

**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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Despite the long-standing consensus that preaching was one of the most important communicative tools of the Reformation, Catholic Reformation, and subsequent confessional period, and despite a few strong publications in the last decade,[1] research on vernacular evangelical sermons in Germany can still be said to be in its infancy. Court preachers and their activities are an underresearched subset of this topic, as are sermons of the period of evangelical orthodoxy.[2] Tens of thousands of early modern sermons survive in printed form, and laying aside the funeral sermon, which has been treated in somewhat more detail, most of them still await rediscovery and contextualization.[3] Specialist readers in this area welcome any new study on which we can get our hands.

This is the scholarly context in which most readers will approach Joachim Hahn's book, which examines the sermons of Martin Geier (1614-1680), a professor of Oriental languages and later theology at the University of Leipzig, and who became pastor of the Leipzig Thomaskirche and superintendent before he was called to serve as preacher to the Saxon court at Dresden in 1655. The book begins with a literature review in part 1, which traces the minimal role the orthodox sermon played in older secondary literature on preaching; even specialists will find interesting observations here, since many of the surveys

Hahn treats are virtually unread today. Then Hahn turns to a brief biography of Geier in part 2, before discussing his major works and their themes in part 3.

Hahn's primary energy, however, is devoted to his fourth, most extensive section, which emerges from his reaction against charges about the supposed sterility of Lutheran orthodoxy. Orthodoxy was often criticized by its later pietist detractors as sterile and overly dogmatic, a judgment that predominates in the secondary literature at the basis of Hahn's study.[4] This position, imbued with a heavy dose of pietism's own rhetoric about its roots in response to orthodoxy, has been eroding for some time,[5] although the re-examination of orthodoxy has never been applied in much detail to preaching.[6] In particular, Hahn is concerned in part 4 with the extent to which an orthodox preacher might include references to contemporary events in his sermons as a means of reaching his audiences, since the presence of such statements would tend to suggest that orthodox preaching was not as focused on transcendent annunciation of the Gospel, hair-splitting theology, and inter-confessional invective as has sometimes been suggested.[7] This question of the extent to which preachers related their sermons to current events known to their audiences is an interesting one, and one that has not been effectively analyzed for any period of pre-

modern preaching; standard studies of the theme suggest that Luther understood the necessity of this approach, but that his successors quickly neglected it.[8] A more subtle understanding of the problem reveals that while not every preacher dealt with current events in his published sermons, there were many other ways of doing so.[9] To analyze Geier's preaching along these lines, Hahn considers Geier's references to the Thirty Years' War, his acknowledgement in his sermons of the state of morals and social relationships at court, his discussions of state and court authority, and his references to natural science and technology. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Geier's sermons were saturated with reference to the war, which he and many of his listeners preserved in lively and clearly traumatic memory. For example, he criticized the weakening morals of his audience, which he suggested were a direct consequence of the war, and he preached frequently in support of *Obrigkeit*, even as he tried to instruct his noble listeners in the proper way to exercise their authority. Throughout, Hahn shows convincingly that Geier was an avid consumer of a great deal of non-theological material that reappeared in his sermons, not only news reports but also encyclopedias and published news reports. Hahn also demonstrates that Geier frequently discussed and took positions on current events that would have been known to his congregations.

The analysis of these points is primarily carried out from a theological point of view, and Hahn presents some interesting points that would have borne a deeper analysis. For example, the theological validity, from the evangelical viewpoint, of the strong legalism of the sermons that urged the believer to better behavior, which Hahn suggests steps over the line to synergism. In analyzing Geier's use of the Christian scriptures, furthermore, Hahn presents a great deal of evidence to suggest that his preaching did not fulfill the stereotypes of orthodoxy, charging, for instance, that Geier occasionally pushed an "existentialization [of the biblical text] at any cost" (p. 96). Yet

Hahn does not then expound a principle for understanding when the interpretation of a pericope is stretched beyond the acceptable tolerance. What is often not clear from Hahn's analysis is the extent to which the themes of Geier's sermons differ from previous evangelical preaching; his discussion of the threat of war, inflation, and plague, of apocalypticism, and of morals suggests insignificant differences between Geier's sermons and the preaching of other late Reformation pastors. Hahn does demonstrate a convincingly clear contrast, however, with regard to Geier's employment of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, a classic locus of Baroque culture. Throughout, Hahn's assertions are illustrated with interesting, often moving examples of Geier's preaching that are effectively incorporated in the text—an excellent service, since one of the dangers of preaching studies is the tendency of authors to cite sermon authors at (often boring) length, and one of the reasons sermon studies are so rare is scholars' fear that their sources will put them to sleep. Some readers may be bothered by some aspects of Hahn's readings, particularly his readiness to diagnose what he sees as faults or failures in the attitudes or strategies that underlay Geier's homiletics, and his often limited consideration of the generic contexts in which certain statements are made.

The book ends with a section that Hahn terms an appendix, in which he compares the contents of Geier's sermons with those of (orthodox preacher) Samuel Benedict Carpzov and (father of pietism) Philipp Jakob Spener, finding similarities in their works as opposed to differences. This material is excellent, but it does raise questions about the appropriateness of Geier as an example meant to epitomize orthodox preaching. Johannes Wallman's overview of pietism suggests that at least one later pietist, the Swede Johann Gezelius d.J., saw Geier's preaching as worthy of emulation, and it may thus be the case that precisely those qualities pietists criticized most in orthodox preaching were absent from Geier's work.[10]

Despite many positive moments that make this study deserve our attention, readers should be aware that Hahn's dissertation was defended in 1990 and not revised in the intervening fifteen years. When we consider the publication of Heinz Schilling's seminal work on confessionalization in 1988, Wolfgang Reinhard's formulations, and all of the discussion and criticism of this concept since then (much of which has lengthened the original time period in which scholars believe confessionalization to have occurred),<sup>[11]</sup> Hahn's statement that not many important publications on his topic have appeared in the meantime (p. 24) is simply unintelligible. The key question of orthodox preaching as a barometer of confessionalization is not answered, for instance, although Hahn's discussion touches upon points that could be adduced to this discussion, such as the question of Geier's expressed understanding of church-state relationships. If the number of publications on court preachers specifically has been low, still our understanding of the social and theological context of the development of confessional orthodoxy has expanded drastically in recent years, as has as our knowledge of its literary and cultural context. The progress that this field has made in the interval since 1990 is immediately evident from Hahn's notes, beginning with his bibliography of Geier's works, which is not indexed to VD 17, the now standard bibliographical work in this area.<sup>[12]</sup> His discussion of Geier's consideration of themes such as violations of sumptuary law and drinking, for example, takes place in complete separation from the by-now lengthy discussion of social disciplining as an aspect of early modernity; his discussion of Reformation apocalypticism is detached from the flood of publications around the last turn of the century that dealt with this theme. It is frustrating to read a book in which one consistently finds oneself thinking that the author's conclusions about the content of Geier's sermons need fuller or more subtle contextualization. As valuable as every new sermon study is, then, Hahn's work will be of greatest val-

ue for readers interested in the narrower topic of the content and concerns of Geier's preaching, and in a content-oriented case study of a Saxon court preacher.<sup>[13]</sup>

#### Notes

[1]. All of these directly relevant works appeared in the interval since Hahn's dissertation was completed. Their conclusions are not taken into account in his work: Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Lutherische Predigt und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeiten," in *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Christoph Rublack (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1992), 344-95; Norbert Haag, *Predigt und Gesellschaft. Die lutherische Orthodoxie in Ulm, 1640-1740* (Mainz: Zabern, 1992); Sabine Holtz, *Theologie und Alltag. Lehre und Leben in den Predigten der Tübinger Theologen 1550-1750* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Thomas Kaufmann, "Lutherische Predigt im Krieg und zum Friedensschluß," in *1648-Krieg und Frieden in Europa*, 2 vols., ed. Klaus Bußmann and Heinz Schilling (Münster-Osnabrück: Verlagsgesellschaft 350 Jahre Westfälischer Frieden, 1998), vol. 1, 245-250. On Reformation-era preaching, see now also Larissa Taylor, ed., *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Beth Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary* (New York: Oxford, 2004); and Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation: Ministers and their Message in Basel, 1529-1629* (New York: Oxford, 2006).

[2]. On court preachers, in addition to the very meager older literature, see most recently Wolfgang Sommer, "Die Stellung lutherischer Hofprediger im Herausbildungsprozeß frühmoderner Staatlichkeit und Gesellschaft," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 106 (1995): 213-228; and Wolfgang Sommer, "Johann Reinhard Hedinger als Hofprediger in Stuttgart," *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 24 (1998): 160-185, as well as Sommer's new *Die lutherischen Hofprediger in Dresden* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), which I could not consider before writing this review. See also the magisterial Luise

Schorn-Schütte, *Evangelische Geistlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), which, although it does not treat court preachers in specific, includes a suggestive discussion of the multifaceted relationship of pastors to the developing territorial states.

[3]. An excellent new survey of this literature that treats the older scholarship in its notes is Cornelia Niekus Moore, *Patterned Lives: The Lutheran Funeral Biography in Early Modern Germany* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

[4]. For a summary of this position as it relates to preaching, see Nicolas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism, 1700-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6-7, 198ff.

[5]. Early on, for example, in Johannes Wallmann, "Pietismus und Orthodoxie. Überlegungen und Fragen zu Pietismusforschung," in *Geist und Geschichte der Reformation*, ed. Heinz Liebring (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), a position articulated most recently in Jonathan Strom, *Orthodoxy and Reform: The Clergy in Seventeenth-Century Rostock* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) and Kenneth G. Appold, *Orthodoxie als Konsensbildung. Das theologische Disputationswesen an der Universität Wittenberg zwischen 1570 und 1710* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2004).

[6]. And indeed, Thomas Parnell Bach does find evidence to support the idea that audiences disliked the sterile qualities of orthodox preaching in his dissertation, "Throne and Altar: Halle Pietism and the Hohenzollerns" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2005).

[7]. The lack of interest among orthodox preachers in speaking to the concrete situations and experiences of their audiences is a commonplace of the secondary literature; see, for example, Wilfried Engemann, *Einführung in die Homiletik* (Tübingen: A Francke Verlag, 2002), 363, who suggests that only the Enlightenment allowed pastors to grasp the context of their listeners as the individual context of the listener's.

[8]. Engemann, *Einführung*, 362.

[9]. For one approach to this problem, see Susan R. Boettcher, "The Rhetoric of Seelsorge for Miners in the Sermons of Cyriakus Spangenberg," in *Frömmigkeit - Theologie - Frömmigkeitstheologie*, 453-466.

[10]. Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005), 95.

[11]. A summary of the debates over this concept to 2003 can be found in Susan R. Boettcher, "Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism and Modernity," *History Compass* (2004), EU 100: 1-10.

[12]. Available on the internet at <http://www.vd17.de/> (Accessed January 29, 2006).

[13]. On piety at the Saxon court in light of Geier's sermons, see now also Wolfgang Sommer's contribution to Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Roland Liebenberg, eds., *Frömmigkeit-Theologie-Frömmigkeitstheologie: Contributions to European Church History--Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

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