**Lecture Synopsis: The Unfolding of the European Reformation**

The lecture examines the notion of the ‘European Reformation’. ‘Reformation’ as renewal was a fundamental element in Christianity. But *the* (Protestant) Reformation refers to something unique - a permanent schism in Western Christendom which has no parallel in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It was messy, long-drawn out, and fundamentally divisive. That suggests we should regard the Reformation as an *event*, which is how it began. But it was also a *proces*s of long, dynamic evolution, with different chronologies and geographies, in which the Reformation takes on different colours and textures. It thereby decomposes into a Lutheran, Calvinist, Counter-, Anabaptist, radical, urban, rural, refugee, further (etc.) Reformation. This lecture tries to understand that.

1. **Chronology:** the underlying chronology of the Protestant Reformation can be understood in ‘generational’ terms:- a **first** generation (1490-1530) of dynamic, chaotic change, mainly in German and Swiss lands; a **second** generation (1530-1560) of attempted repression by the forces of the Old Church and established political authority in Western Europe outside Germany and Switzerland, creating an evolution in the Reformation, alongside a process of evolving political and ecclesiastical consolidation, especially in German and Swiss lands; a **third/fourth** generation (1560-1620) marked by attempts at ‘further reformation’ and ‘confessionalisation’ alongside a gathering movement of political and ecclesiastical ‘Counter-Reformation’. When the Protestant Reformation can be said to end is not the way the question should be asked. If the Reformation is a process, it did not suddenly stop, although the process gradually became integrated into others, overlaid by other concerns. The more generations pass, the more difficult it is to ascribe and analyse a phenomenon directly to the impact of the Protestant Reformation.
2. **The Reformation as a multi-layered Process**: The dynamics of the Reformation were multi-layered and driven by forces which were in tension with one another. The result was the processes of the Reformation were fundamentally contradictory. The **political and polemical** layer dominated the early generations of the Reformation. On the one hand it could be manipulated by rulers and strengthened the authority of the state. On the other hand, the processes of the Reformation created dissident minorities which threatened the legitimation of the state, fomented polemic, embittered politics and created ‘wars of religio’. The unfolding the Reformation was therefore one in which, in the short and medium term, the outcomes were uncertain, debated and contradictory. The **ecclesiastical and confessional** layer dominated the medium and long-term outcomes of the Reformation. This layer too had its contradictory tendenies. On the one hand there was the establishment and consolidation of church organisations on a largely territorial basis, and their efforts to ensure the conformity of people in their charge. This has been called a process of ‘confessionalisation’ (G: *Konfessionalisierung*). The term is used to delineate the impact of attempts to unify beliefs around a territorial entity - a process more marked because of the enlargement of state control over Church affairs in the post-Reformation. In some places, when the state was involved in the imposition of unity, it amounted to state-building. It resulted in projecting a sharper sense of religious-conceived and derived identities of one sort or another - godly households, godly rulers, godly nations. But, in tension with these processes of confessionalisation were those areas where religious minorities were too entrenched to be eradicated. The rural world remained stubbornly resistance to being acculturated to religious changes. Top-down state-led confessionalisation was much less successful in larger states where the political frameworks allowed elites (aristocrats, magistrates, law officers) a say in what happened, and their own opinions. The processes of confessionalisation were unstable because the ecclesiastical settlements on which the Reformation was based were themselves subject to change (often as a result of the changes of religion of a ruler). The **cultural** layers of the processes of Reformation were played out in the longer term. They are the most contradictory for historians to handle. To what extent did the Reformation modify attitudes towards the family, and towards women and children? Did the Reformation influence the patterns of European literacy? Did it create new taboos - towards religious images and music, for example? Did it increase the sense of God’s active presence in the world, and therefore that of the Devil? If so, how far does that account for the increase in prosecutions for witchcraft in the later sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries? To what extent did the Reformation change people’s relationship towards money and wealth? These are open questions precisely because their impact was only felt, to the degree that it was, over the longer term, and because the processes of the Reformation contained within them fundamentally divergent tendencies.
3. **Reformation ‘Geo-politics’.** The **dynamics of the first chaotic period** of the Reformation in German and Swiss lands have to be understood as the result of its spread through multiple media (print, but also preaching, song, letters, etc) and its bringing fresh political players into action in localities. The early Reformation established social coalitions with townsmen, peasants, knights, printers, publicists, who took the Reformation in unpredictable ways, reflecting their own visions of the future. By the late 1520s, the results were beginning to emerge in the foundations of models for a ‘princely’ reformation, one put in place by the ruler, largely Lutheran, conservative (limited ecclesiastical and doctrinal change) and for an ‘urban’ reformation, which retained more of the initial dynamism, and wanted to change churches and doctrines more fundamentally, but which would be less enduring. The fundamental debate over **images** between Lutheran and Zwinglio-Calvinist Reformers provides an example of how the divisions **within** the Reformation became as important in the evolving geo-politics of the Reformation as those with the Catholic world. **The dynamics of the second generation** revolve around the repression of early pro-Protestant movements under the influence of Germany and Switzerland elsewhere in Europe. That repression created a hardening of attitudes, exiles, and martyrs. The Counter-Reformation contributed to the dynamics of the second generation too. There was the consolidation of ecclesiastical organisations and the beginnings of confessionalisation. In Eastern Europe, the Reformation was an important movement, especially amongst the nobility, but it never managed to develop the same impetus. **The dynamics of the third generation** revolve around wars of religion and the pragmatic emergence of zones of religious pluralism. These instabilities fed into European politics and diplomacy through to the middle of the 17thC.

**Conclusion**: Questions to think about: a) Do the processes of ‘confessionalisation’ adequately explain why it proved impossible to reconcile the religious differences raised by the Reformation? b) Was the impact of the Reformation greater in terms of its political divisions or its cultural legacy ?