

Joachim Hahn. *Zeitgeschehen im Spiegel der lutherischen Predigt nach dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg: Das Beispiel des kursächsischen Oberhofpredigers Martin Geier (1614-1680).* Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005. 227 pp. EUR 18.80, paper, ISBN 978-3-374-02294-6.

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Catholic Baroque sermons have long been recognized as a fruitful source for literary and cultural historians of the early modern period. In comparison, the sermons of Lutheran preachers of the Orthodox period have been neglected by those outside the field of historical theology. Only gradually are these confessional divisions being overcome, but this book shows the value of such of cross-fertilization. Written under the direction of Helmar Junghans at Leipzig and completed in 1990, this dissertation was not revised for publication. While the author's contention in the preface that there has been little new research on Orthodox Lutheran preaching in the intervening years slights the contributions of Hans-Christoph Rublack and his students,[1] it also reflects the fact that Orthodox sermons from the later seventeenth century are still largely uncharted territory. Hahn's study is narrowly focused and heavy on theological content, but it gives important insight into the worldview of an influential pastor and his reaction to the political events and cultural changes of his day. It also highlights the problems with older stereotypes about Lutheran Orthodoxy and its presumed contrasts with early Pietism.

As Hahn readily admits, Martin Geier did not have the same influence or reputation as several of his predecessors in the post of court preacher to the elector of Saxony. Nevertheless, the many

editions of his sermons, which include over forty imprints, published well into the eighteenth century and long after Geier's death, attest to his popularity as an author of devotional works. Geier began his career as a professor first of Hebrew and then of theology in Leipzig, where he also served as pastor and eventually church superintendent. Although some of his Leipzig sermons are included in the published collections, most of the sermons are dated after his appointment as Dresden court preacher in 1665. Audience did make a difference for those sermons. The sermons delivered to the burgher audience in Leipzig, for instance, contained only moderate criticism of a prince who was depicted as pious and who protected the truth of Lutheranism, while those preached in Dresden were more outspoken in their opposition to tolerance of other confessions at court and emphasized the need to preserve Saxony's Lutheran heritage. Hahn points to these "local" aspects of the sermons as one important characteristic that distinguished them from the more general literature of edification, so popular throughout the seventeenth century.

The core of the book is Hahn's examination of four general topics in Geier's sermons: his references to the Thirty Years' War and to current wars outside of Germany; his discussion of contemporary morals and social problems; his view of the elector's ruling authority (*Obrigkeit*) and court;

and his statements concerning nature and the scientific advances of his day. Although the Thirty Years' War had been over for almost two decades when most of these sermons were preached, Geier referred to it frequently in his sermons. For Geier, who had grown up during the war, as well as for many in his audience, the Thirty Years' War was still a "current event." Geier generally used the war in a predictable manner, as a demonstration of God's wrath towards those who did not repent and reform, but that was only one of many ways the events of the war were cited in his sermons. He also used the war to illustrate biblical history, especially passages from the Old Testament; he contrasted the time of war with the current peace, to incite his audience to gratitude for their present blessings; and he used specific events to make his points. The destruction of Magdeburg, for instance, warned about the unexpectedness of loss and taught one not to rely on earthly possessions. France's wars and the advance of the Turks in southeastern Europe were a cause for anxiety, a reminder of the inconstancy of life and a warning against optimism and a false sense of security.

Like preachers of most eras, Geier castigated the many moral failings he regarded as prevalent in his day. One particular target of his sermons was the threat to public order that he perceived was a lingering effect of the Thirty Years' War. Geier also linked this threat to the growing taste for French fashion and luxuries in dress eagerly adopted by all levels of society that blurred the traditional distinctions between the social orders and diverted money away from charity to the poor. The Dresden court in particular was criticized for its extravagance and the expenditure devoted to representations of power, a key element of Baroque culture. Geier was more in step with the prevailing winds of absolutism in upholding the view that a Christian ruler was responsible for the spiritual well-being of his subjects and so held ultimate authority over the church. In effect, this position eliminated the church's independence

and reduced it to a branch of the governmental bureaucracy.

Hahn moves beyond the limited question of whether Geier believed in a geocentric or a heliocentric universe to consider his awareness of new scientific ideas, advances in geographical knowledge and contact with non-European cultures more generally. Geier drew on a broad range of sources, most of them by Catholic or Reformed rather than Lutheran authors, for anecdotes and illustrations in his sermons; he acknowledged the doubts and questions his hearers might have about God's providence as they became aware of peoples outside of European Christendom. Geier's discussions of heaven and of the world itself show that he had abandoned the Aristotelian notion of divine and earthly spheres and the connections between them, although indirect references indicate that he continued to believe in a geocentric universe. Hahn thus sees in Geier's sermons not a sense of shock, as new views challenged old ones, but a more gradual acceptance of new ideas alongside the old.

As an appendix to his study of Geier's sermons, Hahn adds what is really a final chapter based on a statistical comparison of the topics in Geier's sermons with those of two of his successors: the "father of Pietism," Philipp Jakob Spener, and the Orthodox theologian Samuel Benedict Carpzov. As members of a generation born towards the end of the Thirty Years' War, neither Spener nor Carpzov referred to the war in their sermons, a finding that highlights the importance of the war for shaping the mentality of Geier and his generation. In other areas, such as morality, church life, view of government authority and references to science and the natural world, Hahn finds more similarities than differences between the sermons of the two Orthodox and the Pietist preachers. Spener differed from the other two primarily in his greater emphasis on eschatology and in his concern for a broader range of issues related to the life of the church, including specific

proposals to reform church structures and improve pastoral care.

Hahn's study of Geier's sermons illustrates the value of sermons as a window into early modern culture. By their very nature sermons are normative and prescriptive rather than descriptive, but Hahn has demonstrated how a careful reading of the text can go beyond the preacher's "Thou shalt/shalt not" verbiage to uncover attitudes, assumptions and values characteristic of his age. Such analysis is important not only for moving beyond stereotypes about the nature of Orthodox preaching but more importantly for deepening and refining our understanding of Baroque culture.

Note

[1]. Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Lutherische Predigt und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeiten," in *Die Lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Christoph Rublack (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1992), pp. 344-95 and works cited there; Norbert Haag, *Predigt und Gesellschaft. Die lutherische Orthodoxie in Ulm, 1640-1740* (Mainz: Zabern, 1992); Monika Hagenmaier, *Predigt und Policy. Der gesellschaftspolitische Diskurs zwischen Kirche und Obrigkeit in Ulm 1614-1639* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1989); Sabine Holtz, *Theologie und Alltag. Lehre und Leben in den Predigten der Tübinger Theologen 1550-1750* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

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