

**Florian Bock, Pastorale Strategien zwischen
Konfessionalisierung und Aufklärung. Katholische
Predigten und ihre implizite Hörer-/Leserschaft
(circa 1670 bis 1800), Münster (Aschendorff) 2023,
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Florian Bock's Habilitationsschrift, written under the supervision of Andreas Holzem at the Eberhard-Karls-Universität in Tübingen, has all the strengths of this genre of academic writing. This study is deeply researched, drawing on an extensive base of primary sources, primarily published sermons from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, with a focus on the period in the title. Bock is deeply immersed in secondary works as well, with studies of the period as well as theoretical and methodological works, primarily German language materials, but with forays into English works as well. The thoroughness required of a *Habilitationsschrift* means this is a big book and it takes some time to get to Bock's analysis of his sources, but the wait is worth it.

The first five (somewhat shorter) chapters lay out the theoretical, methodological, and historiographical questions that inform the study. The last, and by far longest chapter, analyzes the texts of the sermons that form the primary source base for the study. This chapter is really made up of seven shorter chapters that look at how preachers spoke about the local community, religious belief, church festivals, phases of life, politics, views of others, all against the background of the evolving styles of preaching.

Several arguments come through in all parts of the book. Bock displays a healthy skepticism about the traditional ways scholars have characterized the evolution of both sermons and, more broadly, the relationship between the Catholic Church and society. Bock accepts that there are some identifiable changes in what preachers said, including a shift from a Tridentine notion of the role of the preacher/pastor as a *pastor bonus* to an Enlightenment influence idea of the preacher as *Tugendwächter* (watcher over virtues) or »teacher of the people«. Furthermore, Bock identifies a change in style from the earlier period, which he labels the period of confessionalization, to an eighteenth century enlightened or reformed Catholicism. But Bock repeatedly emphasizes that such trends are only partial and that many different religious ideas and kinds of preaching coexisted across the whole period he studies. Indeed, published sermons often drew on different traditions within the same sermon. This complication of the traditional periodization of Church history is valuable in itself, but also opens up space for future scholarship into this period, which Bock calls an »in-between time« (*Zwischenzeit*) between confessionalization and Enlightenment.



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These sermons, as Bock's title suggests, represent a broader pastoral strategy, one identified in other studies of Catholic culture in this period. Bock emphasizes that preachers understood that they had to engage their audience in ways that they could understand. The Capuchin preachers whose published sermons from Bavaria provide most of the sources here, were well-known in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the »popular« character of their preaching. Bock adds that their sermons were much more creative and well thought-out than the stereotypes of Capuchin sermons found in literature (Schiller for example) or in Protestant or Jansenist critiques. Capuchin sermons were also constantly evolving and therefore provide an excellent window on the »religious knowledge« of the population. »Preaching in the period 1670–1800 ... was in a constant state of transformation. Religious knowledge in the sermon changed constantly, [and] the world in its actual state needed to be reorganized by belief. The universal Church with its core techniques of providing salvation should remain unchallenged, but they had to be constantly newly justified in highly creative ways« (350).

Bock's method of analysis, as signaled in his title, is to read the sermons in a way that identifies the »implicit« audience, whether they were reading or hearing the sermons. Bock acknowledges that it is difficult for historians to know how a sermon was delivered or performed, although instructions to preachers often give some indications of style. His sources are published sermons, so there had to have been a process of translation from the written text to the spoken sermon. Bock also argues that the intended audience, in most cases rural people in a parish church, could influence the kinds of sermons delivered by how they received them. In Chapter 6, Bock shows how the themes, topics, and images used by preachers were imbedded in the practicalities of everyday life in the countryside. For example, sermons frequently attacked »Ehrabschneider«, that is people who insulted the honor of others. Research on the role of honor in rural society has shown how central it was in daily life, and the Church was engaging this question. In these ways, Bock reinforces the view that sermons sit at the intersection of theological thinking and everyday life, an understanding that goes back (at least) to studies of early Reformation sermons and pamphlets in the 1980s.

Sermons were an important part of the pastoral strategy of the Church in this period. Bock does see some evolution of the focus of the sermons. In the seventeenth century, he finds that sermons were more likely to reference the idea of the good pastor that was so important for the Council of Trent, with its emphasis on the special and exalted status and role of the parish priest. But, Bock also argues that the decrees of Trent, while normative for the Church, were also flexible enough to allow a variety of emphases by preachers. In the eighteenth century, under the influence of French preachers and publishers, an Enlightenment-influenced notion of the priest as a teacher and guide came to dominate published sermons in Catholic Germany. Bock emphasizes here,



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as on many other occasions, that this was a tendency, but by no means the only kind of sermons delivered in country parishes.

Bock's conclusion ties together his often complex and detailed arguments. First, confessional cultures in the early modern period were complex and plural and Catholic culture, despite its reliance on the Council of Trent, was constantly »re-forming« itself, with contributions from the common people as well as the clergy and the hierarchy. Secondly, preachers were intermediaries in the process, between the Church and its decrees and everyday life. This process meant that Catholicism was not impoverished by Tridentine reforms, but rather remained vibrant and dynamic. Finally, Catholicism was closely tied to rural society, understood as a Christian community. This world, the sermons said, was poor and characterized by scarcity and an imbalance of power, but religion was a tool for surviving, engaging, and improving that world.

This deeply researched, densely argued, and informative study is well worth the effort and it makes an important contribution to the study of early modern religion.



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