



# GTU

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### **Reformations that Matter (and Some that Don't)**

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## Reformations that Matter (and Some that Don't)

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### **The 38th Distinguished Faculty Lecture, 2014 Graduate Theological Union**

Every November since 1976, the GTU's consortial faculty nominates a member to be the distinguished faculty lecturer. The laureate embodies the scholarly and teaching excellence, as well as the ecumenical spirit, that characterize the GTU. The 2014 lecturer is Christopher Ocker, who is Professor of Church History at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, where he has been teaching after having received his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1991. He is also a core doctoral faculty member in the History Area at the GTU and affiliated faculty at the University of California at Berkeley. His books include *Church Robbers and Reformers in Germany, 1525-1547* and *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation*.

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Here's a story. I get it from a notebook in the collection of the Bancroft Library down the hill, across the street. The notebook was assembled in 1593. It is from the inquisition in Guadalajara, Mexico. As I reconstruct it, it goes like this.

There once was an immigrant named Miguel Redelic "the German." But he wasn't *exactly* a German: he was born in a town called Guben, in the

small state of Lusatia, which at the time was technically part of Bohemia. It had been part of Brandenburg, and Germans called the people there not Germans but Wends. The Wends spoke Sorbian, which was more like Czech. At the time of Miguel's birth his corner of Central Europe circa 1545 fell under the archduke of Austria who was the so-called "king of the Romans" and the brother of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Charles was also the King of Spain, and Spain included New Spain, halfway around the world, which was a dominion, at mid-century, reaching as far south from Mexico as Peru.

About the time Miguel was born, Martin Luther was relatively old. He, Philip Melancthon, and numerous of their associates in Wittenberg, who promoted an anti-papal version of Christian reform about eighty miles west of Guben, were steeling themselves for a war in which their prince and his allies would be crushed by Charles, Ferdinand, and their allies in Europe's first confessional war. The city of Guben had adapted a Lutheran church order in the Sorbian language a few years before.

To be honest, neither Ferdinand (king of Bohemia, archduke of Austria, king of the Romans) nor Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor, king of Spain, including New Spain) had much reason to be concerned with Lusatia. Such was the business of men of power. They were after bigger fish. But try to imagine the tangled, tenuous knot of jurisdictions, markets, and polities that all this represents, from the ethnic complexity of someone's hometown to pathways across continents and oceans. The tangle connected a Sorbian-speaking community of perhaps 5,000 people in Lusatia to Europe's first successful attempt at direct-rule colonialism on the other side of the world. And it somehow connected the religious controversy over Martin Luther to planet Earth. Because Miguel the so-called German immigrated to New Spain as a young man around 1565.

He lived we know not where for fifteen years in Mexico. After that, he worked in the silver mines of San Andrés, near Guadalajara, for a decade. Then in 1591 Miguel the immigrant miner was denounced to the

inquisition and investigated by the bishop of Guadalajara for Lutheran heresy.

Why? Miguel was telling tales about his travels as a young man: nothing fancy, just these. On the North Sea coast, at the borderlands of England and Scotland, he saw a Calvinist church with white-washed walls and no pictures or statues of saints. At port in Amsterdam, he heard Calvinist evangelists sent to preach to their ship under quarantine. People were saying that Miguel really knew Protestant beliefs and practices. But it is simple stuff: how the Protestants used both bread and wine in the Eucharist, not just bread; how they denied Purgatory, the papacy, and the value of praying to saints; how Anabaptists in Flanders and Germany held wives and property in common (this bit about wives is extremely unlikely), which might have interested people of Mesoamerica, where Catholic priests were trying to eliminate polygamy.

Miguel was arrested and tried. The inquisition found him guilty of heresy and apostasy. They called him a “convert” to the sect of Luther and his followers, a member of the sect of Luther-Calvin, or a member of “another” sect condemned by the church, as his sentence variously said. I know no reason to believe he ever avoided mass in Catholic Mexico. There were no Protestant churches, open or secret, anywhere in the western hemisphere in the 1590’s. The cause of suspicion seems to have been, in other words, not any particular religious activity or behavior, just those stories from his youth.

By the time the interrogation finished, Miguel was praising Luther’s life, saying Martin Luther pleased God, and he wanted to be like him. He called Luther a prophet and a holy man. Luther, he said during interrogation, prophesied from the prison of the duke of Saxony, taught what true sanctity is, showed in a book how Christianity is enchained, and appeared before the pope and the emperor preaching the truth. A council, he said, had been convened in Germany, referring to the Council of Trent: Trent was part of the Holy Roman Empire. It was meant to subjugate

Germans. Some of this may have come from Miguel unprompted, but it's easy to imagine an interrogator coaching him to these statements, which were almost accurate. He was not accused of saying these things to anyone else. But the trial, in Guadalajara and then Mexico City, rehearsed highpoints of a religious controversy in Germany seventy years before.

Miguel repented. He signed a confession of the Catholic faith. (Figure 1) He had already lost his properties. Off to jail he went, in the monastery of Nostra Señora del Carmen of Mexico City. He served a four-year sentence. This was similar to the sentences given to secret Judaizers in New Spain. Had his crime been bigamy, sacrilege, or sorcery (the crimes of a Spaniard going native or an Indian caught between Christian and indigenous norms), had he been an uncooperative defendant, he could have expected a public lashing and years of hard labor rowing in Spanish galleys. After he served his sentence, his name was added to the names of *reconciliados* hanging on plaques in the cathedral of Mexico City. And after that, we hear nothing of Miguel ever again.

That is the story of Miguel Redelic Aleman, "the German."

So here is a man who lived in Mexico for twenty-five years without raising anyone's suspicion. His conformity to Catholic practice would have been checked by the Consejo de Indias in Sevilla, where he must have received license to travel to New Spain, although no record of that appears to survive. By any reasonable standard, he was not *passing* for Catholic. He simply *was* Catholic, a baptized person who confesses the Creed and receives the sacraments of the church. There were no Lutheran churches in New Spain, secret or open. Catholic priests had, you'd think, more important things to worry about. Human beings, after all, had been occasionally sacrificed to pagan gods in gorgeous temples in Mexico less than a century before. Some people still secretly performed ancient pagan rituals. Catholic rules of monogamy and divorce were new, perplexing, and resisted. The "mestizo world" (Gruzinski) of Guadalajara must have dazzled a man like Miguel when he first arrived, and long after. Because, if scholars

lately have made anything clear, it's how interestingly mingled Christian and pagan, European and indigenous outlooks and ideas were in the memories and practices of both learned friars and ordinary people. As an older man, Miguel might have been shocked to find priests who cared about what he witnessed and how he felt as a young man almost a lifetime and an ocean away.

Consider all the sixteenth-century people you might associate with cultural change and religious controversy, all the people you might associate with political and social transformations of the world, all the peoples whose lives we rehearse in history classes: people like Luther and Calvin, Ignatius and Teresa of Avila; spiritual mavericks like Marguerite d'Angouleme or Faustus Socinus; the rulers of great empires like Charles V, King Francis I, Queen Elizabeth, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman, the Safavid Persian Shah Ismail, the Moghul Padshah Babur; the humanists, such as Erasmus, Rabelais, Bodin, and Montaigne; theologians like the Dominican Cajetan, the Lutheran Melanchthon, the Calvinist Beza, the Jesuit Francisco Suarez, or the Jesuit Diego Lainez. I allege, of all the many people you may have learned to associate with the age of the Reformation(s), this obscure immigrant, Miguel Redelic the so-called German, may tell us something more important about the Reformations that really matter than what we learn from all the rest.

Here is a man of no consequence caught in the vortex of a dramatically changing world, a migrant sucked out of central Europe, where he probably learned mining in the Erzgebirge mountains, and he follows work across an ocean and two seas. I suppose he was open to adventure. But his destiny was also driven by the high price of silver in Chinese markets, which fueled western demand for this basic currency of trans-oceanic trade. Most silver came from two places between 1540 and 1650, New Spain or Japan. Miners in Central Germany, where production was declining, provided skilled labor in colonial silver mines since the Spanish started digging in the 1530's. In a place like San Andres, Miguel would have

worked beside indigenous, Nahua-speaking laborers, both men and women, enslaved and free. He was a cog in the wheel of an exotic and global economic machine.

You could call Miguel's Mexico a massively disrupted, greatly reorganized cultural ecology, about as massively disrupted and reorganized as any sixteenth-century society could be. When he arrived at New Spain around 1565, the pre-conquest generation of indigenous noble families in the Valley of Mexico, the survivors of Hernan Cortes' violent conquest forty years before, were just dying out. The peoples of Mexico had been the subjects of the most sophisticated missionary campaign the world had yet seen. The Valley of Mexico was littered with hundreds of new churches. By the end of the century, resisting tribes on the periphery of this core territory, where the mines of San Andres could be found, had been subjugated. The first generation of missionaries had aggressively built a hybrid Christianity, brilliantly accommodated to Nahua languages and culture. The next generations consolidated these gains. The regulation of private life, the introduction and enforcement of European norms, especially regarding marriage, and the occasional prosecution of immigrants for Lutheran or Judaizing heresies were part and parcel of this consolidation campaign.

It has been said that Miguel gives evidence of "the opinions of minorities, of subversive heterodox groups" in the Spanish colony (Alicia Mayer González). I wonder. To be sure, Protestants did cross the Atlantic, but not much and not for long. Technically speaking, the Augsburg slave-trading settlement of "Little Venice" in Venezuela (1529-1546) was by some technical definition Lutheran, after Augsburg went Lutheran in 1538. Little Venice closed down in 1546. There were Huguenots, French Calvinists, in the colonies established at the Bay of Guanabara in Brazil (1555-1560) and Fort Caroline in southern Florida (1562-1565), but these each lasted only a few years. There were a hundred or so corsairs, some French, mostly English and at least technically Protestant, who survived attack and shipwreck along the Mexican coast in 1568 and scattered into Mexico. They

were rounded up when the Mexican inquisition was established in late 1571, prosecuted as heretics, and sentenced to hard labor in Spanish galleys or executed for heresy in the inquisition's first years. Protestant heretics, in other words, came in sprinkles. This was enough to encourage an aroused inquisition. But there were no organized Lutherans to dread in the New World circa 1590.

Something far more interesting was going on. Luther had become a figure in the repertoire of symbols forming creole identity. Miguel's trial itself made Luther a Mexican presence. He was the devil-inspired attacker of the very practices and beliefs so genuinely helpful to new-world missionaries – the veneration of saints and images, indulgences, relics, processions, and the traditional sacrament, what Alicia Mayer González describes as the “particular conjunction of concepts, practices, rites, and beliefs” of a Catholic faith serving as a “means by which to seek a unique identity and feel the consciousness of the ‘creole fatherland.’” Miguel performed at trial a corroborating Lutheran counter-position to Catholic selfhood. In time Luther's status grew so great, Prof. Mayer González can describe him as an antitype to positive Catholic figures, and an antitype of very high magnitude: a kind of heretical counterpart to the venerated Virgin of Guadalupe.

So here is Martin Luther, who only once in his life left Germany, on a four-week visit to Rome in December and January 1510. He enters the new world, not under his own power or with the help of Lutheran evangelists, but as a certain creole figure in “a multiple world whose hybrid and mestizo qualities cut it loose from standard moorings” (Gruzinski 2002, 203). This was the first “world-historical Luther. Do not underestimate his great power. This creole bad boy could impact the destiny of the unfortunate Miguel a great distance away from Lutheranism. As far as we can tell Miguel had no desire to be a Protestant until caught in the web of a legal procedure, when playing the penitent was his only way out.

Take sixteenth-century Reformations, however you define them – Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Lutheran, Radical, Anabaptist – you pick.



To judge Reformations as planned events, and to judge them by an absolute standard, we'd have to say they all failed. Not one reformer would or could say, his or her intention was to divide churches. Quite the contrary. They all meant to restore the one, true, catholic, and apostolic church to its truest version, however they defined it. Luther failed to free Christendom of a papal Antichrist. Trent and the Jesuit Order failed to reunite the western church around papacy defined as the first priest and pastor of our planet. Schwenckfeldians, Socinians, Anabaptists, and other "Radicals" found hidden and out-of-the-way places to cultivate their biblical and spirit-oriented faiths. More often than not, the radicals barely managed to stay hidden or alive. There was a wide gulf between the stated aspirations of sixteenth-century reformers and their actual achievements.

And yet all intentions notwithstanding, in spite of all unrealized ambitions, the religious controversy of the sixteenth century belonged just not to Protestants but to an expanding Christendom. Let yourself be amazed by this extraordinary thing. Each was now essential to the other – Protestant and Catholic. Each was conceptually entangled with the other, a fact we might best see when we turn away from the reformers' intentions to consider the commoner caught in the webs they wove. The first world-historical Luther was a product of the sixteenth-century religious controversy, not a product of Martin Luther.

It is the Reformation as an unintended *complex* that I propose as Reformations that really matter, adapting, and I think reorienting, Brad Gregory's recent argument. I concede that Protestant and Catholic reforms were hugely consequential, that the religious controversy "changed the world," to say it loosely, but not because reformers changed the world. By foregrounding the unintended complex, we concede the idea that its consequences were unintended, as Brad Gregory has argued, and we sideline a lot of traditional questions in Reformation research, such as: was the late medieval church or the early Protestant church corrupt, as each side alleged; did the Reformation succeed; did politics, faith, doubt, or fear matter

more than doctrine; or how do our favorites in the race, after applying the correct hermeneutical voodoo, authenticate our own religious, social, political, or individual convictions or preferences?

Don't get me wrong. My intention is not to trivialize religious, or non-religious, or anti-religious commitments. I certainly don't mean to disrespect the Protestant identities that have their foundations in the Reformation. My intention is to define "Reformation" in its broadest cultural dimensions. Let the narrow Reformations be. If you or I have made a commitment to a community with a horse in the race of religions, sure, it is reasonable and good for you or me to say, Luther, Calvin, Hooker, Socinus, Zinzendorf, or Wesley matter to me and a group of my friends, because I am a Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Unitarian member of the clergy; St. Ignatius, conciliarism, the school of Salamanca, a reform papacy may matter to me because I am a priest or a member of a religious society founded as a reform order partly in response to the rise of Protestantism. To be sure, studying the Reformation and debating it is, to one degree or another, a useful and important way to know oneself as a Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, and evangelical, and to know yourself as a member of a "traditioned community," as Lewis Mudge used to say. Many millions of us in the world right now, to one extent or another, do so identify ourselves as members of Christian denominations.

Meanwhile, historians, you know, have qualified and relativized the historical concept of the Reformation into a fine powder. This powder is then gathered into piles that are important to special audiences but not necessarily important to anyone else – piles of national, language-group, or local histories. All the better, you might say. Choose piles relevant to your tradition, and dig into the tradition of your cultural enclave. It is hard work to study religious belief, thought, practice, and ritual for the "traditioned community." Shame on theologians and clergy who neglect it.

We could divide up our histories. The atheists go over here. They get the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. The Anglicans,

Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists get the British Isles, and the Methodists also some of seventeenth-century Moravia and Saxony. The Lutherans get Germany, of course, but also Scandinavia, and they can have Minnesota; the Dutch get most of the Netherlands; the Unitarians get Poland and Hungary; and the Catholics get Spain, Italy, Mexico, Peru, and bits and pieces of almost everything. The African Americans can go with the Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals, but they should spend a lot of time studying the Caribbean. The Hindus have India, but so do Muslims, Buddhists, Jesuits, and other orders; later, there come along German Lutherans, Moravians, Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians. The Buddhists get all of Asia. The Muslims can have the Middle East, and work it out with Jews. And now we are someone separated into our denominations. We can fortify ourselves in our seminaries and centers, ground ourselves in the histories of homelands, migrations, and diasporas. Then we can reconvene on Berkeley's Holy Hill to feast on the California buffet where religion meets the world, comparing notes from the histories of our "traditioned communities." In other words, you might say, fine, historians have broken down and particularized the Reformation into many histories. We'll choose the ones relevant to our community or interests, and then come together and celebrate our diversity.

Is this enough? Does membership in a religious community say very much about us, this peculiar group of people attending a lecture on a Thursday evening? In the Protestant Establishment circa 1952, building a pan-Protestant identity seemed to matter a lot. A decade later, when the great experiment of the GTU was begun, it was the height of innovation to create a festival of traditions. Is it anymore?

The Reformation that matters to a professional identity, a family, a congregation, a prayer minion, a denomination, a nation, or an ethnicity, does not matter enough. A peculiar burden of Reformation(s) as a historical topic is to explain not merely the beginning of the multiplication of Christianities in the modern world but to explain how a religion, once so

jealous of its cultural monopoly, so devoted to institutionalizing its spiritual monopoly, building on medieval foundations, as it seemed to do in the sixteenth century, could give shape to this world of incongruent alternative belief and knowledge systems and not actually try to destroy it. It is the burden of the Reformation as a historical topic to help explain fundamental religious change in the predominant religion of the west – and by a certain reckoning, the world. Its burden is to form, not a national, regional, or local narrative, but a more comprehensive view of religion in the world.

As it happens, there are lots of big narratives of the Reformation floating around. Let me just claim, recklessly, that they all boil down to five metanarratives, five big stories about European religion, politics, and culture.

First, there is the metanarrative of stadial progress toward western modernity. It is the Ren-Ref of high school history textbooks. It was a staple of American Protestantism. It still seems prevalent in popular culture. Protestant seminary professors in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century liked to go on the grand tour to Europe, where they visited German historians and theologians, who often favored this metanarrative. A century and half ago you could also find it propagated in frontier Ohio by anti-immigrant, abolitionist sermonizers, and the plotline has been told frequently ever since. (Fig. 2) The stadial metanarrative goes something like this: Protestants broke free of the pope's political and intellectual tyranny and medieval superstition, paving the way for the Enlightenment, modern science, and/or the welfare state, or constitutional democratic monarchy, or liberal democracy – take your pick. It happened by stages. But it basically starts with Martin Luther. That is the plotline of a metanarrative of stadial progress.

There is a metanarrative of western decline. This counter-plotline was big among Catholic scholars during the *Kulturkampf*, that period after the unification of Germany when Bismarck's government promoted Protestant culture as the basis of national identity. (Figure 3) To that

Prussian enterprise, liberal Protestant theology contributed a heady cocktail of Luther, Kant, and Hegel. Catholic scholars, in response, against Kant, Hegel, and Luther, defended the unity of faith and reason. The position is still alive today. For example, Pope Benedict XVI used it in 2006, when he argued that the opposition of reason and faith was caused by a “dehellenization” that arose from “the postulates of the Reformation in the sixteenth century” and the theology of John Duns Scotus two hundred years before Luther. In the counter-narrative, the Reformation contributes to the rise of philosophical cynicism, atheism, fascism, individualism, Christian fundamentalism, and/or moral anarchy – pick your poison. That’s the metanarrative of cultural decline.

There’s the metanarrative of secularization. A baseline is suggested, of course, by the famous sociologist Max Weber. He argued that Protestantism, through a complex process, encouraged the emergence of rationalistic approaches to labor and economy, social organization, and science. The key was what Protestants in Weber’s day called “ethics,” basically, the bundle of values, attitudes, and habits that shape or reflect patterns of human behavior. Weber attributed modernity to a Protestant “ethic,” not a plan or program, but a complex of values and habits that encouraged the rise of capitalism and technocracy.

Even in Weber’s day, America did not really fit the model of rational, technocratic secularization. Nor does the world in our own day. The idea is problematized by Islamist movements and Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa, which seem to grow with modernization, when according to Weber, they should decline as the world’s technocratic disenchantment rises. Accordingly, the concept of secularization among scholars who use it has changed. Purveyors of the secular metanarrative stress not the eclipse of religion by atheism but the migration of religious sensibilities and values into the state. So, for example, Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup> argued, in his later years, that sixteenth-century Reformations facilitated first an intensification of “the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

pastorate,” the quasi-sacred roles of minister and priest, the one sectarian, the other hierarchical, which in turn built deep links between state and people and eventually helped give shape to modern “governmentality.” The state, in his view, assumed qualities and powers one associated with the cure of souls. Another interesting example of this metanarrative comes from Giorgio Agamben.<sup>2</sup> Agamben sees the Reformation as the point at which a medieval tension of what he calls two liturgies, one priestly, stressing sacramental power, and the other monastic, stressing a manner of life, becomes an explicit division between forms of churches and, in turn, contributes to the longer process by which the church abandons its disruptive, messianic vocation and yields to state power. The migration of religious sensibilities mystify the secular state. So goes the metanarrative of secularization lately.

There is the metanarrative of confessional identity-formation. It is the plotline early modern historians like to attack lately in academic conferences, when they are not reproducing it. It stresses the differentiation of Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic state churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the role of theological debate in establishing these differences, the regimes of religious and moral oversight and control created by these states, and the role of religion in shaping and building state bureaucracies. The process of “confessional state-building” exhausted itself by the end of the seventeenth century, yielding to religious indifference, secularism, and nation states. The plotline of confessionalization tends to slide into a story of the emergence of secular Europe. There is a metanarrative of confessionalization.

There is finally a metanarrative of pluralism. This is where the post-colonial scholar insists on the variety of secularisms outside Europe. The sociologist distinguishes differing degrees of religiosity or secularity within Europe. The issue here is no merely to track the multiplication of religious

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<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

products in a world marketplace. The analysis of pluralism adapts a Weberian notion of “functional differentiation.” Functional differentiation refers to the process by which spheres of life, such as economy, politics, the arts, and education, develop their own distinct modes of perception, normativity, and reason and thus become distinct spheres, or, in the language of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, subsystems in the system of society. The metanarrative of pluralism applies a concept of functional differentiation.

Some of you will argue with my metanarratives. They strike me a bit as caricatures. They overlap. The first one, of stadial progress, probably no historian would take seriously today. As for the rest, cultural decline, secularization, confessionalization, and pluralism, users all agree that the chronology of cultural exchange extends well before and well beyond the conflict between Luther and the papacy. Reformations fall within long and wide chronologies. The importance of famous reformers has been relativized. And, while I am being cavalier, let me just claim that the plotline most plainly descriptive of our world is the last one, the metanarrative of pluralism.

Pluralism is simply true of society as we know it.

Consider the obvious.

I may, as a Christian, believe that God exists in a particular way, in the three hypostases described by the Nicene Creed, but I can coexist with someone, I might even marry someone, who rejects the idea of the Trinity or monotheism or the existence of God, and I may function in that marriage perfectly well, unmolested by the state or by my church, even if it disapproves, or by my friends, even the ones who think it is strange or unadvisable to marry across faiths or cultures. I might even be a seminary professor and teach collaboratively with people with whom I disagree about the being of God, in something called a “theological union.” If, on the other hand, I were an atheist, I would interact with religious people, precisely because religion is irrelevant to work, workplace, and everyday commercial

exchange. In this and every “knowledge society,” those religious people will work with me, even if they know I think what they believe is really crazy. Most of the society in which we live has no functional need to separate people into distinct religious or non-religious categories, branding each of us as a certain kind of religious person or a certain kind of atheist or spiritual person. Yet we make those distinctions among ourselves in certain areas of life, choosing those areas in variable ways. We learn languages, develop habits, and conform to norms appropriate to each kind of situation. Sure, something like this plurality seems to exist in all societies all the time, in different and alterable ways. It is worth thinking about how narrow convictions are enforced in one setting and relaxed in another. This sort of switching between norms happens on a massive scale in a pluralistic society all the time.

The big question of the Reformation is, how does the religious controversy of the sixteenth century, a time when spiritual acculturation, doctrinal surveillance, and moral control jumped forward among both Protestants and Catholics, affected functional pluralism then, and how is that pluralism related to functional pluralisms in the world now? Where does the peculiar religious texture of our world come from, a world which, by the way, Catholicism, in all its variety, and the superabundance of Protestantisms comprise the largest religious bloc on earth? I don’t think we know yet the answer to this question. But we should try to find it.

To find an answer requires a new approach to the history of Europe’s predominant religion and its large transitional moments, like “the Reformation.” It is not merely a matter of taking sixteenth-century beliefs seriously. It is not enough to respect the spiritual integrity of people in the sixteenth century. It is not a matter of documenting religious decline. Neither belief nor unbelief alone describes the religious condition of the world we know. The issue is, how theology, ritual, or spirituality might distinguish themselves as “religious” from ideas, values, norms, and organizations in spheres of – let’s say – government, law, family, natural



science, or health care; and then inform, coexist, or compete with those other sets of values.

If you know anything about Reformation historiography in the last hundred years, you know that my new agenda is not so new. Once upon a time, the “big history” of the Reformation was all about tracking the origins of the modern world. Historians looked for evidence of religious authority breaking down in Europe, and Luther’s attack on the papacy fit the bill. They looked for the rise of habits of thought that were not restricted by religious dogma, and the idea of textual revelation, translated and received by lay readers, fit the bill. They looked for the rise of state power free of clerical control, and the “secularization” of church property in the Reformation fit the bill. In a way, I am saying that we should return to questions in these dimensions. But we no longer know what exactly fits the bill.

We now know that the Reformation did *not* free science from religious authority, or undermine the legal privileges of churches. State power grew in Catholic and Protestant places, and also in places where rulers tolerated multiple confessions or were indifferent. Thanks to reams of narrow scholarship on the theology and philosophy of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, we know that epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions in the early sixteenth century did not strongly separate Protestant from Catholic intellectuals, as historians once commonly believed. Humanism flourished in Catholic, Protestant, skeptical, and even scholastic forms. As for science, even if we put aside medieval Catholic innovators like John Buridan and Nicole Oresme, the most important innovators of cosmology and physics in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes – none Protestant, one conventionally Catholic, and the other preoccupied with theism and the soul. Protestant intellectuals were no quicker to accept conclusions of Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes than Catholic intellectuals were. In fact, the first theologian to try to reconcile Copernicus’s sun-centered cosmos

with the bible was a Salamanca theologian, Diego de Zuñiga, in a commentary published in 1584. Why was confessional debate so totally irrelevant to science? Because in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries natural philosophy was pursued in the strongly inter-confessional realm of the liberal arts, geometry and astronomy especially. To put it bluntly, the sixteenth-century religious controversy played no role whatsoever in the rise of modern science. That separation is far more important than trying to fit science into one or another party of confessional debate.

I could go on about how Protestant theologians innovated religious justifications for the state intervention in the church not by separating princes from religious authority but by adapting arguments from medieval canon law, proving the continuity of Protestant claims with the traditional religious obligations of government. Reformers thought they were re-sacralizing society, not desacralizing it.

So why not forget the ambition of finding the germs of a disenchanted modernism in the Reformation? Why not examine the *entanglement* of opposing viewpoints in a wide and untidy frame? Why not put aside the plotline running from medieval belief to modern unbelief or from some fictional medieval cultural and religious unity to diversity? Look for a metanarrative of entanglements *within* western Christianity and between the religion of the West and the cultures of the rest of the world, and let a migrant like Miguel recontextualize the Reformation. The task is not merely to ground living Christian traditions in history. It is to reappraise Christianity as a world religion. Consider how Protestants and Catholics both reoriented a late medieval pluralism, shifting it around new inputs, some of which were created by the controversy between Luther and the papacy, and others of which were created by many other things, such as Jewish expulsions in western Europe, the de-urbanization of Judaism in central Europe, the resurgence of Muslim empires in Asia, and of course contact with the cultures of the far east and in the far west, where a certain nightmare of Protestantism strangely seems to have mattered as much to

creole religion as the threat of pagan remainders. Reformations that matter have a presence in the “connected histories” (Sanjay Subrahmanyam) of the early modern *world*. They will contribute to a better understanding of the entanglements of beliefs and varieties of unbelief in the world.

You know, the religious controversy of the sixteenth century began when this obscure professor, Martin Luther, planned a theological disputation about penance in a provincial university. Somehow this spun out of control and evolved into a huge public debate about the papacy, sacraments, and a lot of everyday religious practices. We know a lot about how and why this happened city by city, region by region. It is what historians lately do best. The expanded agenda I am suggesting to you seems to have almost nothing to do with the debate over Luther or its main points contested in that debate. What does Islam and Mesoamerica, Jews, polygamous pagans, the geometry of celestial motion, or arguments about the nature of a cause have to do with the interpretation of the apostle Paul and the Greek noun for righteousness? Reformations that matter could seem to push reformers right out of our minds.

Yet here is a story. An unfortunate man named Miguel makes a brief cameo appearance on the stage of this world. He is an immigrant boxed into a heresy he very probably was not practicing. His trial helped to hypostasize a kind of Lutheran presence in New Spain, inscribing a Reformation debate onto an expanding Christianity, a differentiated religion even when its unity was enforced. Looking beyond Protestant-Catholic confessional identity-building or the rise of atheism in Europe will not eclipse the Reformation. It will uncover a Reformation that matters in the world where we live.

### ***A Note on Sources for Miguel Redelic***

Miguel Redelic is mentioned briefly by José Toribio Medina<sup>3</sup>, Antonio Barrera-Osorio<sup>4</sup>, and María Alicia Mayer González.<sup>5</sup> His case was

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<sup>3</sup> José Toribio Medina, *Historia del Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en México* (Santiago de Chile: Elzeviriana, 1905), 88.

forwarded to the holy office in Mexico City from the bishop's tribunal in Guadalajara. Its record may be found in the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.<sup>6</sup> My description is based on the holy office's summary of findings and judgment. (My thanks to Arthur John Ocker for help with the Spanish.) Miguel does not appear in the *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias*, vol. 3-5,<sup>7</sup> which cover the years 1539-1577, or in the Spanish national archival database at the time of this writing. Other sources are listed in the following bibliography.

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<sup>4</sup> Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 170 n. 44.

<sup>5</sup> María Alicia Mayer González, "Lutero y Alemania en la conciencia novohispana," in *Alemania y Mexico: Percepciones Mutuas en Impresos, Siglos XVI-XVIII*, ed. Horst Peitschmann, Manuel Ramos Medina, María Cristina Torales Pacheco (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2005), 199-218, here 209.

<sup>6</sup> Miguel Redelic, *aleman. Vezino y Minero de las minas de Sant Andres del obispado de Guadalupe*, Mexican Inquisition Original Documents, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Banc Mss ms 96/95m, vol. 1.

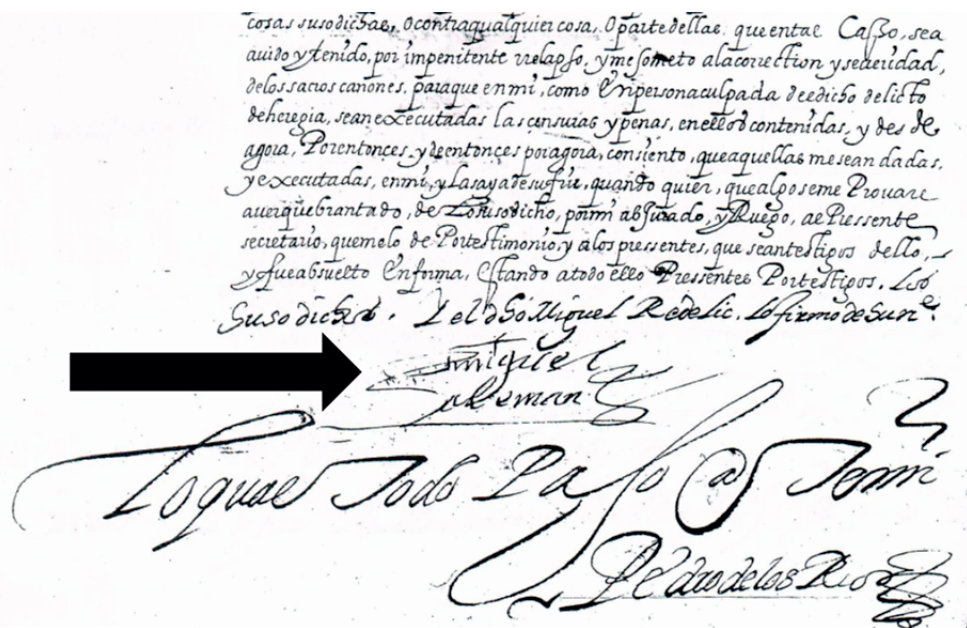
<sup>7</sup> Luis Romera Iruela, ed. *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII*, 7 vols. (Sevilla: De La Gavidia; Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes, Archivos y Bibliotecas, Subdirección General de Archivos, 1940-1986). Portal de Archivos Españoles, [www.pares.mcu.es](http://www.pares.mcu.es) (accessed 26 November 2014).

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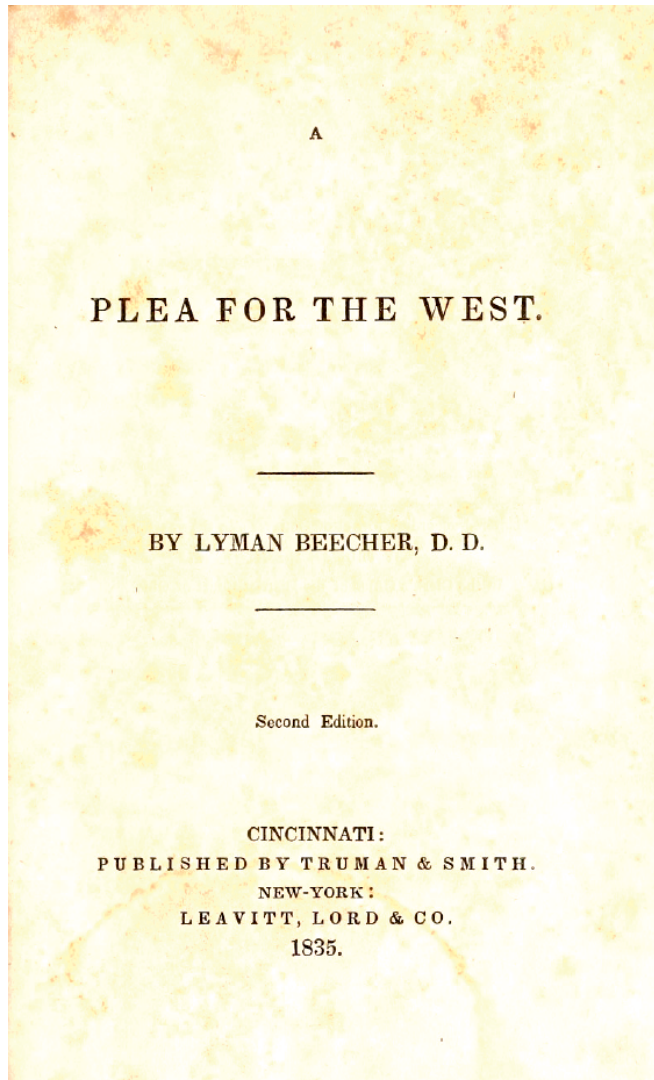
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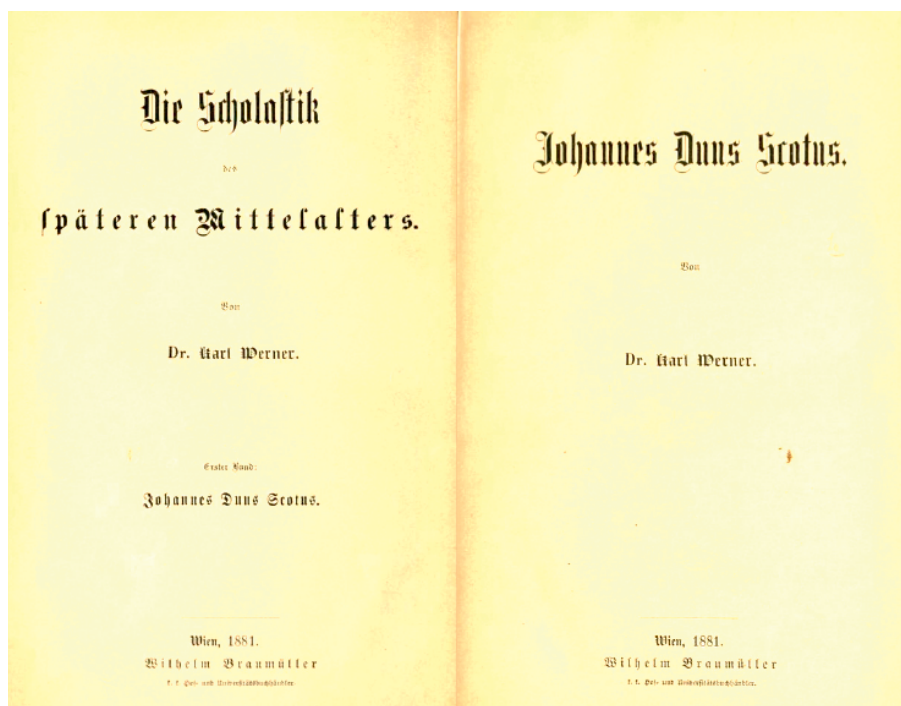


cosas susodichas, o contra qualquier cosa, o parte dellas, que en tal Casso, sea  
 auído y tenído, por impenitente relapso, y me someto ala correction y seditidad,  
 de los sacros canones, para que en mi, como En persona culpada de dicho delicto  
 de heregia, sean executadas las censuras y penas, en ellos contenidas, y des de  
 agora, Por entonces, y de entonces, por agora, coniento, que aquellas me sean dadas,  
 y executadas, en mi, y la mayate, y fues, quando quier, que algo se me Prouare  
 auer quebrantado, de lo susodicho, por mi abogado, Diego, ac Presente  
 secretario, quemelo de Testimonio, y a los presentes, que se antestipos dello,  
 y fue abuelto En firma, estando atodo ellos Presentes Testigos. Los  
 Suso dichos. Yo el Dho. Miguel Redelic. Lo firmo de su m.  
 Miguel Redelic Aleman  
 Pedro de los Rios

**Figure 1.** Miguel Redelic Aleman ("the German") signs his confession, witnessed by the notary Pedro de los Rios. Image from: The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley. BANC MSS ms 96/95m, vol. 1. Used by permission of The Bancroft Library.



**Figure 2.** Lyman Beecher, Presbyterian minister, conservative abolitionist, member of the Colonization Society, co-founder of the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, and father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, claims the American West for Protestant civilization and warns of the dangers of Catholic immigration to the frontier.



**Figure 3.** The Vienna theologian Karl Werner's three-volume study, published in 1881-1887, was the first sustained attempt to trace metaphysical skepticism to developments in scholastic theology.