the pastor in Bechtal, and George Prukher, the pastor in Schwimbach. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37. Only the report from nearby Wöhrd makes specific reference to a pastor who dutifully observed the new church order. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

53. Of the fifty-five clergy who reported to Ansbach for examination, twenty-one tested well (38 percent), thirteen were found to be mediocre (24 percent), thirteen tested poorly (24 percent), and five very poorly (9 percent). Three more pledged to improve themselves (5 percent). Sehling, vol. 11, p. 115. The sources for the Brandenburg-Kulmbach visitation are not extant.
54. See reports about the priest in Castell and the chaplain in Feuchtwagen. Schornbaum, pp. 48, 54.
55. See the report about the pastor in Brichsenstadt. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
56. The visitation team reported that the pastor in Burgloß insisted on holding all ceremonies according to the traditional usage and that he refused anyone the sacrament who had not confessed to him in the traditional manner. Pastors in Creglingen and Zenn also promoted penance and private confession. Schornbaum, pp. 78, 71, 82. The pastor in Freytenbach required payment to hear confession while his counterpart in Gnodtstatt did not. *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 74.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
58. The visitation team told the pastor in Roth to stop forcing laypeople to confess their sins to him. Schornbaum, p. 14. Margrave George had originally wanted private confession to be replaced by a friendly discussion between pastor and penitent when the latter registered for communion. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
59. See the recommendations for Conrad Prüderle, chaplain at St. Sebald. Will, *Historischdiplomatisches Magazin*, p. 378.
60. See the recommendations for Hanns Beck, chaplain at St. Sebald, and Johann Wagner, chaplain at St. Lorenz Church. *Ibid.*, pp. 378, 380.
61. See the recommendations for Thomas Hager, chaplain at the New Hospital Church. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
62. See the visitation committee's remarks about Döber. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
63. See Chapter 7.
64. Wenzeslaus Linck, *Unterrichtung der Kinder so zu Gottestische wöllen geen*, in *Die evangelischen Katechismusversuche vor Luthers Enchiridion*, vol. 3: *Die evangelischen Katechismusversuche aus den Jahren 1528–1529*, ed. Ferdinand Cohrs, pp. 41–48. Both editions were published by Jobst Gutknecht in 1528 and 1532, respectively. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
65. Leder refers to Linck's catechism as a "guide for instruction on confession." See Leder, p. 42. Cohrs regarded it as "the first confirmation booklet of the evangelical church." Linck, p. 42.
66. Linck, p. 44.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
71. Nürnberg printer Jobst Gutknecht printed an edition of Luther's *Der kleine Katechismus* in either 1529 or 1530. WA, vol. 30, pt. 1, p. 679. Two other

- printers in the imperial city released editions of Luther's *Deutsche Katechismus* (it was later referred to as *Der große Katechismus*): Friedrich Peypus in 1529 and Jeronimus Formschneyder in 1531 and 1533. *Ibid.*, pp. 500, 502.
72. Leder, p. 45.
 73. WA, vol. 30, pt. 1, p. 265(B), ll. 15–19.
 74. *Ibid.*, p. 271(B), ll. 14–27.
 75. WA, vol. 30, pt. 1, pp. 679–680. The original version contained no form for confession. *Ibid.*, p. 581.
 76. *Ibid.*, p. 343(B), ll. 5–21.
 77. *Ibid.*, p. 344(B), ll. 3–19.
 78. *Ibid.*, p. 345(B), ll. 3–5.
 79. *Ibid.*, p. 345(B), ll. 9–12.
 80. Luther added “Ein kurze Vermahnung zu der Beicht” to the second edition of the catechism. The edition printed by Friedrich Peypus in 1529 did not contain it while the two printed by Jeronimus Formschneyder in 1530 and 1531 did. WA, vol. 30, pt. 1, p. 502.
 81. Luther made these comments while discussing the third article of the Creed—“I believe . . . in the forgiveness of sins.” *Ibid.*, p. 190, ll. 25–29.
 82. *Ibid.*, pp. 233, l. 23–234, l. 2.
 83. *Ibid.*, p. 234, ll. 11–12.
 84. *Ibid.*, p. 235, ll. 25–28.
 85. *Ibid.*, pp. 235, l. 29–236, l. 1.
 86. *Ibid.*, p. 237, ll. 23–27.
 87. *Ibid.*, p. 238, ll. 1–2.
 88. *Ibid.*, p. 238, ll. 10–12.
 89. A section entitled “Wie man die Einfältigen soll lehren beichten” replaced the previous treatment of confession in the 1531 version of the *Small Catechism*. *Ibid.*, pp. 581–582 (text, pp. 383–387; quotation, p. 385, l. 4).
 90. Spengler had written similar treatises for the city councils in Strasbourg (1525) and Goslar (1528). Although it was never published, Grimm writes of the 1528 *Defense* that it was “the culmination of Spengler’s attempts to make clear the reasons for the council’s acceptance and promotion of the Reformation in Nürnberg.” See Grimm, p. 88.
 91. Gottfried Seebaß, “Apologia Reformationis: Eine bisher unbekannte Verteidigungsschrift Nürnbergs aus dem Jahre 1528,” *ZbKg*, 39 (1970): 20–74, espec. p. 55.
 92. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

6. *The New Rite*

1. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 489, ll. 28–30.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 495, ll. 6–9.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 471.

4. “Because Christ gave the authority and command himself, it will truly have power.” *Ibid.*, p. 545, ll. 15–17.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 546, ll. 9–14.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 536, l. 33–537, l. 2.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 537, l. 28–538, l. 1.
8. Spengler wanted Osiander to adopt the tough language of the Saxon *Instructions for the Visitors*. He also thought Osiander’s church order should have included an explanation of evangelical doctrine along with its description of Lutheran ceremonies, especially since the Nürnberg order would likely be used by Lutherans throughout Germany. Osiander later explained that he had always intended to provide a treatment of doctrine in a separate volume. Finally, the Council secretary was critical of Osiander for having acted alone rather than collaborating with the other members of the commission. Osiander countered that he had only wanted to provide a draft for discussion (AOGA, vol. 3, p. 677). Spengler attributed the Nürnberg preacher’s actions more to hubris than to pragmatism. He later asserted that Osiander’s main problem was his “*ambitio*” and “*pertinacio*.” Grimm, p. 114.
9. See AOGA, vol. 3, pp. 243–246. Spengler’s preface had not been used in the 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order. The final version of the church order discarded Spengler’s preface as well as Osiander’s treatment of Christian freedom in favor of the statement on evangelical liberty in the *Instructions for the Visitors*. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 169b, n. 1.
10. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 598, ll. 34–37.
11. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 220.
12. The first team included Christoph Kress and Hans Volckamer. The jurist in the second team was Johann Heppstein, the magistrates, Christoph Koler and Bernhard Baumgartner.
13. Grimm, p. 145.
14. Leif Grane asserts that “in order to understand the origin and development of the Augsburg Confession, it must be recognized that it is the product of two parallel objectives, one represented by theologians, the other by politicians . . . The Augsburg Confession is thoroughly colored by this ‘double-mindedness.’” Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 19.
15. BSLK, p. 66, ll. 1–7. (The line numbers refer to the Latin version.) For an English translation, see *Concordia or Book of Concord. The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 13. (I have followed the *Concordia*, which is based on the Latin version of the Augsburg Confession.)
16. BSLK, pp. 66, l. 10–67, l. 9; *Concordia*, p. 13.
17. BSLK, p. 67, ll. 12–16; *Concordia*, p. 13.
18. BSLK, pp. 97–100, art. 25; *Concordia*, p. 19.
19. Herbert Immenkötter, *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana vom 3. Au-*

- gust 1530. Corpus Catholicorum*, vol. 33 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1979), p. 102. For an examination of confession in the Augsburg Confession and the *Confutatio*, see Hans Jorissen, “Die Sakramente-Taufe und Buße,” in Erwin Iserloh, ed., *Confessio Augustana und Confutatio. Der Augsburger Reichstag 1530 und die Einheit der Kirche*. Internationales Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum, Augsburg, September 3–7, 1979. *Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte*, Heft 118 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), pp. 524–544.
20. Immenkötter, p. 104.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
 22. Grimm, p. 151.
 23. BSLK, pp. 249–291; *Concordia*, pp. 77–94.
 24. BSLK, p. 250, ll. 2–10; *Concordia*, p. 77.
 25. BSLK, pp. 251, l. 51–252, l. 1; *Concordia*, p. 78.
 26. BSLK, p. 253, ll. 24–34; *Concordia*, pp. 78–79.
 27. BSLK, p. 261, ll. 43–45; *Concordia*, p. 82.
 28. BSLK, p. 259, ll. 15–20; *Concordia*, p. 81. Later Melancthon asserted, “Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance, are truly sacraments. For these rites have God’s command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament.” BSLK, p. 292, ll. 24–29; *Concordia*, p. 94.
 29. BSLK, p. 291, ll. 30–40; *Concordia*, p. 94.
 30. The recess concluded with the threat that after April 15, those electors and princes who supported the recess “should have the right to seize the persons and goods of those who disobeyed it, treating them as they saw fit . . . for they consider them deserving of the most severe punishment and outlawry because of their unchristian, disobedient transgression. Their bodies and possessions, land and people should be declared free to everyone.” Grimm, pp. 154–155. On the role of Nürnberg in the Diet of Augsburg, see Grimm, pp. 144–155; Gerhard Pfeiffer, “Nürnberg und das Augsburger Bekenntnis, 1530–1561,” *ZbKg* 49 (1980): 2–19; and Engelhardt, “Die Reformation in Nürnberg” (1937), pp. 211–266.
 31. See Sehling, vol. 11, p. 117.
 32. Dixon, p. 31.
 33. James Martin Estes, *Christian Magistrate and State Church: The Reforming Career of Johannes Brenz* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 85.
 34. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.
 36. The Council was still hoping that the Schmalkald League would produce a single Protestant church order at its upcoming meeting in Ulm and therefore wanted to delay work on its own guide for worship as long as possible. Neither the Nürnberg Council nor Margrave George received an invitation to

- the meeting in Ulm because of their refusal to enter into full military alliance with the other evangelical cities and principalities. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 221.
37. See “Gutachten der Nürnberger Theologen über die Sendordnung des Johannes Brenz,” AOGA, vol. 4, pp. 236–237.
 38. Even Brenz did not want individual pastors to have the authority to ban sinners. He argued that the power of excommunication should rest with a commission of clergy appointed by secular magistrates. Estes, p. 92.
 39. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 238, ll. 9–12.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 238, l. 28–239, l. 6.
 41. See “Church Offices,” in ER, vol. 1, p. 334. The 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order contained instructions for superintendents. AOGA, vol. 3, p. 224, ll. 15–19.
 42. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 239, ll. 15–16. See also Estes, p. 64. In another response to the Ansbach draft written by Osiander, the Nürnberg preacher insisted that in villages where there was no representative of the secular government, pastors should be required to obtain the permission of their superintendents to exercise the ban. Allowing the power of excommunication to reside in the authority of one man was simply too dangerous in Osiander’s estimation. See “Stellungnahme der Nürnberger Theologen zu den Verbesserungsvorschlägen der Ansbacher für den Kirchenordnungsentwurf der Nürnberger,” AOGA, vol. 4, p. 233, art. 15.
 43. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 224.
 44. The Council had reviewed the church order again in preparation for sending it to the upcoming meeting of the Schmalkald League in Frankfurt. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
 45. See NStaatsA, RV 797, fol. 17’, from May 30, 1531, and AOGA, vol. 4, p. 226.
 46. See “Ratschlag von wegen angestellte Nürnbergischer Kirchen Ordnung. de 1530,” GNM Merkel-Handschriften, no. 129. Only Christoph Scheurl and Johann Hepstein opposed giving the clergy the ban. See AOGA, vol. 4, p. 349, n. 6.
 47. Georg Theodor Strobel, *Neue Beyträge zur Litteratur besonders des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Nürnberg und Altdorf, 1791), p. 378.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
 50. The Council had requested advice from the theologians after the jurists were unable to reach a consensus. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 345.
 51. *Ibid.*, pp. 311, l. 24–312, l. 2. On July 19, 1531, the Council had ordered the city’s provosts and theologians to prepare a report on how the catechism should be taught in Nürnberg.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 311, ll. 19–20.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 313, ll. 14–15.
 54. This report was written sometime between July 27 and September 14, 1531. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

55. Ibid., p. 322, ll. 30–32.
56. Ibid., p. 322, ll. 10–15, 21–26.
57. Ibid., p. 321, ll. 1–4.
58. Ibid., p. 323, ll. 10–13.
59. Strobel, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 379–386. Linck produced his own written opinion that closely resembled that of his colleagues. See “Lincks Gutachten zum Bedenken der Juristen, 1531 [etwa Sept. 14],” in Lorz, pp. 242–277. Linck’s comments on confession, absolution, and the examination of faith occupy pp. 270–277.
60. Strobel, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 380.
61. Ibid., p. 382.
62. Ibid., p. 384.
63. Ibid., p. 383.
64. At least three jurists, including Scheurl, had expressed the concern that Nürnberg’s clerics wanted to reinstitute mandatory private confession. Lorz, p. 274. See reports from Christoph Kugel and M. Marstaller in GNM Merkel-Handschriften, no. 129, fols. 46 and 63’.
65. Strobel, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 385.
66. Here the Nürnberg theologians were following a trend in early Lutheranism. See Aland, “Die Privatbeichte im Lutherthum,” p. 471.
67. Strobel, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 386.
68. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 348. Linck’s written opinion had also included extensive comments on the ban (cf. note 59). See Lorz, pp. 246–258.
69. AOGA, vol. 4, pp. 349, l. 7–350, l. 4.
70. Spengler cited Matthew 18:15–18 in particular. Ibid., pp. 350, l. 12–351, l. 7.
71. Ibid., p. 351, ll. 8–9.
72. Ibid., p. 353, ll. 1–6.
73. Ibid., pp. 353, ll. 14–28, and 354, l. 22–355, l. 3.
74. Ibid., p. 362, l. 27.
75. Ibid., p. 357, ll. 25–28.
76. Ibid., p. 362, ll. 32–34.
77. Linck had argued in his written opinion that magistrates should recognize the spiritual authority God had given to the clergy and do everything in their power to promote it. He went so far as to maintain that it had been a mistake for the magistrates to require pastors to inform them when they wanted to use the ban. It required no external validation from secular authority. Linck insisted that according to Christ the ban belonged under the jurisdiction of clergy alone (see notes 59 and 68). Lorz, pp. 256, 248–250.
78. AOGA, vol. 4, p. 348.
79. Ibid., p. 374.
80. “Bedenken der Marggräflichen Theologen über die Marggräflich-Brandenburg- und Nürnbergerische Kirchenordnung,” in Georg Theodor Strobel, *Miscellaneen Literarischen Inhalts größtentheils aus ungedruckten*

- Quellen* (Nürnberg, 1779), pp. 151–156. See also AOGA, vol. 4, pp. 383–385.
81. Strobel, *Miscellaneen*, p. 153.
 82. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
 83. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
 84. See Osiander's "Gutachten über das Ansbacher Gutachten zum 'Neuen Begriff' der Kirchenordnung [1531, Dezember, nach 19.]," in AOGA, vol. 4, p. 381, ll. 6–8.
 85. See "Nuremberg, Peace of," in ER, vol. 3, pp. 162–163, and Holborn, pp. 217–219.
 86. AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 38–39.
 87. ARA, Repertorium 111, Nr. 9, fol. 327.
 88. *Ibid.*, fols. 329–329'. The written opinion was signed by Luther, Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Justus Jonas.
 89. The final version reflected much more the theology of Osiander than of Brenz. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 45.
 90. Osiander, always eager to have the last word, included a protest against the Council's opposition to the ban in the catechetical sermons he was commissioned to append to the new church order. In the section on the keys he warned his readers that "although now such a fine, salutary, and godly ordinance—i.e., the punishing of public, scandalous sins—has been completely shattered, destroyed, and suppressed, we should not, therefore, despise and discard the authority and use of the keys. For those who have caused such disorder and to this day stand in the way of it being improved will certainly find their judge, no one should doubt this. However, if we would ask God to restore to us this and other good ordinances which he himself created, just as he restored to us his word, he would certainly hear us and respond." AOGA, vol. 5, p. 325, ll. 21–28.
 91. *Ibid.*, p. 146, n. 626. The final version of the church order made the following provision for barring the unworthy from the sacrament: "The pastors should pay attention if among those who register are people who are subject to a known error or heresy or otherwise malign the clear, incontrovertible word of God, which, unfortunately, some are not ashamed to do, or if they live with known, undeniable vices, which Paul in I Corinthians 5 [1–5; 9–13] and elsewhere enumerates, or if there are senseless people and fools, or children or other simple folk with no understanding, who neither know nor want to learn the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The pastors should in no way allow such people to go to the holy sacrament, rather they should make abundantly clear to those in error and with open sin [the reality of] God's judgment and the uncertainty of this fleeting life so that they may be moved to repentance. If they improve themselves and display signs of the same, one should accept, console, and absolve them and allow them to participate in the body and blood of Christ again as other Christians do." AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 145, l. 22–146, l. 7.

92. Gottfried Seebaß, *Das reformatorische Werk des Andreas Osiander* (Nürnberg: Verein für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1967), p. 237.
93. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 142, ll. 8–12.
94. Ibid., p. 141, ll. 22–27.
95. Ibid., p. 142, ll. 8–9, 16–23.
96. Ibid., p. 143, ll. 21–24.
97. Ibid., p. 120, ll. 1–6.
98. Ibid., p. 142, ll. 12–13.
99. Ibid., p. 144, ll. 2–13.
100. Ibid., p. 144, ll. 13–16.
101. Ibid., p. 143, ll. 8–13.
102. Ibid., p. 75, ll. 9–13.
103. Ibid., p. 143, ll. 14–20.
104. Ibid., pp. 144, l. 19–145, l. 7.
105. Ibid., pp. 53 and 179, ll. 17–23.
106. BB, 105, fol. 211.
107. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 55.
108. Ibid., p. 57.
109. The commission’s members included councilmen Hieronymus Baumgartner and Leonhard Schürstab, provost Hektor Pömer, and preachers Wenzeslaus Linck and George Koberer. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 58. Osiander was not invited to sit on the commission because he had once again incurred the disfavor of the Council due to a new conflict about confession. See Chapter 7.
110. Eck wrote a treatise against the new church order entitled *Christlicher Unterricht mit Grund der Schrift wider die angemaßten Setzer und Angeber vermeinter neuer Kirchenordnung*. See AOGA, vol. 5, p. 60.
111. See NStaatsA, RsB 7, fol. 279.
112. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 125.
113. See Thomas Tentler, “Confession,” in ER, vol. 1, p. 403.

7. Resisting the Old Jurisdiction

1. Grimm, p. 118.
2. See WABr, vol. 6, p. 447, l. 18.
3. It should be noted that the provisional 1528 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order also contained no form for general confession and absolution.
4. See Chapter 6. Osiander later insisted that officials in Nürnberg and Ansbach had carefully inspected the church order before allowing it to be published. AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 444, l. 32–445, l. 9.
5. WABr, vol. 6, p. 447, ll. 10–11.
6. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 340, ll. 8–9. The minority party was made up of Osiander, his provost, Hektor Pömer, and Friedrich Pistorious, the former abbot of the St. Egidien monastery.
7. The majority group was made up of Linck, Schleuppner, George Koberer,

- Sebastian Fürnschild, Johann Frosch, and Thomas Geschauf (called Venatorius).
8. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 342, ll. 3–4.
 9. Ibid., pp. 340, l. 30–341, l. 2.
 10. Ibid., p. 342, ll. 15–17.
 11. Ibid., p. 342, ll. 25–28. Osiander did not have in mind here an interrogation of specific sins or an assessment of the penitent's degree of sorrow. As in the 1533 church order, he only wanted the penitent to evidence adequate knowledge of the Lutheran catechism and to inform her pastor that she had sorrow for her sins and wanted to be freed from them.
 12. Ibid., p. 343, ll. 2–11.
 13. Osiander's opponents argued that Luther, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Melancthon each supported general absolution. They also noted that the influential Hamburg Church Order included a form for the general confession and absolution of sins. Ibid., p. 343, ll. 12–20.
 14. Ibid., pp. 343, ll. 22–24, and 344, ll. 3–4.
 15. Ibid., pp. 343, l. 25–344, l. 3.
 16. Ibid., p. 337, n. 17.
 17. See Lazarus Spengler's letter to Veit Dietrich in Maximilian Moritz Mayer, *Spengleriana* (Nürnberg, 1830), p. 114. The letter is dated Friday, April 22, 1533.
 18. WABr, vol. 6, p. 477, l. 24.
 19. The Council had the 1533 Electoral Saxony Visitation Articles in mind here. Klaus, "Die Rüstgebete," p. 542.
 20. WABr, vol. 6, pp. 446–448.
 21. See Bernhard Klaus, *Veit Dietrich: Leben und Werk* (Nürnberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1958), p. 153.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Ibid., p. 154.
 24. Ibid., p. 153.
 25. Brenz urged the magistrates to consider that "some of the old educated teachers not inappropriately referred to absolution as a sacrament of penance." Ibid., p. 153.
 26. Ibid., p. 154. Brenz made the outlandish claim that laypeople used to communicate two times every six weeks and that their priests had been able to confess them each time.
 27. Ibid., p. 154.
 28. WABr, vol. 6, pp. 453–455.
 29. "For the preaching of the holy gospel is also in essence an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to many people in common and publicly or to one person alone, whether in public or in secret." WABr, vol. 6, p. 454, ll. 6–9. See Luther's comments to a similar effect in an Easter Tuesday sermon included in Caspar Creutziger's *Sommerpostille* (1544). WA, vol. 21, pp. 262, l. 32–263, l. 8.
 30. See BSLK, p. 67, l. 5.

31. “Because all absolution, whether general or private, must be understood to require faith and to help those who believe in it.” WABr, vol. 6, p. 454, ll. 13–15.
32. Although Luther and Melancthon opposed Osiander’s position on general absolution, it should be noted that the 1533 Wittenberg Church Order also contained no form for general absolution. See Sehling, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 700–710. Luther preferred an exhortation to worthy participation in the Eucharist over general confession, exactly what Osiander had provided in the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order. Luther thought general confession had gradually replaced the exhortation in the Middle Ages. See Klaus, “Die Rüstgebete,” pp. 539–541. Despite their similar liturgical preferences, Luther and Osiander still had very different views on the validity of general confession. See discussion below. Klaus argues that Luther excluded general confession from his church orders because he thought it represented an incursion of the private and personal into a worship service that emphasized the communal. See *ibid.*, p. 542.
33. See Chapter 8, pp. 184–185.
34. WABr, vol. 6, p. 455, ll. 30–34.
35. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 412, n. 4.
36. After the magistrates had left the preachers, Osiander informed his colleagues that he still had many reasons for opposing the Council’s decision. He revealed to them that he had written a letter to Luther and Melancthon defending his position, though the letter had been delayed in arriving at Wittenberg. Osiander maintained that had the two reformers received his letter, they would have responded much differently. See NStaatsA, HS 415, fol. 10. Osiander’s letter is not extant. Luther did concede later in a letter to the Nürnberg Council that he had not been properly informed of Osiander’s position. See WABr, vol. 6, p. 527, ll. 9–10. Nevertheless, Luther and Melancthon adopted the same position on general absolution when asked for another written opinion by the Nürnberg Council in 1536. See WABr, vol. 7, pp. 594, l. 11–595, l. 20.
37. Unfortunately the sermon is not extant.
38. See Paul Tschackert, “Ungedruckte Briefe zur allgemeinen Reformationsgeschichte aus Handschriften der königlichen Universitätsbibliothek in Göttingen,” in *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, vol. 40 (Göttingen, 1895), pp. 16–17. Roting had teaching responsibilities in both the Hospital and St. Egidien schools.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
41. NStaatsA, HS 415, fol. 2.
42. *Ibid.*, fol. 2’.
43. Osiander complained that the magistrates “had made and established themselves as lords and judges over what one could and could not do, or should and should not preach in the church.” AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 354, l. 7–355, l. 1.

44. Ibid., p. 355, ll. 11–17.
45. Ibid., p. 356, ll. 12–25.
46. NStaatsA, HS 415, fols. 4'–10'.
47. Spengler asked in his written opinion, “according to God’s Word do not the governing authorities and Christian community [*ein oberkejt und christliche gemejn*] possess the authority to determine whether all teaching is Christian or not?” NStaatsA, HS 415, fol. 6.
48. In order to provide further evidence for how the Council had resisted lording its religious authority over the city’s theologians, Spengler cited the introduction of the provost’s church order in 1524 and the 1528 church visitation, both of which were enacted upon the initiative of theologians. In both cases the Council allowed the theologians to proceed because it thought their proposals were in keeping with God’s Word. NStaatsA, HS 415, fol. 5.
49. Ibid., fol. 6'.
50. Ibid., fol. 9'. Spengler also reasoned that Osiander’s assertion that the Wittenbergers would have expressed themselves differently had they read the letter he sent them was itself a de facto confession that Luther and Melancthon’s written opinion did not support his view. Ibid., fols. 10–10'.
51. Ibid., fol. 9.
52. Ibid., fol. 7.
53. Ibid., fol. 10'.
54. Mayer, p. 118.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 117.
57. Ibid., p. 118.
58. Ibid., p. 119. Luther did, in fact, write to both Osiander and Nürnberg’s other theologians on several occasions in order to urge them to brotherly unity. See the relevant letters in WABr, vol. 6, pp. 502–507 and 530–534.
59. See HS 415, fols. 2–2'; RB 16, fols. 94–95; RV 825, fol. 7' from July 15, 1533; RV 825, fol. 8' from July 16, 1533; RV 825, fols. 9'–10 from July 17, 1533.
60. RB 16, fol. 95; HS 415, fol. 73'.
61. Five of Nürnberg’s preachers submitted written opinions to the Council; four collaborated on one together while one of them prepared his own. In the former opinion Linck, Schleuppner, Koberer, and Venatorius implied that they believed private absolution was a sacrament, though they did not state this position clearly. When responding to Osiander’s claim that there were three sacraments—baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution—they wrote, “for our part, we do not wish to quarrel with Herr Andreas or others about this because the important thing is not the number of sacraments but their power and effect along with their Christian use.” NstaatsA, HS 415, fol. 73'. The author of the other opinion, Sebastian Fürnschilts, was much more precise. Referring to article 13 of the *Apologia* for the Augsburg Con-

- fession, he wrote, “there absolution is denoted as the third sacrament,” a position Fürnschilts fully endorsed. HS 415, fol. 79.
62. HS 415, fol. 75.
 63. The sermons took place on August 15 and August 17, 1533.
 64. RB 16, fol. 102.
 65. RB 16, fol. 102’.
 66. RV 826, fol. 13’ from August 22, 1533; RV 826, fol. 14’ from August 23, 1533; RV 826, fol. 15 from August 25, 1533.
 67. AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 412–491.
 68. *Ibid.*, p. 432, ll. 23–24. See also p. 441, ll. 15–23.
 69. Osiander could also refer to this key as “a key of knowledge” (*einen schlüssel des erkanntnus oder des wissens*), as could Luther. See *ibid.*, p. 429, l. 14, and WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 491, ll. 18–20.
 70. For Osiander the unique function of the sacraments was to accomplish the personal appropriation of divine grace. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 428, ll. 5–15.
 71. *Ibid.*, pp. 433, l. 35–434, l. 3.
 72. *Ibid.*, p. 438, ll. 12–16.
 73. *Ibid.*, p. 456, ll. 28–31. Osiander emphasized throughout his treatise that it was possible for believers to lose baptismal grace through sin. See discussion below.
 74. *Ibid.*, pp. 438, ll. 12–15, and 457, ll. 3–7. Luther had similarly related the keys to baptism in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, WA, vol. 6, p. 572, ll. 1–34 (LW, vol. 36, p. 95). On the relationship between baptism and penance in medieval theology, see Cameron, p. 159.
 75. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 456, ll. 6–10.
 76. He asserted, “the one who does not believe that he has been forgiven all his sins through baptism, with the exception of those he commits when he lives according to the flesh, despises his baptism and makes Christ out to be a liar.” AOGA, vol. 5, p. 456, ll. 28–31.
 77. *Ibid.*, p. 455, ll. 19–33.
 78. *Ibid.*, pp. 458, l. 39–459, l. 12.
 79. *Ibid.*, p. 459, l. 25.
 80. *Ibid.*, p. 442, ll. 21–23.
 81. *Ibid.*, p. 465, ll. 10–22. Osiander agreed that, although it was good to encourage virtue, “one should by no means place a condition on absolution, for the true loosing key of God is based and founded on God’s grace and command alone and in no way on our works.” *Ibid.*, p. 465, ll. 26–30.
 82. When comparing private absolution to the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord’s Supper, Osiander asserted, “thus also in absolution the word spoken with the laying on of hands is not a sign of the loosing but the loosing itself. For as truly as the servant speaks to and touches the confessant physically, so God himself truly speaks to and touches him with his Word and Holy Spirit in and with the absolution and laying on of hands.” AOGA, vol. 5, p. 489, ll. 26–30. For a discussion of the sacramental status of absolution in Osiander’s theology, see Claus Bachmann, *Die*

Selbstherrlichkeit Gottes: Studien zur Theologie des Nürnberger Reformators Andreas Osiander, Neukirchener theologische Dissertationen und Habilitationen, vol. 7 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), pp. 160–179. Bachmann argues that for Osiander the word of absolution had an ontological component.

83. Osiander defined a sacrament as “a transaction [*handel*] in which God’s promises and truth are by divine command presented to an individual, accepted and personally appropriated [*in busem gestedcht*], so that the person is consecrated, sanctified, and received into the kingdom of God and eternal life.” *Ibid.*, p. 485, ll. 1–4. He argued that both Luther in the *Babylonian Captivity* and Melancthon in the *Apologia* for the Augsburg Confession had clearly stated that absolution was a sacrament. *Ibid.*, pp. 482, l. 29–483, l. 2. In fact, Luther had equivocated on this issue in the *Babylonian Captivity*, at first calling absolution a sacrament and then concluding that, strictly speaking, it was not. See WA, vol. 6, p. 572, ll. 10–34 (LW, vol. 36, p. 95). Melancthon had been clearer on the issue, but not all Lutherans accorded the same authority to his *Apologia* as they did to the Augsburg Confession itself, which was less precise.
84. For a discussion of the connection between Osiander’s soteriology—according to which Christ’s essential righteousness was infused into believers—and his theology of the keys, see Dietrich Stollberg, “Osiander und der Nürnberger Absolutionsstreit: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der praktischen Theologie,” *Lutherische Blätter*, 17 Jahrgang, 85 (July 17, 1965), pp. 153 and 165–166.
85. Osiander advised confessors to respond in the following way to confessants who had doubts about their worthiness to receive absolution: “you do not need to worry about whether or not I should speak and pronounce God’s mercy to you. You need only hear and believe the word of absolution that you are truly forgiven in heaven. For it has been commanded to me—not you—to determine whether I should absolve you or not.” AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 465, l. 35–466, l. 2.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 448, l. 30–449, l. 2.
87. WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, pp. 465–507 (LW, vol. 40, pp. 321–377).
88. *Ibid.*, p. 496, l. 40 (LW, vol. 40, p. 364).
89. *Ibid.*, p. 480, ll. 24–25 (LW, vol. 40, p. 344).
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 498, l. 31–499, l. 1. I have used the LW translation (LW, vol. 40, pp. 366–367) except for the quotation from Romans, which has a mistake in the LW. For a similar passage, see WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 499, ll. 16–28 (LW, vol. 40, p. 367), where Luther emphasizes the objective working of the keys against a Catholic interlocutor.
91. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 449, ll. 4–10.
92. WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 499, ll. 1–8 (LW, vol. 40, p. 367).
93. Osiander also cited this excerpt from Luther’s treatise in his own work, but failed to see how it undercut his argument. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 449, ll. 10–14.
94. In the *Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance* Luther insisted that faith was

- essential for the reception of forgiveness, and even made faith one of the three constitutive elements of his version of confession, along with grace and absolution. See Chapter 3, p. 54.
95. WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 505, ll. 28–30. I have used the LW translation (LW, vol. 40, p. 375).
 96. Ibid., pp. 505, l. 42–506, l. 4 (LW, vol. 40, pp. 375–376).
 97. Ibid., p. 468, ll. 21–22 (LW, vol. 40, p. 329).
 98. Ibid., p. 499, ll. 9–13 (LW, vol. 40, p. 367).
 99. Osiander asserted in his treatise, “we are not able to produce faith, it is a work of God.” AOGA, vol. 5, p. 426, ll. 26–27. See also *ibid.*, p. 472, ll. 1–2.
 100. Another way of stating this difference would be to say that while both men conceived of the word of absolution calling forth faith, Luther thought the actual reception of forgiveness depended on the cleric’s words being met with the faith that those same words had created. Osiander thought the cleric’s words effected forgiveness regardless of the confessant’s response to them, although he clearly wanted faith to follow.
 101. It should be noted that Osiander did not conceive of clerical absolution itself acting as spiritual poison, for he was clear that the unworthy confessant’s sin was forgiven. But this impious reception of absolution would then provoke divine wrath.
 102. Luther nowhere made this claim for general absolution.
 103. See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 400.
 104. See *ibid.*, pp. 368–369.
 105. On the key of knowledge, see Lea, vol. 1, pp. 158–159, 161–165. For Luther’s discussion of the key of knowledge, see WA, vol. 30, pt. 2, pp. 490, l. 27–491, l. 32 (LW, vol. 40, pp. 357–358).
 106. Ibid., p. 492, ll. 8–15 (LW, vol. 40, p. 358).
 107. Osiander insisted several times in his treatise that a confessant simply had to come to his confessor and say, “I am sorry for my sins” (*es reuet mich*), to be worthy of absolution. See AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 454, l. 9, and 481, l. 25.
 108. When commenting on John 20:21–23 in a 1536 sermon, Osiander argued that only those who possess the Holy Spirit could exercise the keys properly. He further maintained that this unique claim to be led and governed by the Holy Spirit in the binding and loosing of sins could be made only by one who “has been properly called” (*ordenlich beruffen ist*), i.e., by a recognized Lutheran pastor. AOGA, vol. 6, pp. 170, l. 32–171, l. 10. See discussion of the 1536 sermon below.
 109. Though Osiander opposed the Catholic sacrament of ordination, he nevertheless thought ordination an essential mark of the true Church. He pushed for an evangelical ordination service in Nürnberg that would go beyond the simple examination of a candidate’s faith and conduct followed by a formal calling from the Council. The St. Lorenz preacher wanted evangelical bish-

ops to ordain each new pastor by laying hands on them. Unfortunately for Osiander, there would be no formal ordination service in Nürnberg until 1583. Already in 1537 Luther had prepared a service of ordination for evangelical ministers in Saxony under orders from his prince. (*Ordinatio ministrorum verbi*, WA, vol. 38, pp. 423–431; LW, vol. 53, pp. 122–126.) The service contained a prayer for the candidate and the laying on of hands. Up to this point Luther had been satisfied to test a candidate's faith and conduct, allowing secular rulers to issue official callings. This is what happened when Veit Dietrich took up his St. Sebald post in 1535. Luther made no effort to ordain him. See Klaus, *Dietrich*, pp. 168–174, and Seebaß, *Osiander*, pp. 265–270.

110. Osiander wrote that he was not interested in resurrecting “papistical mandatory private confession,” as some maintained. He would not allow clerics to interrogate penitents and instructed confessors to grant absolution to all who came in repentance and asked for it. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 453, ll. 29–30.
111. Osiander gave tremendous power to confessors, in some respects more than the late medieval Church had. His insistence on the unconditional nature of clerical absolution went beyond late medieval theologies of absolution, the majority of which required some measure of lay appropriation. Even Johannes Paltz would have found Osiander's emphasis on clerical absolution excessive.
112. HS 415, fols. 81–84'.
113. *Ibid.*, fol. 82.
114. Spengler explained, “when such [divine] forgiveness and promise is spoken and proclaimed to me alone, private absolution is certainly more powerful [than general absolution], because I can receive it as addressed to me alone, which is more consoling.” *Ibid.*, fol. 82'.
115. *Ibid.*, fol. 83'.
116. *Ibid.*, fol. 84'.
117. On October 8, 1533, the Council instructed Lazarus Spengler to send the three written opinions to the theologians in Wittenberg and ask for their advice. See AOGA, vol. 5, p. 416, n. 27.
118. WABr, vol. 6, pp. 527–530. Luther also sent individual letters to Osiander and Linck urging them to unity. WABr, vol. 6, pp. 530–534.
119. The Wittenbergers disagreed strongly with the implication of Osiander's argument that the laity could obtain forgiveness for serious sins only through private absolution. They wrote, “we cannot and will not burden consciences so heavily by saying that forgiveness of sin may be obtained only through private absolution.” WABr, vol. 6, p. 528, ll. 21–22. They also continued to emphasize the importance of faith in the personal appropriation of the gospel, whether heard in a crowd or individually.
120. The Council paid the Wittenbergers 100 Joachimstalern for their trouble. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 417, n. 36.
121. RB 16, fol. 109'.

122. Ibid., fol. 110.
123. See AOGA, vol. 5, p. 416.
124. Mayer, p. 126.
125. In March 1535 Wenzeslaus Linck wrote a letter to Friedrich Myconius in which he mentioned a report he had sent to Luther informing the Wittenberg reformer that the absolution controversy had flared up again in Nürnberg. Unfortunately, this report is not extant. AOGA, vol. 6, p. 166.
126. Ibid., pp. 62, l. 18–63, l. 5. Osiander explained that the laying on of hands along with the actual words of absolution themselves constituted the external sign of this sacrament. Ibid., pp. 64, l. 20–66, l. 2. It seems clear from this statement that confessors in St. Lorenz Church continued this practice even though the Council had forbidden it in 1533. (See Chapter 6, p. 135.) Osiander also discussed the laying on of hands in his treatise on the keys. See AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 486, l. 26–488, l. 5.
127. Osiander preached his sermons on August 13, 15, 20, and 22.
128. AOGA, vol. 6, p. 170, ll. 8–12.
129. Ibid., p. 184, ll. 18–27. It should be noted that Osiander conceded that the character of a confessor did not affect the validity of his absolution. Ibid., pp. 170, l. 31–171, l. 11. A good portion of the sermon against general absolution was given over to explaining why the evangelical understanding of the keys required no coercion, as had been the case under the papacy.
130. Ibid., p. 181, ll. 19–22, 30.
131. Ibid., pp. 182, l. 30–183, l. 3.
132. “And how can distressed consciences be consoled and stilled with such deception [*gauckhlerey*]? If the confessor does not know what he does, how shall they [i.e., the distressed consciences] know? If they are to decide for themselves, what need have they of the confessor?” AOGA, vol. 6, p. 183, ll. 18–22.
133. As *Kirchenpfleger* Baumgartner took up many of the tasks for which men like Sebald Schreyer had been responsible before the Reformation. Baumgartner oversaw the daily administrative needs of the city’s churches and also held authority over the College of Preachers to which Nürnberg’s leading theologians belonged. See Günther Petsch, *Das Nürnberger protestantische Kirchenrecht der reichsstädtischen Zeit: Eine kirchenrechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Düren-Rhld.: Max Danielewski, 1933), pp. 37ff.
134. AOGA, vol. 6, p. 166. For a discussion of the several clashes that occurred between Baumgartner and Osiander, see Gunter Zimmermann, “Hieronimus Baumgartner und Andreas Osiander: Zwei politische Positionen der reformatorischen Bewegung in Nürnberg,” *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 46 (1986): 63–81.
135. RV 866, fol. 16’, from August 25, 1536.
136. Dixon, p. 160.
137. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 147.
138. Osiander had sent Dietrich a letter assuring him that he in no way meant to attack his reputation in his sermon against general absolution. Ibid., p. 156.

139. Ibid., pp. 157–158.
140. See RV 866, fol. 28, from September 4, 1536.
141. The Council ordered that Melanchthon should be given twelve measures (*kandeln*) of wine and be honorably received into the city's hostel. RV 868, fol. 14', from October 20, 1536.
142. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 159.
143. "De absolute ad Noriberg." See NStaatsA, HS 415, fols. 107–110, and CR, vol. 3, pp. 173ff.
144. Melanchthon insisted that it was Zwinglian to abolish private confession. HS 415, fol. 107.
145. Ibid., fol. 107'.
146. Melanchthon left the Council with the following ten questions: "(1) Whether private absolution was established by the words 'if your brother sins against you, etc.' [Matthew 18:15–20], or whether the same words speak of a general exhortation outside of this office? Or whether the same words refer to the authority and discipline of the church, through which a lapsed person may obtain forgiveness of sins via other means? (2) Whether private absolution is necessary in such a way that, generally speaking, the lapsed person may be helped by no other means? (3) Whether lapsed people may also obtain forgiveness of sins from God through a public sermon and whether, after hearing the public sermon, it suffices for them to repent and believe? (4) Whether general absolution is ever efficacious [*krefftig*]? (5) Whether the condition of faith and sorrow makes either general or private absolution uncertain? (6) Whether such an absolution [i.e., general or private] is somehow different from a sermon? (7) Whether the power of the keys is rendered useless if the servant does not distinguish with certainty between whom he should bind or loose? (8) Whether it is necessary for someone who desires private absolution to promise beforehand to amend his ways? (9) Whether forgiveness of venial or daily sin should be sought from the clergy [*Kirchendiener*]; whether [forgiveness] is also acquired from the power of the keys or in other ways? (10) Whether the power of the keys is for use only with post-baptismal sins?" HS 415, fol. 109'.
147. Ibid., fol. 109.
148. Melanchthon remained very concerned about Nürnberg's absolution controversy and shortly after his return to Wittenberg wrote to Dietrich urging the Nürnberg preacher to keep him informed about it. CR, vol. 3, pp. 185ff.
149. RV 869, fol. 6, from November 6, 1536. The Council also ordered its preachers not to discuss absolution in their sermons and to instruct their chaplains to continue administering the forgiveness of sins in the usual way (i.e., through general and private absolution).
150. The Council asked the Wittenbergers to show Osiander from the Scriptures where he was wrong. NStaatsA, BB 114, fol. 2'.
151. The Wittenberg letter is dated November 28, 1536. WABr, vol. 7, p. 594.
152. "The sum and basis of this conflict rests on this article." Ibid., p. 595.
153. The Council had decided on December 7 to await a further answer from Lu-

- ther and his colleagues. It had also instructed Baumgartner to show the Wittenberg letter to Pömer and Dietrich. RV 870, fol. 8, from December 7, 1536.
154. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 161.
 155. *Ibid.*
 156. See Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, pp. 42–44.
 157. See Samuel L. Sumberg, *The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 178–179.
 158. Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 43.
 159. Robert Scribner discusses this explanation in his article “Reformation, Carnival, and the World Turned Upside-Down,” in Ingrid Bátor, ed., *Städtische Gesellschaft und Reformation* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1980), p. 253.
 160. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
 161. The illustrations reproduced here come from an anonymous *Schembartbuch* in the Nürnberg Stadtbibliothek (Nor. K. 444), which Sumberg dates to the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Sumberg also discusses other *Schembartbücher* that date much closer to the final parade in 1539. Sumberg, pp. 14–20, 25.
 162. According to Sumberg, both artisans and those of honorable families participated in the *Schembartlauf*. See Sumberg, p. 60. Presumably artisans handled the construction of the floats while both classes participated as actors (*Läufer*) in the parade.
 163. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
 164. *Ibid.* See also AOGA, vol. 5, p. 387, l. 7. Osiander did not condemn the use of astrology and medicine to predict and treat plagues. But he insisted that the primary reason for the pestilence was sin and therefore the most effective means of opposing it was repentance and loving service to those who had been stricken. See AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 390, l. 30–391, l. 4; 391, l. 18–392, l. 1; 393, ll. 3–7.
 165. The Nürnberg chronicler who recorded this event attributed the crowd’s violence especially to Osiander’s sermons about the office of the keys. Georg Ernst Waldau, *Neue Beyträge zur Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, vol. 2 (Nürnberg, 1790), p. 263.
 166. Spengler also asserted in a letter to Dietrich that many Nürnbergers had read Osiander’s treatise. Mayer, p. 130.
 167. Scribner, “Carnival,” p. 236. For an illustration of the 1523 *Schembart* runner who wore a costume covered with indulgences, see Sumberg, p. 219, fig. 20.
 168. Scribner discusses twenty-two such uses of carnival during the Reformation, seventeen of which occurred between 1520 and 1525. “Carnival,” p. 234.
 169. Waldau, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, p. 263.
 170. The Council temporarily dismissed one patrician, Jakob Muffel, from his

seat on the Council and threw another, Joachim Tetzl, in the tower. See Waldau, *Neue Beyträge*, p. 264, and Wilhelm Möller, *Andreas Osiander: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld, 1870), p. 188.

8. Confession Established

1. Bernhard Klaus has argued that toward the end of 1539 Osiander attacked Veit Dietrich's view of absolution, causing the latter to appeal to Melanchthon for vindication. See *Dietrich*, pp. 163–168. More recently, Gottfried Seebaß has challenged Klaus's assertion by noting that while Dietrich did present his views on absolution to Melanchthon, he made no mention of having been assailed by Osiander. More important, Seebaß observed that the RV records make no mention of the absolution controversy having broken out again in 1539 or any time thereafter. This means that even if there was a conflict between Osiander and Dietrich as Klaus maintained, it never became a matter of public concern. Dietrich and Osiander did apparently disagree over the wording of the Nürnberg formula for general absolution, even though they both opposed it, but Seebaß rightly maintains that the relevant correspondence between Melanchthon, Dietrich, and Osiander makes no reference to a serious conflict between the latter two about absolution. (Melanchthon responded to the two theologians' disagreement over the wording of Nürnberg's formula for general absolution by sending Dietrich two alternative formulas, one written by Luther, the other by himself. See Strobel, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 387–390. Neither was ever used in the imperial city.) As Seebaß points out, Dietrich followed Osiander's lead by choosing not to include a form for general confession and absolution in his 1543 *Agendbüchlein für die Pfarrherren auf dem Land*. The two Nürnberg theologians were allies, not opponents, in the battle over absolution in the imperial city. See *Osiander*, pp. 260–261.
2. Osiander earlier complained in his treatise on the keys that laypeople rarely even registered for communion, which meant that pastors frequently had to consecrate new elements within the celebration of the Lord's Supper itself to accommodate the unanticipated communicants. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 459, ll. 5–12.
3. It should be noted that while private confession was the rule in much of Lutheran Germany, especially by the end of the sixteenth century, in some places, most notably Württemberg, it was rarely practiced. Regions in Upper Germany like Württemberg that were influenced by Reformed theology were much more hesitant to institute Lutheran private confession than were those areas that had little contact with Calvinism. Bezzel, pp. 96 and 48, n. 138.
4. RV 903, fol. 3', from May 9, 1539.
5. Waldau, *Neue Beyträge*, vol. 1, p. 71. Dietrich composed his report sometime in 1539 or 1540, but it was not published until 1541.

6. See Klaus, *Dietrich*, pp. 190–210.
7. In 1542 Veit Dietrich published a treatise entitled *Wie man das volck zur Buß und ernstlichem gebet wider den Türcken auff der Cantzel vermanen sol* in which he asserted that impiety was “the well and source out of which the Turk and all his misfortune has arisen.” Quoted in Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 192.
8. Unfortunately, the exhortation is not extant.
9. RV 958, fol. 32', from July 11, 1543, and RB 21, fol. 230'.
10. AOGA, vol. 8, pp. 118–119. In his sermon Osiander defended the right of preachers to demand spiritual progress from their congregations. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.
11. See Seebaß, *Osiander*, p. 261.
12. RV 960, fol. 22, from August 30, 1543.
13. It is interesting to note, however, that one year later the Council approved a new edition of Dietrich's 1543 *Agendbüchlein für die Pfarrherrn auf dem Land*, which allowed rural pastors to use the small ban. See Chapter 9, p. 205, for a discussion of the circumstances that produced Dietrich's church order.
14. See Franz Lau and Ernst Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany to 1555*, trans. Brian A. Hardy (London: Black, 1969), pp. 173–175.
15. RV 981, fol. 13, from March 26, 1545.
16. AOGA, vol. 8, p. 335, ll. 5–10.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 336, ll. 16–19.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 337, ll. 15–16, and 338, ll. 6–13.
19. RV 990, fol. 34, from December 12, 1545.
20. Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 487–553.
21. W. Germann, *D. Johann Forster der hennebergische Reformator* (published by author, 1894), pp. 374–375.
22. Pömer died on January 7, 1541. Forster was not referred to as a provost (*Probst*), but as the administrator of the St. Lorenz provostship (*Probsteiverwalter*). Pömer was the last Nürnberger to hold the traditional title. Germann, p. 354.
23. NGL, vol. 1, pp. 451–455.
24. Germann, p. 353.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
27. See Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 395–397.
28. It should be noted that Osiander later provided an instruction booklet on confession for the laity in the Palatinate-Neuburg churches. He had been instrumental in establishing the Reformation in this region. See AOGA, vol. 8, pp. 112–115.
29. See Sehling, vol. 13, pp. 390–391, 403–404.
30. Lay Regensburgers did later push for confession to take place on Sunday mornings, when it was more convenient for them, but the Council and the

- clergy refused their demand, arguing that it would be impossible for confessors to examine and absolve all communicants properly in the short time allotted before the Sunday liturgy. Leonhard Theobald, *Die Reformationsgeschichte der Reichsstadt Regensburg*, pt. 2 (Nürnberg: Die Egge, 1951), pp. 23–24. Theobald specifically contrasts the firm Regensburg position on confession with the weaker one of Nürnberg, which, he argues, was partially to blame for the conflict that city experienced.
31. Sehling observed of the Regensburg emphasis on private confession and its special Vesper service, “the whole conflict with Osiander would not have occurred had there been something similar in Nürnberg.” See Sehling, vol. 13, p. 370.
 32. CR, vol. 5, pp. 871–872.
 33. Sehling, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 514–517, 554–555.
 34. See, e.g., the 1542 *Constitution und artickel des geistlichen consistorii zu Wittenberg*, in Sehling, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 202. Other church orders that only provided for private confession and absolution included the 1539 *Kirchenordnung zum anfang, für die pfarherrn in herzog Heinrichs zu Sachsen fürstenthum* (ibid., p. 271), the 1539 *Kirchenordnung einem erbarh rath zu Leipzig zugestellt* (ibid., p. 539), the 1548 *Kirchenordnung der Fürsten Johann und Georg [von Anhalt]* (ibid., vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 554), the 1534 *Bericht des Superintendenten Schlaginhaußen über die von ihm in Cöthen beobachtete Gottesdienst-Ordnung* (ibid., p. 583), the 1534 *Kirchenordnung zu Hatzkerode* (ibid., p. 587), the 1540 *Kirchenordnung im churfürstenthum der marcken zu Brandenburg* (ibid., vol. 3, p. 50), the 1543 *Cristlike kerkenordeninge im lande Brunschwig* (ibid., vol. 6, pt. 1, p. 65), the 1564 *Kirchenordnung zu Fusttenthumb und Stadt Lüenberg* (ibid., p. 542), the 1536 *Kirchenordnung der statt Hannover durch D. Urbanum Regium* (ibid., vol. 6, pt. 2, p. 1005), and the 1539 *Ordnung der Christlichen Kirchen zucht, Für die Kirchen im Fürstenthumb Hessen* (ibid., vol. 8, p. 109).
 35. Sehling, vol. 3, p. 60. This guide for worship and doctrine was based on the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order.
 36. See, e.g., the 1537–1538 *Kirchenordnung für die St. Wenzelkirche zu Naumburg* (Sehling, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 78), the 1540–1541 *Ordeninge der misse, wo de van den kerckheren unde seelsorgern im lande zu Meckelnborch, im fürstendom Wenden, Swerin, Rostock und Stargharde schal gehalten werden* (ibid., vol. 5, pp. 150–151), the 1555 *Ordnung der ceremonien in der pfarkirchen zu Sant Georgen der statt Nordlingen* (ibid., vol. 12, p. 318), and the 1545 *Forma. Wie vom hailigen Tauf, und dem H. Sacrament des Leibs und Bluts Christ . . . zu reden sei. Gestellt in die Kirch und Gemaind Christi, der Stat Augsburg* (ibid., pp. 86–87). It is fair to assume that even in these cases the clergy still attempted to follow the stipulations of the Augsburg Confession by making private confession and absolution available to those parishioners who desired it.
 37. See, e.g., the 1545 *Cellische Ordnungen* (Sehling, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 297), the

- 1552 *Kirchenordnung, so in unsern, Johan Albrechts, von gottes gnaden herzogen zu Meckelnburg, fürsten zu Wenden, graven zu Swerin, der lande Rostock und Stargard herrn, fürstenthunen und landen sol gehalten werden* (ibid., vol. 5, pp. 175, 197), and the 1553 *Christliche kirchenordnung der grauschaft Hohenlohe* (ibid., vol. 15, pp. 64–71).
38. Lutherans and Catholics were unable to come to an understanding on the role of faith in justification.
 39. See Gustav Bub, *Die Politik des Nürnberger Rates während des Interims* (Nerchau i. Sa.: B. Noack, 1924), p. 8.
 40. The Council referred to the Interim as the “Restitution,” presumably of papal rule. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 274.
 41. The pope, against the emperor’s wishes, had removed the Council of Trent to Bologna and then accused Charles of complicity in the assassination of his son, who was also the father-in-law of Charles’s biological daughter, Margaret.
 42. The Catholic framers of the Interim were Julius Pflug, bishop of Naumburg; Michael Holding, bishop of Mainz; Pedro de Sots, Charles V’s confessor; Pedro de Malvenda, Charles V’s palace preacher; and Johann Müllich, King Ferdinand’s palace preacher.
 43. Article 17 of the Interim addressed the sacrament of penance. See Joachim Mehlhausen, ed., *Das Augsburger Interim von 1548: Nach den Reichstagsakten, deutsch und lateinisch*. Texte zur Geschichte der evangelischen Theologie, Heft 3 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), pp. 82–84.
 44. Ibid., pp. 82, ll. 3–4 (German), and 83, ll. 2–3 (Latin).
 45. “For as soon as the sinner truly repents of his sins and in faith approaches the throne of mercy and believes that he receives in the sacrament what Christ promised [in John 20:22], it happens as he believes.” Mehlhausen, pp. 82, ll. 7–11, and 83, ll. 6–8.
 46. Ibid., pp. 82, l. 21, and 83, l. 18.
 47. RsB 24, fols. 225’–226.
 48. Ibid., fols. 232–232’. Melancthon had recently fallen into disfavor with the emperor when imperial agents intercepted letters he had written to Dietrich that were critical of the Interim. The Council later asked Dietrich for these letters, wanting to avoid further conflict with the emperor. Much to its chagrin, the Council would later learn that Dietrich had been in correspondence with Brenz about the Interim, the latter theologian having been deposed from his office by the emperor for his criticism of the new church order.
 49. AOGA, vol. 8, p. 523, ll. 3–5.
 50. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 276.
 51. Osiander preached against the Interim on June 10, 1548. When confronted by the Council for his disobedience, the St. Lorenz preacher explained that he simply could not avoid railing against the Interim because it contained so much that was offensive to the gospel. He said he would do so again in the

- future and was prepared to sacrifice his post if it came to that. The magistrates were not yet ready to take him up on his offer. Bub, p. 23.
52. Ibid., p. 13.
 53. On June 3, Hieronymus Baumgartner expressed his opinion to the Council concerning the Interim that “in it are contained so many burdensome articles that almost the whole of papal religion is reestablished, with the exception that clerical marriage and communion in both kinds are to be tolerated until a general council.” Bub, p. 12.
 54. The theologians were also shown Melanchthon’s and Brenz’s written opinions. RV 1024, fol. 34, from June 18, 1548.
 55. The emperor had threatened to interrogate each of the Nürnberg’s Council members individually about the Interim and then occupy the city with his troops. On the same day the imperial commission arrived, a messenger from nearby Windsheim reported to the Council that imperial troops were waiting to occupy his city if it did not accept the Interim. The messenger wanted to know what Nürnberg was going to do. Bub, pp. 14, 19.
 56. Dietrich had preached a fiery sermon against the increase of grain prices in the city in which he had implicated the Council. Klaus, *Dietrich*, pp. 201, 261–272.
 57. Bub, p. 18.
 58. The Council received a written opinion from Osiander between July 12 and 14 (AOGA, vol. 8, pp. 563–616) and another joint report from Friedrich Pistorious, George Löffelat, Leonhard Culmann, Blasius Stöckl, Hieronymus Stöckl, and Osiander on August 2 (AOGA, *ibid.*, pp. 623–640).
 59. See, e.g., RV 1026, fols. 10’–11, from July 30, 1548; RV 1026, fol. 22’, from August 6, 1548.
 60. AOGA, vol. 8, p. 638, ll. 19–21.
 61. Ibid., p. 639, ll. 1–4.
 62. François Fegeli de Seedorf (1691–1758), a doctor of theology at the University of Ingolstadt, once asserted that Nürnberg’s leading theologians asked Charles V to help them reinstitute private confession in their city as a brake against immorality. See *Lettres sur Divers Points de Controverse Contenant les Principaux Motifs qui ont déterminé Son Altesse Serenissime Monseigneur Le Prince Frédéric Comte Palatin du Rhin . . .* (Mannheim, 1749), pp. 346–347. Waldau was correct to refer to Seedorf’s claim as a *Legende*, as there are no sources to support it. See *Vermischte Beyträge*, p. 15. The extant records suggest that Nürnberg’s theologians wanted no part of the Catholic version of confession throughout the Reformation era.
 63. RV 1026, fol. 22, from August 6, 1548.
 64. RsB 24, fols. 300’–313.
 65. Bub, p. 48. Osiander had preached absolute fidelity to God’s Word, which, in his mind, excluded making concessions to the emperor. The Council was very angry with the St. Lorenz preacher because it had already assured him and his colleagues that it would never require literal observance of the In-

- terim, a fact he had largely ignored in his sermon. Osiander polarized his colleagues on the issue, causing several of them to reconsider their earlier commitment to cooperate with the Council.
66. Culmann had studied at Erfurt and Leipzig and had taught in the Bamberg cathedral school. He had also occupied various clerical offices in Ansbach and Nürnberg before becoming a preacher in Crailsheim. He took over the St. Sebald preachership after Dietrich's death, but was forced to leave this post in 1555 in connection with his views on Osiander's soteriology. He occupied several other preacherships before his death in 1562. NGL, vol. 1, pp. 228–232. Löffelat had previously served in Poppenreuth. RsB 24, fol. 305'.
 67. RsB 24, fols. 300'–306'.
 68. Besold, a native Nürnberger, had gone to the St. Sebald Latin school where Sebaldus Heyden was his teacher. He later studied under Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg. In addition to his posts at the New Hospital Church, he also taught at the St. Egidien gymnasium. In 1548 he married Osiander's daughter, Catharina. He later briefly occupied his father-in-law's former office in St. Lorenz Church before his death on November 4, 1562. NGL, vol. 1, pp. 108–109.
 69. RsB 24, fols. 306–309'.
 70. NGL, vol. 3, p. 780.
 71. NGL, vol. 4, pp. 83–87.
 72. RsB 24, fols. 310–312.
 73. RV 1026, fol. 30', from August 10, 1548. (Also cited in AOGA, vol. 8, pp. 628–629, n. 28.)
 74. The document may be found in ARA 24, item 5, fols. 169–170'.
 75. Ibid., fol. 170.
 76. The Council allowed for several classes of people to ignore the new fasting regulations: manual laborers, drifters, pregnant women, unweaned children, and old and weak people. Ibid., fol. 170'.
 77. Bub, p. 18.
 78. The Nürnberg letter also advised the Windsheim Council to deal gently with those people who were reluctant to observe the new holidays and fast days, as these were simply “worldly commands.” RB 24, fol. 159.
 79. CR, vol. 7, from September 3, 1548. Cited in Bub, p. 32.
 80. A conference of evangelical cities in the north led by Braunschweig wanted advice from southern Lutheran cities on how to handle the Interim. Fining had been commissioned to visit Nürnberg and other leading evangelical strongholds and then report back to the conference. AOGA, vol. 8, pp. 653–654.
 81. Ibid., pp. 658, l. 5–659, l. 2.
 82. Ibid., pp. 659, l. 14–660, l. 3.
 83. RsB 24, fols. 315'–317'.
 84. The chaplains reported that “the crowd [*hauff*] of weekly communicants is very large.” RsB 24, fol. 316.

85. Ibid., fol. 316'.
86. Ibid., fol. 317.
87. Ibid.
88. RB 24, fol. 144.
89. They also recommended that those chaplains who served as confessors should be relieved of other duties like singing and reading that would distract them from properly examining and absolving communicants. Students in Nürnberg's Latin school were to take up those duties that the chaplains would no longer be able to perform. RsB 24, fol. 319. The Council did not accept this suggestion. RB 24, fol. 160.
90. RV 1028, fol. 14, from October 2, 1548. For a slightly different version of this document, see "Was eines Ehrbaren Raths dieser Stadt Nürnberg Bedencken gewesen, die alten Ceremonien in ihrer Ehrbarkeit wieder aufzurichten," in Carl Christian Hirsch, *Geschichte des Interim zu Nürnberg* (Leipzig, 1750), pp. 153–157. Unfortunately, Hirsch does not provide information about the source of his version, so I have followed the one present in the RV.
91. RV 1028, fol. 14, from October 2, 1548.
92. RB 24, fols. 160–160'. The entry is dated October 29, 1548.
93. RV 1029, fol. 27', from November 5, 1548, and RB 24, fol. 161.
94. RB 24, fols. 161–162'.
95. This new church order was not the Augsburg Interim; it was a compromise drawn up in Ansbach to placate the emperor. See Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 325–331 and AOGA, vol. 8, p. 671, n. 2.
96. See AOGA, vol. 9, pp. 422–447.
97. His name was Hieronymus Rauscher. Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 294.
98. The city's jurists had advised the Council, "if you accept the Interim you must be prepared for a general revolt [*eines gemeinen Aufruhrs*]." Bub, p. 28. See also Bub, sec. II, chap. 2, "Schwierigkeiten des Rates mit der Bürgerschaft," pp. 62–67.
99. Hans Sachs, *Das Interim*, in Keller and Goetze, vol. 32, pp. 439–445.
100. See Chapter 5, pp. 99–101.
101. RB 24, fol. 182'. Also cited in Bub, p. 63.
102. Albrecht was the son of Casimir, who had preceded George the Pious as the margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach. The latter had served as regent for Albrecht during his minority and then granted him his inheritance (Kulmbach) in 1541. Albrecht was a self-proclaimed Catholic who wanted to enforce the Interim in its entirety. Dixon, pp. 26, 50–51.
103. On the so-called Margrave's Wars, see Strauss, *Nuremberg*, pp. 184–186; Leder, p. 124; and Gerhard Hirschmann, "Die zweite Nürnberger Kirchenvisitation 1560/61," *ZbKg* 32 (1963): 111–132.
104. It should be noted that Lutherans in northern Germany resisted the Interim far more ferociously than did their counterparts in the south, who were more firmly under the imperial thumb. In Albertine Saxony Lutherans negotiated their own version of the imperial church order—the so-called Leipzig In-

- terim—that required little more than the wearing of surplices by the clergy. In Ernestine Saxony and the rest of the north, resistance was nearly total. Cameron, p. 347.
105. See Lau and Bizer, pp. 226–228.
 106. RB 27, fol. 38'. For a more detailed statement of the preachers' position, see "Schrift der Herren Predicanten an einem ehrbarn weisen Rath um Abstellung des Interim," in Hirsch, pp. 192–198.
 107. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 197a, ll. 25–29, and "Ordnung bei den kranken," pp. 199b–200a.
 108. RB 27, fol. 39.
 109. Ibid., fol. 40.
 110. There were other evangelical cities that waited until the Interim to enforce Lutheran private confession. On the decision of the Nördlingen Council to implement private confession during the Interim, see Sehling, vol. 12, pp. 278–279; Dan. Eberh. Dolp, *Gründlicher Bericht von dem alten Zustand und erfolgter Reformation der Kirchen in . . . Nördlingen* (Nördlingen, 1738), Anhang LVII; StadtANö, Signatur R39, F9, Nr. 2, section entitled "Von Beicht und antzaigenn," in "Der Statt Nordlingen Neue Kirchenordnung durch ain Erbarn Rat auß Christenlichen und Notwendigen bedennckhen gestelt und furgenommen. 1548." On the discussion between the two imperial cities about the Interim, including private confession, see BB 40, fols. 121'–123; RV 1026, fols. 6–6', from Saturday, July 28, 1548; StadtANö, Signatur R39, F9, Nr. 12, Interim, fol. 132'. For a general treatment of the Reformation in Nördlingen, see Hans-Christoph Rublack, *Eine bürgerliche Reformation: Nördlingen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982).
 111. The Council instructed the clergy to continue giving penitential and catechetical sermons after vespers. It also prohibited wedding dances, which it thought incurred divine wrath owing to their riotous atmosphere. RB 27, fols. 40–40'.
 112. The city's theologians believed that God had punished the city for adopting the Interim and now required repentance from Nürnbergers before he would bless them again. Hirsch, p. 197.

9. Propaganda and Practice

1. *Luther's House*, p. 146. Earlier in the same work Strauss argued, "*Pietas*—dutiful conduct motivated by reverence willingly given to God, parents, and others in positions of sovereignty—*pietas* was the salient attribute of the evangelical youth. Its essence was unquestioning and unqualified submissiveness." See Strauss, *ibid.*, p. 138.
2. See Andreas Althamer, *Katechismus* (1528), in Cohrs, *Die evangelischen Katechismusversuche*, p. 18.
3. Klaus Leder has observed that "the story of schools in the sixteenth century is the story of the catechumenate." *Kirche und Jugend*, p. 86.

4. Steven Ozment has also used the *Children's Sermons* to refute Strauss's interpretation of evangelical catechetical literature. I am indebted to him for drawing my attention to this source. See Ozment, *Protestants*, pp. 104–117. For another treatment of Osiander's catechism, see Haemig, "Communication, Consolation and Discipline," pp. 30–48.
5. AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 191–196, and Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 123–125.
6. See D. G. Selwyn, ed., *A Catechism Set Forth by Thomas Cranmer* (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978), p. 26.
7. Strauss, *Luther's House*, p. 210.
8. *Ibid.* Cf. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 308, ll. 10–28.
9. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 269, ll. 12–13.
10. Strauss, *Luther's House*, p. 211.
11. Cameron, p. 115. Strauss was certainly aware of Osiander's intention to prepare his auditors for grace by preaching the law. (See Strauss, *Luther's House*, p. 212.) Nor did he doubt that Osiander attempted to be sensitive to the emotional needs of his listeners when discussing human depravity—indeed, Strauss thought this sensitivity may well have contributed to auditors' passive reception of his message. Immediately following the above-cited quotation about how Osiander's comments on sin cause modern readers to wince, Strauss wrote, "Their effect on the sixteenth-century audience is of course another matter. But it is not unreasonable to suppose that they made some sort of impression, being presented—as I have already emphasized, and as their place in the full text of the sermons makes clear—not in a voice raging with fire and brimstone, but in tones of infinite patience and loving solicitude for the spiritual well-being of the flock. Osiander was not unsympathetic to the sensibilities of his listeners; far from it." Strauss saw a human side to Osiander's sermons but still thought their ultimate effect was negative, owing to their alleged focus on human depravity. See Strauss, *ibid.*, p. 211.
12. AOGA, vol. 5, pp. 269, l. 10–270, l. 14.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 213, l. 27–215, l. 22.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 216, ll. 5–9. This sermon is also cited in Ozment, *Protestants*, p. 115.
15. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 202, ll. 8–20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 205, ll. 5–8.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 304, ll. 37–40.
18. Osiander utilized the explanations of the various parts of the catechism found in Luther's *Small Catechism*, except in his sermon on the keys (*Vom ampt der schlüssel*). As Mary Jane Haemig explains, "Though Osiander puts it [i.e., the sermon on the keys] at the same place where Luther places an order for confessing in his *Small Catechism*, Osiander's sermon is not based on or explicitly connected to that part of the *Small Catechism*. In every other sermon the preacher repeats Luther's explanation of the part (from the *Small Catechism*) at the beginning and end of the sermon and has

the congregation repeat it after him at the end. Near the beginning of the sermon ‘On the Office of the Keys’ the congregation is asked to repeat a scripture passage, John 20:22–3. The brief explanation stated by the preacher and repeated by the congregation at the end is not Luther’s, but Osiander’s.” Haemig, p. 36. The explanation to which Haemig refers ran, “I believe that when the divinely-called servants of Christ deal with us [*mit uns handlen*] on the basis of Christ’s divine command, especially when they exclude open, unrepentant sinners from the Christian community and when they again absolve those who repent and desire to improve themselves, that this [binding and loosing] is as powerful and certain in heaven as if our dear Lord Christ himself were dealing with us [*als handelte es unser lieber herr Christus selbs*].” AOGA, vol. 5, p. 326, ll. 26–30. Haemig asserts, “This explanation was printed in many later editions of Luther’s *Small Catechism* and came to be part of instruction in many Lutheran churches.” Haemig, p. 36, n. 20.

19. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 319, ll. 13–17.
20. Ibid., pp. 323, l. 34–324, l. 3.
21. Ibid., pp. 325, l. 29–326, l. 14.
22. See Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 366.
23. It should be noted that Dietrich believed that laypeople could absolve each other but only in time of extreme need. Unlike his colleague, the St. Sebald preacher also insisted that absolution required faith to be effective. Dietrich wrote in his catechism, “When your sins frighten you, you should go to a pastor or, in times of necessity, to another Christian, who has been commanded by Christ to speak to you forgiveness of all your sins, provided that you believe it from your heart.” Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 359.
24. The work was entitled *Den knaben und maidlein, so teutsch leren, frag und antwort uber die epistel S. Paulus zu Tito* (Nürnberg, 1533). See Leder, p. 80. As many as 4,000 boys and girls attended Nürnberg’s German schools each year. See Matthias Wilhelm Senger, ed., *Leonhard Culmann: A Literary Biography and an Edition of Five Plays as a Contribution to the Study of Drama in the Age of the Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1982), p. 24.
25. Two Latin schools were attached to the St. Sebald and St. Lorenz churches and two others to the Heilig-Geist-Spital and the St. Egidien monastery. As of 1526 Nürnberg also had a humanist *Gymnasium* founded by Philip Melancthon, the first of its kind in Germany.
26. Sebaldus Heyden, *Catechistica summula fidei christianae* (Nürnberg, 1538). Heyden dedicated his catechism to Veit Dietrich. It was published by Johann Petrium. Houghton, C1012.2.
27. Heyden, fol. a7’.
28. By contrast Heyden taught that baptism and the Lord’s Supper were both a *sacramentum*. Ibid., fols. a5, a6’.
29. Ibid., fol. a8’.

30. Ibid., fol. b1.
31. Ibid., fol. b2.
32. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 244, ll. 19–21.
33. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 172.
34. *Kinder Postilla Uber die Sontags / und der fürnembsten Text Euangelia / durch das gantze Jar. Gestellt durch M. Vitum Dietrich / Prediger zu Nürnberg* (Nürnberg, 1565), p. 107. NSB Amb. 1224.4o. The first edition appeared in 1546. See Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 7, no. 17.
35. *Kinder Postilla*, p. 107.
36. Veit Dietrich, *Agendbüchlein*, in Sehling, vol. 11, p. 549a.
37. AOGA, vol. 5, p. 144, ll. 14–15.
38. Sehling, vol. 11, p. 481.
39. Ibid., p. 482.
40. Ibid., pp. 483, 124.
41. Ibid., p. 529a.
42. Ibid., p. 530b.
43. See Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, pp. 98–99.
44. *Ein Christenlich Teütsch Spil / wie ein Sünder zür Büß bekärt wirdt / Von der sünd Gsetz und Euangelion / zügericht und gehalten zü Nürnberg Durch Lienhard Culman*, in Senger, pp. 255–328.
45. Culmann did not take over Dietrich's preachership until 1546.
46. Senger, p. 159.
47. Ibid., p. 170.
48. Ibid., p. 280, ll. 564–568. See also p. 602, note on text line 568.
49. Ibid., pp. 280, l. 587–281, l. 594.
50. Ibid., p. 303, ll. 1117–1119.
51. Ibid., p. 304, ll. 1186–1187.
52. Lutheran pastors were still occasionally referred to as priests, even though the term was associated with the old Church. See Sehling, vol. 11, pp. 186–188, for examples of how Osiander could use *Priester* along with the more typical *kirchendiener* to refer to the Lutheran clergy.
53. Senger, pp. 305, ll. 1218–1221, and 306, ll. 1232–1237.
54. RB, vols. 31–55 (1559–1597) make no reference to confession or any disturbances associated with it. By way of contrast, the RB records from the 1530s and 1540s have numerous entries about confession.
55. See, e.g., the anonymous *Feuerzeug Christlicher Andacht* (Nürnberg, 1537) and, especially, Christoph Lasius's *Ein Beychtbüchlein* (Nürnberg, ca. 1560). Absolution was also an important theme in Lutheran hymns in the second half of the sixteenth century. See, e.g., “Ein ander Gesang / von der Einsatzung deß Sacraments / Im Thon / Es sind doch selig alle die / usw. Durch Veit Dietrich,” in *Geistliche Lieder und Psalmen / D. Mart. Luth. und anderer frommen Christen / Nach ordnung der Jarzeyt. Auffß new zugerichtet und gemehrt mit etlichen schönen Geistlichen Liedern* (Nürnberg,

- berg, 1580), fol. 113', NSB, Will. 7.1190. See also "Ein Lied, vom ampt der Schlüssel, und krafft der heiligen Absolution," in Nicolaus Herman, *Die Sontags Evangelia über das gantze Jar, In Gesenge verfasst, Für die Kinder und Christlicher Hausveter* (1560). Herman's collection may be found in Phillip Wackernagel, ed., *Die Lieder des ersten Geschlechts der Reformationszeit: Von Martin Luther bis Nicolas Herman, 1523–1553*, vol. 3 of *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1870), p. 1183, item 1381. I am grateful to my colleague Christopher Brown for drawing my attention to this source. See also "Vom rechten gebrauch der Kirchen Schlüssel," in *Der Klaine Catechismus Caspar Löners* (Nördlingen, 1545), in Wackernagel, vol. 3, pp. 641–642, item 729.
56. Hans Sachs, *Ein faßnachtspiel mit 4 personen und wird gennet: Der grof eyferer, der sein weib beicht höret* (January 14, 1553), in Keller and Goetze, vol. 17, pp. 29–41.
 57. Religious officials in each town were to be asked if they were holding ceremonies according to the 1533 church order and Dietrich's *Agendbüchlein*, both of which required private confession. The visitors exhorted the pastor in Eschnaw that he should "practice private absolution with all diligence, as is the custom in the honorable Council's territory." See Gerhard Hirschmann, *Die Kirchenvisitation im Landgebiet der Reichsstadt Nürnberg 1560 und 1561* (Neustadt a.d. Aisch: In Kommission bei Degener, 1994), pp. 37 (art. 1) and 153.
 58. See, e.g., the report from Gräfenberg where the pastor had been using general confession instead of private. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
 59. The following towns were practicing private absolution, according to the records in Hirschmann: Grebern (p. 115), Petzenstein (p. 131), Feucht (p. 166), Imeldorf and Liechtenaw (p. 221), Sachsen (p. 228), and Puschen-dorff and Veitbrunn (p. 268). Several other communities claimed to hold services according to the established church orders but there was no specific mention of private absolution.
 60. See, e.g., the report from Grindlach where a man was using a formula that included a reference to the keys to bless his cows, thinking it would protect them from wolves. Hirschmann, *Kirchenvisitation*, p. 236.
 61. See the report from the pastor in Dennenlohe and Eltersdorf to this effect. *Ibid.*, p. 246. A 1558 visitation of the nearby region of Kulmbach discovered much the same. See the commission's report on the pastor in Melckendorf. NLKA, Markgräfliches Dekanat (Superintendentur) Kulmbach, Nr. 157, fol. 7.
 62. NLKA, Markgräfliches Dekanat Uffenheim, Nr. 8, item 148, fol. 7 (Gnotstadt, 1565). See also item 149, fol. 7 (Rudolfshouen, 1566).
 63. See the exhortation given to the pastor in Dennenlohe and Eltersdorf. Hirschmann, *Kirchenvisitation*, p. 260. Hans-Christoph Rublack has argued that such abuses in evangelical private confession rendered it useless as

a tool of social discipline. Laypeople did everything they could to avoid a rigorous examination of faith, thus making confession a means of cheap grace. The Lutheran ritual also did little to challenge unjust patterns of conduct: the rich never waited in long lines to be confessed but went ahead of the common folk. Evangelical private confession simply conformed to existing social structures. As Rublack maintains, “confession remained a rite of purification which did not compel the laity to change their lives.” Rublack, “Lutherische Beichte,” p. 134. Whether Lutheran private confession was intended to effect the kind of moral and social change Rublack assumes is, of course, debatable.

64. See, e.g., the recommendation given to the pastor in Petzenstein by the visitation commission. Hirschmann, *Kirchenvisitation*, pp. 144–146.
65. In a 1558 visitation of the nearby Dekanat of Uffenheim, officials were in the habit of referring to evangelical private confession as “the private examination and absolution” (*die privat Exploration und Absolution*). NLKA, Dekanat Uffenheim, Nr. 8, item 1, fol. 1'. See also item 148 (Cregligen), fol. 1.
66. Hirschmann, *Kirchenvisitation*, p. 196.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 41 (art. 5).
68. *Ibid.*, p. 42 (art. 12).
69. John Bossy, “The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25, ser. 5 (1975): 38.

Conclusion

1. The quotation comes from a letter Melanchthon wrote to Veit Dietrich on February 15, 1540. Cited in Klaus, *Dietrich*, p. 166.
2. See Seebaß, *Osiander*, pp. 254–273.
3. Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 300.
4. *Agendbüchlein*, in Sehling, vol. 11, p. 529a.

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