

*Shepherds of the Empire: Germany's Conservative Protestant Leadership, 1888–1919*, by MARK R. CORRELL. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 276 pp. \$49.00.

Theological responses to modernity have taken many forms over the past two centuries, from radical accommodation to strident resistance to critical engagement. One form of the last approach, now often forgotten but of relevance to North Americans living with the dissolution of Christendom, appears in conservative intellectuals in Germany under the Empire. In the generation before Karl Barth's decisive break with modernism, other thinkers also challenged the dominant assumptions of German theology without drifting into hard-nosed fundamentalism or vague pietism.

In this work about these thinkers, Correll traces the careers of the court preacher and anti-Semitic political activist Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909), the

biblical theologian and ethicist Martin Kähler (1835–1912), the NT scholar Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), and the preacher and spiritual healer Christoph Blumhardt (1842–1919). These diverse figures represent important streams in Protestant church life a century and more ago. In each case, Correll traces his subject's career and relationships with the dominant theological voices of the era (e.g., Ritschl or Harnack). While some of these men gained fame before the reign of Wilhelm II, and Schlatter in particular exerted significant influence during the Weimar period and beyond (e.g., in the work of Ernst Käsemann), the book's focus on the post-Bismarck era has the advantage of concentrating on an often neglected part of the story and providing a richer context for the upsurge of crisis theology (so-called Neo-Orthodoxy) after World War I.

Correll's story considers another aspect of theological discourse in Wilhelmine Germany, the state of preaching during that period. Admitting the rarity of published sermons from this period, this book considers pastoral examination sermons given by candidates for ordination at a major transition in their preparation, which were archived by the state churches as part of their ordinary record-keeping. In this admittedly limited sampling, certain patterns do emerge, notably the absence of theological conflict except in students from conservative schools and the consistent mixture of traditionalism and nationalism. Such features also appear in the sermons of Kähler and Schlatter, for both men left intra-Christian polemics out of the pulpit. A fascinating aspect of this preaching (discussed in ch. 7) appeared during the Great War, when preachers of all theological persuasions shared a confidence that German victory equaled the triumph of Christianity over forces of barbarism or selfish individualism. The smashup of November 1918 created an intense crisis of faith because the church had equated the nation's work with its own.

For students of the history of theology, *Shepherds of the Empire* brings life to names often quickly passed over in textbooks in favor of either their more famous "liberal" contemporaries or Barth, Bultmann, and their colleagues of the next period. While the book assumes that the reader knows something about the larger story and thus does not explain such major movements as the pre-Schweitzer *Quest of the Historical Jesus* or the *Babel und Bibel-Streit* (not even mentioned, as far as I can see), it provides enough detail to make its story intelligible even to a less informed reader. Correll demonstrates a deep acquaintance with the actors in his story and, to a lesser extent, with their ecclesial and political settings.

Nevertheless, a number of problems with the book deserve attention. First, an unusual number of minor errors of detail appear, such as reporting Barth's birthday as 1868 instead of 1886 (259), making Wilhelm II crown prince during his grandfather's lifetime (37), and describing Stoecker and Kähler as both cousins (31) and brothers-in-law (45). Such minutiae do not matter much in themselves, but they challenge confidence in the overall historical accuracy of the work. Second, there are many points at which the book does not neatly connect the work of Kähler and Schlatter, in particular, to the theological research of their era. Repeatedly, one hears that their work served as a foil to

“liberal” scholarship, but not much of a sense of the diversity and complexity of the intellectual climate of the time. This thinness of reportage is unfortunate, not only because of the extraordinary creativity of the period, but because it is not always easy to determine just how creative these conservative figures truly were. Third, and perhaps most significantly, Correll’s attempt at establishing the influence (or at least setting the context) of his four major characters by examining the state of sermon-making in Wilhelmine Germany succeeds only in part. It would be helpful to have a more detailed description of homiletics during that period, or at least greater support for some claims about it (since the footnotes often cite one or two sermons without quoting the original texts or indicating how representative they were). In other words, this part of the work remains unfinished. One may hope that Correll will pick up the thread in time.

To conclude, then, this study marks a valuable contribution to the history of theology in recent times. A cautionary tale for modern American church leaders, the story of a non-fundamentalist conservatism deserves a wide audience.