Metz, Detlef

Das Protestantische Drama. Evangelisches geistliches Theater in der Reformationszeit und im konfessionellen Zeitalter. Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2013. Pp. 906. Hb, 98.00 Euros.

The author of this immensely long *Habilitationsschrift*, submitted to the Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen in the field of church history, tells us disarmingly in the very first sentence how he came to write about the Protestant theater of the Reformation and the long sixteenth century. On a trip to Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic, he discovered by accident that there was such a thing in the early modern period as Jesuit theater, whereupon he asked himself whether the Protestant confessions had produced anything similar. This led him to discover the huge corpus of works that the book discusses. The author has therefore taken on a literary subject and one that literary scholars have been discussing for at least a century and a half, but is looking at his material from the point of view of a theologian. It is as though a literary historian were to come upon the concept of angels and decide to write the definitive treatment of this concept from a purely literary point of view.

In Part A, Metz begins by explaining that the corpus of Protestant dramas in the century after the Reformation is indeed very large and that, though some of the plays are in Latin and are influenced by the Humanists, most of them are in German, and that most of them were written by teachers and priests. His aim is to find out what the purpose of these plays was and to what extent they were adequate or successful tools with which to present the theological concepts of Protestantism to audiences and players. Given that the Reformers were said in general to eschew pictorial representation, the author wishes to explain the popularity of the theater in the post-Reformation century. Part B begins with a detailed account of the attitude of each of the Wittenberg Reformers towards the theater, not just of Luther and Melancthon, but of Hunnius, Meisner, and Polycarp Leyser the Elder too. It then moves to chronicle the role that drama played within Reformed Protestantism until the Calvinist clamp-down, both in German-speaking Switzerland and in France. There are short accounts of the theological writings on theater of Bucer, Zwingli, Bullinger, Gwalther, Calvin, Farel, Viret, Beza, Breiteringer, and Wetter. As these two lists of Lutheran and Reformed theologians show, the author aims to be compendious and all-encompassing. Though the accounts are descriptive rather than analytical, it is useful to have them all in one place and helpful to place what Reformed Protestants thought about the uses of drama alongside Lutheran utterances.

By this point the book is the length of a normal monograph—315 pages—but there is much more to come. Part C discusses three thematic groups of plays written between 1533 and 1613, taking them one by one: nine plays on the Abraham theme, four dealing with Stephen the martyr, and three taking Luther himself as their subject. The focus in all of these is their theological message. Part D deals in Section I with such questions as the individuality of the dramatists, to what extent this is visible in their plays, and whether the plays exhibit anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish polemic. Questions of performance are also touched on briefly, though there is not as much evidence for this as scholars would like. The same thoroughness that the author exhibits throughout leads him in Section II to discuss Jesuit theater, though he acknowledges that it has already been well served by scholars, citing the standard works by Elida Maria Szarota, Jean-Marie Valentin, Ruprecht Wimmer, and Fidel Rädle. However, he makes the very valid point that Jesuit drama too only came into being because of the Reformation and so it belongs in his study. He describes how this Latin-speaking theater was regulated in the various versions of the *Ratio studiorum* and discusses to what extent it was based on Jesuit spirituality and theology and whether it influenced Protestant drama. Here he comes to the conclusion, universally accepted by scholars, that the much more developed stage and scenic effects of the Jesuits influenced Protestant dramatists but that there was no cross-over in terms of subject matter. He asks why the Jesuits kept Latin as the language of their plays and how this could be reconciled with their express purpose of convincing and converting believers, when most of the audience was without Latin. The answer to the first question is that the Jesuits wished to align themselves with the church in Rome and to distance themselves from the Reformation, which vehemently espoused the vernacular. The answer to the second question is that the texts of Jesuit plays were understood differently by the educated and by the uneducated in the audience and, more importantly, that the plays were designed to appeal to the emotions, to which end staging and spectacle played an important part. Section III then deals with the way in which drama could be and was used in the development and spread of the Protestant churches.

Though the author is not much concerned with theory in general and not at all with literary theory, he does discuss at length the concept of confessionalization (*Konfessionalisierung*) which was put forward by the historians Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard in the 1980s to designate the interpenetration of religion, state, and society in Europe in the aftermath of the Reformation. Metz questions whether this is a helpful term to explain the spread of drama in the long sixteenth century. He comes to the conclusion

that to a limited extent it is. The pedagogical character of Protestant drama enabled Bible stories and matters of doctrine to be conveyed in an accessible manner, and the plays were good vehicles for inculcating morals and the proper attitude towards authority and were a useful alternative to more worldly distractions, for instance, during the carnival period. Local schools were often involved, so that taking part in these plays taught deportment and public speaking, and the involvement of local worthies encouraged identification with the city and created a sense of community. To this extent post-Reformation drama, no matter which of the three confessions it came from and no matter the differences in performance, had a social function that did play a part in the confessionalization of German- and to a lesser extent French-speaking society. However, he finds the term inadequate to explain the way in which drama functioned in practice and sees theater not so much as a tool but rather as an expression of a particular confessional culture. Plays and subjects could sometimes cross over from one confession to another, and a play could take on a life of its own in performance and have a different meaning from what the author intended, which goes beyond the top-down approach inherent in the *Konfessionalisierung* theory. The author admits that Protestant drama, which is largely Lutheran drama, did not have much potential for dramatic or theatrical innovation. The same subjects were treated in the same way over and over again throughout the sixteenth century, so that it was only the Jesuit theater with its theatrical lavishness and its textual inventiveness that had the capacity to innovate.

It would be unfair to criticize this book from the perspective of literary criticism; the author is a theologian and is not interested in questions of intertextuality, performativity, gender, style or literary and linguistic merit. He can say with justification that literary scholars have focused on plays dealing with the topics of Susanna, Esther, and Judith, so he therefore chooses other topics. Nor is he a historian *tout court*, asking what these works tell us about sixteenth-century society from the standpoint of different territories, confessions, and decades, just as he is not a social historian using the plays as evidence for the status of the authors, the early modern school system, or the social organization of the towns where the plays were performed. The author examines this great corpus of material from the perspective of a church historian. He wishes to see what role drama and theater played in the development of the three main confessions in the post-Reformation century, concentrating largely, though not exclusively, on the German-speaking world and asking how the plays related to the theology of those three confessions. Whether these are innovative questions in the field of church history, this reviewer is not qualified to judge. Scholars, including literature specialists, will find the book useful

for its completeness and compendiousness, assisted by indexes of persons, subjects, places, biblical figures and stories, and biblical references. If they are specialists of early modern German theater, they will not, however, learn much that they did not know already.

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