

Brad S. Gregory

SALVATION AT STAKE: CHRISTIAN MARTYR- DOM IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

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1999. xvi + 528 pp. ISBN 0-674-78551. \$49.95.

This prize-winning work represents classic scholarship in church history on a grand scale. Born in the early 1990s as a doctoral dissertation project at Princeton University, Gregory's study matured through extensive postdoctoral research in the United Kingdom, the Low Countries, and France into what must be regarded as one of the more impressive analyses, in terms of both breadth of scope and depth of analysis to be published in the field in many years. To be sure, the study of Christian martyrdom is hardly virgin soil. From it have sprouted many previous studies of individuals like Jan Hus and Thomas More, while the approaches of martyrologists like John Foxe and Jean Crespin have also been subjected to fairly extensive scholarly enquiry. Gregory takes the quest a giant step farther by considering martyrdom on an interdenominational and international scale which runs counter to the narrow-gauged and lamentable overspecialisation so characteristic of scholarly endeavours in our time. Eventually his diggings led him into mountains of Latin, Dutch, French, English, and German sources to create a copiously annotated volume.

A professor of European history at Stanford University, Gregory accepts the willingness of approximately 5,000 Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and other Protestants in western Europe to relinquish their lives rather than live on terms dictated by their spiritual foes as a sincere religious act of faith. Explicitly eschewing twentieth-century anthropological psychological approaches, he sets out "to analyze early modern martyrdom without recasting or judging the convictions, attitudes, or actions of the protagonists through theories or values that distort them". His approach is in a crucial sense two-fold, in that he examines both martyrs' own testimonies as they prepared to die for their faith rather than accept life on other people's terms, and the accounts of those who detested and were willing to kill them because of religious differences. *Salvation at Stake* is thus a study not only of the *ars moriendi*, or art of dying tradition inherited from the Middle Ages, but also a fresh look at religious persecution. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is Gregory's general finding that witnesses and participants offering evi-

dence from radically differing perspectives often corroborated each other. Both persecutors and the persecuted (including those of the co-religionists of men and women who had been burned or otherwise killed) tended to agree that the act of putting spiritual nonconformists to death was not one of perverse cruelty by sadists but often done reluctantly by normal people who thought it their duty to repress heresy and who tried repeatedly to convince their victims to recant. The two parties disagreed pointedly, however, in their interpretation of the willingness of the nonconformists to give up their lives for their beliefs. To their executors, their recalcitrance was the work of the devil, but the martyrs insisted with no less vigour that God was their guide. In their testimonies, many of which were quite eloquent, they gave expression to the vibrancy of their faith which incorporated explicit doctrinal norms of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The theological history of early modern Europe lived was thus not merely the domain of the religious and intellectual elite, but also affected considerable numbers of people who were not even literate.

Much of Gregory's study is devoted to the analysis of the cults of Protestant martyrs, an area which previously received scant scholarly attention apart from its Calvinist and Anabaptist components, in contrast to the tradition of veneration of Roman Catholics who died for their faith. He demonstrates cogently that the culture of martyrology inherited from the late Middle Ages was carried over into Lutherdom and was manifested in that wing of the Reformation at an early stage in numerous pamphlets and songs in honour of sixteenth-century German evangelicals who had given their lives. Gregory thus underscores the birth of a Protestant martyrological tradition antedating Calvin. By analogy, he is able to establish a line from the medieval Catholic cult of martyrs to Anabaptist reverence of their deceased heroes of the faith.

In its discussion of an age-old religious phenomenon, *Salvation at Stake* opens many new doors to scholarly endeavours. One can safely predict that Gregory's ground-breaking investigation will prompt other scholars in one country after another to analyse hitherto tenebrous dimensions of this gruesome aspect of church history and that comparative approaches to the subject will be among the methodological benefactors. Whether Gregory's colleagues in various disciplines will generally heed his prompting to reject anthropological and psychoanalytical theories is doubtful; their lure is much too tempting, especially in the eyes of secular scholars who do not ne-

cessarily accept the underlying legitimacy of Christian faith as a determinant in its own right. But even investigators who choose to follow different disciplinary paths into the killing fields of early modern European Christianity have Gregory to thank for pointing them in its direction.

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Johan Cilliers

DIE GENADE VAN GEHOORSAAMHEID. HOE EVANGELIES IS DIE ETIESE PREKE WAT ONS IN SUID-AFRIKA HOOR?

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Die derde werk in Johan Cilliers se “Prediking”-trilogie *Die genade van gehoorsaamheid* is ’n uiters tydige werk. Soos die subtitel *Hoe evangelies is die etiese preke wat ons in Suid-Afrika hoor?* aandui, handel dit oor etiese prediking in Suid-Afrika. Cilliers se hoofmotief met die skryf van die boek voer hy terug na Luther se uitspraak: “Die Woord van God kom om ons te verander.” Vanuit die evangelie kan die kerk die verworping van die samelewing teëwerk. Vir Cilliers behoort etiese prediking wesentlik tot die prediking van die evangelie. As die prediking van die etiek agteruitgaan, gaan die prediking van die evangelie agteruit. In die ewekansige steekproef wat Cilliers uit ’n aantal radiopreke en -meditasies gedoen het, blyk dit dat etiese aangeleenthede dikwels net aan die oppervlak van preke voorkom. Daarby swyg ’n groot persentasie van die preke en meditasies oor enige etiese aangeleentheid.

Nadat Cilliers in ’n inleidende hoofstuk die motivering vir die skryf van die boek gegee het, behandel hy in hoofstuk 2 verlossingsprediking. Die prediking van die verlossing is ’n woord oor God en ’n woord van God. Dit is nie net inligting oor verlossing nie, maar eerder ’n gebeure van die verlossing self.

Hoofstuk 3 handel oor die prediking van die sonde. Die realiteit van die sonde mag op geen manier in die prediking gesystap of verswak word nie. Dit is alleen moontlik deur die korrekte prediking van die wet in sy sondeontblotende funksie. Die prediking van die wet is nodig om die evangelie konkreet en verstaanbaar te maak in terme van die mens se sondige toe-