PROJECT MUSE®

Radikalität der Reformation. Aufsätze und Abhandlungen
(review)

Hans J. Hillerbrand

The Catholic Historical Review, Volume 96, Number 1, January 2010,
pp. 125-126 (Review)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.0.0652>

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/369549>

approach or expertise" (p. 13). As an historian of the pedagogical tradition, she wisely sums up: "With the assimilation of humanism into the theological curriculum, the debate between scholastics and biblical humanists lost much of its urgency and gradually abated" (p. 13). This remark indeed raises the question whether a second volume might not be useful in which an analysis would be given of the variety of Catholic and Protestant approaches to the philological exegesis of the Bible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

University of Groningen

ARJO VANDERJAGT

Radikalität der Reformation. Aufsätze und Abhandlungen. By Hans Jürgen Goertz. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2007. 378 pp. €61,60. ISBN 978-3-525-55200-1.)

Hans-Jürgen Goertz, longtime holder of the chair in social history at the University of Hamburg, began his scholarly career some forty years ago with a study of the theology of Thomas Müntzer, the charismatic figure in the early German Reformation (much beloved by Marxist historians because of his involvement in the German peasants' war) who challenged Martin Luther's new theology with the insistence on the primacy of suffering, spiritual and physical, in the life of the Christian. Since then, Goertz has been an active and trail-blazing participant in the scholarly conversation about the fringe groups of the Reformation, variously labeled "Left Wing" or "Radical Reformation." The present volume brings together over a dozen essays on that phenomenon. Since most of these essays were previously published, the expert will find little that is new here, as is the case with all such collected essays that are publications of mature and seasoned scholars. By the same token, however, by putting the results of some twenty years of scholarship into a single volume (the essays were published between 1986 and 2006), we are afforded a splendid coherent summary of Goertz's understanding of the dissidents or radicals of the Reformation. Since some of the essays were originally published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and other English-language publications, the volume will prove to be more useful for German-reading scholars.

The distinctiveness of Goertz's understanding of the "radicals" has been its revisionist character. When he appeared on the scholarly scene, the orthodox view was that the emergence of the Anabaptist movement in the Reformation occurred in Zurich was characterized by a single-minded commitment on part of the earliest Anabaptists to bring Luther's and Ulrich Zwingli's biblical insights to their proper conclusion, and that all subsequent Anabaptist groupings can be traced back to Zurich. Goertz pointed out that Anabaptist conventicles emerged in other places as well, that one can speak of a homogeneous Anabaptist movement only with great difficulty, and that there are identifiable connections between Anabaptists and social unrest in Switzerland and Germany in 1524–25.

Goertz's contribution to this new perspective a generation ago was substantial, and several essays in the present volume show his originality and insight. Like all revisionists, however, there has been a tendency to overstatement, and his striking openness to approach the past aided by categories coming from Derrida and Foucault is not universally shared. Indeed, there are indications that the revisionist school of Anabaptist studies, which he represents, is triggering revisionism itself (for example, Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli*, Berlin, 2003).

The essays in this volume cover the gamut of early Reformation "radicality"—iconoclasm, biblical exegesis, community of goods among the Hutterite Anabaptists. What is important here is Goertz's insistence that the term *radicality* must be used for the entire spectrum of radical sentiment, that such "radicality" itself underwent a development as time passed, and that the phenomenon must not be understood as exclusively theological.

The book cements, if such were necessary, Goertz's pivotal place in the study of the dissenters of the Reformation during the last generation. The focus on "radical" movements, however, means that his other, major contribution to Reformation scholarship—calling attention to the ubiquitous phenomenon of anticlericalism in the early-sixteenth century as catalyst for the Reformation—receives only passing attention.

Duke University

HANS J. HILLERBRAND

Life Writing in Reformation Europe: Lives of Reformers by Friends, Disciples and Foes. By Irena Backus. [St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History.] (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008. Pp. xxxiv, 259. \$114.95. ISBN 978-0-754-66055-2.)

Benjamin Disraeli once observed that one should prefer biography to history, for biography is "life without theory." Of course, Disraeli's remark says more about his view of the kind of history being written in his own day than it does about his notion of biography. To be sure, biography is not a neutral enterprise and often can reveal as much about the context of the biographer as it does about its subject or perhaps even more. Such is the focus of Irena Backus in her study, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe*. Exploring a number of important biographies or *Lives* of reformers written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Backus hopes to shed light not only on the methods and genre of these *Lives* but also on how they function as part of the reception and propagation of the European Reformations. Their accuracy or approximation to modern standards is not her primary concern. Rather, she argues that studying this kind of literature provides windows into the theological, polemical, and civic climate of this period.

While *Lives* are not a fundamentally new genre, those in the Reformation do have unique characteristics that distinguish them from the classical