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**Soergel, Philip M. Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany**

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question centrale de l'Eucharistie, ou celle du sacerdoce, mais l'éditeur a dû faire des choix, guidés selon lui par les tendances actuelles du renouvellement historiographique.

Construites la plupart du temps dans un vrai souci de clarté pédagogique, malgré l'aridité du sujet, ces contributions sont assises sur une documentation abondante et rédigées par des spécialistes reconnus dans leurs domaines de compétence respectifs. La richesse informative de ce volume, qui offre aux étudiants et aux chercheurs un état des lieux appelé à évoluer au fil des études à venir, en fait un instrument de travail particulièrement précieux, un ouvrage de référence qui se consulte ponctuellement, plutôt qu'il ne se lit d'une seule traite. La riche bibliographie et un index précis viennent heureusement compléter ce recueil de qualité.

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**Soergel, Philip M.**

*Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany.*

Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 234 + 10 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-19-984466-1 (hardcover) £40.

The 183 pages of Soergel's very tight prose belie the massive research undertaking behind this volume. Extant sixteenth-century German wonder books are many and diverse, encompassing both learned theological treatises as well as collections—the true *Wunderbuch* is such a collection—of reports, in both manuscript and ephemeral print, of monstrous births, astronomical portents, geological events, meteorological disasters, and the like. The sheer weirdness of these works—both individually and as a genre of sorts—has confounded generations of interested scholars; even more have likely preferred to look away altogether, both for practical and ideological reasons. The compass of just one of the many collections investigated by Soergel gives some idea of the practical challenges these documents pose: at his death in 1558 the Zurich pastor and wonder booker Johann Jakob Wick had compiled 24 volumes averaging 600 pages per volume and including 499 pamphlets and 430 broadsides!

Ideologically, enduring stereotypes of reformers and their work as tending towards Weberian disenchantment and increasing rationality have further encouraged historiographical neglect. But as Soergel points out, even the most celebrated Protestant doctrines—cessationism, for example—are ultimately only that: doctrines, whose historical promulgation should not be inflated to describe a general cultural shift or rupture, nor indeed an intellectual revolution.

Soergel not only wants us to look (yes, there *are* illustrations), but to look with a purpose. Therefore he begins by emphasizing how widespread the beliefs associated with the practice of wonder booking were. He starts with none other than Luther, who wasn't a wonder booker *per se*, but whose ambivalence on miracles (as on so many things) has frequently been explained in terms of his transitional role as the last medieval. Against this "vestige" theory Soergel presents the evidence of well-known second and third generation reformers who actively pursued and developed the form and content of the wonder book over the course of the sixteenth century. These included the Wittenberg students Job Finckel, Caspar Goltwurm and Christoph Irenaeus, and the south German Conrad Lycosthenes, each of whom Soergel examines in detail, as well as many lesser-known individuals whose works he discusses in consideration of particular points. While many of these can be counted among the ranks of the Gnesio-Lutherans in general, and among the followers of Matthias Flacius in particular, Soergel is at pains to establish that the practice of the wonder book cannot be mapped directly onto what he somewhat minimizes as the "tensions and strains" that beset German evangelical communities and polities after mid-century. Thus, for example, the wonder booker Andreas Hondorff was a thoroughgoing Philippist, and even otherwise decidedly Flacian writers tended towards a Philippist natural philosophy in their wonder books.

Indeed, it is Soergel's argument that something more profound than theological wrangling drove the fascination with wonders and, especially, the marked shift in what he calls the "tone" of wonder books over the period from 1520 to 1570. Soergel concludes that the darker tenor of later works reflects the development of confessional culture, and especially of its disciplinary dimensions. Thus, by the third quarter of the sixteenth century natural events ranging from monstrous births to meteorological disasters were increasingly read as divine punishments for moral failing, both personal and communal. Moreover, the wonder books, as well as the printed reports that provided much of their content, were increasingly spiked with social and political criticism.

Finally, Soergel sees the waning of the wonder book as a response to changing socio-cultural conditions. Elite and pastoral interest in the subject matter diminished and wonder prints ultimately disappeared by the first quarter of the seventeenth century because writers no longer felt they had the same receptive audiences. Thus Soergel arrives at conclusions about both the appearance and disappearance of the wonder book that better integrate the theology of the times with other sixteenth-century sciences, especially natural philosophy. Furthermore, he considers the reception of such an integrated science of the natural and supernatural by broader populations as well as the reciprocal influence of such popular interest on intellectual elites. Soergel thus dispenses with some of the most persistent dichotomies in the scholarship on formative Protestantism in recent decades—elite-popular, idealist-materialist—to offer an uncommonly organic social history of ideas. He achieves this in a marvelously engaging prose style. For example, this reviewer was most amused to read that Job Fincel’s work presented “a universe that *quaked and pulullated* with evidence of human misdeeds”!

All that said, there are a few things that could have made this book even better. First on the list would be a bibliography. The notes are extensive, but cannot serve the same purpose as a proper bibliography. The index also comes across as something of a grudging concession to convention—though, in fact, a really good index would have made this book useful to a much wider audience. Likewise, some more expansive consideration of certain linguistic details would undoubtedly be welcomed by specialists and non-specialists alike: for example, an explanation of why or how the German term *irdische* could mean both “earthly” and “fleshly” would have been helpful. Finally, on the subject of details, this reviewer was surprised to read that Tettwang was in Upper Bavaria.

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