



Amy Nelson Burnett. *Teaching the Reformation: Ministers and Their Message in Basel, 1529-1629.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. xii + 448 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-530576-0.

Reviewed by Randolph Head (Department of History, University of California-Riverside)

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The Maturing of Post-Reformation Studies

Amy Nelson Burnett's rich and nuanced study of Basel pastors' education, preaching, and teaching after the Protestant Reformation testifies to the growing maturity of post-Reformation studies at several levels. Burnett, who has published extensively on both theology and social history in the region that includes Basel, Strasbourg, and southwest Germany, brings a depth of perspective and an attention to detail to her study that will impress every reader. In the last generation, the emphasis in scholarship on sixteenth-century Germany has shifted from the Reformation itself to matters after the chaotic religious and political movements of the 1520s became established enough for new religious organizations and divergent religious practices to emerge. In a sense, the persuasive efforts that historians undertook during the 1970s and 1980s to reconnect Martin Luther and the movements he triggered to their late medieval backgrounds—one need only mention the work of Heiko Augustinus Oberman—freed scholars to look afresh at the mid- and late sixteenth centuries, now no longer viewed simply as the natural consequence of Luther's world-shaking breach with the Old Church.

The key model that has provided the watchword for post-Reformation studies, for better or for worse, has been confessionalization, first advanced by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling in the 1980s. The term and the debates about its significance have provided the impetus for an enormous amount of useful scholarship, much of it critical, that seeks to connect changes in religious organization, state-building, social discipline, and

the formation (or not) of something that might be called a modern consciousness. By now, confessionalization refers to far more than the simple modernizing paradigm advanced most forcefully by Schilling, having become instead an entire field of research with its own internal debates about when, how, and by whom confessional identities and confessional institutions were formed, and to what effect.[1] Burnett's study of Basel fits well into this context, since it takes up the process of confession formation in profoundly well-informed ways that move it far beyond the initial confessionalization model. The maturation of this paradigm, too, is well represented by Burnett's work.

As studies of confessionalization began, it quickly became clear that whatever effect the early Reformation may have had on the laity, it transformed the way that the clergy, Catholic and Protestant, functioned in German states and in German society. As seminal work by Luise Schorn-Schutte, Susan Karant-Nunn, and (for Switzerland) Bruce Gordon showed, disciplining the clergy to the new churches' mission and to a new relationship to the state helped make confessional religion possible—and was much easier than disciplining the laity.[2] In contrast to the autonomous pre-Reformation social estate of clergy integrated into a single western European church, post-Reformation clergy came under closer scrutiny and faced much greater pressure from secular rulers, even as they took on new obligations to teach their flocks and advise their rulers. Especially in the parts of German-speaking Europe that officially adopted one of the new

faiths, most of the clergy's worldly possessions and authority fell to local rulers such as urban magistrates and territorial princes, a development formally sealed by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The same transition applied to the Reformed cantons of the Swiss Confederation, in even greater measure than in Lutheran Germany. Burnett's book starts with this fact, attending to the particular circumstances in Basel. A recent addition to the Swiss Confederation (1501), Basel retained strong ties to the German-speaking cities of Alsace and the upper Rhine, which gave religious development in the city a distinctive cast. The other key precondition for the emergence of a distinct and remarkably homogenous pastorate in Basel from 1529 to 1629 was the city's university, which became the pivotal institution in the recruitment, education, and control of the city-state's clergy.

Burnett's study of the Basel clergy covers recruitment, education, preaching, and effects on the Basel church and, to a lesser extent, on the Basel laity. An introductory section of three chapters describes Basel, narrates the specific course of the Basel Reformation, and describes the institutional evolution of the Reformed Church that emerged there. It also provides a comprehensive description and career analysis of the Basel pastors over the century she studies. Part 2 turns to the education of future pastors and their theological views, part 3 concentrates on their preaching, and part 4 considers the pastor's role in the parish, which included not only catechism and preaching, but a variety of other services to his flock and obligations to church and secular leaders. Burnett has drawn exhaustively on the available sources, such as nearly 1,000 printed university disputations, hundreds of printed and manuscript sermons, university records, and the rich archival holdings of the Basel magistrates—although her focus falls consistently on the clergy. The resulting study provides a superb analysis of the clergy in Basel. As a broader study of religious and lay life, the book provides a major contribution, as well, although its clerical perspective puts some limits on its wider implications and also reveals a characteristic source problem for studies of early modern religion.

Two key methodological approaches structure Burnett's analysis: generational analysis and a professionalization model. Both seem appropriate and are well justified by the evidence. Burnett divides the Basel clergy into three generations, each of which experienced religious conflict and their own roles in a distinctive way. The first generation consisted of those who became pastors before or shortly after the Reformation, a relatively heterogeneous group that included former priests as well

as lay people, and which came from various regions in southern Germany and Switzerland. This generation began to die in the 1550s, and was mostly out of office by the plague epidemic of 1564. The second generation, which dominated from the 1560s to around 1600, all grew up within a firmly Protestant context, although Basel's precise place between the Lutheran and Reformed positions remained somewhat unclear. Generally better educated than their predecessors, the second generation of pastors experienced high turnover at first, but a few of them had extraordinarily long careers. The third generation, consisting of those who entered the ministry after 1580, seems the most homogeneous of all. Nearly all came from Basel and were educated at the city's gymnasium and university with the support of stipends, and all grew up within a confessionally-specific Reformed society and church. As the detailed charts and graphs at the end of the book make visible, Basel's church entered the seventeenth century with a consistently trained and professional local clergy that had strong ties to one another and to their land.

With her precise characterization of the Basel clergy as a foundation, Burnett proceeds to analyze changes in this group's formation and influence in parts 2, 3, and 4 of her study. The analysis of clerical education and of the Basel university in general is illuminating. By tracking the curricula of the city's secondary schools as well as the expectations faced by university students in the arts and theology faculties, she demonstrates several key developments. First, the quality and intensity of education at Basel increased substantially. Indeed, one of the advantages that the second and especially third generations of Basel clergy enjoyed was having already learned in secondary school material that earlier generations had only studied at the university, such as formal rhetoric and dialectical analysis of sermons. In the early part of Burnett's period, humanist pedagogy predominated, leading to an emphasis on rhetoric. Later, method and logic became increasingly important, especially after the Ramist dialectic achieved a leading role among Basel pedagogues. Another key issue for Burnett in this section is Basel's transition from an independent theological stance much influenced by Martin Bucer into conformity with a strong Reformed theology as it developed in Zurich and Geneva. Indeed, Burnett maintains that despite Simon Sulzer's relatively ecumenical approach to issues such as the Lord's Supper during his term of leadership, Basel never really experienced a "Lutheran moment." Rather, she argues, Sulzer's views drew on Bucer and indeed on Johannes Oecolampadius, whose founding role in the

Basel church gave his views influence long after the theological debates had moved beyond his position. In any event, by late in Sulzer's career, Basel's essentially Reformed theology was firmly established, a development sealed by the more confessionally oriented leadership of Johann Jakob Grynaeus. A review cannot do justice to Burnett's subtle interweaving of pedagogy, theology, and political context in this chapter: fully familiar with the history of education and the history of dogmatics in the period, she connects them to the evolution of both institutional church and the practice of religion in Basel in illuminating ways.

Part 3 performs a similar combining act with regard to preaching in Basel. Burnett starts by analyzing the evolving homiletics taught to young pastors in Basel with the passion of a theological historian. But by connecting the rather dry world of academic homiletics to specific careers and by discussing specific sermons, she brings to life the place of changing preaching in a dynamically changing religious landscape. In essence, her analysis ties the shifting pedagogical balance from humanist rhetoric to post-Reformation scholastic dialectics and Ramism to a parallel evolution in how Basel's preachers preached. After an early period characterized by expository preaching that tried to lay out Scripture according to the evolving Reformed position—a trend enabled in part by the continuing use of the traditional lectionary—Basel's preachers later turned to more topical sermons, responding in part to developments in Lutheran Germany. Topical preaching was better suited to confessional difference, since focusing on a single topic in a sermon allowed for highlighting the differences between Reformed doctrine and its challengers. Emerging in the 1580s, topical sermons soon came to dominate, a trend only accelerated by the strongly Ramist tendency towards distinction that appeared in the early-seventeenth-century sermons. Burnett's close analysis of specific sermons highlights these shifts, as well as confirming the increasing doctrinal precision and confessional specificity preachers were expected to convey. Indeed, in her discussion of various preachers, Burnett goes so far as to offer her own critique of their effectiveness, judging how audiences probably responded to various preaching strategies and methods.

Burnett's part 4 is the most ambitious, but also the most speculative section of the book. It addresses an important question that traditional historiographies of education or preaching sometimes leave aside: how much effect did changes among university professors or even urban and rural preachers really have? On the whole,

Burnett takes an optimistic stance, reporting that by the seventeenth century, Basel's clergy was relatively satisfied with the flock's knowledge of doctrine, if not with its morals. As in the rest of the book, Burnett argues primarily from clerical sources, such as visitation records, and she concludes that Basel experienced a "successful" (if slow) Reformation that changed both belief and ceremonial practice among the entire population. In this section, her book is usefully complemented by Heinrich Richard Schmidt's marvelously detailed history of the Reformation-on-the-ground in rural Bern over the same period.[3] (A comparable study of Basel's laity in both city and country remains to be written.) Focusing as she does on the clergy, Burnett's analysis remains essentially top-down, although she is anything but hasty in her conclusions. Her optimistic view from the clergy's perspective balances Schmidt's more cautious analysis from the perspective of the laity; taken together, the books reveal the complexity behind any assessment of the Reformation's "success" or "failure," even in a territory as contained and tightly governed as Basel.

Indeed, although Burnett is admirably cautious in her conclusions about success, her entire analysis highlights one of the thorniest problems of studying religious life in Europe after the Reformation: the predominance of clerical sources. The very richness with which the clerical perspective is documented—something that makes this study so powerful and impressive—also reminds us that vast swathes of everyday religious life were far less likely to find their way into written records. Just as property records emphasize the perspective of property owners, and crime records the perspective of magistrates—to take two other areas where early modern German and Swiss archives excel—the predominance of the clerical voice in matters of religious belief and practice tends to skew historians' analysis in ways both conscious and unconscious. Clerics were not only literate, they were also loudly but very selectively vocal, and we are therefore constrained, willy-nilly, to approach questions about what the laity believed and how the laity practiced its faith primarily through clerical eyes. Yet the rare snippets that survive from other perspectives remind us that we need to be cautious about conclusions that may simply re-broadcast the clerical voice. Burnett makes splendid and critical use of her sources, giving us a nuanced and dynamic picture of the intellectual milieu of Basel pastors. Given her topic, though, it should be no surprise that her analysis is importantly shaped by clerical perspectives, clerical concerns, and clerical documentation. Where she seeks to extend her conclusions beyond this

milieu, therefore, readers should keep this source problem in mind. Burnett's own analysis is careful and judicious, but it conveys only some of the richness of spiritual life in Basel, since it remains mostly within the universe defined by the clergy themselves.

The press deserves commendation for producing a full-length and fully documented study that goes into such depth on the clergy of a single Swiss town. The inclusion of extensive tables and graphs that document Burnett's systematic investigation of the clergy and their products, as well as the full apparatus, make the scholarly weight of her contribution manifest. Works like this one make evident the maturation and potential of post-Reformation studies, and open the door for new questions and fresh critiques.

Notes

[1]. See the April 2005 H-German Forum on Confessionalization at http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/Confessionalization/Confess_index.htm.

[2]. See for example Luise Schorn-Schutte, *Evangelische Geistlichkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Götersloh: Götersloher Verlagshaus, 1996) and idem and C. Scott Dixon, eds., *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Susan Karant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979); and Bruce Gordon, *Clerical Discipline and the Rural Reformation: The Synod in Zürich, 1532-1580* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

[3]. Heinrich Richard Schmidt, *Dorf und Religion: Reformierte Sittenzucht in Berner Landgemeinden der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: G. Fischer, 1995).

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