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Author: Schuster, Dirk
Title: "Döring, H.-J. / Haspel, M. (eds.): Lothar Kreyssig und Walter Grundmann. Zwei kirchenpolitische Protagonisten des 20. Jahrhunderts in Mitteldeutschland"
Published in: Contemporary Church History Quarterly
Volume: 21 (1)
Year: 2015
Pages: 1 - 4
ISSN: 2291-0786
URL: <https://contemporarychurchhistory.org/2015/03/review-of-hans-joachim-doring-and-michael-haspel-eds-lothar-kreyssig-und-walter-grundmann-zwei-kirchenpolitische-protagonisten-des-20-jahrhunderts-in-mitteldeutschland/>

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CONTEMPORARY CHURCH HISTORY QUARTERLY

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REVIEW OF HANS-JOACHIM DÖRING AND MICHAEL HASPEL, EDS., LOTHAR KREYSSIG UND WALTER GRUNDMANN. ZWEI KIRCHENPOLITISCHE PROTAGONISTEN DES 20. JAHRHUNDERTS IN MITTELDEUTSCHLAND

March 1, 2015 · by the Editors · in Reviews, Volume 21 Number 1 (March 2015)

Contemporary Church History Quarterly

Volume 21, Number 1 (March 2015)

Review of Hans-Joachim Döring and Michael Haspel, eds.,
Lothar Kreyssig und Walter Grundmann. *Zwei kirchenpolitische
Protagonisten des 20. Jahrhunderts in Mitteldeutschland*
(Weimar: Wartburg Verlag, 2014). 132 Pp., ISBN
9783861602520.

By Dirk Schuster, University of Potsdam; translated by John S.
Conway, University of British Columbia

Over the past twenty-five years, an enormous amount of interest has grown about the role of German Protestantism and its representatives during the period of the Third Reich. All sorts of new findings are appearing. One of the focuses of research has been on the so-called “German Christians” and their theological conflation of Protestantism and National Socialism; another is the fact that in recent years many of the provincial churches have begun to examine their own histories. For example, a conference held in 2012 and organized by the Lothar Kreyssig Ecumenical Center and the Evangelical Academy in Thuringia discussed the role of two controversial figures whose impact could hardly have been more different, namely Lothar Kreyssig and Walter Grundmann. The former was a member of the Confessing Church, who took a stand as a judge against the Nazi

euthanasia program, while the latter was the ideological leader of the “German Christians” and academic director of the notorious Institute in Eisenach dedicated to the eradication of Jewish influence from German church life. The present volume which prints some of the papers given at that conference, as well as other contributions, demonstrates very clearly the ambiguous legacy the present German Protestant churches have to deal with.

Anke Silomon’s introductory chapter provides biographical details about both men. Even though she relies on already published research, the author does give a survey of their careers, which will be of value to those readers not familiar with the subject. Both men were born during the reign of the last Kaiser, and their careers spanned the whole period up to and including the time of the German Democratic Republic, i.e. after 1949. This is followed by an article by Oliver Arnhold, who in 2010 published a comprehensive study of the “German Christians” as well as of the Eisenach Institute, which took the title of “The Institute for the Research and Removal of Jewish influence on German church life”. This contribution was drawn from a lecture Arnhold gave in 2014, which was subsequently included in this volume, and concentrated primarily on the ill-fated Institute. Hence unfortunately this means that his portrait of Walter Grundmann, who is supposed to be the main topic of this volume, is too condensed.

For his part Tobias Schüfer discusses Grundmann’s understanding of the Church and the Law. He takes the view that for Grundmann freedom and equality were to be seen as “negative qualities, urgently needing to be abandoned” (p. 68). Such a pejorative opinion is not false, but also not new. More significantly, Schüfer’s article shows, on the basis of Grundmann’s post-war writings, the lack of any admission of guilt. Even though it was already clear that Grundmann never felt any personal guilt for his activities during the Nazi period, Schüfer confirms this conclusively by examining his post-war writings and his subsequent treatment of his earlier publications.

The most interesting and rewarding article in this book is that provided by Torsten Lattki, who proves, through a detailed examination of Grundmann’s depictions of the Pharisees, both before and after 1945, that Grundmann never abandoned his anti-Jewish opinions. In all of his writings the Pharisees are seen as being the true Jews, and excerpts are produced from both pre-and post-war publications, which clearly show that Grundmann continued to hold and express his polemical opinions. To be sure, his antisemitism and his attempts to depict Jesus as “un-Jewish” were more subtly voiced in his later years of teaching in East Germany. These points have already been made in the large-scale studies by Susannah Heschel and Oliver Arnhold, but Lattki has produced the most convincing evidence that Grundmann continued to expound his antisemitic views even after the end of the Third Reich. Equally significant is Lattki’s contention that Grundmann’s works and methods of study were all part of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, which found a considerable following among theologians, students, and lay people in both east and west Germany (p. 92). It will be one of

the task of future researchers to establish just how influential was Grundmann's antisemitic picture of Judaism.

The essay by Karl Wilhelm Niebuhr stands in a marked contrast to the above scholarly contributions by Schüfer and Lattki, since it is largely a repeat of an earlier article from a 2007 collection. He is trying to show that, even though Grundmann did express anti-Jewish sentiments, he was largely being misled and misused by the Nazis. Thus he seeks to prove that the Eisenach Institute was only a marginal operation, and that Grundmann and his closest colleagues were "only a relatively small minority, never taken seriously in the academic world" (p.37). This reviewer is not convinced. The evidence surely shows well enough that articles by the leading figures in this Institute were accepted by prestigious journals such as the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* or the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*. Grundmann's picture of a non-Jewish Jesus or the claim that the positions of Christianity and Judaism were incompatible and contradictory found a considerable following in the academic community of the 1930s and 1940s? We have only got to think of his teacher Johannes Leipoldt or the later director of the Institute Georg Bertram to see that both the Institute, its staff and its findings were widely known. In addition we could cite the activity of the well-known scholar of Persia Hans Hermann Schaeder who quite deliberately used the Institute's facilities in order to propagate his conclusions about the racial connections between Eastern and Western religions. His attempt to reach a wider academic community by this means, however, failed to gain much support even from the "German Christians" with whom he had little or nothing in common ideologically. Niebuhr's contention that Grundmann never argued in the sense of a "biologically-based racism" (p. 39), but believed that the separation between Jews and Christians was due solely to religious factors, is not provable. But we have to remember that such pioneers of this kind of *völkisch* thinking as Houston Stewart Chamberlain saw religion as one of the central characteristics of racial identity, and equally accounted for religious differences as being derived from racial characteristics, in exactly the same way as Grundmann was later to argue. The latest research, for example by Horst Junginger, whom Niebuhr quotes in a footnote, has convincingly proved that the so-called racial antisemitism was based on religious factors. And Grundmann, like other well-known researchers in the field of religious studies, such as Karl Georg Kuhn or Carl Schneider, sought to show that Jews had singular racial characteristics which Jesus allegedly and diametrically opposed. According to Niebuhr, Grundmann never enjoyed any following among the proponents of "a biologically-based racial antisemitism." Indeed his views were perhaps rejected by such men (p. 42). It would have been good if Niebuhr had provided some quotations to back up such risky claims. The same is true for his suggestion that Susannah Heschel's study of Grundmann and the Eisenach Institute has now been "largely superseded".

The second protagonist in this volume, Lothar Kreyssig, is unfortunately described in only two articles, which are not enough to do him justice. He was after all one of the most active members of the anti-Nazi opposition, whose behavior demonstrated how churchmen could have behaved differently. And he continued the same oppositional stance against the dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic after 1949. Axel Noack describes his activities in the post-1945 era, such as his leadership in founding the *Aktion Sühnezeichen* (a religiously motivated German Peace Corps), or his attempts to establish a collaboration between Catholics and Protestants, which ran into considerable opposition among the more rigidly-minded church authorities. Erardo C. Rautenberg presents his findings about Kreyssig's views on legal matters during the Third Reich. Written from a juristic perspective, this is a promising subject, but could have been more fully developed.

It is a pity that Lothar Kreyssig was not given more space in this volume of
of the superfluous pieces about Walter Grundmann which can in any cas
was

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