

Conference Report, “Pietism in Thuringia”

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Conference Report, “Pietismus in Thüringen - Pietismus aus Thüringen. Interaktionen einer religiösen Reformbewegung im Mitteldeutschland des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts“ (Gotha, Germany)*
by *Mary Noll Venables*

<http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-27195>

In the middle of March, fifteen scholars from Germany, the United States, Ireland and Canada gathered in Gotha to consider the Thuringian roots, expressions and impulses of Protestant Pietism. The conference was convened by SASCHA SALATOWSKY and ALEXANDER SCHUNKA (Forschungsbibliothek and Forschungszentrum Gotha of the Universitaet Erfurt) and sponsored by the Freundeskreis der Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, the Evangelische Kirche in Mitteldeutschland, and the Ernst Abbe Stiftung in Jena.

Alexander Schunka welcomed the participants to Gotha’s Friedenstein Castle and introduced the theme of Pietism in and from Thuringia, noting that the need to integrate Thuringian history into the broader history of Pietism has been recognized for some time. He stressed that the conference organizers were not aiming to replace one mythic leader of Pietism with another (August Hermann Francke with Duke Ernest the Pious) or one geographical center with another (Halle with Gotha) but to broaden and enrich current research on Pietism by looking at the transfers of ideas, practices and even people. Indeed, throughout the conference the importance of individual connections, especially with August Hermann Francke, were stressed repeatedly.

In her keynote address VERONIKA ALBRECHT-BIRKNER (Siegen) proposed a theoretical basis for linking efforts at Lutheran reform from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. She sought to do so by examining the overlaps between the term 'Reformation of Life,' which claimed legitimacy by being linked to the Lutheran reformation of the early sixteenth century, and the term 'Pietist,' which was much more controversial and, when first used, purely pejorative. Building on work by Fred van Lieburg [1], Albrecht-Birkner suggested expanding the confessionalization paradigm to include reform movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She argued that religious renewal movements after the Reformation were the culmination of the confessionalization process. Albrecht-Birkner noted that the confessionalization process included both normative top-down measures and bottom-up processes.

The presentations in the first session looked at reform movements in Saxe-Gotha in the seventeenth century. TERENCE MCINTOSH (Chapel Hill) began by examining efforts at church discipline. Ernest the Pious’ first church ordinance required pastors to receive permission from the consistory before

refusing to serve communion to an errant parishioner. A subsequent ordinance allowed pastors to ban someone from receiving communion and inform the consistory afterwards. These instructions were superseded by the 1664 *Werck der Christlichen Disciplin*, which appointed parish-based inspectors, who along with pastors and deacons had responsibility for church discipline. August Hermann Francke spent some of his childhood in Gotha, and McIntosh speculated that Ernest's system in Gotha served as a model for Francke's church discipline in Halle.

MARY NOLL VENABLES (Cork, Ireland) examined the gradual creation of systems of state and systems of religion through the example of Christoph Brunchorst, a court preacher under Duke Ernest the Pious. Venables posited that throughout his life, Brunchorst combined two strands of piety: the prayer, Bible reading and Christian conversation recommended in his 1663 *Christliche Vorstellung der hohen geistlichen Anfechtungen* and the 'official' piety he administered in Gotha churches and schools. A reader of the *Christliche Vorstellung* could see that a reformation of life, or at least the perseverance to withstand trials, was possible without supervision from secular authorities.

JONATHAN STROM (Atlanta) examined the first report on piety after Ernest, looking at the controversy surrounding conversion in Gotha in the 1690s. While sixteenth-century Lutherans were familiar with "repentance and conversion" ("Buße und Bekehrung"), conversion accounts were rare until the 1690s. Johann Hieronymus Wiegleb, the assistant headmaster of the Gymnasium Illustre, argued that true conversions, marked by a desire to pursue sanctification, would make themselves known in true Christian life. Strom thought that Wiegleb's involvement in conversion 'politics' pointed to Pietist interest in conversions, but also scepticism about the efficacy and methods of conversion.

The next session examined, primarily through case studies, the establishment and consolidation of Pietism in Thuringia. DOUGLAS SHANTZ (Calgary) examined Ahasverus Fritsch, the chancellor of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt. Fritsch founded the Jesusgesellschaft in 1676; it brought members together for godly conversation, spiritual encouragement, and charitable works. Highlighting the continuity of reform noted by Albrecht-Birkner, Shantz maintained that themes from Fritsch's writings from the 1670s into the 1690s—the lack of Christian behaviour in all estates, faith producing virtues, need for true Christian behaviour and Christian encouragement—resonate with Philipp Jakob Spener's program for reform.

MATHIAS MÜLLER (Mainz) investigated Johann Schilling and his encouragement of Pietism in Pößneck toward the end of the seventeenth century. Schilling studied theology in Leipzig, where he met Francke. He followed Francke to Erfurt and then returned to his hometown of Pößneck, where he started a collegium. The pastors in Pößneck charged Schilling with being a Pietist, disrespecting them and having been visited by Francke and other suspicious people. Schilling counterattacked,

arguing that pastors in Pößneck were false pastors because they failed to interpret scripture by the inner light. Francke's visit caused renewal and controversy, pointing out the growing importance of Francke as the catalyst of a movement.

WOLFGANG BREUL (Mainz) reported on the lawyer Otto Heinrich Becker and his activities in Waldeck and Reuss. Becker was born in 1667, studied law and received his licentiate in Halle in 1699. While a student, he made contact with spiritualists and became interested in reform. In 1700/1701 he joined the chancellery in Waldeck. With the support of Count Christian Ludwig, Becker helped reissue the church ordinance for Waldeck in 1703. In 1713/14 Becker left Waldeck for Reuss-Obergreiz, where he also helped publish a church ordinance. Both the Waldeck and Greiz ordinances encouraged pastors to preach on the corruption of human nature and on the need for new birth, the grace of God and the fruits of faith. They also recommended sermon exams, prayer meetings, distributing Bibles, catechism classes, repentance services and pastoral visitations, and they required pastors to submit reports on their parishioners to the consistory.

ERNST KOCH (Leipzig) examined Johann Ernst Stolte who was born in 1672. While studying in Jena, Stolte became convinced that studying the Bible should improve piety, and he decided to host a collegium pietatis. City authorities became concerned; originally, they only outlawed singing a hymn at the meeting, but the dispute escalated. By 1708, the superintendent in Eisenach outlawed the assemblies. Stolte's conflict with the consistory continued and was only resolved, when in 1715, Stolte was called to a pastorate in Weimar, where students from Jena continued to visit him for spiritual encouragement. Intriguingly, the presentations from Müller, Breul and Koch were concerned with reforming tendencies that began when the protagonists were students.

The third session connected reform movements in Thuringia with those in other Central German areas. WOLFGANG MIERSEMANN (Halle) examined the Thuringian roots of Pietist critiques of dancing (part of a larger debate over things adiaphora). Along with Pietists in Halle, Johann Hieronymus Wiegleb and Johann Konrad Kesler opposed dancing and believed their views on the activity were a sign of being opposed to the "world." Their position on dancing departed from Luther's opinion that dancing was acceptable as long as it remained "moral" (*sittlich*). In 1697, Kesler and Wiegleb published a tract against dancing with a foreword by Francke. Miersemann posited that the Gotha Gymnasium served as a laboratory for later reforms in Halle.

JENS NAGEL (Gotha) surveyed the pedagogy of Francke in Halle, Gottfried Vockerodt in Gotha and Christian Weise in Zittau. While all three worked for "practical education" (*Realienkunde*), they differed vociferously over participating in worldly practices, again highlighting controversy over adiaphora. Weise, a moderate opponent of Pietism, was the rector of the Latin school in Zittau and a leading advocate of teaching political comportment. Vockerodt was strenuously opposed to educating

children for careers at court, which he thought formed a danger to their souls. Likewise Francke saw court life as a danger and thought court mores were counter to Christianity.

Also addressing the topic of education, ANTJE SCHLOMS (Mühlhausen) presented her research on orphanages, looking at influences on Francke's orphanage in Halle and the influence the Halle orphanage exercised on others. Francke's orphanage, founded in 1695, was broadly patterned after orphanages in the Netherlands, but was also influenced by the Gymnasium Illustre in Gotha and the Lutheran orphanage in Erfurt. Schloms found that while many orphanages followed Halle as a general example, and others followed its teaching plan or its business model, the most important links between orphanages were personal—based on correspondence, circulating manuscripts, and hiring employees of the Halle orphanage.

Continuing the theme of connections to Francke, HOLGER TRAUZETTEL (Halle/Siegen) reported on Francke's 1718 visits to the territories of Reuss, where he encountered a "small but growing number of pious counts." For his entire trip, Francke kept a detailed diary that recorded daily events and conversation partners to document for himself and others how he used his time. Perhaps inspired by Francke, Heinrich XXIII of Reuss-Lobenstein also kept a travel journal. Trauzettel commented that Heinrich XXIII was Francke's greatest follower, holding a particularly strict line on adiaphora.

The fourth and final session examined Thuringian Pietism from a cross-border perspective. Using the biography of Johann Müller and an overview of supporters of the institute, CHRISTOPH RYMATZKI (Mühlhausen) explored Thuringian support for the Halle Institutum Judaicum. Müller was born in 1649, studied theology in Jena, served as a pastor in Pferdingsleben, and was appointed deacon in Gotha in 1694. He opposed bird shooting, card playing, dancing (again, activities considered adiaphora). He became increasingly interested in missions to Jews and Muslims and wrote an evangelistic pamphlet "Licht am Abend." The pamphlet was printed in Halle with help from Johann Heinrich Callenberg, who led the Institutum Judaicum. Rymatzki estimated that by 1730 almost half of the institute's total supporters were in Thuringia, with concentrations in Erfurt, Gotha, Jena and the Reuss territories. Rymatzki posited that some of the supporters were Pietists, but not all.

ALEXANDER SCHUNKA (Erfurt/Gotha) continued the theme of relations outside of Germany by using Francke's metaphor of an "arboretum" (*Pflanzgarten*) to examine Thuringian networks in London, Moscow and the Levant. In London, some German immigrants, mostly clergy with connections to Halle and/or Gotha, worked to raise funds for Francke's Halle institutes; they also founded a school and had contacts with the court. In Moscow, there were several German Lutheran parishes with similar links to Gotha. Protestants in the Ottoman Empire had a much lower profile and were present as travelers, prisoners of war, and businessmen. Because of their interest in the world-wide church, Pietists in Halle sometimes offered language training for businessmen in hope that the recipients

would support the work in Halle.

In the final presentation RÜDIGER KRÖGER (Herrnhut) provided a reversed perspective, by looking at influences from Herrnhut on Thuringia. Befitting his role as head of the library and archives in Herrnhut, Kröger formulated his presentation as a lure to come and investigate Thuringian connections in Herrnhut. For example, in 1727 Zinzendorf visited Jena, where more than one hundred interested students met him, several of whom corresponded with him for more than fifteen years. In 1737, it was known that a “fellowship of the renewed” (*Kreis der Erweckten*) met in the mayor's house in Gotha. There are also hints that there were circles around Zinzendorf's sons in Jena in the late 1730s and 1740s. The Moravians established a settlement in Neudietendorf. Zinzendorf's diary also mentions visits with people in Jena, Gotha and Erfurt.

The concluding discussion drew together overarching themes: confessionalization, the development of piety, the development of states, discipline, mobility, communications and networks. Many presentations grappled with questions of how to introduce reform and the interaction between reform from above and reform from below. Several reports tackled the issue of adiaphora, which has been debated throughout church history. One participant queried, What was distinctive about Thuringia? Would similar themes emerge if one looked at other small territories? These questions pointed to the need not just to integrate the Thuringian states into the history of Pietism but, more broadly, to integrate the history of smaller territories, which is relevant not just historians of Pietism but for all who study German history.

*A German version of this conference report will be appearing on H-Soz-Kult.

Notes

[1] Fred van Lieburg, "Conceptualizing Religious Reform Movements in Early Modern Europe," in *Confessionalism and Pietism: Religious Reform in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006), pp. 2-3.

Conference Program

Keynote address

Veronika Albrecht-Birkner, Reformation des Lebens und Pietismus—ein Problemaufriss

1. Session: Origins. Politics and Piety in Saxe-Gotha

Terence McIntosh, Herzog Ernsts des Frommen 'Werck der christlichen Disciplin'—eine Wiege der von August Hermann Francke in Glaucha/Halle eingeführten Kirchengründung?

Mary Noll Venables, Christoph Brunchorst and the Encouragement of Piety in mid-seventeenth-century Thuringia

Jonathan Strom, Johann Hieronymus Wiegleb and the Experience of Conversion in Gotha

2. Session: Establishment and Consolidation of Pietism in the Landscape of Piety in Thuringia

Douglas H. Shantz, Ahasver Fritsch: His Conception of Christian Renewal as seen in his Program for the 'Geistliche Fruchtbringende Jesusgesellschaft' of 1673-1676

Mathias Müller, Die Pößneckschen Händel

Wolfgang Breul, Otto Heinrich Becker zwischen Waldeck und Reuss

Ernst Koch, Von Jena nach Weimar. Der Weg von Johann Ernst Stolte

3. Session: Interactions. Reform projects between Thuringia and Middle German Territories

Wolfgang Miersemann, Tanz-Kritik aus dem Thüringischen. Zu den Anfängen der pietistischen Kampagne gegen das 'Weltübliche Tanten'

Jens Nagel, Pädagogische Reformbewegungen im Konflikt. Die Kontroverse zwischen den frühen pietistischen Pädagogen Vockerodt und Francke sowie der politisch-galanten Bewegung der 'Zittauer Schule' um Christian Weise

Antje Schloms, Thüringen-Halle und zurück. Gegenseitige Beeinflussung und Verbindungen im Bereich der Waisenfürsorge seit der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts

Holger Trauzettel, Fromme Grafen? August Hermann Franckes Beziehung zu den Reußischen Territorien

4. Session: Making Contact. Thuringian Pietism in a Cross-border Perspective

Alexander Schunka, Pflanzgarten: Thüringische Netzwerke in der weltweiten Reich-Gottes-Arbeit des Halleschen Pietismus seit 1700

Christoph Rymatzki, Der Freudeskreis des _Institutum Judaicum_ und der Hallenser Judenmission in

Thüringen 1730-1740

Rüdiger Kröger, Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine und die ernestinischen Territorien