

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Das Jüngste Gericht in den Konfessionen und Medien der Frühen Neuzeit.*  
Edited by Johann Anselm Steiger and Ricarda Höffler. Göttingen:  
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht unipress, 2023. 433 pp.

Although the locus “eschatology” had often been a slighted doctrine in public theology until the twentieth century, God’s final judgment of humankind has usually played an important role in popular piety, certainly in part because of its final consequences for every human being. The Last Day, as the conclusion of the human narrative in this frame of existence, lends itself to depiction by graphic artists, composers and hymn writers, poets, and (rarely) playwrights. A conference cosponsored by Johann Anselm Steiger’s interdisciplinary graduate Kolleg “Interkonfessionalität in der Frühen Neuzeit” at the University of Hamburg and the Reformationsgeschichtliche Forschungsbibliothek Wittenberg brought together fifteen scholars to offer an overview of the depictions of the Last Day in theological writing, preaching, the graphic arts, music, theater, and poetry. Steiger’s essay begins with his demonstration of how Luther integrated the eschatological evaluation of works of mercy in preaching on Matthew 25 into his understanding of salvation by grace and faith alone. It moves to an analysis of confession and absolution in terms of its application of both law and gospel. All this he sets in the context of artistic depictions and printed texts, revealing how different media delivered the same message. This approach informs many of the essays.

Although the initial essay explores inter-testamental Jewish apocalyptic depictions of the last judgment (Stefan Beyerle) and two others discuss Roman Catholic treatments of the end times, most essays analyze German, largely Lutheran, eschatological presentations from Albrecht Dürer’s Landauer altar of 1511 (Jeffrey Chips Smith) to the eighteenth-century reduction of a focus on God’s final judgment to the margins of public discourse, at best a tool for moral instruction, in the Enlightenment (Matthias Pohlig). The

topics of research focus on a wide range of situations, including artists' depictions of the Last Day in ecclesiastical settings and in city halls, where, alongside portrayals of contemporary courts and council meetings in town halls, God's judgment gave legitimation to civic rule (Ricarda Höffler). Opposition to theater in general, in the tradition of Tertullian, and the difficulty of dramatic portrayal of the Last Judgment limited but did not eliminate playwrights' attempts to do so (Bernhard Jahn). Several essays explore previously unstudied corners of the rich tradition of Lutheran music. Hymn writing, of course, enriched the Lutheran devotional life, but the Wittenberg poetic tradition fostered in Latin by Melancthon continued in seventeenth-century Germany beyond the well-known work of Andreas Gryphius, as is shown in the treatments of the Last Day by Hamburg pastor Erdmann Neumeister (Stefan Michel). Even technology has its place in this discussion, with Leonard Malec's study of the use of the mechanism of clocks in literature preparing readers for the end.

The subjects treated often require photographic reproductions of altarpieces, book pages, and the notes of musical pieces. These enhance the volume with visual reinforcement for careful analyses of elements of the media that cultivated faith and perceptions of the world and its Creator among Lutherans from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The result provides a challenging sketch of how theological ideas penetrate daily life through a variety of media. The essays provide insight into the functioning of specific media and thus encourage further study of the overall impact of theological thinking as it is communicated through these different vehicles. This kind of micro-study helps shape fresh interpretations of the period as a time for dynamic developments in the cultivation of the faith and the use of the gifts of God by early modern Lutheran pastors and laity. Such studies will lead to a new appreciation of the depth and breadth of the Reformation's on-going influence on both church and the wider society in subsequent generations.

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