

Projekte

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Military Occupation under the Eyes of the Lord.
Studies in Erfurt during the Thirty Years War¹

The growing interest in ways of experiencing and coping with war in past societies has led researchers to examine the role of religion anew. The much-debated question to which degree religious enmities catalysed armed conflicts has made way for a set of less-explored issues: which of the manifold messages propagated in sermons and devotionals did laymen and -women adopt and adapt or reject? Did believers focus on comfort and protection or emphasise punishment and sin? All reference to calamities entailed accusations, yet how was guilt allocated on a parochial level? Were scapegoats identified and persecuted or did members of communities internalise the calls for repentance and blame themselves for their sins and sufferings?

This project takes on these thorny questions by studying the impact of the Thirty Years War on a local level. It centres on divine interventions perceived during war. The well-known judgements and miraculous salvations² are examined with a focus on their roles in the religious lives of civilians who wrote during the war or looked back on it afterwards, based on their own experiences. By including the latter retrospectives in the study, it is possible to address, if not test, the reigning hypothesis in the field that concerns the long-term cultural effects of war. The year 1648 not

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² Jean Delumeau, *Sin and fear. The emergence of a western guilt culture, 13th-18th centuries*, New York 1990; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, Oxford 1999; Manfred Jakubowski-Thiessen, Hartmut Lehmann (Hrsg.), *Um Himmels Willen. Religion in Katastrophenzeiten*, Göttingen 2003.

only marks the end of the age of religious wars within Europe, some researchers have suggested. The „disruptive experience” of an exceptionally long-lasting conflict further challenged the traditional view of war as a God-sent trial and visitation.³ It thus led to a positive disillusionment, which freed contemporaries from atavist beliefs.⁴

Erfurt in Central Germany is well suited for such a case study. The sizeable Lutheran town with a Catholic minority hosted a Swedish garrison from 1631 until 1650, with a break from September 1635 to December 1636. Twelve printing presses were based in the town, whose burghers also nurtured a tradition of chronicle-writing. This makes it possible to analyse the representations of the war in printed sermons and in the fifteen extant manuscript town chronicles. A comparison between these corpora not only indicates to which extent lay Lutheran chroniclers took on their preachers’ views on divine interventions. It also helps to demonstrate how the latter adapted sermons to fit their audiences’ attitudes and sensibilities.

The analytical section is organised in three thematic sections. Prodigies are first examined as communicative phenomena. The tension between the theological focus on the soteriological aim of temporal afflictions and the more ‘mundane’ interest in averting God-sent catastrophes is important throughout this section.

A second section looks closer at the lay impiety diagnosed by theologians and inspects their resulting efforts to increase collective repentance. Pre-existing programmes meant to tighten ecclesiastic discipline were adopted by a number of Lutheran rulers in the

³ Johannes Burkhardt, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg*, Frankfurt/ M. 1992, Kap. IV: Der Störfall frühneuzeitlicher Geschichtserfahrung. Ein Epilog zum dreißigjährigen Alltag.

⁴ Theodor K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*, New York 1975; Bernd Roeck, *The atrocities of war in early modern art*, in: Joseph Canning u. a. (Hrsg.), *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, Aldershot 2004, S. 129-40, hier S. 137-140.

course of the war, especially following military defeats.⁵ The theological controversy about these moral reforms is first analysed on a local level, along with disputes about a related apocalyptic commentary. A second chapter then compares these theological diagnoses with the use of prayers in lay chronicles and the institutionalised penitent measures. This survey should provide a more balanced assessment of lay *praxis pietatis* and help to assess the responses to the call for repentance within a parochial culture of shame.

The third and final section examines lay adaptations of the religious figures of thought. A chapter on ‘how to make an example of soldiers’ explores how chroniclers and pastors construed the sudden violent death of a brutal soldier as divine judgement. Here, narration and selective cognition helped to uphold the belief in temporal divine justice. A final chapter surveys civil-military conflicts to establish whether the fear of the often invoked divine judgement had any moderating impact on the way soldiers’ behaved towards civilians.

The exchanges examined in this project took place between pastors and the lay chroniclers and were, on the whole, characterised by considerable agreement. Most chroniclers were, admittedly, reluctant to share in the emphasis on „afflictive providences” found in homilies.⁶ Just like their English contemporaries, they were prone to take more vindictive notes of the soldiers’ evil deaths, thereby placing God on their side. The clergy’s call to internalise blame for personal sufferings certainly remained disputed amongst parishioners during the war. Also, the associated demand to visit the week-

⁵ Z. B. Gunner Lind, *Interpreting a Lost War. Danish Experiences 1625 to 1629*, in: Franz Brendle, Anton Schindling (Hrsg.), *Religionskriege im Alten Reich und in Alteuropa*, Münster 2006, S. 487-510. The main synthesis remains Hans Leube, *Die Reformideen in der deutschen Kirche zur Zeit der Orthodoxie*, Leipzig 1924.

⁶ Kaspar von Greyerz, *Vorsehungsglaube und Kosmologie. Studien zu englischen Selbstzeugnissen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen u. a. 1990, S. 77.

ly prayer hour and abstain from acts of vigilante justice met notable dissent.

Yet these existing tensions seem to have receded in post-war retrospectives. Funeral sermons all presented the past sufferings of individual believers as a nobilifying trial of faith rather than a punitive visitation of sins. Chronicles attest to a process of selection and amplification of the experiences that were consonant with the tenets. This helped to reinforce convictions that had been destabilised during or outright challenged by the war. The edifying meaning of prodigies like the famed comet from 1618 were thus fixed by retrospectives, whilst commemorative ceremonies after 1648 presented peace and the past war as events willed by God.

Strong convictions about divine interventions thus persisted in the face of a major „disruptive event”,⁷ due to selective cognition and ex-post rationalisation. Some parishioners certainly questioned the divine import of the sufferings experienced; a few even accused God of acting as a tyrant.⁸ Yet the respectable householders who wrote the town chronicles examined here kept a safe distance to these views; blasphemy records offer a more promising source to study such dissent.⁹ The very fact that the provocations were deemed blasphemous meant that they were marginalised and had only a limited societal effect in the long-term; atheism was still not a respectable alternative in the period examined here.

Pointing to the tenacity of strong convictions should by no means lead us to ignore the religious changes documented on an

⁷ Burkhardt, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg* (wie Anm. 3).

⁸ Benigna von Krusenstjern, „Gott der allmechtig, der das weter fiehren kan, wohin er will.“ Gottesbild und Gottesverständnis in frühneuzeitlichen Chroniken, in: Wolfgang Behringer u. a. (Hrsg.), *Kulturelle Konsequenzen der „Kleinen Eiszeit“*, Göttingen 2005, S. 179-194, hier S. 183.

⁹ Francisca Loetz, *Mit Gott handeln. Von den Zürcher Gotteslästerern der Frühen Neuzeit zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Religiösen*, Göttingen 2002; Arthur Stöggmann, *Hoffet ihr noch auf Gott, ihr narrischen leutt? Blasphemie und klerikale Autorität in Niederösterreich (1647/1648)*, in: Andrea Griesebner u. a. (Hrsg.), *Justiz und Gerechtigkeit. Historische Beiträge (16.-19. Jahrhundert)*, Innsbruck u. a. 2002, S. 169-198.

individual level.¹⁰ The Thirty Years War did also affect collective forms of Lutheran religiosity: whilst prayer days grew in frequency and took on new forms, pious pipedreams about the ‘reformation of manners’ began to have an impact on the lives led by parishioners; theological controversies, in turn, undermined radical apocalyptic policy-making. At the present state of research it remains difficult to assess the representativity of the findings from Erfurt. By generating new hypotheses, the present case study should help to indicate fruitful avenues for further research.

¹⁰ Howard Hotson, *Paradise postponed. Johann Heinrich Alsted and the birth of Calvinist millenarianism*, Dordrecht 2000; Hans Medick, Sondershausen als „Schindershausen“. Selbstverortungen und Wahrnehmungshorizonte der Gewalt in Volckmar Happs *Chronicon Thuringiae* aus der Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges, in: Andreas Bähr u. a. (Hrsg.), *Räume des Selbst. Selbstzeugnisforschung transkulturell*, Köln u. a. 2007, S. 173-185.