

PhD-topic Paul Gohlke

Seventeenth Century Protestant Piety within and beyond confessional borders.

Heinrich Müller's relevance for theological and social history issues

in the Baltic Sea region.

My research project focusses on occurrences of individual early modern Protestant Piety. The 17th century stands out due to intensive production of vernacular devotional literature.

My thesis is that this literature processes concepts of medieval Christian mystic and is, therefore, to be identified as ‚preconfessional heritage‘. Authors like Johann Arndt (1555 – 1621) occasionally praised the devotional work of medieval scholars and their current importance for the 16th and 17th century. Arndt explicitly names Thomas a Kempis, Saint Bernhard of Clairvaux, Louis of Granada and others and recommends them within his theological network.

One of the hereby significantly influenced Theologians has to be Heinrich Müller (1631 – 1675). He can be regarded as one of the most important scholars at the University of Rostock of the 17th century. Müller wrote several devotional books on individual piety, that have been published extensively within the Baltic Sea region and beyond until the late 19th century.

For this PhD-project, I want to research the rhetorical strategies, literary techniques and first of all the theological ‚preconfessional‘ sources, that Müller uses in his texts. Therefore, it is planned to develop a differentiating and specialized concept of confessional border-crossing. Thomas Kaufmann originally introduced the terms of trans-confessionality (‚Transkonfessionalität‘) and intra-confessional plurality (‚Binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität‘).¹ Under these methodological assumptions, I want to research both the traces of pre-Reformation piety and synchronous catholic devotion, which Kaufmann subsumes under ‚Transkonfessionalität‘ and also the theological changes Müller makes within his own already dogmatically consolidated confession, which leads to a certain plurality within the Lutheranism (‚Binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität‘) even before the beginning of German Pietism. In their individual approach, numerous examples and Müller’s thought-of recipients, which is the congregation, Müller's books are also interpreters and witnesses of the 17th-century civil society of north-eastern Germany.

¹ KAUFMANN, THOMAS: Einleitung: Transkonfessionalität, Interkonfessionalität, binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität – Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese. In: Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte (Band 201). Heidelberg 2003, 9 – 15.