

# The Religious Context of the German Peasants' War

ZHU Xiaoyuan

(Professor of Department of History, Peking University, Beijing 100871 China)

**Abstract:** This paper explores the religious ideas of the German Peasants' War and seeks to relate them to values and attitudes of and the tensions within the social groups which were called "the Common Man." The most original part of this paper is its discussion of the role of communal tradition in organizing a peasants' society based on the idea of "godly law." The pre-reformation peasants' rebels struggled against the lord's abuses which were justified by appeals to the ancient tradition but they did not necessarily condemn the political structure or challenge the legitimacy of feudal lordship. With the crises in the Holy Roman Empire that began in 1500 and continued into the Reformation era however came a political split and a change in religious structure which caused a demand for political reformation and an attack on feudal authority and existing order. The growth of communalization also found new ideological expression and brought against existing rule the opposition of the religious theology. This opposition intensified the peasants' sense of separation from "godless lordship," increasing their concern for the ideas of Christian love, common good and brotherly unity.

**Key Words:** The German Peasants' War Twelve articles Tyrolean Constitution Michael Gaismair Hans Hergot

**Author:** ZHU Xiaoyuan, Ph. D., University of Oregon. He is a professor in History at Peking University. He is the author of 12 books and over 200 articles on medieval and early modern European history, the German Peasants' War and the German Reformation. Mail address is: Department of History, Peking University, 100871 Beijing, China. Phone: 15811200202. Email: zhupku@hotmail.com

Christianity had a profound influence upon the German Peasants' War. The peasant armies of Allgäu, Lake Constance and Baltringen in Upper Swabia for example called their association the "Christian Union." Peasants in Tauber Valley called theirs a "Christian Brotherhood." And the rebels in the duchy of Württemberg attempted to "introduce, encourage, and administer a Christian constitution."<sup>[1]</sup> This emphasis on Christianity can also be found in programmatic pamphlets of the Peasants' War. The first sentence of "Twelve Articles of the Peasantry in Swabia" dedicates "To the Christian reader the peace and grace of God through Jesus Christ."<sup>[2]</sup> At the very beginning of the "Tyrolean Constitution," Michael Gaismair writes "You will seek in all things not selfish advantages but first the honor of God."<sup>[3]</sup> And a pamphlet by Hans Hergot is entitled "On the New

---

[1] Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasant's War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H. C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore and London, 1985), 63.

[2] Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525*, 195.

[3] Michael Gaismair, "Tyrolean Constitution," trans. Walter Klaassenin and Michael Gaismair, *Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden 1978), 131.

Transformation of a Christian Life. "It's because of this religious character Peter Blicke has characterized the Peasants' War as a struggle of "Biblicism versus feudalism."〔4〕

"Divine justice became the battle cry of the German Peasants' War," writes the great Czech historian Frantisek Graus "and this 'ideological basis' enabled the peasants to go beyond fighting for the special grievances of their particular communities and start 'a struggle for a new order established according to God's will and justice.'"〔5〕 Divine justice or godly law writes Peter Blicke was "the goal of the revolution."〔6〕 He writes "If a new law were congenial to the peasants' legal mentality—if it could transform their distresses, tensions, hopes, and expectations into legitimate, ethical demands—then that law would obviously appear as a redeeming force. Peasants found this new law in 'godly law.'"〔7〕

In this article I will concentrate first on popular views of Christianity during the German Peasants' War. Secondly I'll look at the sources of those views and finally I'll discuss the practical application of religion during that period. My study of popular views of Christianity is based on the three pamphlets listed plus the "Twelve Articles."

## 1. Popular Views of Christianity

The ideology of the Peasants' War was deeply rooted in Christian ideals. It has often been said that the Common Man propagandists of the era produced no theological argument of their own. The American scholar Paul A. Russell based on a detailed study of eight pamphlets has concluded that the common people's ideas were "scarcely very original." He writes "Their theology is testimony to a spiritual depth and mystical orientation in some political consciousness and a vision of a world about to end in others. The vigor of this theory consists in its independence of either Lutheran or Catholic dogma."〔8〕 Russell's view may correctly reflect his selected sources. Yet a search of the pamphlets of the German Peasants' War convinces me that though the pamphleteers' religious ideas were not very original nor expressed in a systematic way it is still possible to draw from them something like a popular theology.

The pamphleteers aimed to justify the German Peasants' War as a fight to free the Common Man from his status as the "clergy's spiritual serfs and the lords' physical serfs."〔9〕 The theology which served as the ideological basis for the War emphasized the conflicts between God and the Devil and between true believers of God and the Devil's agents on earth. The "Twelve Articles" teaches the Gospel by emphasizing that God is most merciful and loving. The Gospel teaches that God who is the greatest, best, most excellent in virtue, righteousness, and goodness, bestows peace and grace on the Common Man. "The Gospel does not cause rebellions and uproars, because it tells of Christ the promised Messiah, whose words and life teach nothing but love, peace, patience, and unity. All who believe in this Christ become loving, peaceful, patient, and one in spirit."〔10〕

〔4〕 Blicke, *Revolution of 1525*, 87.

〔5〕 Frantisek Graus "From Resistance to Revolt: The Late Medieval Peasant Wars in the Context of Social Crisis," in Janos Bakod. *The German Peasant War of 1525* (London, 1976), 4.

〔6〕 Blicke, *Revolution of 1525*, 91.

〔7〕 Blicke, *Revolution of 1525*, 89.

〔8〕 Paul A. Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521—1525* (Cambridge, 1986), 1.

〔9〕 "To the Assembly of All the Peasants," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffer, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, trans. Zhu Xiaoyuan, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975), 118.

〔10〕 "The Twelve Articles," in Peter Blicke, *The Revolution of 1525*, 195.

At the same timethe pamphleteers also focused on God's justice. For examplethe pamphlet "To the Assembly of All the Peasants" speaks of a God who rewards good and punishes evil. If people want to praise Godthey should consider the wondrous power of God to punish the godless. In this sense, God is called upon as the leader of the rebels for Good.<sup>[11]</sup> The other side is led by the Devil.

All evil comes from the Devilthe Antichristbecause God cannot be responsible for evil. As "The Twelve Articles" says: "It is not the gospel that drives some Antichrists and foes of the gospel to resist and reject these demands and requirements, but the devilthe deadliest foe of the gospel, which arouses through unbelief such opposition in his own fellows."<sup>[12]</sup>

Evil is a substanceas is goodand both are taken back to God and the Devilthe Antichrist. Although God and the Devil are not equalfor in the long run God will prevailthe Devil is present for the time being and is responsible for all evil in the worldsuch as diseasedeathangerand greed. The aim of the Devil "is to suppress and abolish the word of Godwhich teaches love, peace, and unity."<sup>[13]</sup> According to R. W. Scribnerthis Devilthis Antichristwas born in Babylon from the tribe of Danthe son of a whore and the Devil.<sup>[14]</sup> By the end of the fifteenth-centuryhe was as common a figure in popular religious thought as the Devilhimself. He is mentioned in numerous popular prophecies at the beginning of the sixteenth century and featured in works by popular writers. A Latin summary of his life appeared in nine printed editions between 1473 and 1505. God and the Devil Christ and Antichristare fundamentally opposite characters who inevitably come into conflict.

The pamphleteers emphasize that God and the Devil both have their respective forces. The Devil's force consists of greedyevil peoplesuch as tyrantsevil lordsand greedy clergy. They are willing to serve him because even if "they really knew that the Devil himself were lord of the landand they enjoyed himthey would still support himand not leave him," due to their selfish desires.<sup>[15]</sup> The aim of the Devil is to turn people into animalssuch as dogsnakesdragons and wolvesas the Bible called them. People would become tyrannical and selfish. Just as a lord would kill a man because of a harea tyrantlike the Roman Emperor Tiberiuswould kill many of his sons and his own wifeor as Emperor Nero had his mother dissected alive to satisfy his criminal curiosity about where he lay in the womb.<sup>[16]</sup> The conclusion of the pamphleteers wasas the author of "To the Assembly" writesthat for those greedytyrannical and evil people "the Devil is their employer and Satan their commander."<sup>[17]</sup>

God's force consists of true Christiansto which flock most common people belong. God's great design for the world's people is to bring them grace and peace. That cannot be achieved unless God's Gospel spreads out and the godly law is carried out. Thereforeit needs people to become true Christiansto have true faith in their hearts. The author of "To the Assembly of All the Peasants" defined the essence of the true Christian faith as the principle expressed by three strongirrefutable texts:

[11] "To the Assembly of All the Peasants," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 129.

[12] "The Twelve Article," in Blickle, *Revolution of 1525*, 195.

[13] *Ibid.* .

[14] Robert W. Scribner *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), 148-149.

[15] "To the Assembly of All the Peasants," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 123.

[16] *Ibid.* , 123.

[17] *Ibid.* , 118.

- First “So whatever you wish that men ‘ would do to you do so to them. ’ ”<sup>[18]</sup>

- Secondly “God measures brotherly love, which must come from the whole mind and the whole heart and soul, against his own love for men. ”<sup>[19]</sup>

- Thirdly “Here is neither lord nor servant. We are all one in Christ”<sup>[20]</sup>.

If people accepted the principles expressed by these texts grace and peace will come to them and the gates of Hell and all of its troops shall not prevail. If people do not accept this faith of the Gospel the Devil will easily take advantage of them.

In the conflict between God and the Devil people are free agents. They may choose to follow God or the Devil. If they choose correctly they assist God in His ultimate victory. Choosing correctly means accepting the world for what it is. . . God’s world. The author of “To the Assembly of All the Peasants” thus asks “The soul will be captured either by the Devil or by God. See here what will you make on yourself?”<sup>[21]</sup>

The pamphleteers’ concept of salvation rested on setting a proper relationship between man and God. This was closer to the Catholic understanding of salvation as process than to the Lutheran one of salvation as event. The pamphleteers believed that “man can come to God only through true faith and can be saved only through His mercy. ”<sup>[22]</sup> However, earthly life and good works are essential for men’s salvation. For example to love people “Create not to damage but bring love and salvation. ”<sup>[23]</sup> The pamphleteers in general agreed that only good men can be saved and there is no salvation for a bad person. For example the author of “To the Assembly” quotes David 5 [ = Ps. 126:3 ] and writes “Do not trust the prince of men or the children of the world for in them is no salvation. ”<sup>[24]</sup> The pamphleteers said nothing about predestination which is integral to Lutheranism and even more so in Calvinism. Religious ideology of the German Peasants’ War crossed the boundaries of those two denominations.

The pamphleteers believed that evil men must receive punishment commensurate with their crimes. They described several levels of punishment. Temporary punishment came in Purgatory after a person’s death. The purpose of this level of punishment was to cleanse the soul of guilt so that on the day of resurrection one may be raised by the Savior to face final judgment. The author of “To the Assembly” believed that the hellish punishments that await sinners are never “terrible enough to dissuade us from doing evil were it not for temporal fear and punishment. ”<sup>[25]</sup> Because of this he averred that godly justice would punish some serious crimes “only after a man’s death. ” He listed some seventy-six tyrants of the Roman Empire of whom thirty-four were killed dishonorably and horribly every one of them on account of his tyranny. Some drowned some were beheaded and some burned.<sup>[26]</sup>

Today as we study this popular theology we find that its central teaching is the war between God and the

[18] *Ibid.* ,114.

[19] *Ibid.* ,114.

[20] *Ibid.* ,114.

[21] *Ibid.* ,122.

[22] “The Twelve Articles,” in Blicke, *Revolution of 1525*, 196.

[23] “To the Assembly of All the Peasants,” in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 114.

[24] *Ibid.* ,130.

[25] *Ibid.* ,118.

[26] *Ibid.* ,122.

Deviltogether with the message that the earth is the battleground of this struggle. This theology differs from the one whose primary concern is personal salvationfor examplethe Protestant interpretation of Paulinism. Popular theology emphasized how people were to become God's troops enlisted to defeat the agents of the Devil on earth. When all were finally pureand the Devil and all his works at last destroyedthe distinction between Heaven and earth would be overcome so that all may worship and live with God in full glory of His creation. In this sensesalvation was not an individual task accomplished by each person for himself. Ratherit was a collective and social task that relied on the entire society's "Christianization."

## 2. The Image of a True Christian Believer

In the pamphletswe often read such phrases as "the good Christian," the "servant of God," and the "true Christian believer." The pamphleteer used these phrases to contrast with another kind of Christianthe "painted Christian" or "Roman sophists." These phrases expressed the pamphleteers' popular views of Christianity that neither fit within orthodox Protestantism, nor orthodox Catholicism.

What was the image of a true Christian? According to the pamphleteersa true Christian first must offer himself completely to the honor of Godi. e. the common good and the Word of God. He must be ready to help other peoplebe moral and dogood works.

Secondlyas Hergot's pamphlet showsa true Christian must receive the sacraments regularly. Prayer and fasting were critical. Also"When the people have childrenthey shall bring them at age of three or four to the church and offer them to God."<sup>[27]</sup> Hergot believed that all good Christians should restrict themselves from eating meat on holidays such as Ascension Day. He expressed his strong dissatisfaction with those artisans who ate meat in Adventbetween Ascension and the Pentecost.<sup>[28]</sup> He believed in all sorts of miracles and wonders. He also held to the sacramentsof which he wrote"Of the seven sacramentsfour will be regarded as good workwhile the other three will constitute an indissoluble bondand whosoever breaks it will be severely punished. The punishment will be meted out in the house. Namelythe person will be bound hand-and-footwhile the othersto his humiliationwill walk on him."<sup>[29]</sup>

Beyond these individual actions of a good Christianthe pamphleteers also developed the notion that a good Christian always tried to please God. One way to do this was to build hospitals for the sick and aged. Hergot writes:"There shall be a levy of men to give helpwherever God's honor and the common good require it. They will also have a house where the old people will be supplied with fooddrinkand everything else they need for their healthbetter than in any hospital."<sup>[30]</sup> Another good work was the fight against tyrannyas the author of "To the Assembly" writes:"Those whom Christ condemns as dogs and swine should be cast down from their thrones! That would greatly please God."<sup>[31]</sup>

---

[27] Hans Hergot, "On the New Transformation of a Christian Life," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 548.

[28] *Ibid.*, 549.

[29] *Ibid.*, 549.

[30] *Ibid.*, 548.

[31] "To the Assembly of All the Peasants," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 126.

Finally, the pamphleteers sometimes believed that a true believer would have some mysterious connection to God or the Holy Spirit. Hergot writes “There should be one shepherd and one flock on this earth and this shepherd shall pray as follows: ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost.’”<sup>[32]</sup> As Hergot shows sometimes the Holy Spirit will teach ignorant people wisdom so that they may become wise.

How may we characterize these popular views? Most of these ideas stand squarely in Catholic religious tradition which saw salvation as a process rather than an event. Catholicism is the insistence on good works and the sacraments. On the other hand the pamphleteers by no means rejected Protestant opinions of religion. We see that there were many connections between their views and Protestant ones. We know that the co-author of the “Twelve Articles,” Sebastian Lotzer was an Evangelical pamphleteer and lay preacher.<sup>[33]</sup> Simon Lochmeir who was a lay preacher and leader of a peasants’ army in Franconia in October, 1525, confessed that he “had a great liking for the Lutheran sect and misled many people with him and made them disobedient.”<sup>[34]</sup> The author of “To the Assembly” titled his first chapter “The True Christian Faith Does not Establish Human Government,” which sounds quite Lutheran for Luther believed that “But over each realm the temporal as well as the spiritual God exercises a final sovereignty. Were the whole world indeed so Luther suppose to consist of true and faithful Christians no civil government ‘no prince king lords sword or law,’ would be needed.”<sup>[35]</sup>...

To identify the religious views of these pamphleteers as “popular” is by no means to say that they had rejected official and learned religion. For example, Hergot writes “Each of these lords will have a university in his quarter in which will be taught the three tongues, Latin, Greek and Hebrew which the sole shepherd requires.”<sup>[36]</sup> These are the sacred languages of Latin Christianity. They are also the languages of Biblical scholarship and when the ordinary people themselves considered religion they looked for a biblical rather than a local language.

These writers of the German Peasants’ War did not attempt to abolish Catholic tradition or change the meaning of Christianity. In fact those pamphleteers in many respects preferred the Catholic theology which is based on rituals sacraments and Biblical language. These religious ideas of the pamphleteers suggest that the sources of peasant reformation lay not only in the Protestant movement but are also greatly influenced by Catholicism as well.

### 3. Religious and Social Reform

The pamphleteers’ religious views must be considered in the context of their proposed social and church reforms. These reforms as Gaismair writes aimed to establish a “wholly Christian order founded in all things

---

[32] Hans Hergot “On the New Transformation of a Christian Life,” in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds., *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 552.

[33] Henry J. Cohn, “The Peasants of Swabia, 1525” in Bak, *German Peasant War*, 10.

[34] *Ibid.*, 26.

[35] Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London and New York, 1984), 85.

[36] Hans Hergot “On the New Transformation of a Christian Life,” in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds., *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 551.

solely on the Holy Word of God and to live by it completely."<sup>[37]</sup> The central precept of reform was to be "godly law."

The concept of godly law provided a theory for the rejection of tyranny, the unjust lord's law, and the old tradition which had been wrongly interpreted by the lord. The essence of godly law can be seen in its highest source, the sovereignty of the Scripture. By emphasizing the authority of godly law, the common people were able to challenge the privileges of the ruling lords. When the pamphleteers discussed who should have rights to administer governmental power, they turned on the point of whether those men were true Christians with God's Word in their hearts. The pamphleteers by no means wanted to separate politics completely from property and rights because the village, which did not include all residents, was itself defined by property rights.

The pamphleteers recognized the bonds between church and state. This led them to argue that civil power should not dominate the church but should defend and maintain the "true church." This true church should be managed by godly ministers of religion. In other words, they wanted civil authority to support and protect the church, even as they also believed that the church needed to be reformed. The model for reform was located in "God's honor and the common good."<sup>[38]</sup>

Based on the ancient church, a reformed church would have certain characteristics. First of all, it should be an open church—a Christian fellowship—in which there are neither lord nor servants. All were Christian brothers and Jesus Christ their head. Hans Hergot writes "The revelation of God must nonetheless be displayed to the whole world, not once but often. Very often."<sup>[39]</sup>

This Christian fellowship followed the principle of equality, in which "all ranks of the world, clerical and lay, noble and commoner, king and prince, burgher and peasant. . . they all concerned one as much as the other. Cities, land, and people, all that God ever revealed, pertained equally to everyone."<sup>[40]</sup> Secondly, the church should rest under the control of the local government. As Hergot suggests, "The lord will establish sets of biblical codes. . . The biblical code, one in each district, will teach the Word of God to the salvation of souls and will therefore nourish the soul as well."<sup>[41]</sup> Thirdly, "All the chalices and precious metals are to be taken from every church and house of God and minted into coins to be used for the common benefit."<sup>[42]</sup> Fourthly, a church supported by tithes and which attends to social welfare "is to be given by everyone according to the command of God and is to be used as follows—every parish is to have a priest according to the teaching of Paul who is to preach the word of God. He is to be honorably supported from the tithe according to his need, and the surplus is to be given the poor."<sup>[43]</sup> Since the preacher was already paid, he should not charge extra for the sacraments. Fifth, for training the pastors, schools or colleges should be established. The professors in the

[37] Michael Gaismair, "Tyrolean Constitution," trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Michael Gaismair, Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden, 1978), 131.

[38] Hans Hergot, "On the New Transformation of a Christian Life," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds., *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 550.

[39] *Ibid.*, 554.

[40] *Ibid.*, 552.

[41] *Ibid.*, 550.

[42] Michael Gaismair, "Tyrolean Constitution," trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Michael Gaismair, Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden, 1978), 134.

[43] *Ibid.*, 132.

college may also be members of the local government. Sixth, pastors were to be elected by the community, which also had authority to depose a pastor who behaved improperly. The elected pastor should preach the holy gospel purely and clearly without human additions or human doctrines or precepts.<sup>[44]</sup> Seventh the church should base itself on the Holy Scripture the highest authority. Eighth it should be a plain church without images since “all images crucifixes and chapels which are not parish churches and the mass are to be done away with in the whole land and they are an abomination before God and utterly unchristian.”<sup>[45]</sup>

The Bible served the pamphleteers not just as a norm of church reform but also as the justification for social reform. For example, the notion of Christians as brothers, spiritual siblings, was very old, and was the basis for the entire ethos of monasticism. What was new in the Common Man’s Christianity was the effort to apply it to ordinary laymen.

The Bible was also the source for the pamphleteers’ central concept godly law. This ideal came to replace that of the “old law,” because as Blickle shows “It could be used to overcome the structural problems of feudalism and finally feudalism itself. Even where they could not serve as a basis for argument [by old law] because feudalism was too stable or where feudalism had already been eroded by new doctrine of the early modern state the superstructure of godly law could be adapted independently to put forward demands of quite different content.”<sup>[46]</sup>

Based on the Bible the pamphleteers argued that the common people were equal to the nobles if according to the Christian ideal equality for the author of “To the Assembly,” meant that people should have a right to both elect and depose rulers who proved to be tyrants. For, Gaismair it meant governmental control or management. People needed to pay taxes in return for which the government would take care of the people and promise them a better life. For Hergot, because both the commoners and the nobles were Christians, they should be socially, religious and politically equal. He wrote “Do you really believe that the Holy Ghost will be mute forever and buried as though He can speak no more? His voice and His truth go forth; they ring like a trumpet in the hearts of all men.”<sup>[47]</sup>

In the practice the pamphleteers did recognize however a certain political religious and economic inequality. For example, with regard to religious although Hergot emphasized that an poor, uneducated fisherman and a tax-collector were able to write the Bible and in time came to be considered the wisest through the work of the Holy Spirit. He said people needed those educated priests and should accept the exclusive sacramental power which the church conferred on them for the benefit of the people.

Politically for example the author of “To the Assembly” believed that it was essential for the true Christians to hold power and rule. He never went so far however as to say that only common people were qualified. Those who hold power might be rich men but they might also be the poor men. They might be nobles but they might also be merchants and peasants. It did not matter into what political power or

[44] “The Twelve Articles,” in Blickle, *Revolution of 1525*, 196.

[45] Michael Gaismair, “Tyrolean Constitution,” trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Michael Gaismair, Revolutionary and Reformer*, 131.

[46] Peter Blickle, “Biblicism versus Feudalism,” in Bob Scribner and Gerhard Benecke, eds., *The German Peasant War of 1525-New Viewpoints* (London, 1979), 142.

[47] Hans Hergot, “On the New Transformation of a Christian Life,” in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds., *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 553.

economic stratum true Christians were born. What mattered was that the governmental power be exercised by true believers. It is quite clear that for the Common Mansociety then was still divided into the ruler and the ruled. Despite the division into ruler and ruledthe religious ideal of equality nonetheless promoted brotherly union and brotherly love and linked the common good in general with social welfare in particular. The pamphleteers emphasized dutycaring for the poor and establishing hospitals for the sick or aged people. ' ”

## Conclusion

The most important belief of the pamphleteers was that people were divided into men of God and men of the Devil. The former did well and were hopefully chosen for Salvationthe latter did evil and would go to Hell. The pamphleteers believed that it was essential for true Christians to hold power. They emphasized that true Christians were chosen by people and justified by the Scripturenot those with powerwealth and title.

The pamphleteers did not attempt to abolish Catholic tradition or change the meaning of Christianity. Their influence on religion was not as radical as the Protestant Reformation. The sources of peasants' reformation lay not in the Protestant movement alonebut also in Catholicism and other independent sources.

While the pamphleteers emphasized social justice based on the godly lawthey also stressed that the communal order was based on God's Word. The Gospel provided common people not only news of salvation after life but also social reform here on earth. Hergot describes this message of social reform as the command of God. "God will humble all estatesvillagescastleschurchesand monasteries," he wrote"and He will institute a new transformation in which no one will say 'That is mine. ' "[48]

The religious and social reform will bring happiness to the people, Hergot wrote. "This ordering of the earth and the single shepherd will restore all the benefits and blessing which man needs in body and soul. Through this ordering of the earththe small villages will be able to defend their lands from the great cities and lordsand what is to be found on their lands will belong to them. "[49]

---

[48] Hans Hergot, "On the New Transformation of a Christian Life," in Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, eds. , *Flugschriften der Bauernkriegszeit*, 547.

[49] *Ibid.* , 552.

**中文题目：**

**德意志农民战争中的宗教**

**朱孝远**

俄勒冈大学博士,现为北京大学历史系教授。曾撰写过 12 本书,发表过有关中世纪欧洲、近代早期欧洲、德意志农民战争、德意志宗教改革的论文近 200 篇。联系地址:朱孝远 中国北京:100871 北京大学历史学系。电话:15811200202。电子邮件:zhupku@hotmail.com

**提要:**本文探讨德意志农民战争中普通人的宗教观念,探讨在“神法”的作用下农民村社传统如何奠定新基础。宗教新观念使普通人的村社得到发展,他们起来反抗与宗教神学相对立的统治,反抗“不信神的领主”。通过基督徒之爱、公共利益、兄弟之爱,农民们也看到了宗教神学的教导与封建权威之间的对立。

**关键词:**德意志农民战争、十二条款、蒂罗尔宪章、盖斯迈尔、海尔高特