

Bösch, Frank; Hölscher, Lucian (Hrsg.): *Kirchen – Medien – Öffentlichkeit. Transformationen kirchlicher Selbst- und Fremddeutungen seit 1945*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2009. ISBN: 978-3-8353-0504-5; 266 S.

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It is incontrovertible that the Roman Catholic and Protestants churches not only in Germany but in most of Europe have suffered from plummeting attendance and a membership hemorrhage since the 1960s. In recent years, most historians writing on this subject have become loathe to resurrect secularization paradigms that stemmed from the 1960s and have employed instead paradigms of religious transformation. As society's perception of the churches was dramatically altered beginning in the late 1950s, they argue, the churches developed new identities and self-understandings in response to these fundamental changes in the public sphere.

This modestly sized but highly insightful volume hones in on one key element in this transformation: the expansion and radical restructuring of the mass media from the 1950s through the 1970s and the changes accordingly wrought in religious identities. Conceiving of the relationship between the media and religious institutions as dialectical, the eight chapters of this volume argue that the media during the so-called «long sixties» served as a medium to alternately showcase religiosity and undercut the legitimacy and reputation of religious institutions. As the churches lost direct contact to their members through membership losses and waning attendance, this vacuum was filled by their heightened presence in the mass media. This volume correspondingly focuses not only on how the mass media portrayed the churches and larger questions of faith but more importantly on how the churches were forced to develop new communication strategies. These strategies ran the gamut from censorship and public protest to the creation of religious academies, religious broadcasts on radio and television, demonstrations for peace, citizens initiatives, telephone ministries, some of which enjoyed considerably more success than others.

It is to the credit of the volume's editors, Lucian Hölscher of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum and Frank Bösch of the University of Giessen, that they place the complexity of the relationship between the media and the churches continuously in the forefront. Bösch and Hölscher argue that one cannot speak of a simple dichotomy in how religious leaders and journalists sought to portray the churches. It was not always the case that after 1958, the year which marks a fundamental caesura in this volume, journalists simply used their critical scalpel against the church, forcing beleaguered church leaders to launch a valiant but ultimately unsuccessful defense. It is certainly true that by the early 1970s more than forty percent of German journalists at newspapers, newsmagazines and television stations were not formal members of any religious institutions. In a clear sign of sympathy for those who wished to democratize, liberalize and pluralize ecclesiastical institutions, these journalists were wont to deploy a rhetoric of strife and warfare to describe the disagreements between church reformers and conservatives after seminal events such as the Second Vatican Council. In their reporting on issues such as the birth control pill, the Nazi past and confessional schools, many media figures clearly sought to limit the churches' influence over society. At the same time, however, some of the most influential journalists, including Rudolf Augstein and Axel Springer, remained deeply committed to their faith, and the pages of their own publications provide striking glimpses of their own religiosity.

Nikolai Hannig adeptly illustrates this complicated relationship between the new media culture and religion in the Federal Republic by repeatedly turning back to Augstein in his outstanding chapter, «Von der Inklusion zur Exklusion? Die Medialisierung und Verortung des Religiösen in der Bundesrepublik (1945–1970).» Augstein, Hannig rightfully notes, is best known for wielding the axe against the Roman Catholic Church in various polemics, editorials and leading articles. The Spiegel editor helped usher in a new era of critical religious reporting at the end of the 1950s. In 1958, he devoted the cover of Spiegel and fourteen ensuing pages to the Qumrum texts discovered nearly a decade before. In

marked contrast to most religious reporting from earlier in the 1950s, Augstein sought not to show how modern society could corroborate stories from the Bible but to serve as a new agent of religious enlightenment by claiming sensationally that there had been no historically verifiable truths about Jesus. But Hannig also brings to light a less familiar side to the combative editor who had earned a certain degree of infamy in religious circles. Augstein appears here surprisingly as the defender of religious orthodoxy. His reputation as a provocateur notwithstanding, Augstein openly criticized the «modern theology» of the Protestant, Dorothee Sölle, granted access to the pages of *Spiegel* to the Protestant theologian Walter Künneth, who argued that Christian parishes draw their sustenance not from the hypotheses of the theologians but from the «bread of the bible».

Somewhat adrift in this volume, which otherwise focuses only on the two Germanies, is Uta Balbier's outstanding chapter on the Billy Graham Crusades in the United States in the 1950s. Her succinct chapter highlights the reasons for the remarkable success Graham's crusade ostensibly enjoyed. Thoroughly anti-Communist, Graham also appealed to the consumption ethic of the American middle-classes. He emerged as a master of marketing and advertisement. Indeed, his crusade would have been unthinkable had it not been for the print and television mediums, who gave extensive coverage to mass rallies like those held at Madison Square Garden in the late 1950s. Why did the media so gladly cooperate? Balbier correctly notes that Graham's world view overlapped with that of the two media magnates, William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce, who helped create star power for both Graham and his wife. It is something of a pity that the editors did not include a chapter detailing efforts by German churchmen to promote religiosity and revivals in the Federal Republic. Balbier's powerful account invariably evokes transatlantic comparisons of media and religious cultures that cannot be answered in a volume this slim.

Was the media culture in Germany more apt to look at the churches critically than its counterpart in the United States? American journalists, of course, also broached funda-

mental religious topics in the 1960s, but was reporting tempered by their higher rates of participation in religious institutions?

Three chapters are devoted to the impact of visual transformations on religion. Benjamin Städter turns his attention to how visual representations of clergy in film and print changed between 1945 and 1970. The *Heimat*-filme, he points out, typically portrayed Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy alike as anchors of their communities. By the second half of the 1950s, however, some clergy began to find such depictions banal, distasteful, and, even in the words of the Protestant theologian Helmuth Thielicke, «ein Frevel im Gottes Hauses». It did not take the media long to popularize a new image of the clergy – that of the fighting protester. But added to this repertoire of images was one with roots in the *Kulturkampf* era – that of the priest unable to restrain his sexual appetites. Jürgen Kniep turns his attention to film censorship and the churches, who sent approximately two dozen representatives to the film screening board, the Prüfungsausschuss der Freiwilligen Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft (FSK). Not surprisingly, most of the church representatives fought for a tougher line against immorality, indecency and blasphemy than their secular counterparts. But here too, surprises abound in Kniep's account. The church representatives did not deny approval to Willi Forst's controversial film, *Die Sünderin*, even if the Protestant representative immediately resigned in an act of ostensible protest. Kniep's account effectively demythologizes the subsequent protests that have become the focus of considerably scholarly attention: the protests had little to do with a sighting of Hildegard's naked breast but everything to do with prostitutions, suicide and euthanasia. Later in the 1960s, church representatives gave their assent to Ingmar Bergman's masterpiece, *Das Schweigen*, to all viewers over eighteen in spite of scenes considered pornographic. But they were unable to halt the run of *Die Wechsler im Tempel*, a film from 1967 deemed blasphemous. Realized that their influence was waning, they formally left the FSK in 1971. But even this step was considerably less than momentous, since cinema was no longer the leading visual medium. Reinhold Zwick's

chapter focuses less on the churches' Film-politik but on the transformation of religious images in the cinema of the «long sixties». Looking extensively at films like *Easy Rider*, Zwick argues that film proved to be powerful forum for deconfessionalization and the search for a new syncretic religiosity. The sexual revolution promulgated in the new cinema, in fact, took on characteristics of a secular religion.

The closing three chapters focus on the semantics of ecclesiastical media and public spheres. While two chapters focus on religious academies in both East and West Germany, it is Sven-Daniel Getty's impressive chapter on debates on church reform in four Protestant and Roman catholic magazines that warrants the most attention. Two Protestant publications that catered mostly to pastors and theologians, the *Lutherische Monatshefte* and the *Evangelische Kommentare*, frequently clashed over whether to stick with the tradition of the *Volkskirche* or whether to develop more modern and relevant identities and pastoral models. Such debates over identity and structure were not just the province of German Protestantism. Staking out different positions over how to implement the reforms of the Second Vatican Council were two magazines, *Concilium* and *Communio*. Published in seven languages and associated with prominent theologians like Johann Baptist Metz and Hans Küng, *Concilium* pushed to extend the spirit of the council to the present and to push for a more progressive and pluralistic church. Founded seven years later in 1972, *Communio* emerged as a forum for more conservative theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Lehmann and Joseph Ratzinger, who strongly criticized the hopes to create a church «from below». Colliding in the debates waged on the pages of these publications were not only different understandings of the church but opposing semantics, which become the focus of Getty's analysis.

While not the last word on the subject, this volume raises a powerful array of new approaches for how to tackle the relationship between the churches and the media. Most impressive is its refusal to resort to simplistic generalizations and posit a binary opposition

between the mass media and the churches. Perhaps most reflective of the tenor of this volume is an observation posited by Hannig. Even as many church leaders were prepared to drop their traditional opposition to modern society by the 1960s, leading journalists and publishers were increasingly determined to marginalize the churches and limit their societal influence. This volume will be a must-read for those working in the religious history of Germany in the so-called «long sixties».

Zitierweise:

Mark Edward Ruff: Rezension zu: Frank Bösch/Lucian Hölscher (Hg), *Kirchen – Medien – Öffentlichkeit. Transformationen kirchlicher Selbst- und Fremddeutungen seit 1945*, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2009. Zuerst erschienen in: , Vol. 105, 2011, S. 576-579.

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