Preface

The chapters that follow explore the political languages used in a sixteenth-century German city and the impact of religious change on those languages. They examine written texts commissioned by the semiliterate and illiterate members of society as well as those authored by literate magistrates; they also examine visual images painted to hang on the walls of the chambers in which the magistrates met and inscribed in their law codes and legal handbooks. Although each chapter is in some sense an essay in the examination of a particular set of sources not generally utilized by historians of political discourse, these essays are designed to be read together and to reflect not only the diversity of the visual and verbal languages in which political relationships were discussed within one German city, but also the concepts and organizing principles that they shared and that were validated by contemporary epistemology.

Put another way, this book focuses on the power of the image in political discourses of the sixteenth century, as well as on two particular image clusters: one that disappeared and one that developed in Lutheran cities during this period. The term “image” is here broadly defined in an effort to avoid the religious iconoclasts’ dichotomy between “word” and “image,” a dichotomy the disciplinary boundaries of our own academic culture have tended to perpetuate. As used here, “image” refers not only to the object removed or threatened by the iconoclasts, to the painted, inscribed, or carved museum piece, or to that object as a means of conveying complex religious concepts to “the simple folk.” In this sense, sixteenth-century images are being well explored by other scholars.¹ “Image” here refers instead to the peculiarly concrete languages, verbal as well as visual, in which abstract concepts were conceived and articulated in the medieval and early modern periods. The

term “political discourse” also requires definition: it does not here refer to that canon of theoretical texts that have had the greatest or most obvious impact on our own political theories; those texts have been and are being explored by other scholars. Rather we explore the connection between theory and praxis, examining the expression and conceptualization of political relationships in the specific context of a city that underwent religious change in the sixteenth century.

It is my thesis that visual and verbal images, many of them having their origins in conceptions of the sacred, were a powerful—perhaps the most powerful—part of political thought in German cities in the sixteenth century, that political relationships were conceptualized and negotiated within the municipal walls more often in the languages of image, figure, and metaphor than in the rationalized language of legal categories. It is for this reason that the Reformation, which made certain images and certain methods of viewing images inappropriate and gave greater sanction and authority to others, had such an impact on political language. And it is to the Lutheran Reformation and the epistemological and cosmological transformations that it both wrought and presupposed that we must turn to understand the changes in political language which we discover. At least in Regensburg, the case study in the chapters that follow, the changes in the political languages spoken within the walls cannot be linked to the specific tensions of that city’s troubled economic situation at the end of the medieval period, to the dramatic and even bloody political “upheaval” it witnessed in the second decade of the sixteenth century, to the pogrom with which it closed that decade, or to any change in political structure or access to political office. My own prosopographical research plays no rôle in the following account only because it reveals that the route to office in a political system much less patrician than that of nearby Nuremberg did not greatly change over the course of the century. In particular it should be noted that there was no change in the administration of justice in either its broad or its narrow sense to account for the radical change in the visual language in which justice was conceptualized within the council chamber. The transformation of the language of justice and magistracy was rooted not in a transformed political, social, or economic structure, but instead in a transformed view of the structure of the cosmos and of human thought. This suggests that the fit between the political relationships within the walls and the images in which the Wittenberg reformers explicated sacred relationships may help to account for the rapid spread of Lutheranism within German cities.

Why did visual and verbal imagery form the basis for the communication of political ideas and relationships at the end of the medieval period? How was the use and understanding of imagery changed by Lutheranism? These questions lie at the heart of our investigation. They are addressed theoretically in the prolegomena, an examination of the epistemological positions occupied by “word” and “image” as they were understood by Augustine of Hippo, whose discussion of psychological anthropology and epistemology

dominated the medieval period, and by Martin Luther, who radically revised the Augustinian anthropology and epistemology. The chapters that follow the prolegomena address the same questions in a case study of the transformation of the political language of judgment and authority within the walls of Regensburg, a small (c. 10,000 population), free imperial city on the northernmost bend of the Danube roughly midway between Nuremberg and Munich.

For reasons both epistemological and cosmological, political relationships were conceptualized (I am tempted to write “made concrete”) in imagistic rather than in rationalized language in both the late-medieval and the Lutheran city; chapters 1 and 2 explore the way images “meant” in late-medieval Regensburg and the impact of Lutheranism on that capacity for meaning. The Last Judgment panels that hung on the walls of Northern courtrooms in the late-medieval period were in the sixteenth century systematically replaced in Lutheran cities by allegorical depictions of *Justitia*. This replacement expressed a cosmological shift, one also evident in the transformed epistemology of the theological writings explored in our prolegomena: the late-medieval cosmology in which sacred history and eschatology were emphatically present in the temporal world had been replaced by a Lutheran cosmology in which the two realms were held apart by the concept of predestination. Painted images through which one had previously glimpsed the world beyond the temporal became opaque, examples rather than windows.

In the Lutheran epistemology the temporal and sacred realms were separated by a chasm unbridgeable by human efforts at communication; the mediating hierarchy of the medieval period was no longer a useful concept for understanding either sacred or political relationships. Luther’s Reformation replaced the medieval hierarchical ordering of things with an ordering based on the dyadic relationship of paternity. In chapter 3 we see that reordering at work in the language of the Regensburg councillors’ attempts to come to terms with the involvement of outsiders—whether emperor or neighboring prince—in the internal affairs of a city whose walls had been made porous by economic and political distress.

I have already suggested that the languages that have survived for Regensburg are not obviously marked by the sometimes violent “unrest” among the small tradespeople and craftworkers just outside the circle of inner power in the last decades of the fifteenth and the first decades of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, those people if not those events did play a rôle in the transformation of the language in which the political dialogue was carried out. Familiar sources—frescoes, painted panels, tracts on the responsibilities of magistrates, and ordinances—tend to reflect the perspective of the politically dominant. In a further effort to map political discourse as a dialogue between subjects and council rather than between more rarified political theorists, we turn in the fourth chapter to a reading of those more familiar sources together with less familiar documents directed to the city

council by its subjects. The more nuanced picture of the use of political language which emerges reveals a paternal language of politics which developed not as the result of authoritarian imposition but in the course of a dialogue between governors and governed as each group sought to define and negotiate its relation to the other.

The breadth of my sources means, of course, that I have incurred a variety of debts in the process of my research. A grant from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst enabled me to spend the academic years 1982/1983 and 1983/1984 exploring the archives and libraries of Regensburg and Munich in the Federal Republic of Germany. My research in the Stadtarchiv, Regensburg, was aided by the courtesy and helpfulness of Guido Hable, former Archivdirektor, and Raimond Sterl. In the Staatliche Bibliothek, Regensburg, to which I retreated after the Stadtarchiv closed for the day, the generosity of Dr. Gisela Urbaneck and her staff made that retreat profitable for my research; much of the evidence and argument developed in chapter 3 appeared first in an exhibition Dr. Urbaneck kindly encouraged me to arrange on the second floor of the Staatliche Bibliothek. The director of the Museen der Stadt Regensburg, Dr. Wolfgang Pfeiffer, has allowed me access to the rare books held by the museum as well as to photographs of its collections. Professor Karl Möseneder and the students in the Institut für Kunstgeschichte at the Universität Regensburg provided an academic "home away from home" in seminars on the art historical and ritual aspects of *Feste* in Regensburg. An invitation from Dr. Hans Medick gave me a chance to discuss some of my research results with members of the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen; the fact that they would find in this book little trace of the project I described then in no way lessens my gratitude for their comments and hospitality. The extension of that Göttingen trip to Wölfenbüttel and a summer seminar run by Professor Peter Blickle at the Herzog August Bibliothek led me to meet Robert Scribner, for whose encouragement and scholarly advice I am immensely grateful.

My time in Munich was briefer than that in Regensburg, a fact that only increases my debt to Dr. H. Hauke and the staff of the Handschriftenabteilung of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the scholar's haven amid the bustle of Munich, and to the reading room staff of the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv. Escapes, even from scholarly havens, are essential, and for that I am grateful to the museums and musicians of Munich, but particularly to the Bayerische Staatsoper and the wide range of its operatic offerings in repertory. Also in Munich, I cherish the memories of stimulating conversations with Norbert and Inge Schindler, Winfried Freitag, and their friends, as of *Sekt-Frühstücke* with the members of the fifth-floor GAP in Studentenstadt.

Research provides its own stimulation; a surprise, a discovery, or the perfect piece of evidence lies always around the next corner. Writing, on the other hand, turns too easily into drudgery. That drudgery was greatly reduced by the unflagging efforts and courtesy of Vivienne Bourkoff, Jenny

Newman, and the staff of the Inter-Library Loan office in the Milton S. Eisenhower Library of the Johns Hopkins University. The inevitable isolation of writing was redeemed for me by the scholarly community that is the History Department at Johns Hopkins, and, although I have presented no part of the present book before the department, the memories of pointed comments made in seminars in which I have presented papers have, I hope, improved the argument here. For their comments on specific chapters, I am most grateful to Orest Ranum and Michael McCormick at Hopkins and to colleagues in Cambridge, particularly to Brian Daley, S.J., of the Weston School of Theology and Mark Edwards of the Harvard Divinity School.

If no scholarly project ever achieves true completion, this one has at least achieved a static form in publication thanks to the patience of John Ackerman and the production staff at Cornell University Press and to a subvention from the National Endowment for the Humanities. That this journey can be measured in terms of months rather than years is owing to the opportunity for uninterrupted work provided by the Junior Fellowship generously awarded me by the Harvard University Society of Fellows and by the facilities of the Houghton and Widener libraries of that university. My primary debt, however, is to Mack Walker, who from the beginning allowed me unusual freedom in pursuing historical questions into the realms of art history and—though I admit it hesitantly and with trepidation—the history of religion.

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