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Theory and Society

Renewal and Critique in Social Theory

ISSN 0304-2421

Volume 42

Number 2

Theor Soc (2013) 42:189-218

DOI 10.1007/s11186-013-9188-x

Volume 42 • Number 2 • March 2013

**THEORY
and
SOCIETY**

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Social Theory**

 Springer

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The true citizens of the city of God: the cult of saints, the Catholic social order, and the urban Reformation in Germany

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Published online: 12 March 2013
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Abstract Historical scholarship suggests that a robust cult of the saints may have helped some European regions to resist inroads by Protestantism. Based on a neo-Durkheimian theory of rituals and social order, I propose that locally based cults of the saints that included public veneration lowered the odds that Protestantism would displace Catholicism in sixteenth-century German cities. To evaluate this proposition, I first turn to historical and theoretical reflection on the role of the cult of the saints in late medieval history. I then test the hypothesis with a data set of sixteenth-century German cities. Statistical analysis provides additional support for the ritual and social order thesis because even when several important variables identified by materialist accounts of the Reformation in the social scientific literature the presence of shrines as an indicator for the cult of the saints remains large and significant. Although large-scale social change is usually assumed to have politico-economic sources, this analysis suggests that cultural factors may be of equal or greater importance.

Keywords Sociology of religion · Shrines · Rituals · Communal integration · Conflict

The Reformation was one of history's great episodes of a religiously-inspired social change. Beginning with Luther's public dissent in 1517, Protestant insurgents waged a struggle to "redeem" German cities by reforming them in line with their religious principles. These "Evangelicals"—so called because of their professed inspiration by and commitment to the authority of the Gospels alone (Schilling 1988)—demanded profound changes in liturgy and religious teaching and wanted to remake the civic constitution of society. Not surprisingly, Evangelical agitation sparked veritable "culture wars" between defenders of the Catholic establishment and professed reformers trying to pressure, "reluctant magistrates to dismantle the Catholic religious establishment" (Tracy 1999, p. 241; see also Edwards 1994; Heming 2003).

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Historians have shown that the primary locus of the Reformation as a movement for religious change was in the cities (Mörke 2005; Scribner 1986). Chartered German cities enjoyed substantial autonomy and were self-governing under their own councils. In the context of what Te Brake (1998) calls a distinctive “political space,” the coming of the Evangelical insurgency sparked by Luther made the cities an arena for religious and political contention. Although the experiences of cities are diverse, clear patterns can be discerned in that struggle. Carried on the shoulders of Evangelical students and broadcast through the pamphlet press and popular preaching, the Protestant challenge to the Roman Church generated local reform movements built around urban political coalitions (Kim and Pfaff 2012). These movements assailed the Catholic establishment, pressuring local elites to abolish the old order and institute a new religious regime. When such petitions failed, more radical confrontations often resulted and this led, ultimately, to the institution of reform or the defeat of the insurgency (Te Brake 1998, pp. 35–44)

While the dramatic confrontations between reformers and the defenders of the status quo have received much attention, less attention has been given to another outcome in which, as Te Brake (1998, p. 39) puts it, “popular support for religious reform remained scattered and the cooperation between reforming preachers and responsive laity was too fleeting.” Te Brake (1998, pp. 42–43) can only hint at why Evangelical insurgencies sometimes proved so feeble. Certainly, in some cities conservative forces enjoyed the help of powerful allies such as territorial prince-bishops or the Habsburg dynasty (see also Nexon 2009). However, they also prevailed in settings usually considered far less congenial to Catholicism and in which there was a seemingly favorable set of political opportunities for their challengers, such as in free and imperial cities and in regions whose territorial prince embraced Protestantism.

Although most of the larger German cities ultimately instituted reform during the period of study considered here (1517–1545), a substantial minority remained stubbornly resistant to Evangelical ideas, pro-reform agitation, and the obvious temptation of seizing ecclesiastical assets. Why were some urban populations more tightly bound to the Catholic order and thus less likely to embrace reform? Why did the Catholic social order sometimes prevail, even in the face of political and economic pressure?

These questions are of great importance for social science. Most work in the comparative and historical social sciences attributes the outcomes of large-scale movements for institutional change to political and economic factors (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). Interest-based theories would lead us to expect that the residents of Central European cities would have universally embraced reform. After all, Protestantism offered a simpler, more direct, and less expensive route to salvation, rationalized and unified civic administration, greater political autonomy, and the allure of seizing substantial ecclesiastical assets. In fact, the governments of most large towns ultimately did adopt the Reformation. Yet, as the economist Robert Ekelund has observed, theories predicated on economic or political incentives tend to over-predict reform (Ekelund et al. 2006, p. 120). What might explain why the Catholic social order proved more robust than our theories of contentious politics and religious economies would lead us to believe? Has the power of Catholic cultural institutions been underestimated or neglected? The analysis presented here demonstrates that cultural factors

mattered—in particular, the extent to which religious life of a city involved the veneration of local saints.

What is clear is that ecclesiastical and liturgical reform was not simply a religious question. Rather, reform was a matter of cultural and political contention since the sort of reforms demanded by Evangelicals could not be accommodated within existing institutions, prevailing customs, or established law (Pettegree 2005). When the Evangelicals triumphed in a locality, a new civic regime had to be established that swept away Catholic institutions and many features of everyday life.¹ In this sense, the Reformation can be interpreted not only in theological terms or historiographical terms, as has been done traditionally, but more broadly as the cultural disintegration of the traditional Catholic social order.

Religion, political culture, and the Reformation

In *Religion and Regime* (1967), Swanson offered a provocative theory of why some European societies adopted Protestantism while Catholicism prevailed in others. Based on a sample of sixteenth-century European societies, Swanson demonstrated a correlation between how divided power was in a society and its likelihood of adopting Protestantism. In attempting to explain the finding, he identified two expressions of political culture in late medieval Europe that reflected differing emphases in the understanding of God and the divine presence in the constitution of the polity. One conception was premised on “immanence,” that is, the presence of God in the material world. The other conception focused on the “transcendence” of God from the material world. In those polities in which members tended to see God as immanent, the divine was present not only in the Gospel and in the sacraments but in securing the communal welfare of the faithful. The presence of God and his agents in the community was akin to a supernatural “medicine” that endowed the group with salvific power. By contrast, the transcendental understanding was that God was present but in an interpersonal way; a supreme partner in a series of exchanges with faithful individuals (Swanson 1971, p. 427; see also Stark and Bainbridge 1987). Neither implied secularism because the believer should experience transcendent deity through devotion to Christ and be inspired by faith to goodly conduct and practice sound government.

In the “constitutions” of polities—by which Swanson meant both political culture and institutions of governance—the influence of these differing conceptions of the divine became increasingly pronounced in the early modern period. While immanent political cultures tended toward collectivism and authoritarianism, transcendental

¹ For instance, in the city of Nuremberg, Evangelicals mobilized popular demonstrations that openly targeted representatives of the pope and prominent monasteries, with the city council doing little to protect them from attack or violation (Strauss 1966). In 1525, the Evangelicals prevailed in the council. They abolished the Roman mass, expelled prominent defenders of orthodoxy, and prohibited members of monastic orders from preaching. Soon after, they pressured monasteries to dissolve and decreed that priests could be appointed only with the permission of the city government. Similarly, when followers of the Evangelical reformer Ulrich Zwingli won control of the city of Augsburg in the 1530s, the city council purged Catholic loyalists, abolished the Roman mass, and began to dissolve convents and monasteries (Locher 1979).

political cultures tended toward association and limited government. Whereas a worldview marked by the immanence of God demanded unity, obedience, and conformity to uphold the body of Christ and to achieve collective salvation, transcendence emphasized autonomy, the personal encounter with Christ, and a government of pious magistrates.

Swanson's Weberian study of religious mentalities thus finds affinities between religious-political worldviews and the different settlements of the great sixteenth-century religious conflicts (see also Kippenberg 2005). But a substantial problem with the thesis is that it is difficult to tease out causal relationships between the affinities he describes and the varying outcomes of the Reformation. How confident can we be about whether the different beliefs about God and community preceded the Reformation or were their effect (see, e.g., Gorski 2003)? A stronger version of the thesis would posit that pre-existing differences in religious-political culture increased the odds of Protestantism's adoption in a society. If so, then the Reformation cemented differences in the cultural constitution of societies that were already present in their collective life. This seems to be the position that Swanson (1971) wanted to defend in reaction to his critics. He later elaborated that: "Experiences of deity are generated by experiences of life and the action of a society, especially of the force of collective purposes and requirements in creating and directing the action of people as a society's agent.... Patterns of governance characteristic of social systems [i.e., communally integrated societies] make it seem that collective purposes are immanent in the social structure through which they are made articulate and then are implemented (Swanson 1986, pp. 1993–1994)."

What remain lacking in this conceptualization are concrete institutions that can be identified with a religious-political culture marked by immanence. I propose that the cult of the saints was a cultural institution that we can readily associate with an immanent religious-political culture. Historical accounts suggest that a robust cult of the saints may have helped some European regions to resist inroads by Protestantism (Beissel 1976; Sargent 1986; Soergel 1993; Weinstein and Bell 1982). A general argument along these lines was explicitly made by Rothkrug (1980). In considering the limits to Protestantism during the first decades of the Reformation, Rothkrug posited that early Evangelical inroads were resisted more effectively in areas where the cult of the saints was highly developed, such as in the Low Countries, the Rhineland, or the South.

Rothkrug's historical thesis, while encountering criticism (e.g., Sargent 1987), has been a touchstone for a number of important studies on the role of the saints, pilgrimage, and popular piety in the Reformation age (Heming 2003; Sargent 1986; Signori 1993, 1999; Soergel 1993; Volkmar 2002). Beyond its historiographical reception, his work is particularly interesting because he observed, based on a census of shrines, a negative correlation between the density of saints shrines and the regional institution of the German Reformation, whereby regions with few saints more commonly instituted reform. He admitted that the correlation was "unexpected" and offered a "profusion" of explanations to try to account for it (Rothkrug 1987, pp.144). However, as Rothkrug's work did not rely on a consistent unit of analysis and his study included no form of multivariate analysis, its provocative argument has had little impact on sociological research on social order and social change in early modern Europe.

Did a vibrant local cult of the saints help the Church to stave off Protestantism and, if so, why? In exploring the limits of the Reformation movement, this article builds

on the neo-Durkheimian theory of social order to develop the cult of saints thesis. I contend that in those cities in which the cult of the saints was locally established a specific kind of cultural institution buttressed the established Catholic order. The cultural power of the cult of saints has long been recognized. As Mecklin (1955, p. 50) observed, “There is no more powerful means of moral and spiritual education than that provided by an institution or a social setting in its dominant personalities.... The canonized spiritual leader of the past secures through the concrete symbolization of shrine and image, through music and ritual, an institutional setting that safeguards him against the inevitable revolutions of society.” In political struggle actors frequently employ cultural resources—particularly by placing in contention sacred objects associated with the constituted order (Pfaff and Yang 2001). This is especially true where political and religious authorities are intertwined, as they were in sixteenth century Europe.

Based on the theory of communal integration developed below, I propose that the greater the presence of local saints shrines in a city, the greater should have been the integration of population of that city into the Catholic order. Applied to explaining variation in urban reform, this yields a straightforward, testable hypothesis concerning the influence of the cult of the saints in helping to resist Protestantism in the cities: *The greater the per capita number of saints shrines in a city, the lower that city's odds of instituting the Reformation.* I evaluate the thesis in light of the role of the cult of the saints in late medieval history, which provides evidence that such cults reinforced the Catholic social order and helped to sustain popular attachment to the Church, and with an original data set of sixteenth-century German cities.

The German-speaking lands during this period provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate the proposition because there, as a result of the “Holy Roman Empire’s” (HRE) political, economic, and cultural decentralization, the urban Reformation became a broadly-based social movement.² Moreover, there is enough variation in the institution of Protestant reform in the cities to make the early Reformation (1517–1545) a good test of the thesis. Moreover, Central European cities of this period were unique in that they enjoyed varying levels of political independence and formal powers of self-government. In this context, cities had a substantial say in deciding their religious constitution and, as historians have shown, political contention and popular sentiments played an important role in that determination.³

Reconsidering the cult of the saints in the early modern age

In *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924) the eminent historian Johan Huizinga famously argued that the late medieval Church had, in its effort to cement the faith of the common people, fundamentally weakened its legitimacy, particularly with

² There is a rich historiography of the Protestant Reformation and the urban communes. While it impossible to review that historiography in any detail given the constraints of this article, the literature makes clear that the Reformation was primarily an urban event and that the cult of saints was bound up in the civic constitution of many German towns.

³ This study investigates the local fate of the Church prior to the outbreak of general religious warfare in 1545 and the subsequent “confessional age” in which new churches were firmly established by princely fiat (Gorski 2000, 2003).

theologians and the literate classes. He saw the Church as having been “heedless of the danger of the deterioration of the faith caused by the popular imagination roaming unchecked in the sphere of hagiology” (p. 149). Whereas the Church had been ruthless in its treatment of what it regarded as heresy, it proved “confiding and indulgent toward those who, sinning out of ignorance, rendered more homage to images than was lawful” (pp. 149–150).

Huizinga asserted that by the early sixteenth century the cult of the saints had few theological defenders and thus it readily collapsed. But his account may have missed a crucial distinction. Although it is true that the materialism, worldliness, and fantastic hagiography of the cult of the saints appear to have undermined its universal appeal and didactic value, one should draw a distinction between the universal and the local veneration of saints. Local saints, conceived of as communal patrons and protectors, may have retained their appeal even as the general cult of saintly intercessors gave way to direct intercession through Christ. In fact, in some regions the cult remained a part of everyday life rather than collapsing in the face of Protestant agitation and polemics (Beissel 1976, part II, p. 142).

The distinction between the local and the universal invites a rethinking of the cult of the saints on the eve of the Reformation struggle. In the medieval Christian tradition, saints are defined by their extraordinary virtues and possession of grace, that is, divine favor that bestows supernatural power on extraordinary servants of God. Evidence for saintliness resided, above all, in wonder-working power. Ordinary folk appealed to saints for healing, comfort, and all manner of worldly assistance and understood them as part of a heavenly aristocracy that was the “spiritual counterpart” to the earthly nobility (Rothkrug 1987, p. 145). The devotional practices associated with the cult of the saints united this and other-worldly concerns. As Kolb (1990, p. 613) observes, “the saints had been viewed as sources of holy power to protect and manipulate the lives of believers and to assure God’s mercy in eternity.” Theologians endorsed the worship of relics for fostering moral community and emotional congress with God. In 1418 Johannes Herolt, a Dominican preacher in Nuremberg, claimed that the bodies of the saints were “temples and instruments of the Holy Ghost dwelling in them and operating through them” and that those who denied them were heretics (Mecklin 1955, p. 48).

Saints fulfilled several roles including worldly assistance and spiritual intercession on behalf of faithful individuals, patronage, and symbols of communal authority (Wilson 1983). However, a distinction can be made between, on the one hand, the general veneration of saints—as in the prayers to saints believed to provide some special personal assistance or to the Virgin Mary—as celestial personages and intercessors and, on the other hand, localized cults centered on the collective veneration of tombs and relics of saints. What is particularly important in collective veneration is the role of saints as patrons and as expressions of legitimate civic authority. Communities regarded their saints as *local* heroes, “influential beings who offer help and protection to their clients,” involved actively in civic affairs and in pleading the city’s case in the court of Heaven (Webb 1993). Indeed, the saints helped to secure a place for the community in the order of the cosmos and served as a kind of dike protecting sinful communities from a flood of godly retribution. As the bishop Otto of Freising proclaimed, “the world could not long endure both by reason of the multitude of our sins and the shameful unrighteousness of this most unsettled

time, if it were not restored by the virtues of the saints, the true citizens of the City of God” (Rothkrug 1980, p. 43).

The cult of the saints was based in shrines, “a holy place housing the relics of a saint,” either “the actual tomb, often richly decorated, or to the building in which it was preserved” (King 1979, p. 664). Shrines were physical spaces where the sacred was tangible and holiness could be directly encountered by a saint’s devotees, making them the symbolic and emotional centers of communities. Beissel notes of the procession of relics in masses and festivals, “The medieval believers saw in their relics not only dead fragments of bone but rather also the person to whom the remains belonged being carried along” (Beissel 1976, part I, p. 3). Wilson (1983, p. 11) observes of late medieval laymen that “It was commonly believed, at the ‘popular’ level that, far from inhabiting any distant heaven, the saint remained present in his shrine.... Concomitantly, where the relics were absent, it might be difficult if not impossible to perceive any link with a saint.” As Burke (2009, p. 12) has observed of shrines in sixteenth century Europe, “the vast majority of these sacred spaces and monuments held meaning only for local citizens.” Placed in chapels, monasteries, or churches, they became focal points for the cultic veneration of the saints and, in the cities, a crucial feature of urban civic life. Rituals surrounding these shrines appear to be associated with emotional energy and psychological release; a telling indicator of this is that the cult of saints accounted not only for many festivals and celebrations but for the majority of reported miracles before the Reformation (Rothkrug 1987; Sargent 1986).

As premier memory sites, the shrines of saints belonged to the civic patrimony of a town and were among its greatest treasures. Carried onto the battlefield, the relics of saints helped cities to prevail in defensive warfare; processed through the streets, they helped townspeople confront plagues, sieges, and other emergencies. The anniversary of those events then became new opportunities to honor the patron-saint. Incorporated into the church liturgy, local saints were invoked in the installation of political and ecclesiastical officers, as well as in the sealing of civic oaths, contracts, and fraternities (Wilson 1983, p. 11). Local saints and their miracles inspired holidays, festivals, and civic processions, times when work was suspended and urban elites were expected to give alms or sponsor feasts (Webb 1993, 2002). Outside of formal rituals, “popular” forms of veneration also developed that invoked the sacred magic of the saints, including spontaneous rituals like a group’s walking in circuits around shrines, touching saintly bones and bathing in or imbibing liquids that had immersed relics (Thomas 1971). Confraternities (mutual-aid and burial societies) frequently placed themselves under the protection of local saints (Wilson 1983, p. 14).

The urban ruling classes invested heavily in the veneration of local saints, seeing in them a source of legitimate authority and a means by which to shape the urban polity (Burke 2009). The cult was especially important in early modern cities because the organizational resources available to rulers were few and legal institutions were basic. Promotion of the cult trumpeted community and threatened oath-breakers, the lawless, and the disobedient with supernatural sanctions. As the cities expanded rapidly in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the cult of saints were evoked as rallying points around which new bonds of association might be forged and ties of allegiance be secured. Voluntary organizations such as guilds, confraternities, and neighborhood associations found saints invaluable symbolic resources in the effort to integrate urban residents. Weinstein and Bell (1982, p. 170) note that “All these

agencies used religious symbols and practices to seal the bonds of fraternity and solidarity: patron saints, special cults, obligations of alms, participation in feasts and processions.”

For their part, the ruling elite eagerly sought to display both “piety and authority” by sponsoring and organizing festivals of local saints (Webb 1993). But for the Church, which relied on an often tense alliance with civic rulers, the cult may have been even more important because the veneration of local saints tied the community to Rome. Official liturgy was readily modified to include local saints; Beissel (1976, part II, p. 71) observes that the veneration of martyrs institutionally linked the Church and the city: “Their images stood on the altars and were continually adorned; their festivals were celebrated annually and prevented their being forgotten. The missals named many of them in the canons of the Holy Mass, the breviaries praised them, and their stories were proclaimed by collections of their legends.” The cult of the saints could enhance the local status of bishops and abbots, otherwise commonly regarded as “foreign” to the commune. Moreover, priests taught that when citizens refused to pay tithes, cheated or abused the clergy and usurped the property of the Church, they risked calamity by alienating their saints (Wilson 1983, p. 30). Where such warnings were seen as credible, the cult could reinforce ecclesiastical authority.

In many respects, Catholic theologians realized that the late medieval cult of the saints was often superficial and overly emotional, criticisms that Evangelical reformers would loudly amplify. However, the prevailing view was that, so long as the veneration of saints and relics remained in its place and fulfilled its popular role theological integrity could be maintained at the elite level (Beissel 1976, part I, p. 72). This fact leads Mecklin (1955, p. 50) to note that “No saintly ideals ever flourished in the Middle Ages that did not receive the sanction and enjoy the sympathy and support of the ecclesiastical authority.... The social significance of the saint depended upon this spiritual and moral solidarity the guarantee of which was found in the supreme authority of the church.” While urban patricians may have sponsored cultic pageantry, it was the Church that regulated access to sainthood, evaluated claims to sanctity, and required that candidates for sainthood demonstrate miracles in ways that accorded with official rubrics.

Indeed, the Church took quite seriously its role as the guarantor of the “authenticity” of saints and, by the thirteenth century, ecclesiastical authorities had instituted elaborate bureaucratic procedures for the reliable determination of sainthood and kept records of reported miracles (Soergel 1993; Wilson 1983). For sure, in making itself the sole source of legitimate relics and the institution that regulated their worship, the Church appears to have enhanced its clout. Yet perhaps more importantly, the cult of the saints thrived on the advocacy of its adherents who rallied around and promoted the miraculous feats of their patron saints and candidates for sainthood. These activities created cross-cutting social ties that placed voluntary organizations in direct relationship with the Church (Parigi 2012).

Nevertheless, the cult of saints was not always easily manipulated to the benefit of the authorities nor was it fixed and immutable. The power and favor of saints was believed to ebb and flow over time. Citizens generally believed that saints could bestow not only blessings and assistance upon the people that loved them but could also withhold favor or punish those that neglected or defiled them. Saints were expected to provide tangible material assistance to their loyal clients. This meant that when material expectations were disappointed, crowds might punish their saints

by insulting them, dragging down their statues, and spattering their images with mud—behaviors that anticipated the iconoclastic rioting of the radical Evangelicals (Scribner 1987).

Moreover, the meaning and importance of local saints proved flexible, their symbolic meanings and practical uses changing with shifting conditions and political interests (Signori 1993; Weilandt 2007). For example, as cities grew in wealth and influence, they were sometimes able to supplement their (minor) local saint by “rescuing” the relics of a major saint from the east. With the relocation of the physical remains of a great hero of the Church away from a place where he might be profaned by infidels, a city could officially adopt a powerful patron and declare him a local, as Venice did with St. Mark or the German city of Trier did with St. Matthias (Webb 1993). As a feature of political culture, the very mutability of the cult of saints was its virtue, as it helped to constitute community in spite of differences: “The ambivalent and vague nature of rituals, the fact that they were always open to various interpretations, made it possible to represent a consensus that could never have been brought about by discourse” (Stollberg-Rillinger 2011, p. 18).

Saints and the Catholic social order: a neo-Durkheimian theory

Neo-Durkheimian theory directs our focus to the local, public, quotidian, popular, and emotional dimensions of the cult of the saints in late medieval Europe as foundational to the urban Catholic social order. A ritual can be defined as an act, or sequence of acts, that involves multiple participants; that is highly routinized and conventional; that is enacted demonstratively; and that generates social distinctions and symbols (Stollberg-Rillinger 2011). Durkheim (1965) originally posited a relationship between ritual behavior and the adherence to social order, putting collective veneration of the sacred at the heart of his theory of social solidarity. Ritual, organized around sacred objects as its focal point, and organized into cultic practice, was for Durkheim the fundamental source of the “collective conscience” that creates structure and helps ensure cultural continuity, while providing individuals with meaning and binding emotions. Participation in rites integrates the individual into a social order both in one’s “day-to-day relationships of life” and in those celebrations of the collective “which bind [one] to the social entity as a whole.”

For Durkheim, the power of sacred objects is established and refreshed by communal veneration itself. Public veneration of an object held to be sacred by a community is a powerful affirmation of collective conscience and a call to obey communally defined morality. The cult of saints should be understood, as in Durkheim’s sense of the term, as the communities of believers united in the veneration of a sacred object and bound by its sacred prescriptions. Moreover, Durkheim (1965, p. 80) instructed, a “cult is not a simple group of ritual precautions which a man is held to take in certain circumstances; it is a system of diverse rites, festivals, and ceremonies which all have the characteristic that they reappear periodically. They fulfill the need which the believer feels of strengthening and affirming, at regular intervals of time, the bond which unites him to the sacred beings upon which he depends.”

Durkheim’s fundamental insight was that ritual performance can (re)invigorate group membership by generating communal emotions, refreshing the symbols that

express the meaning of the group, and asserting group morality. In addition to deepening the feeling of community, it is generally understood by contemporary sociologists that confidence in religious explanations, a key feature of group commitment, is reinforced by repeated ritual participation (Stark and Finke 2000, pp. 93–96, 107–109). In the full richness of its theology and liturgy, Christianity admits both the immanent and the transcendent (Berger 1967; Riesebrodt 2007). The fundamental Christian rituals assert that believers are part of a universal community constituting a single body (e.g., baptism, Eucharist) that materially unites believers living and dead. Devotional practices emphasize transcendence and mystical unity with the divine. In the Middle Ages, the proliferation of Marian cults and shrines to the suffering Jesus, His wounds, and His Sacred Heart offered spaces for individual piety and the opportunity for congress with these celestial personages.

However, besides mystic devotions, the late medieval Christian tradition prominently featured rituals that focused less on individual transcendence and more on membership in an immediate sacred community, one that was understood as local. Certainly, the mass, baptismal ritual, and the taking of the Eucharist in communion can also achieve this feeling. Nevertheless, a central feature of Western Christianity in this era was ritual life centered on the cult of the saints. From a sociological perspective, saints are representations of a collective ideal, abstractions of communal values and heroes that bridge the sacred and transcendental sphere with the secular and worldly sphere. As students of Durkheim observed, “The hero is the symbol of a given society, the society’s progenitor in many cases and a sort of ideal summing up in one mythic individual the chief characteristics of the various empirical members of the group” (Mauss et al. 2009, p. 5). In Catholic societies such heroes are saints, the supreme exponents of the faith; martyrs, ascetics, missionaries and selfless servants of the Church (Wilson 1983, p. 3).

The medieval cult of the saints included two distinct expressions. The first was the saint as general friend, patron and intercessor. Devotees believed that saints assisted them in matters intimately connected with their hagiography. These experiences made them sympathetic to the plight or afflictions of the living, such as in areas related to benevolent deeds during their lifetime or the conditions of their martyrdom. For the same reasons, saints became associated with particular tools or trades leading to their being adopted as symbolic patrons of guilds (Burke 2009). Within the scope of concern of the saints upon whom one called, their intercession was generally available to all in need. Rather than being connected to a specific community in a specific place, all Christians could participate in such cults.

The second expression of the cult of the saint was through the local saint, the native, patron, or protector of a particular place or city. As a Catholic theologian explained in 1530, “Although it can be believed that those blessed spirits which enjoy eternity with the angels care for Christians everywhere, it is nonetheless piously to be believed that there are many of them who exercise a special care and protection over those places which they were born, or where they lived for a long time, or suffered dire tortures and death for Christ” (Webb 1993, p. 15). These patriotic saints were available as intercessors principally to the residents or citizens of a particular town or city. It is these cults that neo-Durkheimian theory would lead us to expect would explain why the Catholic order sometimes proved durable in the face of challenges. The primary appeal of such saints was as symbols of a specific local community

occupying a delimited space who protected the welfare of the pious citizenry united in their name.

Sociologically, this expression of the cult of the saints, based as it is in civic life and public action, is central to understanding the firmness of the Catholic social order. First, as Giesen (2006, p. 343) observes of this kind of ritual participation, it tends to “open up the space for community or for collective identity in its most elementary form.” The cult of the local saint helped constitute moral boundaries, exclude strangers, provide access to goods and privileges, and define a sacred citizenship that operated across distinctions of wealth and status (Mauss et al. 2009, p. 48). Indeed, the patron saint of a town can be interpreted as a totemic representation of the community itself, the veneration of that saint serving as worship of the city and its enduring nature (Durkheim and Mauss 1963). This need not imply that integration occurs without conflict, as jostling can occur among the adherents of the cult for their position in it, their rival interpretations of the myth, and its relevance and importance to the challenges they face.

Second, rituals surrounding the local cult of the saint also helped to constitute the public culture of the city. The saints and their hagiography determined commemorative events, festivals, and collective memory. The saints, understood as real people linked to the fate of the city and its inhabitants, had stories whose tragedies and triumphs could be reenacted, linking present to past in rituals understood as “iterations of events” going forward into history (Giesen 2006, p. 338). As opposed to private devotions, cults are enacted through public performances that bring groups of people into the same space with the same focus of attention. The shrines of the saints served as “sites of memory” where collective memory coalesces. In the ritual action surrounding holy relics, collective meanings are produced and reproduced and attached to physical objects of memory literally enshrined in a sacred space (Hall et al. 2003, p. 241). As Durkheimians have long emphasized, rituals tied to memory “preserve and celebrate traditional beliefs” and “integrate the glory of society’s past into its present concerns and aspirations” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991, p. 379).

Collins’s (2004) neo-Durkheimian elaboration of the theory of rituals is especially useful in understanding the social mechanisms at the heart of the ritual process. Collins contends that rituals are powerful because of their physical expression and embodiment. Rituals instigate collective action that thrives on bodily co-presence and mutual emotional entrainment. When engaged in successful rituals, individuals feel solidarity with one another and imagine themselves to be members of a common undertaking; they become infused with emotional energy and exhilaration; they establish and reinforce collective symbols that are moral representations of the group that ought to be defended and reinforced; and they react angrily to insults toward or the profanation of these symbols. Their experience of solidarity is prolonged and stored in focal symbols that allow cult adherents to re-experience the communally integrative emotions they encounter in rituals.

In some cases, neo-Durkheimian theory would clearly lead us not to expect rituals to enhance social solidarity. In a significant departure from Durkheim’s original formulation, contemporary applications are interested in why rituals fail; an outcome that is particularly obvious in studies that document the decay or collapse of formal rituals. Collins observes that formal, coercive rituals sometimes fail, or decay over time, such that they produce “little or no feeling of group solidarity; no sense of one’s identity affirmed or changed; no respect for the group’s symbols; no heightened emotional energy” (2004, p. 51). This decay is experienced in rituals that reek of manipulation,

opportunism, and stale ceremonialism. Indeed, Collins argues that under these conditions public rituals provoke not communal solidarity but “strong abhorrence.”

Indeed, the shrines of saints as sites of collective veneration and memory are not expected to produce solidarity automatically. They may *divide* the publics that gather at them, as some participants venerate the sacred object and others feel disdain or can only muster feelings of ambivalence in reaction to it. This can occur when the sacredness of the objects that the shrine is meant to celebrate is not felt by those taking part or when the members of a society are divided by official efforts to shore up adherence to collective symbols (Pfaff and Yang 2001). One such case is the divisive commemorations of the assassinated Israeli premiere Yitzhak Rabin. Memory sites dedicated to Rabin became contested by rival political factions, producing, “A fragmented commemoration that consists of multiple and diverse times and places, and in which different discourses of the past are enacted and expressed in order to appeal to different groups, [and which] does not enhance social solidarity” (Vinitzky-Seroussi quoted in Hall et al. 2003, p. 244). Another case is provided by Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz’s (1991) study of the American Vietnam Veterans Memorial. They show that it is not only difficult to create a site of memory around which communally integrative emotions can coalesce when a defeat must be commemorated, but it especially difficult when no shared recollection or feelings regarding the event can be crafted. The Vietnam memorial presented Americans with a “genre problem,” as the memory of the war generated neither “consensus” on the meaning of the event nor “pride” in the political community. Rather than generating communally-integrative collective action, the Vietnam memorial became, predominantly, a site of personal devotion, private healing, and remembrance.

The distinction between public and private commemoration and those sites that are experienced communally versus personally sheds light on the difference between the local cult of the saints and the medieval phenomenon of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage shared with urban cults a fascination with shrines and relics. Yet while rituals surrounding local patron saints asserted community, structure, and the eternal, the medieval Christian pilgrimage was, in Turner’s sense, a “liminoid” experience—a transitional state between alienation from everyday life and reincorporation into structured community. The pilgrimage experience took place over a circumscribed period, involved transit over physical and social spaces, and generated psychological tension and personal spirituality rather than enduring group membership (Turner and Turner 1978). For the medieval Christian pilgrim, the journey to the distant object of veneration was explicitly a personal “liberation from profane social structures” rather than the wellspring of *communitas* (p. 9).

A vital local cult meant everyday reminders of the sacred in civic life, a calendar that commemorated extraordinary events and founding myths, festivals that celebrated the solidarity of the community and its intimate bond with the supernatural through physical objects (relics) and places (shrines) where the faithful could gather to be affirmed and rejuvenated. An intact cult of the saints should have rooted people in social space, helped to cement ecclesiastical influence, defined a spirituality that linked diverse status groups in a common civic identity and deepened popular attachment to the Church. If so, then the cult of the saints could have made for a robust connection between a community and the Church as well as a bastion from within which the Evangelical insurgency could be resisted.

Cologne provides an example of how a city resisted the Evangelical insurgency with the help of its cult of the local martyr St. Ursula. From the twelfth century, Ursula's homegrown cult was deeply woven into the cultic life of Cologne's citizens. Ursuline processions expressed corporate unity in elaborate displays of civic pride and popular piety. Her cult made her the civic protector and the symbolic face of the city, a fact reflected in the city's coat of arms (Montgomery 2009). A patriotic rallying point, devotees to the cult of Ursula used her to project the status and wealth of the city beyond its walls into the Rhineland and the Low Countries. The city's elite heavily patronized St. Ursula, yielding a rich treasury of sacred art and ornate reliquaries in the city's fine cathedral. Unlike most free and imperial cities, Cologne avoided "popular religious ferment" as elite interests in continuity and the ecclesiastical establishment were reinforced by popular attachment to "the tradition of Cologne as the holy city sanctified by the blood of its martyrs" (Scribner 1987, p. 217). Certainly, material interests help to explain why Catholicism triumphed in Cologne—the extensive and rich ecclesiastical establishment created cross-cutting circles of economic beneficiaries—but so too does the role of the cult of the saints in helping to achieve civic unity, political consensus, and cultural cohesion in rites, processions, and civic festivals.

Neo-Durkheimian theory recognizes that communal integration through ritual action may also fail and this process can be traced based on historical accounts of the eruption of religious insurgency in other free and imperial cities. In the case of the free and imperial city of Strasbourg, we see how the local cult of Saint Aurelia became a focal point of an expanding conflict among rich and poor and between guildsmen and burghers, thereby focusing popular radicalism.

Although the relics of Aurelia had been "particularly powerful and popular" (Wandel 1995, p. 117), her shrine became embroiled in a conflict that divided the residents across class lines. Rather than Aurelia's relics being located in the city's grand cathedral, they were housed in a parish church. Over time, elite veneration of the saint and patronage of her memory occurred not in her humble shrine but in the cathedral. Indeed, the communally integrative power of the cult was weakened by excessive sponsorship by the wealthy and the endowment of private chapels to the saint. As Stanford (2011, p. 152) reports, "All of this pomp came at a price, however, and it was a price that was becoming increasingly difficult to afford—and increasingly resented." Tensions mounted among those who worshipped at St. Aurelia, those who worshipped in the cathedral, and the middle-class townspeople that resented flagrant piety and clerical excesses (p. 296).

In this context, it was precisely in the parish of St. Aurelia that Evangelical preachers made their first important inroads when reformer Martin Bucer was appointed as the parish's priest. Bucer's appointment reflected existing anti-clerical sentiment, particularly resistance to tithing and a desire to end clerical privileges. Exploiting the cult of Aurelia as a wedge to divide guildsmen against the civic and ecclesiastical elite, Bucer's followers portrayed the cult as an instrument of elite domination and as a practice that gave license to ignorant peasants and the disruptive, idolatrous poor. Insurgents claimed that the veneration of relics by the lower classes had made authentic worship impossible, decrying in a petition those that "bow before it, pray to it, those same refractory persons [who] take special pains, when the Word of God is preached, to denigrate the same and to provoke those who desire to hear it" (Wandel 1995, p. 119).

In iconoclastic rioting that took place in 1524 and 1525, Evangelicals instigated the destruction of shrines, images of saints, and private altars across the city. Aurelia's shrine was repeatedly assaulted and, finally, in 1525, a cross dedicated to her at the city gate was torn down and her relics were profaned by being removed from her shrine and cast into a common grave (Wandel 1995, pp. 111–118). Soon after, the ruling council gave way and the Roman Church was officially abolished. Icons were forbidden in the city, a testimony to a fear among reformers that the common people might yet return to traditional forms of worship (p. 126).

Testing the cult of saints thesis

This article tests the cult of the saints thesis with a straightforward quantitative analysis. The unit of analysis is cities, which varied on a number of relevant dimensions. While the character of cities is hardly uniform, in the dataset assembled for my analysis, initial evidence for the efficacy of the cult of the saints in helping to lower the odds of reform is indicated by simple descriptive analysis, especially the fact that 15 of the 42 cities that had shrines to local saints resisted Protestantism (36 %), about twice the share for all the cities in my population. Even more telling is that 7 of the 12 (58 %) cities in my population located in regimes that were generally favorable to the Reformation (either city-states or princely states), but that did not institute reform, possessed at least one shrine to a saint. In such settings—which both economic and political theories would regard as especially prone to reform—the cult of the saints appears to have helped to buttress the Catholic social order. In the following analysis, I am able to go beyond correlation and individual case description to engage in a simple multivariate test of the cult of saints thesis that includes variables identified in the existing literature as alternative explanations for Reformation outcomes.

Testing alternative explanations

The early Reformation (1523–1545) has been the subject of extensive scholarly research, much of it conducted by theologians and historians. It would be impossible to do justice to this enormous historiography in this article. However, one can identify three general explanations in the historical sociology of the Reformation that can be compared with the cult of the saints thesis. The first focuses on economic development and its effects, the second on the wealth and organizational resources of the Church, and the third on the politics of rulers in promoting a “magisterial” Reformation in line with their interests. In testing my proposition, I compare it with indicators of variables consistent with these alternative theories.

Economic interests

The size of cities was associated with their level of economic development and social differentiation. Nicholas (2003, p. 43) notes of late medieval Central Europe that the larger a city, the more diversified its economy would have been. Cities were the trade and marketing centers of regions of surrounding agricultural economies. Free and

imperial cities were not only typically larger and richer than other towns but perhaps more importantly enjoyed substantial political autonomy both from the Emperor and from the territorial princes. Although they also enjoyed chartered rights of self-government, cities under princely authority were much more apt to be influenced by the interests of these rulers. Since the important work of Moeller (1972), historians have recognized that free and imperial cities were apt to adopt the Reformation and had already imposed substantial control over ecclesiastical affairs.

There had been profound macro-structural changes prior to 1517: proto-capitalism had arisen and trade expanded; urbanism grew and a strong and ambitious class of townsmen asserted its interest. In this context, historians have depicted the Reformation as a social movement unleashed by literate townsmen among the “lower and middle strata of burghers” (Karant-Nunn 2005; Moeller 1972; Ozment 1975; Rublack 1989). Long-standing historical arguments contend that the abolition of monasticism, the secularization of Church holdings and the elimination of feast days would have been appealing to the nascent bourgeoisie as means by which to increase the supply of capital and labor (Troeltsch 1931). And Luther’s denunciation of vagabondage, idleness, and begging appealed to magistrates as it offered the prospect of lower-cost charity and greater discipline among the lower classes (Kahl 2009).

Ekelund and his collaborators (Ekelund et al. 1996, 2006) have recently built on this literature to offer a theory of the Reformation that focuses on economic incentives. As the economy grew, opportunities for clerical corruption and venality expanded. This became increasingly objectionable, particularly to the urban literate classes (Ozment 1975; Southern 1970). Moreover, growing social differentiation, urbanization, and the appearance of print capitalism undercut ecclesiastical discipline and made it more difficult for the Church—a typically lax monopolist—to meet changing spiritual demands (Ekelund et al. 2006).

Ekelund posits that Protestant rivals swiftly gained market entry because they offered a lower salvation price than the Catholics. Making convincing objections to the financial abuses, Protestants exploited demand among civil authorities for more credible and efficient suppliers of spiritual goods (Ekelund et al. 1996: pp. 162–163). Because Protestantism endorsed a unified legal and civil authority that would strengthen urban governance (Witte 2002), it seems to have reverberated with the civic republicanism shared by many burghers (Brady 1998; MacCulloch 2004; Moeller 1972; Mörke 2005).

Improvements in urban economic productivity should be reflected in larger city sizes (Cantoni 2009; Bairoch 1988; de Vries 1984). It may also be that the prominence of trade, rather than total economic activity, made a city more prone to adopt Protestantism. A straightforward proxy for the relative importance of trade in a city’s economy is membership in the Hanseatic League. The Hansa was founded by north German merchant communities as a guild to protect their mutual trading interests at home and abroad. The league expanded widely, drawing in member cities from across the northern and central HRE and engaging in trade from the Baltic Sea to the Alps. Cities that belonged to the Hansa are likely to have been more commercially developed than other cities and mercantile guilds appear to have played a larger role in their governance (Dollinger 1964; Greif 2006). The ruling burghers of these cities may have been especially prone to see advantages in abolishing Catholicism.

It is also plausible that the cult of the saints affected religious contention through specific economic incentives tied to shrines rather than through communal integration.

Shrines may have deterred urban elites from adopting Protestantism because it would mean forgoing their share of a lucrative pilgrimage trade. There were the economic benefits of pilgrim “tourism” to the city and lively markets for pilgrim medals, saints’ badges, and the like (Webb 2002). Hence, some bishops and secular rulers avidly invested in the collection of relics, because “a high-quality relic collection was as much a draw as a well-crafted cathedral” (Ekelund et al. 1996, p. 139).⁴ As the volume of pilgrims increased in the late fifteenth century, many cities were compelled to invest in “newer, grander tombs” to accommodate the crowds and remain attractive destinations (Soergel 1993, p. 25; also Beissel 1976). Prominent relics and the associated trade and tourism may have represented sunk costs that would be lost if Catholicism were abolished (Ekelund, et al. 1996, pp. 138–140).

However, the relative attractiveness of saints’ relics varied considerably. Some saints were only locally important, drawing pilgrims from their own surrounding rural areas. Those shrines included in broad-ranging “pilgrim tourism” tended to be well-positioned on trade routes (Webb 2002). Indeed, the major pilgrimage sites in the German lands identified by Beissel (1976, part I, pp. 122–125)—such as Cologne, Aachen, and Trier—were generally located on the major trade routes. These fortunate cities were thus able to invest in the construction of dazzling, richly-adorned shrines (Webb 2002). In short, while hundreds of thousands of people participated in pilgrimages in the decades before 1517, the effect was hardly general, with some shrines—particularly in the Rhineland—drawing the greatest numbers.

Church resources

Ekelund et al.’s (2006) account applies the religious economies model, treating the Church of the early sixteenth century as a monopoly firm. This approach compels us to consider how the Church would have obstructed Protestant entry and maintained its status as a privileged, exclusive religious provider. Ekelund proposes that the visible wealth and splendor of the local ecclesiastical establishment could have acted as a signal that deterred Evangelicals from launching a sustained attack. In addition, the organizational power of the Church, expressed largely through its monastic orders, could have been deployed to suppress heresy and provide welfare goods that bound urban populations more tightly to it. If so, shrines may simply have been features of underlying organizational power and reflections of the wealth and influence of the local clerical elite.

Political interests

Germany was part of the HRE, a polity based on the sovereignty (*Herrschaft*) of territorial rulers united under the imperial crown. The monarchy was elective, however, with a handful of the largest principalities, bishops, and imperial cities

⁴ Some of the leading pilgrim destinations invested heavily in assembling impressive reliquaries. Aachen boasted the relics of the indigenous saint Charlemagne, as well as imported relics including garments belonging to Christ, Mary, and John the Baptist (Webb 2002, p. 138). Cologne, the famed “German Rome” and bastion of theological orthodoxy, boasted the relics of the locally martyred St. Ursula and her virgins, the martyred legionary St. Gereon, the relics of the Three Magi, and bones of the Maccabees (Montgomery 2009; Heal 2001). Such cities could attract enormous numbers of pilgrims—for instance, during a period of special indulgence in 1496, about 150,000 people visited Aachen (Webb 2002, p. 138).

having the right to select an emperor's successor and meet with him in council—the imperial diet, or *Reichstag*) (Neuhaus 1997). In practice, the HRE was a very loose confederation that included nascent states ruled by powerful dukes (*Herzöge*) and prince-electors (*Kurfürste*), ecclesiastical states, city-states, autonomous cantons, and the direct holdings of the Habsburg dynasty. Consequently, the emperor's authority was quite limited outside his own domains and the princes sought to prevent the centralization of power (Kohler 1990; Neuhaus 1997; Nexon 2009; Schubert 1996).

Much of the literature identifies political interests as propelling the institution of reform in the cities. Swanson (1967) proposed that relatively open and responsive political regimes would have favored the Reformation, while hierarchical and authoritarian ones would have tended to oppose it. Since Moeller (1972), historians have generally argued that free city-states favored the Reformation as a means by which they could enhance their autonomy, improve revenues, and free-up economic resources. The imperial and free city-states (*Reichs- und Freistädte*), had the greatest political independence among Central European cities. The Swiss cantons enjoyed similar liberties, as they had won their autonomy from the Habsburgs by force of arms. The political opportunities presented by such cities should have facilitated Protestant inroads.

We would expect that cities located in ecclesiastical states would have strongly favored the Church because of the local clout of ecclesiastical authorities, the fact that most prince-bishops were aristocrats that had acquired their offices at considerable expense and the fact that these bishops as both prelates and princes had coercive means at their disposal (Te Brake 1998, pp. 43–44). However, the Catholic order in such territories may not have relied solely on force: in the major ecclesiastical administrative centers about a tenth of the population was directly employed by the Church and an even greater proportion was economically dependent on it (Schilling 1988). While strong ecclesiastical authority could have focused anti-clerical sentiment, it is more likely that in such towns Protestant rivals would have faced stiff opposition from a populace deeply invested in its established Church.

A similar set of incentives and constraints probably confronted cities located in Habsburg territories. The emperor was obliged to assert orthodoxy under his mantle of *defensor ecclesiae* and “advocate of the Roman Church” (Neuhaus 1997). More importantly, the Habsburg dynasty maintained a favorable alliance with the Church and, whatever the sympathies of the burghers in their territories, they risked intervention or invasion by imperial forces if they threatened the Catholic establishment (Fühner 2004).

Although German cities enjoyed unusual autonomy and powers of self-government, they were still situated within the feudal structure of the HRE. Despite its close relationship with the Church, the imperial government was very weak and the religious disposition of regional rulers seems to be most important in determining the propensity of cities to abolish the Catholic establishment. Unlike the Habsburgs, some regional rulers facilitated or even embraced the Evangelical cause in their domains. While the princes only played a “small part” in the civic constitution of the cities (Schubert 1996, p. 74), princely dynasties ultimately sought to influence the outcome of religious contention in territories they governed. Their declaration of support for, or opposition to, the reform cause could have determined the issue, as the will of the territorial princes marked the effective limits on the sovereignty of the chartered towns (Te Brake 1998). Most of the princes came to favor the Reformation as it meant deepening their influence over their territories and weakening the emperor and the pope.

Variables and estimation

To test the cult of saints thesis, I examine the propensity of the population of German cities of 5,000 or greater population to institute reforms in the period 1523–1545. This is the period during which the Reformation had the character of an urban social movement. After 1545, Emperor Charles V went to war against a league of Protestant princes and cities, defeating them in 1546. From this point onward, the movement was largely decided by wars, dynastic politics, and state-building rather than by urban politics.

In sixteenth century Germany, settlements possessing the formal status of city (*Stadtrecht*) were self-governing. They had their own laws and courts, communal associations, feudal exemptions, property rights, and a civic administration that was selected and accountable to local burghers (Nicholas 2003, pp. 92–93; Weber 1981). Accordingly, cities are the appropriate unit of analysis for this study. The analysis is limited to towns in German-speaking lands with an estimated population of 5,000 or more in 1520. This includes cities in present-day Germany, a portion of the Netherlands, and upper Austria, which are included in Rothkrug's (1980) register of shrines. The resulting population includes 145 cities.

Despite the data limitations inherent in historical studies, I was able to identify sources for the coding of a number of important variables associated with general explanations for the Reformation. My sources include historical monographs, historical atlases, and published source materials. The variables employed in the analysis are listed in Table 1, and their Pearson's correlation coefficients are reported in Table 2.

Dependent variable: abolition of the mass

For an indicator of the dependent variable, I focus on whether the Catholic mass was officially abolished (or "reformed") in a town or city. In a few instances, the new Evangelical faith and the old Church existed side by side, but usually not for long. Bi-confessionalism and religious liberty were at odds with the interests of the contenders, with urban elites believing religious pluralism would encourage sectarianism and

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Reform 1523–45	145	0	1	0.79	0.406
Population/log	145	3.70	4.60	3.9223	0.18852
Hansa	145	0	1	0.32	0.467
Trade routes	145	0	8	1.10	1.773
Monasteries/P10000	145	0.000	17.647	3.72187	3.367535
Htchurch/log	145	0.914	2.238	1.31009	0.176221
Free-cities and cantons	145	0	1	0.37	0.483
Princely states	145	0	1	0.34	0.477
Habsburg	145	0	1	0.09	0.287
Saints shrines/p1000	145	0.000	1.600	0.08596	0.217274
Valid N	145				

Table 2 Pearson's correlation coefficients among variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Reform	1	0.027	0.129	0.047	-0.148	0.042	0.034	<i>0.263</i>	-0.078	<i>-0.390</i>
(2) Pop/log	0.027	1	<i>0.216</i>	<i>0.503</i>	-0.079	<i>0.340</i>	<i>0.189</i>	-0.132	0.070	-0.103
(3) Hansa	0.129	<i>0.216</i>	1	<i>0.256</i>	-0.044	0.129	-0.056	0.129	-0.162	-0.157
(4) Trade routes	0.047	<i>0.503</i>	<i>0.256</i>	1	-0.036	<i>0.237</i>	-0.001	0.010	0.024	-0.055
(5) Monasteries per 10000	-0.148	-0.079	-0.044	-0.036	1	<i>0.343</i>	<i>0.217</i>	<i>-0.182</i>	-0.031	<i>0.281</i>
(6) HT church/log	0.042	<i>0.340</i>	0.129	<i>0.237</i>	<i>0.343</i>	1	0.132	-0.025	0.006	<i>0.174</i>
(7) Free cities/Cantons	0.034	<i>0.189</i>	-0.056	-0.001	<i>0.217</i>	0.132	1	<i>-0.521</i>	<i>-0.188</i>	-0.030
(8) Princely states	<i>0.263</i>	-0.132	0.129	0.010	<i>-0.182</i>	-0.025	<i>-0.521</i>	1	<i>-0.288</i>	-0.130
(9) Habsburg	-0.078	0.070	-0.162	0.024	-0.031	-0.006	<i>-0.188</i>	<i>-0.288</i>	1	0.022
(10) Saints shrines per 1000	<i>-0.390</i>	-0.103	-0.157	-0.055	<i>0.281</i>	<i>0.174</i>	-0.030	-0.130	0.022	1

Statistical significance at 0.05 level is indicated by italics

discord (Rublack 1989). Fortunately, reform is a well-documented phenomenon and the variable is coded from secondary sources (e.g., Brady 1999; Cameron 1991; Greengrass 1998; Köbler 1989; Littell 2001; Lortz 1968; Moeller 1972). It is coded 1 if the Mass was officially abolished during the study period, but coded 0 if a city remained Roman Catholic (or bi-confessional).

Shrines

For a proxy for the cult of the saints, I rely on Rothkrug's (1980) list of Catholic shrines in Germany and parts of Austria and the Netherlands that had been established up until 1530, which I checked against Beissel's (1976) history of the cult of the saints in Germany. Rothkrug's list is based on a variety of sources and identifies thousands of shrines of all types, most of them located in small towns and villages. The number of shrines in a city per 1,000 residents is calculated by taking the total number of saints' shrines and dividing it by the estimated population of the city.⁵

Population

Economic historians regard the size of an early modern city as a reliable and readily available proxy for economic development (DeLong and Shleifer 1993; Cantoni 2009). A city's level of economic development may explain why some towns instituted reform while others did not. Given the strong association between

⁵ Note that while Rothkrug's list has been criticized for providing questionable estimates of the number of shrines (Sargent 1987), the strategy of analysis used in this article minimizes the danger of unreliable estimates. Rothkrug's list seems to be prone to error, in large part, because it tries to account for obscure shrines located in small towns and villages. By focusing on the population of large cities, which are better documented in the secondary literature and are readily corroborated, I mitigate the problem of inaccurate reporting.

economic development and city size—the best indicator we have for a city’s overall level of economic development—we expect that the demand for Protestant entry should have been greater with city size. Historical demographers have developed standard techniques to estimate urban population, nevertheless, reported population estimates sometimes vary. In coding these estimates, I took the average value of two estimates of town size gathered from studies that estimate populations from approximately the year 1450 to 1600 (Bardet and Dupaquier 1997; Brady 1999; Dollinger 1964; Israel 1995; Köbler 1989; Nicholas 2003; Pfister 1996; Russell 1972; Scott and Scribner 1996). Population size is measured in thousands of persons, which is logarithmically transformed.

Hanseatic league

A city is coded 1 if it belonged to the Hanseatic League in 1520 and 0 if it was not a member. The data are coded from Dollinger (1964).

Trade routes

If it is the economic advantages of the pilgrim trade that created attachment to the Church, rather than the cult of the saints itself, then the relative connectedness of a city to trade routes could better capture the effect than the shrines themselves. Central Europe’s urban geography was characterized by a large number of medium sized cities that served as regional centers (Nicholas 2003; see also Rozman 1978). Even though most commerce was regional, commercial exchange did connect cities to one another and trade routes seem to have greatly facilitated pilgrim tourism (Webb 2002). I measure the number of land-based trade routes that intersected in a town, including local, regional, and long-distance (*Fernhandelstrassen*) routes (Berthold 1976; Magocsi 2002).

Monasteries and mendicant orders

Drawing on a comprehensive list of the location of all monastic establishments in the HRE in the year 1500 (Jürgensmeier and Schwerdtfeger 2005–2008), I calculate the number of monasteries and convents present in a city per 1,000 residents.

Church size

It is possible to measure Church’s local wealth and organizational power through measures of the size of a city’s cathedral or principal church and the density of monastic establishments operating in a city. Following the suggestion of Ekelund et al. (2006), I use the height of the nave as a proxy for the size of a church. The nave is the central part of a church and is for the use of the laity. In the later medieval period, architects sought to construct as tall a nave as they could, both to increase the area of the church and for the sake of dramatic effect, a very notable feature of Gothic cathedrals. I measure the height of the nave (or dome if the largest church was a basilica) in meters. The data are assembled from figures supplied by historians (Mark 2006; Mitchell 1968) and by the churches themselves. The height in meters is log-transformed.

Political regimes

The observable implication of the political interests' thesis is that cities located in territories shielded from direct ecclesiastical or imperial intervention were more prone to adopt the Reformation as a means by which to increase their autonomy, enhance revenues, and weaken the center. To assess whether the adoption of reform was influenced by the surrounding political regime within which a city was located, I code a number of political regimes as indicator variables. The coding scheme employed here is highly consistent with the depiction of political regimes in the HRE as depicted in Te Brake (1998, pp. 38–44). If a town was chartered as a *free or imperial city* (city state) or was located in an *independent canton* in 1520 it is coded 1, otherwise 0. But if a town did not enjoy this status and was located in a *Habsburg dominion*, it is coded 1, otherwise 0, if it was located in *princely states* independent of the Habsburgs (*Kurfürstentümer*, *Herzogtümer*, etc.) it is coded 1, otherwise 0. *Ecclesiastical states* were ruled by ecclesiastical authorities such as bishops or archbishops and serve as the reference group. The regime types are exclusive and coded systematically by reference to the standard works in political geography (Köbler 1989; Schindling and Ziegler 1989–1997; Spruner von Merz 1880).

Discussion of results

As my dependent variable is dichotomous I analyze the propensity of cities to adopt Evangelical reform by logistic regression analysis (Long 1997). I analyze models that estimate a city's odds of instituting reform during the period 1523–1545. The model estimates are reported in Table 3.

Model 1 provides a simple test of the cult of the saints thesis by regressing the number of saint shrines per 1,000 population on the abolition of the Catholic mass. The estimate indicates that shrines of saints are negatively correlated with Protestant reform and that the effect is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Model 2 estimates the effect of shrines of saints on Protestant reform with the inclusion of economic development variables. The economic theory of the Reformation leads us to expect that the most developed cities and those cities in which trade played the greatest role in their governance would have been prone to Protestantism. The model also includes a measure of how well connected a city was to the network of European trade routes. The results, at least based on the analysis of this population of cities, provide no evidence for the economic explanation of Protestant success, as neither the city size nor the Hanseatic League variables achieves statistical significance. The number of trade route intersections, as a proxy for pilgrimage tourism, also does not achieve significance.

Model 3, which includes variables meant to capture the wealth and influence of the Catholic Church in a city through measures of density of monasteries and the size of its principal church edifice, does not yield support for alternatives to the cult of the saints thesis as indicative of communal integration. The density of monasteries does not lower the odds that a city instituted the Reformation. However, the size of a city's principal church increases the odds of reform and the coefficient is weakly significant. This result is contrary to the expectations of Ekelund et al.'s (2006) account of

Table 3 Results of logistic regression models predicting the odds of Protestant reform

Variable	Model 1: cult of saints	Model 1: economic development	Model 2: church resources	Model 3: political regimes
β (standard errors in parentheses)				
Saints shrines per 1,000 population	-4.499** (1.320)	-4.373** (1.336)	-4.805** (1.560)	-4.996**
Population (log)		-0.637 (1.348)	-1.362 (1.427)	-1.195 (1.485)
Hansa		0.414 (0.536)	0.364 (0.537)	0.332 (0.585)
Trade routes		0.057 (0.158)	0.030 (0.154)	0.040 (0.167)
Monasteries per 10,000 population			-0.057 (0.077)	-0.047 (0.080)
Church height (log)			2.556† (1.465)	2.267 (1.538)
Free city/Canton				1.120† (0.592)
Princely state				2.263** (0.747)
Habsburg domain				0.469 (0.812)
Constant	1.808 (0.256)	4.121 (5.233)	3.941 (5.310)	2.615 (5.528)
N	145	145	145	145
Log-likelihood	-128.755	-127.82	-124.588	-112.603
Pseudo R ²	0.193	0.202	0.232	0.338

† $p < 0.10$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

how large church edifices acted as signaling devices that bolstered the status of Catholicism as an entry-obstructing monopoly firm. Perhaps the size of a city's principal church indicated the wealth of the local Catholic establishment, which would have only made it more attractive to reformers hoping to expropriate ecclesiastical endowments.

Model 4 adds variables to test for the role of political incentives in explaining the variable success of the Reformation. As the literature on the "magisterial" Reformation would lead us to expect, the indicator variable for cities located in free city states and cantons increases the odds of reform, as does the indicator variable for cities located in princely states, compared with the reference category of cities located in ecclesiastical states. Both variables are statistically significant. The indicator variable for cities located in Habsburg states do not achieve statistical significance compared with those in ecclesiastical states. In the presence of measures of regime type, the measure for church size is not significant.

Model 4 provides support for the cult of saints thesis because even when several important variables identified in the literature on the Reformation are included neither the magnitude of the effect of the variable for the density of saints' shrines nor its significance decreases. Moreover, the effect of the shrines is robust to those of the indicator variables for free cities and cantons and princely states. Model 4 thus provides support for the cult of saints hypothesis while also providing support for explanations that stress the importance of political interests.

Before now, Swanson's and Rothkrug's important works on the role of religious-political culture in determining regional outcomes have not been tested using larger-N, multivariate methods and have been criticized by historians, largely on the basis of the

evidence of case studies. Without consistent measures and multivariate estimation, we have been unable to assess the validity of these provocative cultural accounts of social order and social change in the early modern world. Lacking clearly specified mechanisms and measurable indicators of the underlying properties that give rise to the purported differences between communal immanence and associational transcendence, previous research could not be compared with political explanations of the Reformation.

There are limitations to my analysis. As in most historical studies, variables can be difficult to measure and the analysis often depends on proxies rather than more direct (but unavailable) measures. Certainly, the analysis should not be taken as a definitive test of the economic theory of the Reformation. The measurement of economic variables for early modern cities is difficult, as most indicators, such as economic growth or gross product, are not available for this population of cities. Although large for a historical study, the population is modest in size ($N=145$), limiting the power of the analysis. It is also truncated, containing only those cities with an estimated population above 5,000 inhabitants; thus it may not provide the best test of the economic development thesis. It is also possible that economic interests are not readily separated from political ones, with political variables capturing the important underlying variance.

Nevertheless, the study makes important contributions. First, it advances the neo-Durkheimian theory of social order premised on ritual integration and applies the theory to the case of the Reformation. Second, it develops and tests a straightforward cult of the saints thesis on the basis of an original multivariate data set. Historian Robert Scribner (1986, p. 26) worried that, as a result of its nearly exclusive reliance on narrative methods, historical research on the Reformation tends to be unsystematic, based on unrepresentative samples, and biased toward a few well-documented cases—above all the large imperial cities. The present study answers Scribner's call for large N research based on a diverse population of cases, including cities under princely authority.

Studies focusing on the “magisterial” Reformation contend that Protestantism triumphed because it served the shared interests of local urban elites and the rulers of principalities (Brady 1998; Dixon 2000; Schubert 1996; Tracy 1986). Fulbrook (1983), for example, argues that Protestantism flourished in “sociopolitical environments” that enabled reformers if their goals were congruent with the interests of state-building rulers. Similarly, Gorski (2000, 2003) contends that emerging states embraced Protestantism as a strategy to enhance social control. In Stark's (2003) account, the Reformation was an alliance between religious idealists repulsed by the Church's worldliness and modernizing princes interested in gaining control over ecclesiastical assets and revenues. While the analysis provides support for the cult of saints thesis, it also supports theses predicated on political interests in deciding the Reformation.

Economic accounts of the Reformation (Ekelund et al. 2006, 1996) are sensitive to the ways in which religious “firms” may seek to induce demand for their product. According to this view, priestly celibacy, relics, sacred art and adornment, cathedral building, and so on can be regarded as devices that enhance the credibility of the Catholic doctrine and stimulate demand for its services in a population of consumers. The cult of saints can also be seen in this light—the cult of saints could have enhanced the credence of the products being offered by the Catholic firm, thus

reducing demand for Protestant alternatives. While this account is plausible, sociologists of religion suggest that confidence in religious explanations is more likely to be generated by ritual participation than it is by saints as advertisements of Catholic sanctity (Stark 2001; Stark and Finke 2000).

Conclusions and implications

For the sake of analytic clarity, social scientists often seek to separate political factors from cultural factors, the “hard” institutions and incentives from the “soft.” Yet, as this analysis suggests, both sets of factors can be clearly specified and operationalized in historical and comparative research and it may be precisely through the careful *intermingling* of politics and culture that we arrive at convincing explanations (Adams et al. 2005). In this article, I offered the thesis that the local cult of the saints was protective against Protestantism based on a neo-Durkheimian theory of ritual integration. I then tested the resulting hypothesis in a straightforward multivariate analysis that estimated the odds of a city’s abolition of the Catholic mass in a large population of German cities. Statistical findings provide some support for the hypothesis.

The findings reveal a reason why there is observed path dependency in patterns of reform. As observed by Stark (2003), regional differences in the persistence of Catholicism are related to the historical legacy of the Christianization of Europe. In Mediterranean and Western Europe, conversion to Christianity had been gradual and voluntary. On the other hand, the lands to the north and east of the Roman Empire—beyond the Rhine and the Danube—had been converted later, chiefly by the sword. From the perspective of neo-Durkheimian theory, these different historical experiences matter because the gradual and voluntary adoption of Christianity yielded a host of local martyrs, founding abbots, and heroic bishops whose canonization helped to unite local churches into the Roman ecclesiastical regime.

More broadly, the findings of this article allow us to reassess the role that the religious-cultural constitution of early modern communities played in the Reformation. Whereas southern and western Europe was richly populated with saints, much of Germany had relatively few native saints. Only in certain regions of Germany, such as the western bank of the Rhine or Bavaria, were shrines found in large numbers (Beissel 1976; Rothkrug 1987; Soergel 1993; Webb 2002; on the geographical dispersion of shrines, see Nolan and Nolan 1989). There were many places of devotion dedicated to the transcendental figures of Mary and the Christ, but the devotions practiced there focused on personal devotion and universal intercession. As the neo-Durkheimian theory of rituals would lead us to expect, devotional practices associated with these sorts of shrines would not have created comparable local cults that anchored civic communities to the Roman Church.

When Evangelicals endorsed the creation of a well-governed, pious but secular civic authority (Witte 2002), their vision probably had the greatest appeal where Catholic communalism had shallower roots. Without the saints, a wide variety of religious practices and devotional innovations had proliferated in Germany as laymen endowed chapels, chantries, and preaching foundations (Heal 2001; Wilson 1983). Popular religiosity often focused on Christ and Mary, which generally took the form of private devotions and pleas for individual intercession rather than civic rituals. As

Rothkrug (1980) suspected, the resulting separation of heaven and earth in the lives of German Christians may indeed have made Luther's doctrines that divided the holy sphere from everyday life and vaunted secular authority as the sole source of government credible and appealing.

The analysis presented in this article indicates that the cult of the saints provided a general inoculation against the Protestant bacillus. Of course, it did not avert the outbreak of Reformation in every city; in some cities Evangelicals mobilized the public through dramatic attacks against shrines and by instigating iconoclastic rioting—as we saw in the case of Strasbourg's St. Aurelia. So why did the cult of the saints exercise a general protective power for the Catholic establishment while also focusing popular resentment, at least in some cities?

There were factors both exogenous and endogenous to religious-political culture at work. Although population size is not associated with reform in this population of cities, systematic data on previous economic growth is not available for all of these cities. It may be that decades of economic growth *prior* to 1517 undercut the cultural cohesion of German cities (Durkheim 1984). The example of Strasbourg's St. Aurelia and the widening class divisions and residential tensions that surrounded her cult may be indicative of this process (Stanford 2011; Wandel 1995). Moreover, a rising individualism may have favored transcendental over immanent practices of spirituality. Central European piety came to focus less on the presence of the holy in immediate, everyday life, and more on spiritual abstraction and Christian universalism as symbolized by Mary and Christ—"celestial personages"—with no specific site of veneration. In Swanson's terms, the social bases of religious-political culture may have already evolved toward a greater emphasis on transcendence.

There were also developments endogenous to medieval religious culture that undercut the cult of the saints. In the later middle ages there had been a proliferation in the number of saints, a growing tendency toward fable and fantasy in hagiography, and even the outright invention of saints. Beissel (1976, part II, p. 132) observed that the proliferation of relics and saintly articles debased the sacred currency of the cult. The vast collections of imported relics held by prelates and princes increasingly seemed wasteful and self-indulgent—no match for the authentic appeal of local martyrs. Moreover, though northeastern princes and prince-bishops assembled relic collections, they rarely built public shrines to house them, treating them like private treasures (Bacon 2008). The private shrines of the wealthy and powerful could not enhance the public authority of the Catholic faith through cultic mobilization.

In particular, excessive attention to the wonder-working power of the saints undermined the reputation of the cults. Although this was a partly an unintended consequence of efforts to reform the process of canonization and validate the saints, the focus on miracles came at the expense of the edifying and spiritual functions of saintly veneration. While Catholic theologians were aware of this tension, the bureaucratic machinery for the validation of sainthood and the keeping of miracle books had a momentum of its own (Cunningham 1980). In the first decades of the sixteenth century this invited dissidents to decry the increasing excesses of popular veneration. Luther lampooned, "If someone has a toothache, he fasts and prays to St. Apollonia ... St. Blaise for sore throats" (p. 29). Even (critical) loyalists such as Erasmus openly mocked the "foolish" veneration of the saints and bemoaned the failure to regard them as role-models rather than wonder-workers (p. 30).

For Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, and other Evangelicals, pilgrimage and the miraculous cult of saints belonged to the same repugnant system of absolution as the doctrines of purgatory and indulgence from sin. Although generally discouraging spontaneous iconoclasm with its aroma of popular radicalism, they denounced the saints cults as alien and misleading, an idolatrous parody of true piety and a vehicle for papal and imperial manipulation (Heming 2003). Protestants ridiculed folk religious practices, attempting to contrast ignorant superstition with the educated piety of the literate townsmen (Thomas 1971). They condemned the worship of relics and derided the monks and priests that tended the shrines as “wicked deceivers” (King 1979, p. 669). Even Catholic Humanists conceded that some saints were inventions and some relics were fraudulent (Signori 1999). Evangelical preachers insisted that Christ was the only intercessor and condemned superstition and materialism, even as they retained the observance of the major saints as moral exemplars (Heming 2003; Kolb 1990). For many literate townsmen, to reorganize the city in a God-pleasing fashion meant to reform the church in line with the Gospels and to celebrate Christ through transcendent Word and Sacrament, rather than through the worldly and vulgar veneration of the saints.

A further vulnerability arose from the excessive commercialization of the saints. The charging of admission fees to popular shrines, the truck in souvenirs and emblems, and the linking of pilgrimage to the system of papal indulgence undercut the sanctity and integrity of the experience and lent credence to accusations that the Church had cynically exploited the saints for the sake of material gain. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, many pious Christians felt misused and the pilgrimage shrines became a target for their outrage against the clergy (Turner and Turner 1978).

From a neo-Durkheimian perspective, it may be that the Evangelicals had the most success where their preaching and polemics portrayed the cult of saints as efforts to manipulate, deceive, or exploit the faithful. The case of Strasbourg suggests an unraveling of cultural consensus in a rapidly expanding city that, in turn, allowed Protestants to exploit the cult of saints as a wedge issue that forced civic and ecclesiastical elites into an unpopular, reactionary posture. As has been found in the study of public commemorations at contested memory sites, civic rituals cannot reinforce community or consensus where none exists (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). In such moments, the coercive choreography of formal rituals invites transgression more than it reinforces integration or demands subordination (Pfaff and Yang 2001). In some cities, iconoclastic rioting was the predictable result.

If unforced, the cult of the saints had the latent effect of helping to reinforce and legitimate the established order. But where Evangelical insurgents could make manipulation appear the manifest purpose of the Church’s cult of saints, the dissidents undercut the latent functions of cultic celebration and rituals. Self-consciousness and manipulation are deadly to ritual participation and its fundamentally spontaneous, emotional character. The rejection of imposed rituals and the profaning of symbols associated with them seem to be typical of the collapse of social orders, as witnessed in the inversion of the Marxist-Leninist ritual order in the late 1980s (Pfaff and Yang 2001).

Yet in cities where the cult of the saints remained communal, veneration reinforced the Catholic order. Unlike celestial personages, these saints were close, intimate, and rooted in a specific place. Where the cult of saints was indigenous and tied to local relics, it appears to have nurtured the kind of cultural cohesion and social solidarity that led the residents of some cities to react with bewilderment and disgust toward the

Evangelicals and their insulting ideas. By providing a bridge between heaven and earth, between God and his worshippers, the cult of the saints may have helped keep the Catholic cosmos intact (Berger 1967, pp.121–122). In the era of the Counter-Reformation, the Church came to recognize explicitly the value of the cult and heavily promoted saintly veneration and the canonization of new heroes of the faith. The cult of the saints, long in decay, flourished again in the Counter-Reformation battle (Soergel 1993; Parigi 2012). Even today, the increasing beatification rate observed in recent pontificates may be partly driven by the pressure resulting from mounting global competition between evangelical Protestants and Catholics (Barro and McCleary 2011).

Acknowledgments The author would like to thank Michael J. Halvorson for inspiring this article, Katie Corcoran for research assistance, and Karen Snedker, Katherine Stovel, James Felak, Jason Wollschleger, Marion Goldman, James Wellman and Trey Causey for helpful comments on the article. An early draft benefitted enormously from critical comments at the 34th annual German Studies Conference in 2010.

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