

B KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN

BB RELIGION UND RELIGIÖS GEPRÄGTE KULTUREN

BBB Christentum; Theologie

Protestantismus

Bilderstreit

1520 - 1617

Altar <Motiv>

Illustriertes Flugblatt

22-2 *Das Bild des Altars in deutschen illustrierten Flugblättern* : eine Untersuchung zu Bilderstreit und Bildtheologie im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert / Ricarda Höffler. - 1. Aufl. - Regensburg : Schnell & Steiner, 2022. - 448 S. : Ill. ; 29 cm. - (Geistliche Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit ; 1). - Zugl. Geringfügig überarb. Fassung von: Hamburg, Univ., Diss., 2020/21. - ISBN 978-3-7954-3724-4 : EUR 79.00
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No sooner had Martin Luther taken the momentous step to reject the supremacy of the papacy than differing opinions among the Protestants themselves about the nature of “papal idolatry” became apparent. These differences came into sharp focus in the outbreaks of iconoclasm in the early 1520s, which led to the so-called *Bilderstreit* within the Protestant movement. The iconoclasts, mostly fervent Calvinists, followed a strictly literal interpretation of the First Commandment and stripped churches and altars of all decoration, whereas Luther (and others, such as Erasmus and Henry VIII of England) took a more nuanced approach that accepted images for didactic and devotional purposes though not as ways to gain favor with God. This contentious disagreement was particularly important when it came to considering the appearance of an altar, the focal point of any religious service.

The arguments surrounding this important issue were addressed openly and subliminally in the popular press, which Luther and his followers were so adept at using to disseminate their ideas. Luther outlined his anti-papal ideas in several important pamphlets, but more importantly, Lutheran propagandists turned to illustrated broadsheets (*Flugblätter*) to express their opinions. Broadsheets had long been in circulation for devotional purposes, but it was with the Reformation that they developed into a potent political print medium. The combination of word and image on these polemical

sheets was an effective way for writers to reach a broad audience with their religious/theological and political arguments, and the Lutherans exploited the possibilities fully.

During the past several decades historians and social historians have come to recognize the significance of early modern broadsheets as a valuable primary source for gaining insights into issues important at the time. In most cases, studies have focused on broadsheets and related prints against a political background, and what is interesting in the present, illustrated study by Ricarda Höffler is that it is written by an art historian using broadsheets to help explain a significant religious issue (although in the early modern period there often was no clear distinction between religion and politics). In her study,¹ Höffler views broadsheets along with other art forms – painting, sculpture, and architecture – and in so doing helps to round out our appreciation of the role of broadsheets within a broader visual context.

Hoffler's nuanced study is comprised of three carefully argued and highly documented sections that trace a development from a change of perspective about the use of images, to a struggle for the correct tradition, to the final resolution within Lutheran circles. The time period under consideration are the tumultuous decades from the early 1520s to the first centenary of the Reformation in 1617. The focus in the final section centers on a Nuremberg broadsheet celebrating the Reformation – *Christo Soteri Veritatis Vindici* –, one which remained popular in Lutheran circles and was reprinted in 1637 and again in 1677. It depicts a simple altar with Christ on a crucifix flanked by Frederick the Wise of Saxony and Luther on Christ's right-hand side, and Philipp Melancthon and John George I of Saxony to his left. Holding open a bible with his left hand and pointing to the crucifix with his right, Luther is the main figure of the four, an indication that any disagreement about the use of images or the shape of an altar by the Lutherans has been settled in his favor. Compared to Catholic altars at the time, the Lutheran altar is void of all saints and focuses on the crucified Christ. The two most important reformers, however, are present, and if one looks at the many broadsheets published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with images of Luther, it is clear that the figure of Luther has replaced those of Catholic saints and taken on a quasi-hagiographic significance.

In her thorough study Höffler has helped to illuminate a contentious issue of fundamental importance among Protestants. Issues such as these are rarely settled overnight, and Höffler has shown in great detail how the arguments unfolded within the religious, political, and visual contexts at the time. Her study should give others inspiration for drawing on broadsheets and related material to help us understand other topics in the early modern period.

John Roger Paas

QUELLE

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