



Rainer Laechele, Joerg Thierfelder. *Wuerttembergs Protestantismus in der Weimarer Republik.* Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2003. 256 pp. EUR 26.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7668-3824-7.

Reviewed by Michael E. O'Sullivan (Department of History, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill)

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Preparing the Way: Weimar Protestantism, Secularization, and the Third Reich

In the midst of heated debates about the relationship of the German churches to National Socialism, historians often ignore the state of Christianity during the 1920s. Indeed, in a one-page foreword for *Wuerttembergs Protestantismus in der Weimarer Republik*, editors Rainer Laechele and Joerg Thierfelder argue that this volume is necessary because of the lack of emphasis on Weimar Protestantism since the appearance of authoritative studies by Klaus Scholders and Kurt Nowak in the 1970s and 1980s; the need for more discussion about how the Protestant decisions of the Weimar period influenced behavior during the Third Reich; and the neglect of the German Protestant transition after the November Revolution of 1918-19. This book of articles addresses all of these issues effectively, but the lack of a common theoretical agenda or an extended introduction causes its contributions to serve two different readerships. Many essays appeal to a wide-ranging network of scholars because they situate Protestantism during the Weimar Republic within the larger context of German history, especially by demonstrating the impact of the Weimar era on Protestant relations with the Nazi regime and the secularization process. The other very well researched essays assist a select group of specialists pursuing projects about Weimar Protestantism.

This book of eleven essays can be split into roughly three thematic groups. First, five authors focus on important individuals in the Protestant Church. The most engaging essays of this group include Soeren Widman's "Die Kirchlich-Theologischen Arbeitsgemein-

schaften (KTA) in Wuerttemberg," Hermann Ehmer's "Voelkische Pfarrer in Wuerttemberg," and Laechele and Thierfelder's "Parellele Leben? Johannes Merz und Theophil Wurm." Widmen's essay examines the KTA, an organization of young theologians during the early 1930s, and outlines how a handful of young Protestant pastors achieved prominence in Wuerttemberg by challenging the draft of a new prayer book and emphasizing scripture. This article illustrates how the Weimar experiences of these young men contributed to the varied responses of the Protestant Church to the Third Reich. While the rebellious spirit that led these men to challenge church elders during the early 1930s helped them confront the Nazis over church policy during the Third Reich, their rejection of enlightenment and democratic values during the Weimar years led the same men to view the Nazi rise to power from a favorable perspective.

Ehmer analyzes *voelkisch* religion in Wurttemberg by outlining the biographies of Karl Steger, Wilhelm Rehm, Friedrich Ettwein, and Wilhelm Krauss. Drawing parallels between the Weimar and Third Reich eras, he argues that these members of German Christian Movement all occupied positions on the fringe of the Protestant establishment, belonged to a generation between the ages of thirty and fifty during the 1930s, and experienced World War I on the home front. Ehmer, however, contends that these men were out of the mainstream in Weimar because of their *voelkisch* religious beliefs and only gained prominence because of the Nazi rise to power.

The essay by Laechele and Thierfelder compares the lives of Protestant Church presidents, Johannes Merz and Theophil Wurm, arguing that each was the right man for the time he led the Protestant Church in Württemberg. Merz's worldliness and apolitical nature helped him guide the church through the transition into an era with more separation between church and state. The nuanced analysis of Wurm illustrates the importance of both the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar years to his ambivalent relationship with the Nazis. While his anti-Semitic, anti-socialist, and nationalistic viewpoints, developed under the influence of nineteenth-century Protestant populist Adolf Stoecker, led him to support many aspects of National Socialism, his political activities during the Weimar years helped him oppose Nazi church policy. The other essays focusing on individuals are solid pieces of scholarship, but they are narrower in scope. Simone Hoeckele-Haefner examines the flowering of the Protestant press under the leadership of August Hinderer and the *Evangelische Pressverband fuer Deutschland*, and Viola Schrenk describes the exceptional Eduard Lamparter, who defended the Jewish roots of Christianity and pointed out the problems associated with trying to convert Jews. None of these articles, however, relate their themes to broader historical debates, such as comparing Lamparter's story to post-World War II theological studies of Judaism.

The second and strongest thematic group of this volume emphasizes the social history of Weimar Protestantism and includes David J. Diephouse's compelling "Selbstbehauptung und Selbsterneuerung. Der Evangelische Volksbund fuer Wuerttemberg und die 'Krise der Moderne' (1919-1933)" and Joachim Koehler's "Ausbruch aus dem katholischen Milieu? Katholikinnen und Katholiken in Wuerttemberg 1918 bis 1933." Diephouse analyzes the *Evangelische Volksbund fuer Wuerttemberg* in order to illustrate the fundamental problems facing the Protestant Church during what Detlev Peukert called the "crisis of classical modernity." During an age when religion became less a matter of cultural custom and more an issue of personal choice, the *Volksbund* in Wuerttemberg tried to create an all-embracing coalition of Protestants accepting both traditional institutional authority and the growing pluralism of the lay community. They were successful in the early 1920s, attracting a large membership with both liberal and conservative populism, male and female lay helpers, negative attacks on so-called "free-thinkers," and appeals to heal class and urban-rural divisions. The movement lost steam in the late 1920s as a result of tension with other associations, the skepticism

of the Pietist wing of the Protestant Church, and the polarizing nature of Weimar politics.

Similarly, in an essay somewhat misplaced in a volume about Protestantism, Koehler examines the inability of the Catholic Church to maintain a unified front during the 1920s and 1930s. He argues that lay movements, such as the liturgical movement, the Catholic youth movement, and the *Volksverein fuer das katholische Deutschland*, caused a multi-faceted religious revival, but Catholic Action and the apolitical stance of the church repressed this renewal. Both of these historians attach wider significance to their research by portraying Weimar as a crucial stage in both the modernization and secularization of Germany. They both argue that as modernity created more tension between an increasingly diverse population and the institutional Christian churches, Christianity transitioned from a unifying force in the lives of most Germans to a central force for only a devoted minority.

The rest of the essays in this volume investigate specific issues confronting the Protestant Church during the Weimar years. Rudolf Kiess's "Kirche und Schule in der Weimarer Republik" links his topic of the churches and schools to broader historical themes by illustrating how the Weimar era represents one stage in a long history of the secularization of schools. According to his analysis, popular will, left-wing parties during the Weimar era, and the efforts at *Gleichschaltung* by the National Socialists during the 1930s combined to remove the influence of the churches in German schools. The remaining essays address a more specialized audience. For example, Reinhold Rieger examines how the separation of church and state during the Weimar era affected the Protestant theological faculty at the University of Tuebingen, and Siegfried Hermle illustrates how the new church constitution formulated in Wuerttemberg during the early 1920s maintained many older institutions despite the traumatic break in the church-state relationship.

The strength of this book lies in the ability of many of its contributors to contextualize the events of the Protestant Church in Wuerttemberg within larger narratives of German history. Some authors show how events in Weimar shaped the varied Protestant responses to National Socialism, including the devotion of the German Christian Movement; the mixture of opposition and support from both church conservatives and the Confessing Church; and the unequivocal dissent by exceptional men, such as Eduard Lamparter. Other articles illustrate the role of the Weimar Republic as a central phase in the

secularization process in Germany. Despite these strong points, the book suffers from its lack of an extended introduction and common agenda. The parallels of the various articles are to be drawn primarily by the reader. Many beneficial contributions remain of use only to specialists in church history, but could have easily been fo-

cused toward a common goal by a more theoretical and focused presentation. The volume is nonetheless a valuable addition to the neglected history of Weimar Protestantism and essential reading for anyone interested in church history during the twentieth century.

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