

**Wolfgang E. J. Weber, Luthers bleiche Erben.
Kulturgeschichte der evangelischen Geistlichkeit des
17. Jahrhunderts, München (De Gruyter Oldenbourg)
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Anyone who has visited historic church buildings in Lutheran Germany has surely noted the many portraits of the pastors who served those churches through the early modern period. Wolfgang Weber aims to portray the mental world of these men, based on their own voluminous descriptions of the duties of pastoral office. His study draws attention to a neglected topic, the cultural history of the Lutheran clergy over the course of the long seventeenth century. »Luthers bleiche Erben« is an investigation into the way early modern Lutheran pastors saw themselves, their duties, and their relations with others.

Weber opens his book by summarizing the guides for pastors written in the third quarter of the 16th century by clergy who were all strongly influenced by Luther. The manuals of Erasmus Sarcerius, Niels Hemmingsen, and Conrad Porta first expressed ideas about pastoral conduct and pastoral responsibilities that would be developed and elaborated in the lengthy tomes published by Lutheran pastors and theologians through the 17th century that are the focus of the remaining chapters. Weber also considers a few works written in the early 18th century in order to demonstrate the impact of Enlightenment thought on changing views of the Lutheran pastorate.

Although he discusses the Lutheran understanding of the ministry, Weber is not primarily concerned with theology. He is more interested in the way beliefs influenced attitudes and actions. He organizes his material topically, beginning with a discussion of pastoral vocation, the personal and educational qualifications required of pastors, and the problems associated with obtaining a pastoral post. The pastors' manuals devoted as much space to discussing the pastor's public and private conduct as they did to describing his duties.

The central task of a Lutheran pastor was preaching and catechization, but the guides also addressed the administration of the sacraments and performance of other ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals. Weber devotes an entire chapter to the way early modern authors treated the pastors' struggle against vice, particularly sexual sins, dancing, and »self-interest« – the sins of pride, avarice, and ambition. Over time Weber sees a decline in the pastors' ability to chastise sinful behavior from the pulpit, especially when that behavior was associated with the social elite, and the clergy's responsibility for disciplining behavior was assumed by the state.



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The pastors' manuals also addressed issues of self-discipline and what would today be called pastoral counseling. Luther set the pattern with his discussions of *Anfechtungen* and melancholy more generally, but his successors developed considerably the practical measures recommended as a response to these psychological states, whether as a way of dealing with melancholy themselves or as a guide when advising their pastoral charges. Weber sees the strong emphasis in these pastoral manuals on both internal self-discipline and external conduct as contributing to the growth of western individualism.

Many clerical authors also considered the financial aspects of pastoral office. This topic was complicated by the fact that through the seventeenth century the pastorate was a major source of financial stability and social mobility and so attracted candidates who were not motivated entirely by religious zeal. Lutheran authors addressed the problems associated with lay patronage and the continued practice of simony, and they argued for the provision of an appropriate income for pastors. Through the early modern period, marriage to a pastor's widow or daughter was one way of obtaining office and at the same time ensuring financial support for the deceased pastor's family.

Weber describes an important change in works written after the Thirty Years War that reflected the growing power of the state and the resulting demotion in the authority of pastors over their parishioners. By the early 18th century they were well on the way to being seen as mere civil servants. Criticism of the failings of the Lutheran clergy as a class came from both Pietist writers and those inspired by Enlightenment values of reason and usefulness in this life rather than eternal salvation.

Weber's portrait of the early modern Lutheran clergy is familiar to early modern church historians, but Weber is writing primarily for cultural historians, and even church historians will find interesting details in the presentation. The book is not without flaws, however. Much of it consists of lengthy summaries of even lengthier works by Lutheran authors. While the summaries give a feel for the mental world of the 17th century, they can also be tedious to read.

A bit more analysis and less summary would have made the book far more effective; so too would more attention to historical context. There are, for instance, a few references to confessional rivalries, especially with Catholics but also with the Reformed, but there is no acknowledgment that these rivalries might have influenced the positions held by the authors discussed. Weber seldom provides more than the most basic information about the authors, and the reader is left wondering why these particular works were chosen and how representative they are of larger trends. The book serves its purpose, however, as an introduction to the men who played a major role in shaping German Protestant culture.



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