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MEMORIAL

Thomas A. Brady (1937–2025)

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The historian Tom Brady achieved what only very few of his colleagues, past and present, have been able to achieve: he redefined and reconceptualized a whole period of history, and not just any period, but "the Reformation," a period dear to the hearts of many people since the early nineteenth century, when a giant like Leopold von Ranke had focused his work on the period. How was Tom Brady able to do that? First, for him Reformation history never was simply a matter of national politics and theology. Rather, when studying Reformation history he applied his profound knowledge of social history and his interest in local and regional affairs. Second, from early on in his career, Tom Brady had a profound interest in historiographical traditions, conceptual ideas, and pitfalls. When beginning his research on Reformation history, he knew exactly what Ranke and the Ranke disciples had written and what the consequences of their ideas had been. Third, as he liked Southern Germany and Switzerland, when he came to Central Europe to study and to do research, he did not travel to Wittenberg and Berlin but preferred cities like Strasbourg, Tübingen, and Basel. Fourth, and most importantly, Tom Brady was always convinced that there was a broad continuum involving religious ideas, social movements, economic interests, and artistic traditions lasting from the fourteenth well into the seventeenth century, and that the mythical posting of the theses by Luther in 1517 had not been a caesura of world-historical meaning.

Over the years, from his brilliant Chicago dissertation, via his path-breaking Oregon publications, to his Berkeley masterpieces, Tom Brady produced a wealth of insights. In sum, it is not overstated to speak of Reformation history studies before Tom Brady and after Tom Brady. His insights can be grasped best by addressing one's attention to the title of his book *German Histories in the Age of Reformations*.[1] Please note that the title contains not two singulars—"history" and the "Reformation"—but two plurals. These two small changes were fully intended as a program. What do they mean? In Tom Brady's view early modern German history consisted of many centers, large and small, and many traditions. In short: for him, there was no predestined pathway in German national history leading teleologically from Wittenberg to Berlin. Rather, for him Southern Germany had a history of its own, closely connected with the histories of Switzerland, Austria, and Alsace. Equally important was his conviction that there were many meaningful religious and theological attempts to reform the Christian commonwealth in late medieval and early modern Europe, not just the one in Wittenberg, and that all of these attempts deserve our attention as historians.

Tom Brady's *German Histories in the Age of Reformations* should be seen in context with his other works. In his *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation*, he analyzed the way how politics,

[1] Thomas A. Brady, *German Histories in the Age of Reformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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social strata, and reform attempts were closely intertwined.[2] In *Turning Swiss* he demonstrated that in the early modern era the Swiss federation had become a center of power that was appealing in all of Southern Germany.[3] With *Protestant Politics. Jacob Sturm (1489–1553)*, he erected a monument for the long-time Strasbourg mayor, whose influence was equal to that of Luther's patron, Frederick the Wise.[4] In *Communities, Politics, and Reformation* he discussed his Strasbourg findings and insights in a wider context, thus deepening our understanding of the way that we, as historians, should comprehend the interaction of city politics, regional interests, imperial politics, and reform movements.[5] Without Tom Brady's intellectual input the monumental *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600* would not have received the status of the leading compendium for this period, not only for historians but for many neighboring disciplines as well.[6]

Tom Brady will be missed by friends, colleagues, and students. Together with his wife Kathy he understood and cherished the meaning of friendship; their house was always open for their friends as well as for his students. For his students, Tom was a devoted mentor. Together with Kathy he knew that the life of young people did not consist only of academic labor, and he cared for them long after they had defended their dissertations. Students at the Heiko A. Oberman Center for Late Medieval and Reformation Studies at the University of Arizona profited from his knowledge and wisdom when he was there as visiting professor in 2007, as did the students of the National University of Ireland in Galway in 2008.

It was always a joy to meet Kathy and Tom at conferences and other occasions. Tom's colleagues remember him as fair and supportive. He knew how to handle the responsibility entrusted to him, and a deadline meant an obligation that he wanted to fulfill. The Swiss historians honored him with the degree of *doctor honoris causa* of the University of Bern in 1993. American academics honored him by electing him to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003.

Tom Brady passed away after a long illness in the spring of 2025. His friends are grateful to Kathy for caring for him in such an admirable way and are with her in their thoughts. As we mourn Tom's death, we feel fortunate that we have been able to know him, and we celebrate his life and work as a historian. In international scholarship on the age of the Reformation Tom Brady will remain a voice to be heard for many years to come.

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[2] Thomas A. Brady, *Ruling Class, Regime, and Reformation in Strasbourg, 1520–1555* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

[3] Thomas A. Brady, *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empires, 1450–1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[4] Thomas A. Brady, *Protestant Politics. Jacob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (Boston: Humanities Press, 1995).

[5] Thomas A. Brady, *Communities, Politics, and Reformation in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

[6] Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, eds., *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation. Volume I: Structures and Assertions* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); and Thomas A Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, eds., *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation. Volume II: Visions, Programs, Outcomes* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

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