



Stefan Ehrenpreis, Ute Lotz-Heumann. *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002. 138 S. (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-534-14774-8.

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Published on H-German (April, 2005)

Confessionalization and Early Modern German Catholicism

It is striking how the study of Catholicism in Germany remains largely marginalized within a field that is still identified as “the Reformation.” The rise of new conceptual frameworks like confessionalization, or “The Confessional Age,” have only changed this tendency slightly. Yes, most historians have moved beyond the deeply confessionalized historiography that dominated the study of religion in early modern Germany even twenty years ago, but the study of Catholicism remains poorly integrated into the wider field. Stefan Ehrenpreis and Ute Lotz-Heumann, the authors of a new survey of this field, are keenly aware of this problem, as they write: “Allerdings ist es bisher noch nicht gelungen, eine Darstellung der ‘Reformationsgeschichte’ vorzulegen, in der die alten mit den neuen Ansätzen der Reformationsforschung verbunden sind.... Die groessten Defizite in der Reformationsforschung lassen sich bei der Beruecksichtigung katholisch-altglaeubiger Thematiken finden” (p. 113).

Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann do their best to integrate the study of Catholicism into their survey, but, because they are summarizing research in the field, this turns out to be difficult. The field is still Reformation history. The section on “Reformation und kultureller Wandel” focuses on (Protestant) iconoclasm and the importance of (Protestant) pamphlets in the early Reformation. As one would expect, “Stadt und Reformation” draws on the important series of studies of Protestant cities produced in the 1970s and 1980s. Not surprisingly, the chapter on “Reformation in der laendlichen Gesellschaft” focuses on Peter Blickle’s “Gemeinde Reformation” (“Communal Reformation”), with an excursion into the vibrant field of Anabaptist studies. The chapter on women and gender relations emphasizes the changes in the role and status of women caused by Luther’s (and sometimes Zwingli’s or Calvin’s) Reformation.

The authors cannot be faulted for presenting an overview of research in the field that emphasizes the ar-

reas receiving the most attention from historians. Chapters 5 and 6, devoted to the confessionalization thesis, bring to the forefront perhaps the most dynamic area in the study of religion in early modern Germany. Like most other overviews of confessionalization, these chapters begin with Ernst Walter Zeeden’s concept of *Konfessionsbildung* (confessional formation) which emphasized “die geistige und organisatorische Verfestigung der seit der Glaubenspaltung auseinander strebenden verschiedenen christlichen Bekenntnisse zu einem halbwegs stabilen Kirchentum nach Dogma, Verfassung, und religiös-sittlicher Lebensform” (p. 63). Zeeden, a Catholic historian, developed this conceptualization in the late 1950s, yet it did not penetrate the mainstream of German historiography until it was taken up by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard in the 1980s. Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann point out that Schilling, an historian of “evangelischer Herkunft” and a scholar of northern German Protestantism, and Reinhard, a Catholic and an historian of European Catholicism, came together to develop a “confessionalization paradigm” that explained developments in both Catholic and Protestant regions of Germany (p. 63). Confessionalization thus provided a new conceptual framework that helped historians break out of the traditionally confessionalized historiographies of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

Building on Zeeden, but moving forcefully in its own direction, the formulators of the confessionalization thesis linked the development of confessional churches to the rise of the modern state. They emphasized how church and state officials worked together to impose (or encourage, depending on the historian’s emphasis) the development of religious conformity and social discipline among the wider population. In this formulation, the confessionalization thesis emphasized the role of religion in the modernization of society and politics. Reinhard, as Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann show, was particularly

effective in outlining the modern methods—the creation of theoretical norms, the establishment of clear norms of religious practice, the use of propaganda, the intensification of education, and other techniques and media—used by early modern church and state officials to strengthen confessional conformity (pp. 66-67).

Under Reinhard's leadership, research on Catholic Germany was integrated into the study of confessionalization from the beginning. Indeed, the comparative element was an essential element in the three conferences which Schilling and Reinhard organized in the late 1980s and early 1990s, one each on Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic confessionalization. Although these events tended to bring together older scholars in an effort to draw them out of the traditional scholarly fields of Reformation and Counter-Reformation/Catholic Reform, they gave considerable impulse to this field. From the early 1990s on, historians of Catholic Germany, especially the younger ones, embraced confessionalization as a conceptual framework that would help give Catholicism a role in the main developments in German history, that is the rise of the modern state and the modernization of society more generally.

However, the confessionalization thesis also caused problems for historians of Catholic Germany. The "statist" focus, found most strongly in the work of Schilling and other historians of Protestant territories, was only partially transferable to Catholic Germany. There was certainly close cooperation between state and church officials in Catholic Bavaria, in the Habsburg lands after about 1618, and in some Episcopal territories (Würzburg), but not in many Catholic regions, where state institutions were often quite weak. Yet these lands, such as southwest Germany, the Rhineland, and Westphalia, also developed strong Catholic confessional cultures. At the very least, this situation required historians of Catholic Germany (and historians of some Protestant regions as well) to consider that popular confessional identity could develop without the consistent intervention of the state.

Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann point to another set of difficulties presented by the confessionalization thesis. Proponents of confessionalization moved beyond the idea of confessionalization as a process and increasingly wrote of the "Confessional Age," a period of German history that fell between the Reformation (said to end around 1550) and the Thirty Years' War. Of course debates about chronology are notoriously sterile, but in this case the tie between a process (the development of confessional cultures, or confessional identity) and a par-

ticular time period proved very problematic. For historians of Catholic Germany the chronological issue even threatened to bring back the notion of Catholic backwardness. After all, there was relatively little successful confessionalization in Catholic regions before the Thirty Years' War, outside of Bavaria, parts of Franconia and perhaps the city of Cologne. Instead, studies by historians like Louis Châtellier (Alsace), Etienne François (Augsburg), Andreas Holzem (Westphalia), and Werner Freitag (also Westphalia) show that Catholic confessionalism really developed strongly after 1650, after the so-called Age of Confessionalism was over. It appears that Catholics experienced confessionalization, but perhaps later than Protestants.

The confessionalization thesis has become problematic for another reason. Despite some interest among historians of Italian religion, confessionalization is really only familiar to historians of early modern Germany. This parochialism can have a negative impact on historians of Catholic Germany, who are (or should be) engaged with the wider study of Catholicism. A number of very valuable studies of Catholic regions have been done by French scholars like François and Gerald Chaix (on Cologne), yet these historians do not take the conceptual frameworks around confessionalization as their starting point. Anglophone historians writing about Catholic Germany, while increasingly read by their German colleagues, have to consider whether embedding their histories in the discourse of confessionalization will limit their ability to participate in wider debates about religion in early modern Europe. Ideally, of course, useful aspects of the confessionalization paradigm (as Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann call it) will come to inform these wider discussions, but this has not widely happened.

But how and where will confessionalization gain more attention from historians? In my view, confessionalization gained its appeal among historians of Germany because it allowed historians of religion (historians of Christianity really) to break out of the traditional confessional historiographies, while also allowing them to claim a place, along with political and social historians, in the study of modernization. These issues—the confessionalized nature of the history of early modern religion and the place of the Old Reich in the history of modern Germany are of limited interest to non-German historians of early modern Europe.

Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann, however, may have identified how confessionalization can lead German historians into the wider historical discussion. They write: "Der Begriff 'Konfessionalisierung' hat sich in der

deutschen Fruehneuzeitforschung weitgehend etabliert, und das eigentliche Forschungsparadigma wird, trotz teilweise heftiger Kritik, von den meisten Autoren als wissenschaftlich ertragreich anerkannt, allerdings unter der Praemisse der Perspektivenerweiterung bzw. der Modifikation. Angesichts der Verlagerung der historiographischen Interesses hin zur Mikrohistorie, Alltagsgeschichte und neuen Kulturgeschichte ist zu erwarten, dass sich die Konfessionalisierungsforschung in Zukunft auf die Frage nach der Bedeutung und Wirksamkeit staatlicher Konfessionalisierungsmassnahmen fuer die Lebenswelten des "Volkes" richten wird." Historians of Catholic Germany have taken the lead in integrating these new fields into studies of confessionalization. Studies of Baroque Catholicism, that is of the flowering of popular Catholic life in the century or so after 1650, have used the methods described above to give a dense analysis of religious life. Perhaps the best of these studies is that of Andreas Holzem, a massively researched account of all aspects of rural Catholicism in Westphalia. Revealingly entitled *Religion und Lebensformen. Katholische Konfessionalisierung im Sendergericht des Fuerstbistums Muenster. 1570-1800*, Holzem's book successfully uses the methods of *Alltagsgeschichte* and the social history of religion to examine the development of Catholic confessionalism. In his study, and others like it, the confessionalization thesis provides a starting point and, at the same time, is subject to considerable revision.

Finally, recent work on the process of secularization in the eighteenth century by scholars like Michael Pammer and Rudolf Schloegl provide an important link in the

history of Catholicism between the Baroque (and confessional) Catholicism of the century after 1650 and the Catholic Ultramontane revival of the nineteenth century. Pammer and Schloegl show how elements of the Catholic *Buergertum* moved away from traditional, public practices and institutions (like confraternities, pilgrimages, and processions) toward a new, more private and individual religion. These studies benefit from the better understanding of traditional Catholicism provided by the developments in the field discussed above. The studies also demonstrate that, *pace* Weber, the Catholic middle class developed modern characteristics in the eighteenth century. Historians' willingness to recognize parallel developments across the confessions may partially be credited to the work on early modern confessionalization.

There is also some irony in the story of the confessionalization thesis. By linking religion to modernization and the state, the thesis initially served to bring the study of religion, and even the study of German Catholicism, from the margins to the center of German history in the post-Reformation era. However, because the confessionalization thesis has caused historians to examine the development and nature of religious identities, fields of study, like *Alltagsgeschichte*, historical anthropology and local history/microhistory, long marginalized in German historiography, have begun to take a more prominent role. In the future, one would hope that studies of early modern religion will continue to exploit this tendency, while also integrating the history of religious developments in Germany with those in Europe more generally.

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Citation: Marc R. Forster. Review of Ehrenpreis, Stefan; Lotz-Heumann, Ute, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2005.

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