

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on May 3, 2022,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Steven Edgar
Ozment was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

STEVEN EDGAR OZMENT

BORN: February 21, 1939

DIED: December 12, 2019

Steven E. Ozment, McLean Professor of Ancient and Modern History, *Emeritus*, and a distinguished and productive historian of early modern Europe, with a special reputation in the history of the Reformation and of the family, was born on February 21, 1939. Ozment was raised in Arkansas and attended the University of Arkansas for two years, then graduated with a B.A. from Hendrix College in 1960. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity from the Drew Theological School of Drew University and then enrolled for a Ph.D. from Harvard, working under the renowned Reformation scholar Heiko Oberman. After teaching initially at Yale University, Ozment was recruited by Harvard's Department of History in 1979, where he remained until he retired.

Ozment's historical output, including ten books and dozens of articles, followed two major approaches: intellectual history and family history. In his dissertation, a study of late medieval thinkers, and in subsequent volumes such as *The Reformation in the Cities* (1975) and *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550* (1980), nominated for a National Book Award, he focused on the history of Protestant thought, especially in the German and Swiss milieux. He interpreted the Reformation in the context of earlier waves of clerical reform within the Church, emphasizing continuities to a novel extent. He argued for example, that Martin Luther drew inspiration for his protests from medieval mystics who invoked the divine spark within them and reiterated earlier critiques of burdensome and hypocritical religious practices. These proved especially appealing to residents of German cities, who played a crucial role in spreading the Reformation. Ozment's second major theme was family history. Drawing on the rich city archives in Nuremberg, he staked out a stalwart defense of what might be called the happy Protestant family. This intervention developed in reaction to the pioneering scholarship in family history led by Philippe Ariès in France and then Lawrence Stone, with the latter arguing that, in light of the high toll of infant mortality, parents before the modern age could not or did not invest emotionally in their children. Steven rebelled against this view and its reliance on quantitative metrics and comparative social science. He drew on correspondence and manuals for childhood education and insisted, in a burst of scholarship in the late 1980s, that sixteenth-century parents and children formed loving and concerned family units. *When*

Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe in 1983 revealed what today might be called the heteronormative family as not merely an ideal but a practiced reality based on bonds of affection and on producing successful children. In 1986, he presented *Magdalena and Balthasar: An Intimate Portrait of Life in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, which used the correspondence of these two figures to exemplify the thick bonds created by love and loss. In 1990, *Three Behaim Boys* traced sons coming to adulthood during the turbulent decades of the German sixteenth century. *Flesh and Spirit* in 1999 followed five Nuremberg families, building diverse but responsible units that were “only secondarily . . . [the products] of a larger polity, society, and culture.” Ozment understood that the crucible of family life could also go awry. His 1996 *Bürgermeister’s Daughter: Scandal in a Sixteenth-Century German Town* revealed a variant, but *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe* in 2001 reaffirmed the norm. These texts are all simultaneously deeply researched and wonderful “reads.”

German manuals of education, Ozment argued, far from being rather cold and strict guides, with some quirky medical practices, revealed the effort to form responsible and autonomous adults. The view was contested, of course, and Steven’s position, stoutly defended on the basis of what social scientists term “qualitative” evidence—he scorned quantitative metrics—revealed a deep personal stake in the issue. What is more, his approach differed from the approaches of colleagues in his own department, including the medievalist David Herlihy and Byzantinist Angeliki Laiou, both eminent practitioners of quantitative history. At the end of his scholarly career, Steven widened his focus again. Concerned that five centuries of German history with its diverse cities and debates was being judged only in the shadow of the twelve-year Third Reich, he produced *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* in 2004, and in 2013 he published *The Serpent and the Lamb*, a biography of Lucas Cranach, the great painter of the German Renaissance. Ozment argued, through a focus on Cranach’s friendship with Martin Luther, that both men celebrated marital and family love.

Steven obviously empathized with his protagonists of almost half a millennium ago and felt, as he wrote in an essay for *The Public Interest* in 1995, that they had done better at family life in some respects than contemporary American society, with its search for self-expression. Ozment wrote, “A society could only be as smart and foresightful, as disciplined and productive, as secure and charitable, as its individual members. To that end, our ancestors subjected the young at an early age to a demanding educational, moral, and spiritual regimen, which spared them neither swift punishment nor stubborn love.” An exemplar of personal investment with his own students, Ozment supervised about twenty dissertations and won the affection of his students. As one former student, now chair at Brandeis University, relates, he was “impressively democratic about the input of graduate students to the substance of his courses,” and, in the classroom, was “engaging, concise, and funny and regularly illustrate[d] his points about early modern family life with self-deprecating examples from his own.”

That family included, first, Elinor Pryor, mother of three of his children; later Andrea Foster, mother of two further children; and then Susan Schweizer, who survives him along with four

of his children. Steven Ozment retired in 2015, after 35 years of teaching at Harvard. He died on December 12, 2019, from the effects of the Alzheimer's syndrome that overtook him at the end. He was always modest, collegial, and skeptical about trendiness, searching—we think it safe to say—for the right mix of love, labor, and wisdom in families and education.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Blair
James Hankins
Charles Maier, Chair