



# The Reformation of the Keys

*Ronald K. RITTGERS*

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The Catholic Church's claims to spiritual and temporal authority rest on Jesus' promise in the gospels to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. In the sixteenth century, leaders of the German Reformation sought a fundamental transformation of this "power of the keys" as part of their efforts to rid Church and society of alleged clerical abuses. Central to this transformation was a thoroughgoing reform of private confession.

Unlike other Protestants, Lutherans chose not to abolish private confession but to change it to suit their theological convictions and social needs. In a fascinating examination of this new religious practice, Ronald Rittgers traces the development of Lutheran private confession, demonstrating how it consistently balanced competing concerns for spiritual freedom and moral discipline. The reformation of private confession was part of a much larger reformation of the power of the keys that had profound implications for the use of religious authority in sixteenth-century Germany.

As the first full-length study of the role of Lutheran private confession in the German Reformation, this book is a welcome contribution to early modern European and religious history.

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Map of the Holy Roman Empire

Late medieval Nuernberg

The 1539 Schembartlauf hell-float

The storming of the hell-float

Woodcut from Andreas Osiander's children's sermon on the keys

In an exceptionally fair-minded and scrupulous book, Ronald Rittgers charts a route through theological and social complexities with great clarity and subtlety. Lutherans experienced strong and conflicting emotions about confession, and Nuremberg makes a fine case study of their divergent reactions. This is an original and important addition to scholarship.

--Andrew Pettegree, University of St. Andrews

A finely detailed survey of the disputes and controversies surrounding the introduction of an evangelical form of confession in sixteenth-century Nuremberg. There is, to my knowledge, no comparable treatment of the subject. Rittgers's study is deeply researched. His writing is fluent, the argument easy to follow. Useful for Reformation scholars, this book also holds much for the general reader with a serious interest in the history of the Reformation.

--Gerald Strauss, Emeritus, Indiana University

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