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Jahrbuch für die Geschichte des Protestantismus in Österreich 132/133 (2016/2017). Reformationszeit und Protestantismus im österreichischen Gedächtnis.

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Dirk Schuster

The *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte des Protestantismus in Österreich* (Yearbook for the History of Protestantism in Austria) has been published for more than 130 years, exploring the history of the Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Reformed Church of the Helvetic Confession. Despite the fact that today Protestantism is a minority religion in Austria with less than 300,000 members,¹ it has nevertheless significantly influenced Austria's history. For example, large parts of the Habsburg heartland recognised Luther's Reformation, an influence that could only be gradually reversed during the Counter-Reformation. Subsequently, in the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the time of the corporate state (*Ständestaat*), the number of members increased relatively strongly anew. Liberal and German nationalist Catholics changed denomination, such that religious affiliation once again became a political issue in Austria.

These few and already well-known examples are intended to illustrate how the history of Protestantism—in addition to its religious and country-specific characteristics—also represents an important part of the history of Austria. Moreover, since at least the eighteenth century with the rise of Prussia as the dominant power in the territories of the later German Reich, the bias vis-à-vis Protestantism of the Austrian ruling elite has always been a

¹ According to their own information, in 2019 the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession had 271,296 members and that of the Helvetic Confession 12,332. See <https://evang.at/kirche/zahlen-fakten/> (accessed: January 14, 2021).

source of conflict between Catholic Austria and Protestant-dominated Prussia/Germany—which has been intensified again since the late nineteenth century. Accordingly, Austria’s position against Protestantism from the eighteenth century onwards must always be seen against the background of this growing political divide between Austria and Germany. For example, the Protestant description of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the period before the Patent of Toleration (*Toleranzpatent*) could only be published in the German areas.

On the occasion of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the editors of the *Jahrbuch* decided to publish a thematic volume—*Reformationszeit und Protestantismus im österreichischen Gedächtnis* (The Reformation Period and Protestantism in Austrian Memory)—reflecting on the history of Protestantism by examining the following questions: “What image of the Reformation period and Protestantism prevailed throughout history? What role was assigned or ascribed to Austrian Protestantism in the public, in political events, in political discourse, in literature, and in historiography?” (p. 5).² The result is a collection of twenty contributions with very different methodological approaches, from local and regional historical considerations to literary, historical, and press analyses and examinations of places of remembrance.

The first chapter (pp. 11–20) by Michael Bünker (b. 1954), then Bishop (2008–2019) of the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria, is based on a paper he delivered at a conference in Slovakia in December 2017. Therein Bünker tries to give an overview of the 2017 Reformation year, with the text retaining its original presentation style. It is rather unfortunate that such an important subject could not be properly adapted to fit into a themed volume. As Bünker explains, the community of Protestant Churches in Europe wanted to use the Reformation year to answer, inter alia, the question of the “relevance and importance of the Gospel message for people today” (p. 12).³ Bünker is certainly right when he states that the anniversary led to surging interest from Catholics and the general public in Protestant churches (p. 14). However, Bünker then waxes pessimistically, lamenting the increasing secularisation and religious diversity, a supposedly “deep crisis in

2 “Welches Bild von Reformationszeit und Protestantismus herrschte im Laufe der Geschichte? Welche Rolle wurde dem österreichischen Protestantismus in der Öffentlichkeit, im politischen Geschehen, im politischen Diskurs, in der Literatur und in der Historiographie zugewiesen bzw. zugeschrieben?”

3 “Es geht um die Aktualität und Bedeutung der evangelischen Botschaft für die Menschen heute.”

the cohesion of Europe and massive pluralism in society permeating friendships, neighbourhoods, parishes, and families” (p. 18).⁴ One wonders where exactly he locates this “deep crisis.” Is he referring to the short-term political polarisation in the wake of the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015? Bünker further argues that “[o]ur society has obviously lost its future. For many in the affluent countries in the North and the West, including Austria, the greatest expectation is that the status quo will be maintained or that living conditions will at least not become blatantly worse” (p. 19).⁵ He avers that this may go “hand in hand with the polarisation between ‘the people’ and ‘the elites,’ which threatens democracy” (p. 19).⁶ Readers might be astonished when confronted with such a pessimism of the present—especially since all doomsday scenarios of the last twenty years (attacks in New York, banking crisis, Euro crisis, and refugee crisis) have turned out to be completely unfounded, something a bishop should also know.

In addition to this contribution, which is somewhat out of place, the remaining chapters are devoted to the actual focus of the *Jahrbuch*: the Reformation period and Protestantism in Austrian memory. In his contribution (pp. 21–39), Rudolf Leeb (b. 1958), Professor of Church History at the University of Vienna’s Faculty of Protestant Theology, offers an overview of Reformation historiography in Austria from a Protestant and Catholic perspective, beginning around the year 1600. He shows that examining the Reformation period in Austria goes beyond today’s nation-state borders. Until the eighteenth century, the historiography of the Protestant Reformation in Austria was written and disseminated in the Protestant areas of what would later become Germany. This had long-term effects on perceptions about Protestants by Catholics and vice versa, as well as on assessments of the Habsburg Empire by Protestant countries such as Prussia. In the nineteenth century, as Leeb shows, this dualistic form of historiography was somewhat mitigated as Catholic Church historians switched to a more neutral description of the Reformation period in Austria (p. 28). Changes can be observed in the second half of the nineteenth century with the emergence, among others, of Ultramontanism in the Catholic Church, the Away from Rome Movement (*Los-von-*

4 “Wie beobachten eine tiefe Krise im Zusammenhalt Europas und massive Polarisierungen innerhalb der Gesellschaft bis hinein in Freundschaften, Nachbarschaften, Pfarrgemeinden und Familien.”

5 “Unserer Gesellschaft ist offensichtlich die Zukunft abhandengekommen. Für viele in den wohlhabenden Ländern des Nordens und Westens, so auch in Österreich, besteht das Maximum an Erwartung darin, dass der status quo erhalten bleibt oder die Lebensbedingungen zumindest nicht eklatant schlechter werden.”

6 “Sie geht Hand in Hand mit der demokratiebedrohenden Polarisierung zwischen ‘dem Volk’ und ‘den Eliten’.”

Rom-Bewegung), and the influence of cultural Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*)—with the latter often arguing from a racial and nationalistic stance. “As a result of the events, there was now a conversion movement from the Roman Catholic Church to Protestantism which was perceived as the ‘Confession of Germans.’ [...] During these years, historiography became an important medium and a reservoir of argument for the Away from Rome Movement” (p. 34).⁷ Conservative representatives of the Catholic Church responded accordingly, recognising something completely non-Austrian, even alien, in the Protestant denomination. Leeb concludes that the history of the Reformation is viewed differently since 1945, partly due to the additional consideration of socio-historical topics, such as that the view that the history of the Reformation can also be read as a social history and not exclusively as one of religious conflict.

The following two chapters by Ralph Andraschek-Holzer (b. 1963) (pp. 41–85), head of the topographical collection of the Regional Library of Lower Austria, and Dietmar Weikl-Eschner (pp. 87–100), a pastor in Traiskirchen, are addressing a similar topic, but with a focus on the history of the Reformation in monastic historiography in Lower Austria and Crypto-Protestantism (*Geheimprotestantismus*). The latter refers to Protestantism in Austria prior to the Patent of Toleration of 1781.

Next, Astrid von Schlachta (b. 1970), a historian at the University of Regensburg, offers a well-crafted outline of the Reformation Anabaptist movements in Austria, focusing on various descriptions of these groups over the centuries (pp. 101–109). She concludes that previous scholarship has largely paid attention to the Hutterites while ignoring many other Anabaptist communities (p. 108).

The chapters by Wynfried Kriegleder (b. 1958), Werner Telesko (b. 1965), and Ernst Seibert (b. 1946) deal with art and literary history in the context of the overall topic. Kriegleder (pp. 111–132), Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Vienna, examines the positive effects of the Patent of Toleration for Protestants in contemporaneous Austrian literature. Telesko (pp. 133–153), head of the Habsburg Representation Working Group in the History of Art Department at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, analyses denominational motifs in the fine arts since 1781, such as prints, church designs, and monuments. In a nutshell, he connects the different stages of development within the denominational context. Seibert (pp. 155–

7 “Im Laufe der Ereignisse kam es nun zu einer Übertrittsbewegung von der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche hin zum Protestantismus als der ‘Konfession der Deutschen’. [...] In diesen Jahren wurde die Geschichtsschreibung ein wichtiges Medium und ein Argumentationsreservoir der Los-von-Rom-Bewegung.”

172), a docent at University of Vienna's Department of German Studies and founder of the Austrian Society for Children's and Young People's Literature Research, in contrast, uses a chronological three-tier division to explore Protestant children's and youth literature from 1781 up to the interwar period, presenting its development against the changed political and social background. He observes that in the third phase—from the turn of the century until the time of the corporate state—religious questions can hardly be found in the Protestant literature for children and young people because ideological and political topics predominated. Whether this constitutes a genuine Austrian phenomenon or similar developments were to be found elsewhere as well could be a question for further research. Likewise, the question also arises as to what extent cultural Protestantism has found its expression in children's and youth literature.

Martina Fuchs (b. 1966), a researcher at the University of Vienna's Department of History, deals with representations of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in historical novels in Austria from the first half of the twentieth century (pp. 189–209). More than scholarly books, novels and daily newspapers have a major influence on public events. Not only do they depict the events recorded, but also offer their own interpretation of them. Against the backdrop of the religio-political tensions since the second half of the nineteenth century that have already been mentioned several times, it is not particularly surprising that Fuchs comes to the following conclusion: "The authors were less concerned with depicting events from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation epochs, and instead focused on criticising the Church and singing praises of Germanness and loyalty to the Austrian Protestants – this they did employing a distinct black-and-white imagery, which the one decidedly Catholic author represented in this selection also adopted (although from the opposite perspective) with missionary intent. As already mentioned, the effects of the Kulturkampf and the Away from Rome Movement are inherent in the novels; massive völkisch tendencies are therefore not surprising" (p. 209).⁸

Karl W. Schwarz (b. 1952), a church historian and retired Associate Professor at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Vienna, in his very

8 "Es ist den Autoren [...] weniger um die Darstellungen von Ereignissen aus der Reformations- und Gegenreformationsepoche [gegangen] als darum, antikirchliche Kritik zu üben und den Evangelischen Österreichs ein Hohelied des Deutschtums sowie der Treue zu singen – und zwar in ausgeprägter Schwarz-Weiß-Malerei, welche sich der eine in dieser Auswahl vertretene dezidiert katholische Autor in missionarischer Absicht ebenfalls zu eigen macht – eben unter umgekehrten Vorzeichen. Wie schon erwähnt, sind den Romanen Auswirkungen von Kulturkampf und Los-von-Rom-Bewegung immanent innewohnend [sic]; massive völkische Tendenzen nehmen daher nicht wunder."

informative chapter (pp. 173–187) delineates the Protestant role in the monarchy and imperial anniversaries. The Patent of Toleration of 1781 by Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790; r. 1765–1790) initiated a kind of Joseph cult within Austrian Protestantism and ensured that Protestants remained loyal to the Habsburgs until the nineteenth century. By analysing letters of homage from Protestant church representatives to the emperors, Schwarz ascertains that the church representatives saw each emperor not only as a sovereign but also—in Protestant understanding—as an ecclesiastical sovereign, despite his Catholic faith (p. 177). Such appreciation, according to Schwarz, was not solely one-sided. The emperors and various ministers also always received the church representatives personally, showing their respect for Protestantism (p. 182). The church leadership, Schwarz summarises, understood its role in the Habsburg Empire as a partnership and put its “spiritual potential at the service of supporting the monarchy” (p. 187).

Astrid Schweighofer (b. 1979), a church historian at the University College of Teacher Education Vienna/Krems and the Austrian Academy of Sciences, offers a particularly insightful contribution (pp. 211–252). Drawing on contemporaneous daily newspapers, she analyses the view of the Protestant Church in Austria in the authoritarian Catholic corporate state and supplements it with an excursus on the period following the *Anschluss* (1938). Thematically, she subdivides her chapter into five different subject areas, preceded by a brief historical overview. She points out that, due to the negative experiences in the corporate state on the part of many Protestants, an “anti-Catholic elite consciousness” developed (p. 222). What is particularly interesting is Schweighofer’s separation of the media into “homeland-loyal” and National Socialist, Germany-oriented Protestants, thereby avoiding one-sided generalisations. In regard to the period of National Socialism, Schweighofer states that there was a clear shift in the press in favour of the Protestant Church (p. 250). She maintains that the press in the corporate state primarily pursued the goal of contrasting the prevailing negative opinion towards the corporate state and its alleged discrimination against Austrian Protestants with a different image. At the same time, Protestants were obliged to remain loyal to their home country, which the aforementioned differentiation between good (Austrian) and bad (National Socialist) Protestants clearly indicates. Only the last statement by Schweighofer is somewhat misleading. Claiming that the Catholic propaganda in the corporate state caused unrest among Protestants and an orientation towards National Socialist Germany gives the wrong impression. External influences, such as the emphasis on a Catholic Austria, certainly played a role in the Protestants’ turn to National Socialism. Yet, considering this as the main cause completely suppresses the “self-nazification” (*Selbstnazifizierung*) of the Protestants and abruptly turns

them into “victims” of corporate state propaganda. This completely obscures the affinity of many Protestants—not only in Austria and Germany—with the Nazis, as the international scholarly community has shown many times in recent decades (e.g., Blaschke 2014; Gailus 2001; 2008; Ericksen 1985; 2012).

Next, Leonhard Jungwirth (b. 1989), church historian at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Vienna, addresses the perception of Protestantism in Austria on various societal levels, including the state and interdenominational as well as public discourses since 1945 (pp. 253–285). Jungwirth’s analysis shows the increasing shift in perceptions of the Protestant Church from a more right-conservative to a left-liberal stance since the late 1970s—a result which can be observed in a similar way in Germany.

Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer (b. 1955), a church historian, and Frank Hinkelmann (b. 1967), rector of the Martin Bucer Seminary, examine how the reformers are seen and judged within the Free Church movements (pp. 287–297). They concentrate primarily on theological statements and less on actual practice for the sake of “greater objectivity.” Graf-Stuhlhofer and Hinkelmann focus primarily on the basic theological tenets that Protestant, Reformed, and Free Church theologies share, namely the so-called “soli” principles. However, their analysis is not very conclusive, which is also reflected towards the end of the chapter: “Luther’s (and also Zwingli’s and Calvin’s) work [is] generally highly valued. A number of doctrinal correspondences between the popular church reformers of the time and today’s Austrian Free Churches can be determined, but this does not always have to be due to a direct influence.”⁹ Thus, the basic question concerning the significance of the Reformation for the theology of the Free Churches remains unanswered.

The last seven chapters deal with local and regional studies: The contribution of the historian Alexander Hanisch-Wolfram (b. 1977) is devoted to the culture of remembrance regarding Protestantism in Upper Carinthia (pp. 311–322); Andreas Hochmeir (b. 1974), a pastor in Wallern, explores the memories of the Reformation and Protestantism in Upper Austria (pp. 323–337); and Martin Krenn (b. 1983), a historian at the University College of Teacher Education Burgenland, sheds light on the Pinkafeld region as a Protestant place of remembrance (pp. 339–350). Rudolf K. Höfer (b. 1951), a retired Associate Professor of Church History at the University of Graz, focuses on Graz (pp. 351–363); Wilhelm Deuer (b. 1956), the deputy director

9 “[Das] Wirken Luthers (und auch Zwinglis sowie Calvins) [wird] grundsätzlich sehr geschätzt. Eine Reihe lehrmäßiger Übereinstimmungen zwischen den damaligen volkskirchlichen Reformatoren und den heutigen österreichischen Freikirchen lässt sich feststellen, was aber nicht immer auf einen direkten Einfluss zurückgehen muss.”

of the Carinthian State Archives, on Klagenfurt (pp. 365–378); and Cathrin Hermann (b. 1979), the head of the Donauwörth City Archives, on Linz (pp. 379–388), including aspects of urban history under the main theme of the *Jahrbuch*. The reward of such micro-historical studies is displayed particularly well by Martin Scheutz (b. 1967), a Professor for Modern History at the University of Vienna, and his chapter on the architectural legacy of the Reformation around the Dachstein (pp. 299–310). The Patent of Toleration notwithstanding, there were still restrictions on the construction of Protestant churches. These restrictions were only lifted in the mid-nineteenth century, which led to the construction of a large number of church buildings at that time. These churches were built with the generous financial assistance of the German Gustav Adolf Association (*Gustav Adolf Verein*) (p. 306). Especially during the emergence of German national and cultural Protestantism, such financial support from Germany also contributed to that the gradual turn of some Austrian Protestants, over several generations, towards Germany in an emotional sense, who began to perceive this country as their spiritual home. It is only with micro-studies like Scheutz's that such connections can be established, which makes them essential for the study of religions.

This volume of the *Jahrbuch* follows a stringent line. With the exception of the opening essay by Bünker, all contributions address the volume's topic, which means that the central theme remains clearly recognisable throughout. The variety of time periods, topics, and methodologies impressively illustrates the scope of the overall subject. The only significant shortcoming of this otherwise excellent volume is that the topic of gender was not considered by the editors Martina Fuchs and Astrid Schweighofer. When choosing a topic such as Protestantism in Austrian memory, the picture is ultimately always incomplete if none of the contributors addresses the specific question of women or gender.¹⁰ Even so, the volume is highly recommended and provides a plethora of new insights into the religious history of Austria, while also containing information about the different actions of Protestants and Catholics across the centuries.

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¹⁰ See, for example, the anthology *Gender Perspectives* by Wunder and Engel (1998). Dealing with the early modern period, it contains five chapters that discuss religiosity and spirituality in terms of gender-specific issues.

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