

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CALVINIST LATIN MANUSCRIPT FROM BRANDENBURG

LITTLE OLD LADIES BEARING OLDER BOOKS, which they feel sure are rare and valuable, are sometimes encountered by longsuffering rare-book librarians and antiquarian booksellers. Not infrequently their treasure proves to be the Bible, the Works of Shakespeare or some other much printed work in a commonplace late-nineteenth-century edition. But there are exceptions.

In 1977, while a bookseller at Leura in the Blue Mountains, Claude Henri Dany of *La Maison du Livre* in Balmain was approached by one such proverbial little old lady with what proved to be a unique item. Perched on top of her bulging basket of assorted fruit and veg., including a colossal cauliflower, was a Latin manuscript book of over two hundred leaves bound in a curiously colourful parchment leaf. She demanded a fixed sum for it which was promptly paid.

The handwritten titlepage is headed *Idea Theologiae* (form of theology), ascribes the authorship of the work to one Wolfgang Crellius, Doctor of Sacred Theology and Public Professor in the Academy of Frankfurt, and is dated 1624. The author and title, plus two Latin quotations relating to theology, are neatly inscribed on the spine and front of the binding. Written in a fine scribal hand with marginal subject titlings and calligraphic flourishes, the work is a systematic exposition of Calvinist theology after the doctrines of the French Protestant Reformer, Jean Calvin (1509-64) of Geneva, which conflicted at vital points with the earlier doctrines of Luther. It is cast in the form of propositions and questions, as was customary in contemporary academic disputation, with following commentaries (*Commentarii*), all arranged in seventy-one chapters. The Calvinist character of the work is apparent in its exposition of the nature of the Trinity (Chapters 16-19) and of the fundamental Calvinist doctrine of Predestination (*De Praedestione*) in chapter 23. Greek terms are used to express some theological concepts, and Hebrew is quoted at various points in the work.

The fine calligraphic quality of the manuscript is enhanced by its ample fore-edge margins and prominent chapter headings in thick black or red. In format it is a small quarto with a clear inner margin watermark. But its most immediately remarkable feature is the binding. This single parchment leaf came from a much older Catholic choirbook (probably a *Graduale*¹) and displays a section of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, with Gregorian musical notation and illuminated capitals, from the Roman Mass. Evoking the Mass and liturgical music, both of which Calvinists abominated, it is an extremely curious binding for a work of Calvinist theology in the era of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Germany. Possibly it was taken from a zealously dismembered liturgical book and contemptuously put to this utilitarian use.

The author, Wolfgang Crell (d.1664), was the son of the professor of Moral Theology at Wittenberg in Saxony, where Martin Luther had fixed his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in 1517. He was educated at Bremen and Marburg and briefly served the Calvinist Count Maurice of Hesse-Kassel before becoming Professor of Metaphysics at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder in Brandenburg in 1616 and subsequently its Professor of Theology.² From 1614 onwards the Elector, Johann Sigismund (1608-19), sought to replace Lutheranism with Calvinism as the official Protestant religion of his state. So too did his successor, Georg Wilhelm (1619-40). The teaching of the Theological Faculty of the University of Frankfurt an der Oder and appointments to it were employed as the principal means of accomplishing this policy

of a 'Second Reformation' in Brandenburg.³ The University, known as the Viadrina, had been founded in 1506 and succumbed to Lutheranism in 1538. It later developed strong Philippist leanings (that is, towards the doctrines of Luther's associate, Philipp Melancthon, 1497-1560) and established links with the Calvinist University of Leyden in the Netherlands. With the onset of the politico-religious turmoil of the Thirty Years War (1618-48) and the early fall of Heidelberg in 1619 it became for a time the foremost Calvinist school in Germany.

Crell's systematic theological exposition, which begins with a rationale for theology, reflects at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, as in other Calvinist schools of the period, an intellectually rigorous teaching method formulated in response to the success of Jesuit pedagogy in schools and universities elsewhere in Germany. Following the titlepage are five pages which contain fourteen rules of academic disputation and a list of twenty-three students who had subscribed to them 'calamo et animo' (by pen and mind) by signing an undertaking to adhere to them. The list includes students from Silesia and Lusatia in Germany and from Hungary, areas where Calvinism was strong.

Insofar as it can be established, the manuscript was never published. Its non-publication could be explained by the Elector Johann Sigismund's cautious order, in response to widespread Lutheran opposition to his religious policy, that no professor at Frankfurt was to publish anything without prior authorisation except 'programs, personal announcements and wedding or funeral poems'. Physically this extensive and unique manuscript is a finely written and attractive document. Historically it recalls the clash of contending religious systems and the dialectics they produced.

At the time of writing the manuscript was held at the bookshop mentioned in the second paragraph.

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NOTES

1. A *Graduale* contains the text and chants of those parts of the Mass which are sung.
2. *Nouvelle biographie generale*, Vol.11. (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1855), p.157.
3. Bodo Nischan, 'The Schools of Brandenburg and the "Second Reformation": centers of Calvinist learning and propaganda', in *Calviniana: ideas and influence of Jean Calvin*, ed. E.V. Schnucker (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988), pp.215-33.

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