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Christopher Boyd Brown. *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. i + 298 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01705-4.

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Chorales, Print and Song in Reformation Joachimsthal

Christopher Boyd Brown's monograph offers an unique view of the Reformation movement in the mining town of Joachimsthal.[1] By focusing on the local and widespread success of two of the hamlet's historical figures, cantor Nicholas Herman and theologian Johann Mathesius, the author describes how the Reformation was sustained musically in the context of the town's political and social history. Not since Bart Butler's examination of Nuremberg's musical life has a work of this contextual value risen to view.[2] Brown's thesis is stated early in the work: "[T]he sheer volume of sixteenth-century hymnal printing provides very strong indirect evidence of the popular diffusion and use of the Lutheran hymns" (p. 14). This statement, coupled with the assertion that "the Reformation did succeed in creating a new kind of devout Christian among the masses, a success of which the Lutheran hymns were both means and the measure" (p. 25) clearly outlines Brown's argument. This primary assertion may seem somewhat overstated–after all, the Reformation was constituted by a tapestry of events, aesthetics, technology, theology and timing–the role of spiritual expression through music was but one aspect of the larger picture. However, if we lay aside the exclusivist claims that monograph authors are sometimes forced into by their publishers and marketers, we can consider more effectively the several points of this intriguing work.

In chapter 1, the author deals with hymn production in print as an isolated entity. While it is true that hymn printing was almost a trade in and of itself, Brown's claims might have benefited from a discussion of sixteenth-century musical print culture. This omission is mitigated, however, by Brown's weighty analysis of hymn texts as agents of doctrine in chapters 3, 4 and 5; his analysis is aligned with Rebecca Oettinger's findings concerning propaganda hymn texts.[3]

Perhaps Brown's most crucial material, found in chapter 6, concerns domestic devotion. In focusing on the centrality of hymns in the home, however, the author appears to exclude the influence of other printed material available to Joachimsthal's evangelical population. By glossing over the importance of theological tracts and *Andacht* literature, Brown misses an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the impact of print culture in literate households, a point that would have buttressed his

argument substantially. Likewise, it seems unorthodox to focus on Mathesius's views of piety and Herman's musical publications without relating them in detail to Luther's views. One would expect Brown to demonstrate the continuity of these views and their manifestations in Joachimsthal. Taken as it is, Brown appears to assume that Luther's views were well-known, a perspective that lends his book a unique perspective that makes theology in print peripheral to his argument because hymns by themselves (presumably Herman's) "provided a common religious and musical link among all the laity of the town" (p. 39).

The author's excellent discussion in chapter 7 of Joachimsthal's citizens' stubborn resistance to Counter-Reformation efforts in the town through the use of hymns is long overdue. He does scholarship in this area a great service by addressing a topic that others have ignored. Despite the growing plethora of hymnological studies focusing on the development of the chorale, much of that literature refuses to consider the long neglected topic of hymn use as a method of combating confessional imposition–especially in domestic environments.

Moreover, Brown excels in interpreting the musical texts themselves. Here, much as in the line of hymnological methodology, an accurate understanding of the text is key. Indeed, Brown's exemplary execution of this enterprise may serve as an apex of this type of scholarly consideration. His interpretations are fluid, cogent and insightful, especially when discussing music in the public sphere. In these readings, the author clearly demonstrates the link between the public and private domains by examining the text in conjunction with the public proclamation of spiritual ideals. These ideals (expressed in both text and melody), when brought to the household, "helped to integrate the household religiosity … across social lines" (p. 109). Unfortunately, however, by excluding an examination of Mathesius' sermons based on chorale texts, Brown misses an opportunity to demonstrate the intersection of print, hymn, sermon, piety and their reception/use in both public and private spheres.

The book has a strong affinity to and context within the field of the Reformation history, but Brown could have enhanced the relevance of his results by aligning his research with similar musicological works. The lack of connection to the arguments in Butler's seminal dissertation causes him to neglect key points of church music and its political regulation. (This comparison is crucial, considering that both cities adopted Luther's reforms similarly). A discussion demonstrating the influence of the Berg and Neuber printing dynasty as the primary publisher of Mathesius's writings would have provided greater depth as well–especially concerning the broader dissemination of Mathesius's views in evangelical areas.[4] A comparison to Ronald Lee Gould's important study of Wittenberg's early musical and liturgical efforts could have provided another point of comparison on the unique manner with which these issues were handled locally.[5] Brown's reliance on older musicological secondary literature is thus problematic.

Despite some missed opportunities, Brown's book provides the heretofore strongest discussion of evangelical hymn use. He brings together a discussion of many of the assumptions that hymnological and musicological researchers have batted about for decades (which Reformation scholarship has yet to integrate fully) into a cogent, well-documented study of the effects of hymn singing in a small evangelical town.

Notes

[1]. This volume is a condensation of the author's 2001 dissertation, "Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation in Joachimsthal" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 2001). Readers whose interests lie in this area would be well advised to consult that work as a companion volume for a fuller demonstration of Brown's acumen.

[2]. Bartlett Butler, "Liturgical Music in Sixteenth-Century Nuremberg: A Socio-Musical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1970).

[3]. Rebecca Oettinger, *Music as Propaganda in the German Reformation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

[4]. Susan Jackson, "Berg and Neuber: Music Printers in Sixteenth-Century Nuremberg" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998).

[5]. Ronald Lee Gould, "The Latin Lutheran Mass at Wittenberg 1523-1545: A Survey of the Early Reformation Mass and the Lutheran Theology of Music, As Evidenced in the Liturgical Writings of Martin Luther, the Relevant 'Kirchenordnungen,' and the Georg Rhau 'MusikdrÃ¼cke' for the 'Hauptgottesdienst' " (S.M.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1970).

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