

Friedrich Edelmayer, Peter Feldbauer, Marija Wakounig. *Die neue Welt (Bd. 3); Globalgeschichte 1450 - 1620 (Bd. 4); Süd- und Nordamerika in ihrer kolonialen Epoche (Bd. 3); Anfänge und Perspektiven (Bd. 4).* Wien: Promedia Verlag, 2002. 230 S. + 3 Karten; 278 S. ISBN 978-3-374-01918-2.

Reviewed by Peter Barker

Published on H-German (March, 2004)

This study, originally a dissertation submitted at the University of Leipzig, takes Saxony as an example of the organizational problems facing the Protestant Church at a regional level in the immediate post-war period and analyzes the steps taken there to build up a new Church structure in a situation where there were no existing structures in May 1945. The sixteenth "brown" Synod in Saxony had dissolved itself in 1934 and the first post-war synod was not constituted until April 1948.

Saxony was an example of one of the provincial regions of the Protestant Church in which *Deutsche Christen* were in control of the Church hierarchy from 1933. Although various challenges to this control came from the *Bekennende Kirche* and also from a substantial group in the middle, by 1937 they had established their dominance over the whole hierarchy. This meant that in 1945 the established figures in the Church had lost all credibility or were still in exile. Saxony was, however, in a unique position initially, since it was the only Church area to set up three organizational structures in 1945, in Leipzig, Zwickau and Dresden. It was also, like Brandenburg and Thuringia, split between two occupying powers, the Soviet Union and the United States. The Americans did not withdraw from Zwickau and Leipzig until the last week of June 1945, thereby fulfilling the previous agreement on zone frontiers, and allowing Soviet troops to occupy western Saxony. These

problems, combined with the logistical hurdles provided by a transport system which had collapsed, meant that attempts to establish any unified policy across the whole of the Saxon Church region in this early period were impossible to realize, even leaving aside the ideological differences between different factions within the Church.

Hein has used a wide range of archival sources, including some not previously available or insufficiently analyzed. He is particularly concerned to put right the false impression given by the edited edition by Georg Prater of the memoirs of the third Bishop of Saxony, Hugo Hahn, on the period of the *Kirchenkampf*. The deficiencies of this edition had first been highlighted by Wilhelm Niemoeller's review in 1969. Prater had, for example, completely excluded any references to Franz Lau, who had been responsible for the leadership of the Church in the first two years after 1945, before Hahn returned as Bishop from exile in 1947. It is clear from this book that the essential work to de-nazify the Church hierarchy was done by Lau before Hahn's return. Hein refuses to speculate about Prater's motivation for ignoring Lau's role, but he uses the unreliability of primary sources on this period to highlight the problem of coming to an objective assessment of the measures taken by a regional Church to overcome the mistakes of the Church hierarchy during the Nazi period.

Hein also underlines the importance of Erich Kotte, who had belonged to the Consistorium before 1933 and had then been a member of the Bekennende Kirche. Hein shows that Kotte was the most important figure in the personnel decisions made after 1945, but Lau, who was not identified strongly with either side between 1933 and 1945, enabled Kotte to reconcile the different factions and allow some pastors who had supported the Church hierarchy before 1945 to be integrated into the post-war structures. However, only one Superintendent, Willy Gerber in Chemnitz, remained in office. Hein leaves open the question of how many opportunists were able to stay in post in this context, thereby inviting parallels with the post-1990 period. As a result of Lau's role it was therefore not the Bekennende Kirche which played the leading role in Saxony immediately after 1945, as it did in other Church regions. This was only the case after Hahn's return in 1947.

One area missing from the book, which I would have expected to have been at least mentioned, concerns the fate of the Sorbian pastors transferred from the bilingual parishes in eastern Saxony during the Third Reich and the role played by the Church hierarchy in those transfers. Sorbian pastors who survived the war often had difficulties in returning immediately to their original parishes, as they had been replaced by German pastors who were sometimes reluctant to give up their parishes. They also faced opposition and prejudice within the Church hierarchy to the creation of special structures for the bilingual parishes, although after much argument they did force the Saxon Church to set up a separate Sorbian *Superintendentur* in Bautzen in the late 1940s.

The main value of this book is its presentation of a large amount of detailed information and primary documents about different parishes and districts. In particular, Hein highlights the differences between Zwickau, Leipzig and Dresden and the balance that was struck between continuity

and renewal in different areas. Hein does not come to any final conclusions concerning a judgment of this balance, but the material he presents provides the reader with useful aids to make a judgment. Above all, he uses the example of the Saxon Church to demonstrate the complicated nature of the Protestant Church's development after 1945.

Copyright (c) 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Peter Barker. Review of Edelmayer, Friedrich; Feldbauer, Peter; Wakounig, Marija. *Die neue Welt (Bd. 3); Globalgeschichte 1450 - 1620 (Bd. 4): Süd- und Nordamerika in ihrer kolonialen Epoche)Bd. 3); Anfänge und Perspektiven (Bd. 4)*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. March, 2004.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9012>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.