

The Holy Roman Empire, the Schmalkald League, and the Idea of Confessional Nation-Building¹

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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL consensus concerning the connection between the Reformation in general, the Schmalkald League in particular, and the question of “confessional nation-building,” which was secure and predominant until the middle of the twentieth century, has now disappeared.² Until recently, historians, mostly Protestants of Prussian background, agreed: in the age of the Reformation, Germans missed the chance to build a “Protestant empire of the German nation.”³ The failure was attributed to Catholic powers, namely, the emperor and the pope, and it was believed to have severe consequences for German history. In the nineteenth-century view, a development had been interrupted, which for the cultural Protestants of the German Empire seemed to be a telos, namely, to build a powerful nation-state in the heart of Europe. This interpretation still influenced the widely discussed thesis of the “late nation” (*verspätete Nation*) after World War II and seemed to pave a “special German path” (*deutscher Sonderweg*) through the course of modern history.⁴

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²For a short survey of German-speaking reformation historiography from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, see Thomas A. Brady Jr., *Protestant Politics. Jacob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), 2–14; cf. also Thomas A. Brady, “From the Sacral Community to the Common Man: Reflections on German Reformation Studies,” in idem, *Communities, Politics, and Reformation in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1998), 353–69; Heinz Schilling, “Reformation—Umbruch oder Gipfelpunkt eines Temps des Réformes?” in *Die frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch*, ed. B. Moeller, 13–34 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998).

³Friedrich von Bezold, *Geschichte der deutschen Reformation* (Berlin: Grote, 1890), 691.

⁴For the debate over the “deutschen Sonderweg,” see Dieter Langewiesche, “Staatsbildung und Nationsbildung in Deutschland—ein Sonderweg? Die deutsche Nation im europäischen Vergleich,” in *Nationalismen in Europa. West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich*, ed. Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Jörn Leonhard, 49–67 (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2001).

Thanks to fundamentally new ways of approach, research on nationalism over the past twenty-five years has overthrown such interpretations. By historicizing these interpretations, i.e., by describing them as integral parts of the process of nation-building during the nineteenth century, scholars have created a new field of research, the study of “nationalism before nationalism.”⁵ Before considering the Schmalkald League and the Holy Roman Empire in the light of this new approach, I will summarize its most important conclusions for the first half of the sixteenth century (section 1). Then I will briefly introduce the Schmalkald League (section 2). Finally, I will comment on the “idea of confessional nation-building” using the example of the Schmalkald War (section 3).

1.

Recent research on nationalism draws a fundamental heuristic distinction between political and cultural nationalism. Scholars define the historian’s task as the analysis of political and cultural nationalism in each historic context.⁶ If research on political nationalism aims to analyze national movements that strove to build national states, then research on cultural nationalism mainly focuses on the history of national self-interpretation, as seen in myths, symbols, common historical memory, and the values issuing from these kinds of things. By now it is common to speak of a nation as an “imagined order” (*gedachte Ordnung*)⁷ or as

⁵ Consider, for example, Carla Hesse and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *National Cultures before Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Anne McLaren, “Gender, Religion and Early Modern Nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Genesis of English Anti-Catholicism,” *American Historical Review* 102 (2002): 739–67; Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, eds., *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); for the German-speaking literature cf. Reinhard Stauber, “Nationalismus vor dem Nationalismus? Eine Bestandsaufnahme der Forschung zu ‘Nation’ und ‘Nationalismus’ in der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 47/3 (1996): 139–69 and (with the older literature) Georg Schmidt, “Die frühneuzeitliche Idee ‘deutsche Nation.’ Mehrkonfessionalität und säkulare Werte,” in *Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus-Verlag, 2001).

⁶ Cf. Dieter Langewiesche, “‘Nation’, ‘Nationalismus’, ‘Nationalstaat’ in der europäischen Geschichte seit dem Mittelalter—Versuch einer Bilanz,” in idem, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 14–34.

⁷ Rainer M. Lepsius, “Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland,” in *Nationalismus in der Welt von heute*, ed. Heinrich August Winkler, 12–27 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

an “invention,”⁸ evidence of how very influential research on cultural nationalism has become. However, “imagining an order” is not an arbitrary process, but something that is determined by concrete historical preconditions. This is true in two ways. On the one hand, as one “controls the choice of what to use for one’s own construct of nation, one chooses from existing things. One invents by finding.”⁹ “Finding” is not accidental but “a struggle for power, which struggle intends to decide the future by asserting imagined constructs of the past.”¹⁰ It is possible to assert only those self-imagined constructs that are appropriate to the rational criteria of each period. This is the second condition of “invention,” which is connected to concrete historical situations.¹¹

That making such self-imagined constructs is not a cause but the result of creating power is one of the fundamental insights of the more recent research on nationalism, and so, too, is the observation that cultural nation-building does not necessarily aim at building a national state. Even in countries where the processes of building a nation and of building a national state are connected very early, such as the Swiss Confederation or the Netherlands, there can be no talk of a continuous process, as recent research has made clear.¹²

The history of the so-called Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation circa 1500 offers an excellent example of the creative use of power in forming imagined constructs of a nation. In the face of the Ottoman threat, a political process of intensification (*Verdichtungsprozeß*) fundamentally changed not only the political structure of the empire, but also its interpretation.¹³ The late medieval universal interpretation of

⁸ Among German-speaking historians the translation of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) as *Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus-Verlag, 1988) has been very influential; cf. also Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁹ “Dieses Auffinden und die Auswahl, was man . . . in die eigene Nationskonstruktion einbauen will, steuert der Mensch, aber er wählt aus Vorhandenem. Er erfindet, indem er auffindet” (Dieter Langewiesche, “Was heißt ‘Erfindung der Nation’? Nationalgeschichte als Artefakt —oder Geschichtsdeutung als Machtkampf,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 277 [2002]: 593–617, here 602).

¹⁰ The invention of tradition “ist ein Machtkampf, der über die Zukunft entscheiden will, indem er Vergangenheitsbilder durchsetzt.” Langewiesche, *Erfindung*, 616.

¹¹ Cf. Horst Thomé, “Vorbemerkung,” in *Nation als Stereotyp. Fremdwahrnehmungen und Identität in deutscher und französischer Literatur*, ed. Ruth Florack, 1–7 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000).

¹² Langewiesche, “‘Nation’, ‘Nationalismus’, ‘Nationalstaat,’” 23f.; Hirschhausen and Leonhard, *Nationalismen*.

¹³ For the political transformation processes of the late medieval empire around 1500: Peter Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung. Das Reich im späten Mittelalter 1250 bis 1490* (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1989); Ernst Schubert,

the empire, which is mostly articulated as the sacral superiority of the imperial office,¹⁴ expressed in many symbolic ways in things ranging from articles of daily use, for example, drinking glasses, to panel paintings in town halls,¹⁵ was now conflated with new representations of power. The process is expressed in the change of the empire's very name. Since the Middle Ages, the empire was called "holy" and "Roman," because it was considered as the last of the four empires of the biblical prophet Daniel's vision. Its decline would be followed by the end of earthly history and Judgment Day.¹⁶ But in 1492 it became, for the first time, the Holy Roman Empire "of the German Nation."¹⁷ At this time, "German nation" was not a term expressing common ethnic consciousness, but was a category of legitimation. "German nation" was commonly used by bishops in the *Gravamina Deutscher Nation* (complaints of the German Nation), which attempted to reject the growing financial demands of the pope and, contrariwise, the emperor's rationales for his own increasing demands upon the princes of the empire and the magistrates of the imperial towns. In the emperor's usage, the "German nation" was that part of the empire that, after the 1470s, increasingly became a duty and tax association, from which the Italian parts of the empire, the regions of Burgundy, and the Swiss Confederation were slipping.¹⁸

Together with the political process of intensification—this is the second far-reaching transformation around 1500—an increase in media of communication, thanks to the invention of printing, allowed humanistic scholars to construct a national self-image of the Germans, comparable to what had been happening in Spain or France since the thirteenth century.¹⁹ The broad reception of Tacitus's *Germania*, as updated by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, since the end of the fifteenth century, or of Jakob Wimpfeling's *Epithoma Germanorum* (1505), just to give

Einführung in die Grundprobleme der deutschen Geschichte im Spätmittelalter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992).

¹⁴ Cf. Ernst Schubert, *König und Reich. Studien zur spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979).

¹⁵ Cf. Rainer Müller, ed., *Bilder des Reiches* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1997).

¹⁶ On the idea of the *translatio imperii*, see Schubert, *Einführung*, 24f.

¹⁷ Cf. also for the following *ibid.*, 24–38.

¹⁸ Cf. Georg Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches. Staat und Nation in der Frühen Neuzeit 1495–1806* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1999), 9–17.

¹⁹ For Spain and France cf. Schubert, *Einführung*, 42, and for the empire Caspar Hirschi, "Das humanistische Nationskonstrukt vor dem Hintergrund modernistischer Nationalismustheorien," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 122 (2002): 355–96; Wolfgang Hardtwig, "Vom Elitebewußtsein zur Massenbewegung. Frühformen des Nationalismus in Deutschland 1500–1840," in *Nationalismus und Bürgerkultur in Deutschland 1500–1914*, ed. Wolfgang Hardtwig, 34–54 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

two examples, shows that already in the pre-Reformation period there appeared the idea of the unity of a German nation characterized by “common descent, regional anchoring and ethnic plurality, common customs . . . and common history, but also political leadership by important emperors.”²⁰ These were the positive ingredients of a new discourse of national unity, but there was also a negative side: the discourse also relied on concepts of enmity as constitutive of national self-image; these grew into national “prejudices.”²¹ “German simpleness and decency instead of Roman luxury and vice; German loyalty instead of romance duplicity; German bravery and freedom instead of Italian bootlicking and servility.”²² These were the moral assertions used to differentiate Germany from the Mediterranean world. But if positive and negative stereotypes are the two sides of the coin of cultural nation-building in the pre-Reformation period, national integration within a centralized German state was not a goal of the humanistic protagonists of the national discourse.²³ The trans-national power structure of the Habsburg head of state, reaching its peak in the period of the Reformation, prevented the empire from gaining the momentum that in western European monarchies allowed the building of a nation and of a nation-state around a nucleus of power in the form of a ruling dynasty closely identified with the nation.²⁴ Already in the pre-Reformation period, the new emphasis on national identity stood in contradiction to the trans-national power concept of the House of Habsburg.²⁵ This contradiction

²⁰ Cf. Hans Kloft, “Die Idee einer deutschen Nation zu Beginn der frühen Neuzeit. Überlegungen zur Germania des Tacitus und zum Arminius des Ulrichs von Hutten,” in *Arminius und die Varusschlacht. Geschichte—Mythos—Literatur*, ed. Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woesler, 2nd ed., 197–210 (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, and Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999). The quotation, *ibid.*, 208 (“gemeinsame Abstammung, regionale Verankerung und ethnische Vielfalt, gemeinsame Sitten [‘mores’] und gemeinsame Geschichte, aber auch politische Führung unter bedeutenden Kaisern”).

²¹ The negative side is emphasized by Volker Reinhardt, “Der Primat der Innerlichkeit und die Probleme des Reiches. Zum deutschen Nationalgefühl der frühen Neuzeit,” in *Deutschland in Europa. Ein historischer Rückblick*, ed. Bernd Martin, 88–104 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992); Winfried Schulze, “Die Entstehung des nationalen Vorurteils. Zur Kultur der Wahrnehmung fremder Nationen in der europäischen Frühen Neuzeit,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 46 (1995): 642–65.

²² “Germanische Einfachheit und Anständigkeit statt römischem Luxus und Laster; deutsche Treue statt welscher Verlogenheit; deutsche Tapferkeit und Freiheit statt italienischer Kriecherei und Unterwürfigkeit” (Kloft, *Idee*, 206).

²³ Cf. Heinrich Lutz, “Die deutsche Nation zu Beginn der Neuzeit. Fragen nach dem Gelingen und Scheitern deutscher Einheit im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 234 (1982): 529–59.

²⁴ This fact is pointed out by Schubert, *Einführung*, 43 (the “Rückgrat einer zum Staat führenden, weitgehend dynastisch orientierten Kontinuität” was lacking).

²⁵ Cf. Heinrich Lutz, ed., *Das römisch-deutsche Reich im politischen System Karls V.* (Munich and Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1982).

is often overlooked by scholars today, maybe because several humanists used the national argument to advocate a high view of the emperor's authority over the imperial estates, especially those who were themselves in the emperor's service.²⁶

Still today, we know practically nothing about the social range of the new discourse of nation in sixteenth-century Germany. What we know is something that Heinrich Lutz describes as follows: "Luther's road to the unrestricted publicity of the printed word," the path Luther struck after 1520, "leads at once from an inarticulateness of the German backdrop of national identity to an explicit appeal to the national powers and to the pride of the Germans."²⁷ Very early in the Reformation, the newly created nationalistic views matched the demands for clerical reforms of the Wittenberg variety. In his three programmatic writings of 1520, which marked Luther's final break with the papal church, Luther significantly bundled together the elements of the national discourse of the pre-Reformation period. He called upon the "nobility of the German nation" (*An den Adel deutscher Nation*) to give up its ties to the papal church, and he underlined his demand by viewing the papacy eschatologically. In the papacy, Luther saw the Antichrist, who, according to biblical prophecy, will fight God and God's followers at the end of history, while he follows Satan.²⁸

In sum, the early Reformation, in the Wittenberg version, deployed what was, in fact, a pre-Reformation episcopal discourse, both national and critical toward the papacy, applying the new media of print and a humanistic discourse of nation, a broadened communication process of nation now married to apocalyptic thinking.²⁹ It is important to remember that at the beginning of the 1520s this was not a national-secular discourse, but a religiously inflected argument, which was not only communicated to the literate, but also visually propagated for the

²⁶ Cf. for example Heinrich Bebel, *Lob Deutschlands* (Praise of Germany) of 1501, printed in Paul Joachimsen, ed., *Der deutsche Staatsgedanke von seinen Anfängen bis auf Leibniz und Friedrich den Großen. Dokumente zur Entwicklung* (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1921), 32–41.

²⁷ "Der Weg Luthers in die unbeschränkte Öffentlichkeit des gedruckten Wortes führt zugleich von der Unausgesprochenheit des deutschen Hintergrundes zum ausgesprochenen Appell an die nationalen Kräfte und an den Stolz der Deutschen" (Lutz, *Nation*, 18).

²⁸ For the Lutheran nationalism of the early 1520s, cf. Lutz, *Nation*; Schmidt, *Geschichte*, 55–64 (with the older literature); Dieter Mertens, "Nation als Teilhabeverheißung: Reformation und Bauernkrieg," in *Föderative Nation. Deutschlandkonzepte von der Reformation bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Dieter Langewiesche and Georg Schmidt, 115–34 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000); and one of the few essays that focuses its attention on Catholicism, D.V.N. Bagchi, "'Teutschlandt uber alle Welt'. Nationalism and Catholicism in Early Reformation Germany," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 82 (1991): 39–58.

²⁹ Cf. the contributions to Müller, *Bilder*.

illiterate.³⁰ There is also no evidence that the humanistic reflections on nation changed the symbolic representation of the imperial political structure or its ritual practice. Rather, after 1521, the year of the Imperial Diet at Worms and of the conclusive rejection of the new theological doctrine by the head of state, Charles V, the national discourse became a part of the struggle for power between the emperor and the imperial estates of the old faith, on the one hand, and the Protestant estates on the other—around questions of the correct shape of the church-state relationship.

2.

By 1521 the reformatory idea of a nationwide Protestant church had already failed. This is evidence of the restricted efficacy of Luther's communication strategy, and as far as we know, in the next years the Protestant side made only rare appeals to the German nation, whereas the imperial side used the national argument in the traditional way as a term of legitimation.³¹ When the Protestants formed the Schmalkald League³² at the end of 1530 and the beginning of 1531, they did not mean to form a national confederacy or a mechanism of nation-state making.³³ The league made no appeal to the "German nation," insisting instead on each member's duty as a governing authority to provide for its subjects' spiritual welfare. Because only the authorities were responsible for protecting subjects and for guaranteeing their earthly and spiritual welfare, the participation of the people was not a concern. The alliance was provoked by the rejection of the new theological doctrines by the imperial head of state and the majority of the estates in the recess of the Imperial Diet of Augsburg (*Augsburger Reichstagsabschied*)

³⁰For the pamphlets of the 1520s, cf. Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit. Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium 1980* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981); Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda and Martin Luther* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994).

³¹Cf. for example the recess of the Imperial Diet of Augsburg in 1530. Ruth Kastner, ed., *Quellen zur Reformation* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 501–20.

³²Contemporaries named the alliance after the small town of Schmalkalden, located on the Hessian-Thuringian frontier, where the league was founded and where the members of the league very often met in the following years. Cf. "Der Schmalkaldische Bund und die Stadt Schmalkalden," *Verein für schmalkaldische Geschichte und Landeskunde* (n.p. [Schmalkalden]: Selbstverlag, 1996).

³³This was the interpretation of the league's history in the 1870s and following; on the history of the league and the historiography of the Schmalkald alliance, see Gabriele Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund 1530–1541/42. Eine Studie zu den genossenschaftlichen Strukturelementen der politischen Ordnung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation* (Leinfelden-Echterdingen: DRW-Verlag, 2002), especially 5–22.

in 1530. The participants of the Schmalkald alliance promised each other mutual military support when a member was required to defend his subjects. Defense (*Gegenwehr*), which meant military aid only as a last resort, applied to all situations that concerned religion, whether they were cases arising from the religious controversy or cases merely considered a matter of religion by the allies.³⁴ The decisive turn in the history of the league happened at the end of 1535 and the beginning of 1536, when the league agreed on the so-called “constitution of defense” (*Verfassung zur Gegenwehr*). Following this agreement, under the leadership of the elector of Saxony and the landgrave of Hesse, the league began preparations for potential war, although the league was at peace, and began to build up an army, which seven years later, in 1542, was used for the first time against Henry the Younger of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel.³⁵ This 1542 military action forced the allies to justify their actions for the first time in the league’s history.³⁶ The justification they used is significant. They completely stripped their decision to go to war of any religious-confessional justification and presented themselves as the emperor’s accomplices against a notorious offender against civil order, Duke Henry. This amounted to a traditional appeal to the emperor as the guarantor of political order, a point made with reference neither to nation nor to religion. But when four years later, in 1546, Charles V proceeded against the two most powerful allies of the league, the elector of Saxony and the landgrave of Hesse, on the ground of the civil disorder they caused, the league’s 1542 argumentative strategies would no longer suffice.³⁷ At the outbreak of the Schmalkald War in the summer of 1546, both parties undertook media offensives that continued until the end of the war and the league’s disastrous defeat in the summer of 1547.³⁸

3.

Wars are always conflicts of interpretation, too, which is of special importance to the process of nation-building, as recent research on nation-

³⁴ Cf. Haug-Moritz, *Der Schmalkaldische Bund*, 77–92.

³⁵ Thomas A. Brady Jr., “Jacob Sturm and the Seizure of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel by the Schmalkaldic League, 1542–1545,” in Brady, *Communities*, 149–67.

³⁶ Gabriele Haug-Moritz, “Widerstand als ‘Gegenwehr’. Die schmalkaldische Konzeption der ‘Gegenwehr’ und der ‘gegenwehrliche Krieg’ des Jahres 1542,” in *Widerstandsrecht in der frühen Neuzeit. Erträge und Perspektiven der Forschung im deutsch-britischen Vergleich*, ed. Robert von Friedeburg, 141–61 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001).

³⁷ The most recent publication on the war in English is Brady, *Protestant Politics*, 292–327.

³⁸ Cf. (provisionally) Oskar Waldeck, “Die Publizistik des Schmalkaldischen Krieges,” *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 7 (1909/10): 1–55 and 8 (1910/11): 44–133. I am planning a study on this topic.

alism has pointed out.³⁹ The Schmalkald War was the first war of the Modern Age, insofar as it was fought not only with weapons but also with the pen. The Schmalkald party, much more than the imperial party, claimed to fight for the “common man,” a term for those parts of the population not considered worthy to rule.⁴⁰ This is manifest in the fact that out of approximately 170 texts, 95% of which are in German, 75% were issued by the Schmalkald party. The total number of pamphlets published during the war is estimated at about three hundred thousand. The texts varied tremendously, ranging from formal self-defense by the warring parties, issuing from the imperial and Saxon-Hessian chancelleries, through “newspapers” (*Zeitungen*) and ballads (*Lieder*) to texts set firmly within a religious discourse, calling upon readers to repent and pray. What of the discourse of nation?

If we consider, as an initial approach, only those pamphlets that mention Germany, the Germans, or their symbolic representation in the form of *Germania* in the title to represent the discourse of nation during the war, the figures are reduced to 10% of all wartime pamphlets. In them, we find this: with just one exception, pamphlets that use the nationalistic argument come from the Schmalkald party. In other words, already at the beginning of the war the Protestants revived the discourse of nation, which they had last used in a broader way at the beginning of the 1520s. In addition, they stressed the discourse’s xenophobia. This is quite understandable, given Charles’s reliance on Italian and Flemish troops. To give just one typical example, the “Warning to the German and Protestant Warrior” of 1546, by the Augsburg theologian Wolfgang Musculus, argues that it was necessary to take up arms to prevent “foreign nations and the Romance-speaking people” from devastating the “body, honor, goods, wives, and children” of the Germans.⁴¹ Now this may serve as a preliminary conclusion: the national idea does not appear as a value held by all social ranks and confessions, but as a category of interpretation that considers the Protestant Germans to be the true Germans, as already shown by the title of the Musculus pamphlet.

However, this statement does not offer any insight concerning the function of the national idea for the overall Schmalkald interpretation of the war. I would like to address this with two examples.

³⁹A short survey may be found in Langewiesche, *Nation*, 26–31 (with the relevant literature).

⁴⁰My forthcoming study will treat this and the following.

⁴¹W[olfgang] M[usculus], *Vermanung an den teutschen und evangelischen Kriegßman* (n.p., 1546): “(wöllen wir eintweders nit zusehen), dz wir durch frembde nationen und das welsche volk an leib, eer, gut, weib und kinden verheeret” (University Library Augsburg, 02/IV.28.4.498 ang. 11, p. Aii). More examples may be found in Schmidt, *Geschichte*, 92–96.

1. The first example is a pamphlet that was obviously in high demand. There were as many as nine editions of it. It was written by Johannes Schradin, a theologian living in Reutlingen (southern Germany); the council of his home town belonged to the Schmalkald side in the war.⁴² The image on the title page depicts Schradin's topic. There one can see a narrator listening to a noble woman, recognizable as Germania by her "dress and language." She steps in front of Charles, who is sitting with his French-speaking advisers, and she addresses the emperor: "Oh Charles, Charles, although you took all my motherly pride from me a long time ago, I now enter and want to speak to you. If you take it well from me, as I am your true mother, I will be satisfied and pleased. If not, I will have excused myself by this."⁴³ After having explained to her son in detail the Germans' loyalty to his dynasty since the times of Rudolf of Habsburg and their loyalty to his person, she expresses her main accusation against her son—his ingratitude. "If one gives to you both body and property, one hopes that you will express your thanks toward the good and loyal Germans by offering protection, peace, and help." Instead, she accuses her son of following "the Pope's and the devil's lies, and you allow the red whore in Rome to dress you with her harness, and against loyalty and oath, to the German land's disgrace and sorrow, you lead a foreign Romance-speaking people into the German land."⁴⁴ Germania ends her lament with a threat of punishment, which Charles will suffer for such behavior: "And God will . . . punish you forever in the fire of Hell. Concerning every matter, God's will shall be done. Thus Germania fell silent. I thought, how will the emperor answer these words? He acted as though he had not heard a thing and did not say a word."⁴⁵ After this, Germania leaves the room while again prophesying God's punishment of the emperor, while the narrator

⁴²Johannes Schradin, *Expostulation—das ist Klag und Verweiß Germanie des Teutschen Lands gegen Carolo Quinto dem Keyser, des unbillichen bekriegens, darinn angezeigt, wie sollichs wider alle billicheit und recht beschehe* (n.p., 1546), ed. Rochus von Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Verlag F.C.W. Vogel, 1869), 310–20.

⁴³"[O] Carle, Carle, wiewol mir / all mütterliche würde bei dir / genommen ist vor langen tagen, / . . . so komb ich ietzt herein / und wil ein red haben mit dir. / Nimbstu es auf für gut von mir / als deiner muter trewen vol, / bin ich zufried und gfelt mir wol; / wo nit, so wil ich eigentlich / hiermit entschuldigt haben mich."

⁴⁴"[S]etzt man zu dir beid leib und gut, / verhofft, du solltest widerumb / den lieben trewen Teutschen frumb / mit schutz und schirm, fried und geleit / erzeigen auch dein dankbarkeit. / . . . des bapsts und teufels trug und list, / . . . und lest dir die rot hur zu Rom / in dein maul legen biß und zaum / und fürest wider trew und eid / dem teutschen land zu schand und leid / ein frembd welsch volk in teutsche land."

⁴⁵"[U]nd wirt gott dennoch strafen dich / im hellischen fewer ewiglich; / in aller sach gescheh sein will. / Germania schwig also still / Ich dacht: wie will der keyser eben / auf diese red ein antwort geben? / Er thet, als ob ers nit gehort und antwortet ihr nit ein wort."

appeals to the recipients, reminding them that Germania is their mother, too: “Resist as best as possible and stay with the German cause.”⁴⁶

Thus, Schradin uses the idea of the nation as a literary strategy to universalize the military conflict, to contextualize it within a parent-child relationship common to all ranks and to believers of both religious parties. At the same time, he presents the emperor as offending the norms that structure this relationship, namely gratitude and obedience.⁴⁷ In effect, Schradin reverses Charles’s main accusation against the Saxon elector and the Hessian landgrave when he declares them outlaws: Charles V accused them of *crimen laesae maiestatis* in both legal and ethical terms. In the face of his “fatherly mildness, patience, forgiving, and kindness,” shown to his “beloved fatherland of the German nation” throughout his reign, they, the emperor said, returned not thanks, but further abuse.⁴⁸

2. When we look at the function of the idea of nation in similar pamphlets, we see that nationalism as an identity-creating, secular value, propagated earlier by the humanists, was hardly used by Protestants in the war. Rather, national unity was integrated into a perspective dominated by religion and theology. The appeal to nation presented the Protestants as the true Germans, equal to God’s chosen people, the people of Israel. Thus, in a “Lamentation of the German Land with Loyal Eckhart” by Hans Sachs, which is our second example, we find this call to remain steadfast: “You just stay with the light,” i.e., the Protestant faith, “and God will never leave you, he has many ways to help. As often happened to the people of Israel, when they were seeing nothing but death before them their enemy was brought down. His arm is still just as long, by which he will redeem His dear people.”⁴⁹ Just as divine salvation was manifest in the history of the people of Israel, so too was it now necessary

⁴⁶ “[D]em wiltu auch mit leib und gut) / widerstand thun aufs aller best / und halten bei den Teutschen fest.”

⁴⁷ Representing the relationship of emperor and empire as a relationship between son and mother is a traditional literary topos, mentioned, for example, in the Bebel text, quoted above, where the emperor is treated as the only consolation and refuge of his suffering mother, Germania.

⁴⁸ The emperor’s declaration is printed in Friedrich Hortleder, *Der Römischen Keyser- und Königlichen Maiestät (. . .) Handlungen und Ausschreiben . . . Von Rechtmässigkeit, Anfang, Fort und endlichen Ausgang des Teutschen Kriegs . . . Vom Jahr 1546 biß auff das Jahr 1558* (Gotha: Wolfgang Endte, 1645), bk. 3, chap. 16: he exhibited “väterliche Milde, Geduld, Nachsehen und Güte,” toward “unser geliebt Vaterland,” the German nation, but the outlaws returned only more “Ungehorsam, Rebellion, Betrübung und Zerstörung Friedens und Rechens, Verachtung und Verletzung unserer ksl. Mt. Hoheit.”

⁴⁹ Hans Sachs, *Ein klagred teutsches lands mit dem trewen Eckhart* (n.p., 1546), printed in Liliencron, *Volkslieder*, 299–301 (“Bleib du nur bei dem liecht bestehn; / so wirt dich gott ie nit verlassen, / zu helfen hat er gar vil straffen. / Wie es im volk Israhel oft gschach, / das nichts dann sterben vor im sach, / doch wurden sein feind selbst gestürzt. / Sein arm ist ie noch unverkürzt, dadurch er sein lieb volk erlöst”).

to view the signs of the time against the backdrop of the certainty of salvation, as revealed from Creation all the way to Judgment Day.

But the signs of the times were clear, as the media used by the Schmalkald party portrayed them in ever-imaginative ways. The war revealed the end-times and the coming of Judgment Day, as prophesied in Daniel's vision in the Old Testament and by chapter 24 of Matthew's gospel and John's Apocalypse in the New. It was the final hour before Judgment Day. The Antichrist, an ultimate symbol of the evil, appeared on earth for a short time, before being banished to hell forever with his followers. But the Antichrist—this, too, had already been announced by Protestant media in the 1520s—was the papacy and its helpers: the devil, the Catholic clergy, and now also the emperor, incited and led astray by the clergy of the Roman church.⁵⁰

I conclude: during the Schmalkald War the history of salvation was preferred above a rhetoric of nation, to mobilize the Protestant estates and subjects. This is also apparent in the way the League dealt with its defeat.⁵¹ Interpretations based on the history of salvation allow something not possible in secular-national interpretations: they valorize defeat. If the nation is the last value for which the fight is fought, success can belong only to the winner, whereas defeat will diminish one's sense of importance and diminish the loser's cause.⁵² By contrast, in an interpretation based on the history of salvation and religion, a defeat is not a defeat. In fact, the Protestant media did not use the word defeat at all. Defeat was rather considered a test of God's chosen. He who withstands the test by faith is successful, not in the eyes of the world but in the eyes of God. And, as the Bible says, those who trust in God will not be abandoned by him on earth. This victory may "take some time, but some day it will have to come" for "non dormitat neque dormitabit qui custodit Israel," he does not sleep nor will he sleep, who preserves Israel.⁵³ Defeat is transitory; a better future is promised.

⁵⁰We also find all these Protestant stereotypes in the debate of the Interim (1548–51/52), cf. Thomas Kaufmann, *Das Ende der Reformation. Magdeburgs "Herrgotts Kanzlei" (1548–1551/52)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), cf. especially his reflections on the meaning of eschatological thinking for the Protestant "horizon of reality" (*Wirklichkeitshorizont*), 430–48.

⁵¹Cf. Gabriele Haug-Moritz, "Zur Konstruktion von Kriegsniederlagen in frühneuzeitlichen Massenmedien—das Beispiel des Schmalkaldischen Krieges (1547–1552)," in *Kriegsniederlagen. Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen*, ed. Horst Carl, Hans-Henning Kortüm, Dieter Langewiesche, Friedrich Lenger, 345–74 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004).

⁵²This point was made by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "Die Nation—von Gott 'erfunden'? Kritische Randnotizen zum Theologiebedarf der Nationalismusforschung," in "*Gott mit uns.*" *Nation, Religion und Gewalt im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gerd Krumeich and Hartmut Lehmann, 285–317 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

⁵³Johann Pollicarius, *Der XXXVII. Psalm, Der . . . Fürstin Frauen Sybilla . . . und alle den ihren, sampt allen betrübtten Christen zu trost ausgelegt* (Erfurt: Gervasius Stürmer, 1547), Research library Gotha Theol 4° 333–34 (37), "und ob es Gott möchte ein zeitlang verschieben und auffziehen, so wirdt es doch ein mal kommen müssen, Gott wird nicht taub sein."

Thus, as long as the premises of this interpretation fit the criteria of rationality of the overwhelming majority of people, discourses that argue from the history of salvation and of religion would remain more persuasive than national-secular discourses. Only with the loss of the conviction that all earthly events pertain to divine salvation, could the idea of the nation emancipate itself from religion and subjugate both religion and the church to the state, as the idea of nation had earlier been subjugated by religion. This was the prerequisite of “confessional nation-building.” But insofar as the history of the Reformation and of early modern Europe are concerned, the concept of “confessional nation-building” has to be described as a logical, momentous, and influential “invention” of nineteenth-century historians.