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11. THE IMPACT OF THE REFORMATION ON DAILY LIFE

I

In November 1525 the Town Council of Zürich announced that all gravestones in the city would have to be removed within a month, or else they would be confiscated and used for building material. Such an act of impiety towards ancestors and the dead was as astonishing to many contemporaries as it is to the anthropologist or folklorist today: as it seemed to the orthodox chronicler Hans Salat, the world had become godless.¹ The Reformation created a deep rift in European culture which reached far down into the texture of daily life. The Swiss folklorist Richard Weiss saw it as a more powerful source of division than linguistic or political boundaries; in Switzerland he held it to have formed two confessionally distinct cultures with marked differences in modes of speech, in dress, in food, even in the way in which land was tilled.²

Weiss was merely providing a regional example of a commonplace of twentieth-century scholarship, of a notion embedded even in those recent interpretations which emphasize the long-running processes to which Catholic and Protestant worlds were subject — confessionalization, acculturation or the 'reform of popular culture'. On the one hand, there is a religion of cultic observance set in a sacralized world, appealing to the senses and emphasizing collective religious mentalities, what John Bossy has called 'traditional Christianity'. On the other hand, a religion of non- or even anti-ritual forms, expressing rational and individual thought modes, set in a desacralized world in which there were not specially sacred times, spaces, places, persons or things.³

² Richard Weiss, Volkskunde der Schweiz (Zürich, 1946), 309-10.
That this is a deceptively oversimplified, indeed even a false picture of the religious culture of early modern Europe is gradually becoming apparent from a number of directions. First, there is a substantial body of evidence of so-called ‘Catholic survivals’ within Protestant culture which indicates that the break with the past was neither as dramatic nor as complete as conventional wisdom would have us believe. This is true not just of Lutheran areas, with their more moderate forms of Reformation, but also of those dominated by the more radical Reformed tradition. Second, as we uncover more about the popular side of the Reformation by investigating how it spread beyond the circles of theologians, churchmen and social elites, we find that there is often more continuity with pre-Reformation mentalities than we have hitherto recognized. Often the process of religious reform worked not by repudiating traditional thought modes but by presupposing them in order to modify or transform them. Third, a growing body of literature exploring Protestant ‘popular religion’ has uncovered a good deal that contradicts the normative view presented by ‘official’ Protestant belief.

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4 See, for example, Karl-Sigismund Kramer, “Protestantisches in der Volkskunde Frankens”, Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde 60 (1969), 77-92; Gertrud Frauenknecht, “Die evangelische Pfarrkirche Veitsbronn als Ziel einer Wallfahrt,” Festschrift Matthias Zender. Studien zu Volkskultur, Sprache und Landesgeschichte (Bonn, 1972), 384-94; Pieter J. Meertens, “Vorreformatorische Relikte in den reformierten Niederlanden.” Festschrift Matthias Zender, 395-411; Karl Bohnenberger, Volkstümliche Überlieferungen in Württemberg Forschungen und Berichte zur Volkskunde in Baden-Württemberg 5 (Stuttgart, 1980), esp. 24, 59-60; Richard Andree, “Katholisches Überbleibsel beim evangelischen Volk”, Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde 21 (1911), 113-25. These studies go back well into the early modern period, see for example Georg Christoph Pisanski, Beleuchtung eines Überbleibsel des Heidentums und Pabstums in Preußen (Leipzig, 1756); Georg Christoph Zimmermann, Theologische Abhandlungen des Aberglaubens (Frankfurt-Leipzig, 1740; orig. ed. 1721); Bartholomaeus Anhorn, Magiologia (Basel, 1675); Rudolf Gwerb, Bericht von dem aberglaubigen und verbotten Leuth- und Vych besegmen (Zürich, 1646). For other similar works from the seventeenth century, see Albrecht Jobst, Evangelische Kirche und Volkstum (Stuttgart, 1938), 81. They originate from the first attempts made by the evangelical clergy to disseminate their beliefs to the rural inhabitants of Germany; see Johannes Riviis, De officio pastorali ministrorum ecclesiae in pagis (Basel, 1549), which sets out the problems facing a rural pastor and how to deal with them, including the attachment of the peasant population to their old ‘superstitions’ (p. 7).


6 What we might call the earliest ‘ethnography of popular Protestantism’ began
This is not to claim that confessional differences were unimportant. Religious allegiance patently contributed to local and regional differentiation through the impact of ecclesiastical forms, through contrasting attitudes towards daily life rooted in distinctive theological beliefs, through the construction of distinctive religious life-styles, through different sets of social norms and prohibitions, and through personal and social networks determined primarily by confessional allegiance. Thus, there were areas in which confession played a dominant role in the choice of marriage partners and those in which one’s confessional allegiance was plain in one’s baptismal name or in the number of godparents present at a baptism. Demographic differences between large and small families have also been explained in terms of fundamentally different Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards ancestors and progeny. The evangelical propagandist Heinrich von Kettenbach put this latter point succinctly as early as 1523 when he argued that what was previously spent on the cult of the dead could be more fruitfully passed on to one’s heirs. Calvinist parents in Geneva seem to have taken this advice a step further by limiting the number of heirs through a doubling and trebling of birth intervals. The physical landscape could also be said to have been


7 For these points, see Matthias Zender, “Konfessionsgebiete als Beispiel regionaler Differenzierung,” in Günter Wiegelmann, Matthias Zender, Gerhard Heißfurth, eds, *Volkskunde. Eine Einführung* (Berlin, 1977), 163-70, esp. 163.

8 On confessional marriage see Hans-Christoph Rublack, “Konfession als
‘confessionalized’, accurately revealing to the interested traveller the religion of the inhabitants of any territory. Thus, as one passed through Franconia, the sudden absence of roadside image shrines betrayed that one had passed from a Catholic into a Protestant area. Ironically, one was more likely to encounter here a well-preserved gothic church, while luxuriant baroque churches were more frequently seen in Catholic areas. Similarly, in the countryside around Marburg one could easily discern the faith of peasant women from their local costumes and hairstyle, and the same was true in parts of Alsace, Westphalia or Lusatia.

This neat picture of sharp cultural division is nonetheless deceptive, for the unevenness of development over space and time often made the reality of ‘confessionalization’ rather more complex. There were many confessionally mixed areas, where Catholic and Protestant lived alongside one another, not merely village to village but also house to house, just as there were many areas where official religion changed back and forth with the change of ruler, as in the Upper Palatinate or Rhine Palatinate. Such unevenness may explain the fact that weathercocks on church towers may in some localities be taken as a sign that the area is Catholic, in others that it is Protestant. There is also a lack of cultural consistency which allows a custom to ‘switch confessional allegiance’, so to speak. This can be seen in the celebration of birthdays and namedays (the feast of one’s patron

9 Kramer, Protestantisches in der Volkskunde Frankens, 77.
10 Zender, Konfessionsgebiete, 167; Eva Nienholdt, “Die Volkstracht,” Handbuch der deutschen Volkskunde, 3, 81, 89-90, 117; Adolf Bach, Deutsche Volkskunde (Heidelberg, 1960), 351.
11 Zender, Konfessionsgebiete, 164.
saint). The birthday was a medieval custom, joined before the Reformation by the nameday, which became established as a Lutheran custom in the seventeenth century. However the Counter-Reformation advocated celebration of the nameday, perhaps to underline the cult of the patron saint, with the result that evangelical believers gave it up. By the nineteenth century the customs were reversed: birthdays were an evangelical custom, namedays Catholic. But even this distinction was no reliable index of confessional allegiance: in evangelical Siebenburgen, the nameday was celebrated and not the birthday, while in Ermland and Upper Silesia, Catholics celebrated birthdays rather than namedays.12 Eva Ammermüller has traced a similar switching of confessional fashion in baptismal names. In the seventeenth century, an Old Testament baptismal name almost certainly indicated evangelical confessional adherence.13 By the nineteenth century, however, many names which had been preferred by Protestants in the seventeenth century had become biconfessional, while many biconfessional names had become exclusively Catholic.14

There was a similar development in baptismal customs. Catholics had favoured baptism as quickly as possible after birth, within 1-3 days, while Protestants initially deferred it. By the eighteenth century Protestant practice had changed and consistorial ordinances in Thuringia in 1711 and 1747 commanded baptism within two to three days and by the nineteenth century it was common evangelical custom to baptise a child as quickly as possible within two to three days of birth.15 Similarly, Confirmation had been rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century, but the practice began to reemerge in parts of Lutheran Germany in the mid-seventeenth and was a firmly anchored custom in Thuringia from 1718. The practice even revived, if more slowly, in Protestant Switzerland and was firmly reestablished there in the nineteenth century. By the middle of that century it could be a matter of life-long spiritual agony for someone to have taken the Lord's Supper within having first been confirmed, as the Lutheran parson Heinrich Pröhle related from his own pastoral experience. By the second decade of the twentieth century

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12 Zender, Konfessionsgebiete, 168; Bach, Deutsche Volkskunde, 278.
13 Bach, Deutsche Eigennamen in volkskundlicher Betrachtung, 325.
14 Ammermüller, Konfessionelle Unterschiede in den Taufnamen, 102-3.
15 Zender, Konfessionsgebiete, 166; for the eighteenth century, Pröhle, Kirchliche Sitten, 129.
Confirmation was regarded by Protestants in Württemberg as more important than Baptism or the Lord’s Supper: refusing Confirmation to a child could lead to the family concerned leaving the church. It had become an important community and family festival, with children, houses and processional route to the church decked in greenery, lily of the valley and myrtle blossom.\textsuperscript{16}

Such matters reveal shifting fashions among evangelical and Catholic believers alike, often in consequence of changes in official norms. But clear distinctions between the confessions could also flow from the reverse effect, the inability of official prohibitions to establish themselves as normative for popular behaviour. Thus, it is certainly misleading to speak of a ‘reformation of popular culture’ as any kind of effective or unitary process. For example, festive processions to mark the onset of winter survived in Protestant areas, despite attempts to prohibit them, albeit with the central figure transmutated or neutralized. St. Nicholas thus became merely a holy man, rather than the Catholic saint, or he was replaced by Knecht Ruprecht, St. Nicholas’ former companion.\textsuperscript{17} The celebration of the end of winter and the beginning of summer in the mid-Lent ceremony of Todaustragen continued despite attempts to prohibit it or to reshape it into an evangelical ceremony with antipapal overtones. It is attested from the seventeenth to nineteenth century in Thuringia, Saxony, the Erzgebirge, Lusatia and Franconia.\textsuperscript{18}

The inability of Protestant authorities to prohibit rogation day processions which sought divine protection for ripening crops against pests and damaging storms led to a distinctively evangelical form of the Hagelfeier, a procession around the fields with hymns and prayers, which was only displaced by a Hagel- or Flurpredigt in the course of the eighteenth century; the latter was in its turn abolished in Thuringia

\textsuperscript{16} Pröhle, Kirchliche Sitten, 142-143; Paul Wurster, Das kirchliche Leben der evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg (Tübingen, 1919), 105; Jobst, Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten, 29.

\textsuperscript{17} Wiegelmann, Zender, Heißlürth, eds, Volkskunde, 145.

\textsuperscript{18} August Witzschel, Sagen aus Thüringen 2 (Vienna, 1866), 297-307; idem, Kleine Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie, Sitten und Heimatkunde in Sagen und Gebrauchen aus Thüringen 1 (Leipzig, 1866), 193; 2, 199, 334; Johann-Georg Theodor Grässe, Sagenschatz des Königreichs Sachsens (Leipzig, 1894), 38, 115-16; A. Meiße, Sagenbuch der südöstlichen Schweiz (Leipzig, 1894) 115-116; on Franconia: Karl-Sigismund Kramer, Volksleben im Fürstentum Ansbach (Würzburg, 1961), 106, citing Georg Christoph Zimmermann, Theologische Abhandlung des Aberglaubens (1721) who attests the custom from his own experience in Wiesenbach, south-west of Rothenburg.
only in 1808. The custom of the *Flurumgang* was continued in both Saxony and Franconia, although in the latter region it was separated from the custom of marking the bounds (*Flurumritt*), which became a purely secular ceremony directed at checking the correct position of boundary stones and markings. All such practices had fallen into disuse by the end of the nineteenth century, much to the relief of ecclesiastical authorities, for although they might be called acceptable evangelical customs, there was a continual fear that they were too close to Catholic practice.

Similarly, there developed distinctive evangelical forms of Mayday, Whitsun and harvest festival. The Catholic custom of showering the congregation with wafers on Whitsun, following the lowering of a dove to symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit, was retained in evangelical parts of lower Franconia merely with the dove omitted. The wafers were especially popular with children and growing numbers were distributed in the seventeenth century, reaching a peak in the 1670s. The harvest celebration was a festive ritual as elaborate as anything found before the Reformation: as the last wagonload of grain was brought in, the mowers made a circle around the last sheaf, from which the fullest ears of grain were selected and laid in a cross shape on a rake, accompanied by the singing of a hymn. The mowers decorated their scythes and wove a garland from the last ears cut, then marched in procession to the farmhouse, where the garland was presented to the farmer’s wife, in return for a blessing and thanksgiving. As the hymn *Nun danket alle Gott* was sung, the mowers stroked their scythes and the garland was formally hung in the farmhouse parlour. This ceremony is rich in symbolic action but might be called typically evangelical in its dependence solely on lay participation and the use of hymns of thanksgiving.

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19 Pröhle, *Kirchliche Sitten*, 59 on the Thuringian abolition; on the *Hagelfeier* in general see Hans Bächthold-Stäubli, ed., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* 3 (Berlin, 1931), 1314-1316; on attempts in Lüneburg to prohibit the *Hagelfeier*, extending from the *Kirchenordnung* of 1527 until the nineteenth century see Richard Andree, *Braunschweiger Volkskunde* (Braunschweig, 1896), 258-59.


22 See Pröhle, *Kirchliche Sitten*, 261-68, for these.


24 As described in Jobst, *Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten*, 53.
One Christmas custom which could not be displaced from evangelical churches was the dressing and display between Christmas and the Feast of the Magi of the Bornkinnel, a wooden Christchild figure holding an orb crowned with a cross in one hand, the other raised in a blessing. This was an ancient pre-Reformation custom, and it survived in Saxony into the twentieth century as a distinctively evangelical and largely, but not exclusively, urban practice.\textsuperscript{25} We could cite many other examples of popular determination to preserve much-loved and revered customs, a determination also evident in resistance to ecclesiastical authorities attempting to change what was regarded as traditional evangelical practice. Attempts to introduce a new hymnal in Quedlinburg in 1787 met determined resistance by Protestants who feared that they would lose their 'old faith', and a similar attitude inspired refusal to accept a new hymnal in the Basel territory.\textsuperscript{26} Such examples reveal the emergence of a distinctive lay evangelical mentality in opposition to official norms, with resistance strong enough to enforce official accommodation to its viewpoint. The strength of religious conviction behind this mentality can be seen in popular opposition around Ulm and Nuremberg, as well as in Saxony and Württemberg, to the installation of lightning-conductors on churches in the eighteenth century, on the grounds that they represented an interference in God's ordinances for the world.\textsuperscript{27}

II

There is clearly a need to revise our notions about the impact of the Reformation on daily life. Just how radical that rethinking needs to be is revealed if we consider one of the most accepted of commonplaces, that the Reformation led to a secularization or Entzauberung of the world, so that for evangelical believers there were no more especially sacred times, persons, places or things, because the entire world was recognized as God's creation. In this section of the paper, I want to indicate how misleading this view is. Indeed, when the Thuringian pastor Heinrich Gebhardt set out to characterize the reli-

\textsuperscript{25} Grundriss der sächsischen Volkskunde, 159.

\textsuperscript{26} On Basel: Eduard Strubin, Basterbieten Volksleben. Sitte und Brauch im Kulturwandel der Gegenwart (Basel, 1952); on Quedlinburg: R. Freudenthal, Das Feuer im deutschen Glauben und Brauch (Berlin, 1931), 447.

\textsuperscript{27} Narr, Zum Charakterbild, 75, n. 30.
gious belief of the evangelical peasantry in the second half of the nineteenth century, he came to exactly the opposite conclusion: evangelical peasant piety was dependent on a complex structure of holy names, times, places and objects.\textsuperscript{28} Feastdays still marked out holy times or periods such as the \textit{Zwölfertag}, the twelve days between Christmas and the feast of the Magi, which were held in common with Catholics to be days on which protective measures could be taken against evil spirits. Thus, in Mecklenburg a hatchet was chopped into the threshold of the barn and the cattle driven out over it to protect them from sorcery for the coming year, while brooms bound on the \textit{Zwölfertag} were held to provide protection against witches.\textsuperscript{29}

Good Friday, Easter eve and Whitsun were no less sacred times in many Protestant areas such as Mecklenburg or Saxony. Thorns laid in the four corners of a cattle stall on the evening of Good Friday would heal any sick cattle within. Water taken from a running stream on Easter or Whitsun eve had special healing qualities, as did the dew collected before sunrise on Easter or Whitsun morning.\textsuperscript{30} The north German custom of the Easter Day fire, over which young men sprang and through which cattle were driven to increase fertility, was still in use at the end of the sixteenth century. Its ashes could be sprinkled over fields to increase their fertility and to protect crops against mice, and when shaken with water they protected cattle against illness.\textsuperscript{31} There was even a remnant of the holiness of Marian feasts in the way the birth of the Virgin (September 8) was celebrated in Saxony as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century: it was the custom to go to a spring before sunrise and silently to scoop up water in which to bathe, in the belief that it brought the user great beauty.\textsuperscript{32} The powers associated with all these practices derived from the sacredness of the time at which they were performed.

There were equally powerful beliefs associated with the time or day on which ecclesiastical rituals were performed, as we shall see.

\textsuperscript{28} Gebhardt, \textit{Zu bäuerlicher Glaubens- und Sittenlehre}, 68-72.
\textsuperscript{29} Karl Bartsch, \textit{Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Mecklenburg} (Wien, 1880), 233, and on the \textit{Zwölfertag} in general, 242-50.
\textsuperscript{32} Witzschel, \textit{Sagen aus Thüringen}, 2, 243.
later in the case of baptism, marriage or burial, while the time of celebration of the Lord's Supper seemed for evangelical believers to share at least some of the sacredness of the Mass. Thus, clothes worn to take communion were held to have healing power, leather amulets (*Lederfleckchen*) taken to communion by a pregnant woman could later be laid under her back to help in giving birth. Bread taken to the communion service was given to calves to help wean them, and grain taken to the Lord's Supper celebration on Good Friday could be fed to poultry to protect them against hawks. At least some of the power associated with the Eucharist was transferred to the Protestant Lord's Supper: communion wine was held in Saxony and Württemberg to have healing qualities, as was communion given to the sick in Hessen. In parts of Württemberg, however, communion for the sick was not taken willingly for fear that the recipient would not rise from the sickbed, an old Catholic belief.

There is no doubt that many of these beliefs were transferred from Catholic practice, just as there was no doubt that many Protestants regarded the older faith as possessing greater access to sacred power. It was common, from the sixteenth century onwards, for Protestants to turn to Catholic priests for help in the confidence that they were more effective wielders of thaumaturgic power than the evangelical clergy. Thus, Protestants on the Weichsel even in the nineteenth century sought holy water and blessed candles from Catholic priests, and Catholic blessed water was much sought after for its sacred qualities. In 1616 Protestant officials in Coburg tried to use holy water to interrogate witchcraft suspects, and in 1624 Franconian Protestants attempted to work magic with it. In Wieseth in Franconia, evangelical since 1559, a pre-Reformation water used to heal eyesickness was still in use as healing water in 1671. A similar water

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35 For numerous testimonies of this, see Strackerjan, *Aberglauben* 1, 120; Bach, *Deutsche Volkskunde*, 278 (Weichsel); on Coburg: Kramer, *Protestantisches in der Volkskultur Frankens*, 81.
used to heal eye illness was sought after in Lauterbach in Hessen in the eighteenth century, when the local consistory condemned its use. In 1730 water blessed in the name of St. Francis Xavier was sought after by Protestants in Saxony and on the Swabian Alb as a means of ensuring fertility of their fields.

It was probably the power of healing associated with various pilgrimage sites that ensured their survival long after they had been protestantized. A spring near Braunschweig was still revered in 1584, with the regular placing of ex votos attesting its attraction as a healing shrine. Pilgrimage to Veitsbronn in Franconia, which continued into the twentieth century, may have been the result of healing waters there. It was one of six evangelical churches in eastern Franconia where pilgrimages refused to die out with the Reformation. At Ems on the Lahn pilgrimage to St. Daniel at Arzheim near Koblenz still continued a hundred years after the Reformation. The pilgrimage to Büchen in Holstein, site of a miraculous host, was abolished only with great difficulty, even after the host itself had been destroyed. The site was still visited in 1581, and the local pastor still complained of the pilgrimage in 1590, when a final solution was found by completely destroying the chapel. Five evangelical villages still visited the church at Meiches in Hessen in the seventeenth century, where they made offerings in the belief that they would be healed of their illnesses.

There are numerous other evangelical pilgrimage sites attested in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although it is possible that some of them, and indeed some of those already mentioned, may have attracted Catholics from outside their boundaries, rather than local evangelical inhabitants. However, they certainly represented more than mere archaic ‘survivals’. Their very persistence shows that they met a perceived religious need, and reflected a consistent attitude towards a world in which especially sacred places had certainly not disappeared. Even in the nineteenth century, Protestants in East Prussia made pilgrimages to Heiligelinde near Rössel or to Bialutter

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37 Schreiber, Volksreligiosität, 63; Grundriss der sächsischen Volkskunde, 161.
38 Andree, Katholisches Überbleibsel, 115.
near Soltau. They brought offerings, had their illnesses blessed and sought Ablaß.\textsuperscript{10}

It was the same attitude which led to the continued use of weather bells in Protestant territories. It is exemplified in the case of Neudrosenfeld in Franconia, where the pastor prohibited the ringing of weather bells in 1591. When the church tower was struck with lightning, he faced a knowing rebuke from his parishioners and was told what was apparent to everyone else, that the bell was \textit{ein getaufte und zum wetter gesegnete glock}. In this church the weather bells remained until the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{11} Memory of the power of such sacramental objects was long, and a form of blessed bread, believed to be efficacious in repelling fire in the same way as St. Agatha’s Bread or even the Eucharist, was still in use in Franconia around 1600. The old Catholic belief was also retained in a \textit{Feuerseggen} extant in nineteenth century Saxony, involving a spell said over a loaf of bread to provide protection against fire.\textsuperscript{12}

All these examples have in common the notion of consecration or blessing as a means of imparting sacred power to objects, so that they are set aside from the merely profane world. It is illuminating in this context that evangelical churches were unable to dispense with consecrations, as the first generation of reformers had insisted. It is unclear how quickly evangelical forms of consecration began to reappear, since they are rarely mentioned in \textit{Kirchenordnungen}. They are said to have been a development of the sixteenth century and are well attested for the seventeenth century, so much so that by 1700 they had become a firmly established practice. They appear thereafter with increasing frequency and were used in a wide variety of forms: the consecration of church foundation stones, churches, either new or restored (perhaps given impetus by the rebuilding of churches after the Thirty Years’ War), pulpits, cemeteries, fonts, organs (largely in the seventeenth century), bells, altars (attested for 1650), a \textit{Lecturafel} in 1693 and even a \textit{Beichtstuhl} in 1719. Seventeenth century church lawyers took pains to stress that the consecration of a church, for example, was merely a matter of setting a place aside for worship and not of creating it as somewhere specially sacred.

\textsuperscript{10} Bach, \textit{Deutsche Volkskunde}, 278.
\textsuperscript{11} Kramer, \textit{Protestantisches in der Volkskultur Frankens}, 82.
\textsuperscript{12} Kramer, \textit{Bauern und Bürger in Unterfranken}, 125-26; Witzschel, \textit{Sagen aus Thüringen}, 293.
Yet there remained an element of ambiguity, and church space did acquire a certain sacrality, especially the altar. For example, there was the custom of walking around the altar on certain ritual occasions such as the blessing of a woman after confinement in childbirth, or during a wedding ceremony. A midwife bringing a child to baptism would genuflect before the altar, a practice prohibited by the Leipzig Theology Faculty in 1665 in case it gave rise to 'superstition', that is, to the belief that the altar was especially sacred. Yet many evangelical beliefs in the apotropaic or healing qualities of certain objects are only explicable in terms of the assumption that they acquired these qualities either at a sacred time or a sacred place. Thus there were beliefs in the healing powers of a bridal garland, of the prayerbook a bride had in church with her at her wedding, and of the gown used for baptism.

I want to mention here only three other broad examples of Protestant belief in sacrality: bibles, prayers and the sign of the cross. There is a large body of evidence that bibles, hymnbooks and catechisms were ascribed special power and used as particularly sacred objects. Occasionally this is also extended to certain other religious books, such as very popular Pietist works. The power attributed to them was the greater if they were inherited family bibles or hymnbooks. They were used for healing and protective magic, being laid under a bed or a pillow. In Protestant Baden, a recommended cure for palsy was to lay a bible face down on the sufferer, opened at the passage describing how Christ cured an epileptic. A bible or hymnbook laying open on a table provided protection against storms, while a page torn from a bible hung up in a barn protected the cattle from sorcery. These books could be used in divination, as they were in Samland to discover the name of a thief, and their sacred character was attested in the belief that they were incombustible, a quality which accompanied sainthood in Catholic belief. Resistance to the introduction of the new hymnal in Quedlinburg in 1787 was accompanied by the challenge that it should prove its sacredness by facing the ordeal by fire (Feuerprobe).

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43 Paul Graff, Geschichte der Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands (Göttingen, 1921), 283, 402-9; on walking around the altar during weddings or after confinement: Bartsch, Sagen, 46.
44 Kramer, Ausbach, 186; Seyfarth, Abergläube, 274.
45 For extensive discussion: Regine Grube-Verhoeven, "Die Verwendung von Büchern christlich-religiösen Inhalts zu magischen Zwecken", Zauberei und Frömigkeit
These beliefs and customs were typically evangelical and clearly arose from evangelical emphasis on the Word of God as the most potent and sacred religious experience. The same belief was attached to the spoken word as to its objectified form in the Bible and, by extension, in the hymnal. It is also reflected in the belief that the Vater Unser was a prayer of great magical potency, a belief shared by Protestant and Catholic alike. Biblical inscriptions shared the same power of protection and healing, and there are evangelical versions of the medieval use of amulets whose efficacy depended on the words of Scripture written upon them, including the most popular, the opening words of St. John’s Gospel. Inscriptions on houses and barns were a variant of this practice found predominantly during the early modern period, and especially extant from the seventeenth century onwards.\footnote{On the Vater Unser. Strackerjan, Aberglauben 2, 77, 120, 290; on the power of the Word: Seyfarth, Aberglaube, 150 and Grube-Verhoeven, 18-23, and on amulets: 23-28; see also Kramer, Ausbach, 186 on Protestant amulets. On Hausinschriften, see Helmut Nachtigall, Haus- und Torinschriften in Hessen (Giessen, 1985) esp. 21-26, and Robert Tuar, Berner Hausinschriften (Bern, 1981), 8-9.}

Finally, there was an enormous range of spells and charms in the form of Zaubersprüche. The early reformers had tried to replace these with simple prayers seeking consolation and expressing trust in God, but they proved impossible to eradicate. From the seventeenth century onwards they became widely available in printed collections. The only difference between their Catholic and Protestant versions was that evangelical Zaubersprüche were less likely to invoke the Virgin or the saints, and relied on invocation of the name of Christ or the Trinity. Many Zaubersprüche relied on ritualized use of the sign of the cross, which proved to be as popular an apotropaic symbol with evangelical believers as it was with Catholics. It was made when driving cattle out to pasture, when ploughing fields, when sowing seed, on sowing beets (cut into the first beet with a spade), on beginning mowing, or on dropping fishing nets. It was inscribed on the first loaf of bread pushed into the oven, and on a fresh loaf before the first slice was cut. A sign of the cross was made on the breast before putting on clean underwear, and when setting out on a journey three
crosses were made with a whip before driving out of the farmyard.\textsuperscript{47}

These practices could be interpreted as mere acts of piety, and indeed there existed in Protestant belief a penumbra of ambiguous actions and objects which could be interpreted in this way, rather than as possessing inherent sacrality. Here evangelical popular religion was scarcely different from Catholic, except that the shadowy area was larger under Catholic belief because of its overt support for a sacramental system. On the other hand, we could say that there was a covert evangelical sacramentalism. Moreover, there were many evangelical practices that were far less ambiguous, for example when the sign of the cross was put on doors on St. John's Day as a protection against the attacks of the devil. This was but a continuation of pre-Reformation practice, as was the continuation of the ancient custom of signing doors and roofbeams with the formula $K+M+B$ during the Zwölf, still practiced in the early twentieth century in evangelical parts of Württemberg such as Aalen, Cannstadt or Gerabronn.\textsuperscript{48}

It should now be clear that we can definitely speak of evangelical belief in especially sacred times, places and things, and even to some extent persons. In the last section of this paper I want to examine another area of evangelical practice, ritual life, in order to discuss how far the Reformation created a religion that was anti-ritual in its emphasis. We have already seen that certain forms of ritual action -- consecrations and the practice of Confirmation -- were reintroduced in Protestant practice not long after the first generation of reform. We might also mention here that the taking of vows, with offerings and gifts provided in fulfilment of them, was also not considered irreconcilable with evangelical religion, and this is attested by Jobst as a nineteenth century practice, although he characterized

\textsuperscript{47} On Zauberprüche, see R.W. Scribner, "Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in pre-industrial German Society," idem, Popular Culture and Popular Movements, 7; to the literature cited there add Carl Ganzlin, Sächsische Zauberformeln (Bitterfeld, 1902) and Irmgard Hampf, "Vom Wesen des Zaubers im Zaubspruch," Der Deutschunterricht 13 (1961), 58-76; for examples of 'protestantized' conjurations: Seyfarth, Aberglaube, 91. For the customs cited: Jobst, Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten, 50; the crosses made before cutting bread in Wurster, Das kirchliche Leben, 260.

\textsuperscript{48} On the $K+M+B$ formula, representing the names of the Magi interspersed with three crosses, see Adolf Eberhardt, "Sitte und Brauch in der Landwirtschaft," Bohnenberger, Volkstümliche Überlieferungen 60; Wurster, Das kirchliche Leben, 260; on the crosses used on St. John's Day: Jobst, Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten, 53.
it as 'entirely evangelical'. In the last section of this paper I want to concentrate my attention on life-stage rituals, especially those associated with childbirth and death.

III

Childbirth

The claim that the Reformation was a liberation from the tyranny of ritual observance is nowhere more apparent than in the lives of women experiencing childbirth. From the moment of birth until her ritual purification six weeks later, the Wöchnerin was an unclean and dangerous woman being surrounded by all kinds of prohibitions and taboos. The upheaval of cultural and gender norms precipitated by the Reformation was strikingly expressed in Halle in 1522 and in Magdeburg in 1525 when several women caused great scandal by attending church within six weeks of giving birth, without first undergoing any form of ritual purification. With the institutionalization of religious change, the old ceremony of 'churching' was prohibited in many Kirchenordnungen throughout Germany. Yet this change did not meet with universal approval, and there was a continuing demand for the ceremony throughout the sixteenth century. Thus, the 1552 Kirchenordnung of Heinrich IV von Reuss commented that it was still being observed in several places and ordered it abolished, while in Querfurt several places continued to use the ceremony after it had been officially abolished there, so that the 1555 Visitation held it necessary to interrogate pastors about their observance of the prohibition. We have no information about the grounds for this continuing demand, although there may have been health grounds for continuing the practice of six weeks' postnatal confinement: in Electoral Saxony there were complaints as early as 1528 that women had been

49 Jobst, Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten, 11.
51 See the earliest prohibition from 1537 in the territory of Freiberg and Wolkenstein: Emil Sehling, Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts (Leipzig, 1902-1913) 1/1, 467 and subsequently in the duchy of Saxony, 1540: ibid., 170.
52 Sehling, Kirchenordnungen 1/1, 156, 460.
forced to resume normal life too soon after giving birth and that some had died as a result.\textsuperscript{53}

Whatever the reasons, the new churches soon found it expedient to introduce some form of ceremony to mark the reappearance of a woman in the church community following childbirth, and it was retained in numerous \textit{Kirchenordnungen} of the sixteenth century: Anhalt (1532), Wittgenstein (1555), Waldeck (1556), Pomerania (1563), Lippe (1571), Electoral Brandenburg (1572), Mansfeld (1580), Hoya (1581), Solms-Braunfels (1582) and Lauenburg (1585). This usually took the form of a prayer of blessing for the new mother, giving thanks for the successful birth, as was stipulated in 1534 in the \textit{Kirchenordnungen} for Harzgerode and Göthen.\textsuperscript{54} It was sometimes explicitly stated that the ceremony was not to be observed ‘as under the papacy’, but the period of six weeks confinement was explicitly retained in many places, as it was in the principality of Anhalt in 1532, where the fee for churching was also to be paid as of old.\textsuperscript{55}

It was not only the Lutheran tradition which retained the ceremony, for it also survived in the Calvinist Netherlands and in Anabaptist communities in the Netherlands and south Germany. Moreover, whereas a Lutheran territory such as the county of Mansfeld refused to allow any special form of blessing or ceremony for women whose children were stillborn (on the grounds that this would deepen their sorrow), this was permitted in Netherlands Reformed communities.\textsuperscript{56} From the sixteenth century through to the present, a ceremony of blessing for \textit{Wöchnerinnen} seems to have been in continual use in the Lutheran tradition, although the six-week period was not always observed. Rather, it was linked to the baptism of the child, and where children were baptized earlier the blessing of the mother was also performed earlier.\textsuperscript{57}

The existence of an evangelical version of this traditional ceremony should not be seen as a matter merely of ‘Catholic survival’.

\textsuperscript{53} Sehling, \textit{Kirchenordnungen} 1/I, 170. The same views were expressed in the Duchy of Pomerania in 1569: Sehling, \textit{Kirchenordnungen} 5, 387.

\textsuperscript{54} See Graff, \textit{Geschichte der Auflösung}, 311-12; Sehling, \textit{Kirchenordnungen} 1/II, 585, 588.

\textsuperscript{55} Sehling, \textit{Kirchenordnungen} 1/II, 542-43.

\textsuperscript{56} For the Netherlands: Meertens, \textit{Vorreformatorische Relikte} (as note 4) 403; for Mansfeld: Sehling, \textit{Kirchenordnungen} 1/II, 223.

\textsuperscript{57} On the ceremony in various centuries: Jobst, \textit{Evangelische Kirche und Volksstum}, 72; idem, \textit{Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten}, 21-22; Pröhle, \textit{Kirchliche Sitten}, 176-78; \textit{Grundriss der sächsischen Volkskunde}, 82.
It was related to the pre-Reformation ritual of purification in the same way that the evangelical celebration of the Lord’s Supper was related to the Mass. If there is continuity with the pre-Reformation world, it is to be found elsewhere, in the substratum of popular belief surrounding the very act of childbirth and postnatal confinement. The time before the churching of the Wöchnerin and the baptism of the child was a time of great danger for both, in which they were exposed to the threat of sorcery and attacks from demons. When a newborn child was first wrapped in its swaddling clothes, the evangelical midwife would cross her arms three times over the baby and invoke a blessing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an action that could be understood both as an act of piety and as a protective blessing.\(^5^8\) It was a Protestant custom for a candle to be left burning alongside the child at night to prevent it falling into the hands of the devil, perhaps being removed and a changeling put in its place.\(^5^9\) The new-born child was not to be carried over the threshold of the house before it was baptized. The acceptable Lutheran interpretation of this custom was that it was symbolic – the child’s first journey in life was to be that to its baptism. However it could also be understood as a means of protecting it from sorcery.\(^6^0\) Certainly this seems to be the purpose of another Lutheran custom, that of placing the bible and a hymnbook in the cradle during the period before baptism.\(^6^1\) Similarly, the Wöchnerin was not to leave the safety of her room for nine days after birth or to go outside in the hours of darkness. She was not to venture beyond her own courtyard, and was to go out for the first time for her own churching. She was to perform no work, neither cooking, washing nor spinning, and certainly nothing that would lead her to cross the street. If she did have to go out, according to Braunschweig belief, she had to knock three times on the church door in order to prevent her journey being harmful.\(^6^2\)

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\(^5^8\) Jobst, *Grundzüge evangelischer Volkskunde*, 41.


\(^6^0\) Pröhle, *Kirchliche Sitten*, 129-130. That Pröhle takes the trouble to repudiate the idea that the child was not safe from witchcraft shows that this was a plausible explanation for the custom.

\(^6^1\) *Grundriss der sächsischen Volkskunde*, 82.

It is the ritual structure of these beliefs that makes them ethnographically significant. The *Wöchnerin* is in the middle of a rite of passage, in a state of transition that both makes her dangerous and exposes her to danger. Her liminal being is expressed in the Franconian belief that she should not go near a well or it would dry up, or in that from the Vogtland that if she crossed strange ground, it would become barren. In the Erzgebirge, she was not to cross a garden for beets, or else nothing would grow in it again. This theme of the threat to fertility constituted by her liminal ambiguity is also contained in the belief from Langenfeld near Salzungen that if she went out before her churching and met a young bride or newly married couple, either the woman or her child would die in childbirth.\(^{63}\) In terms of the underlying ritual structure, there is a need for some form of ritual action to remove this ambiguity and to bring woman and child safely through this powerful rite of passage. This seems to underlie the custom, also preserved in Protestant usage, whereby a *Wöchnerin* who dies before her churching is carried into the church to make it posthumously.\(^{64}\) The Protestant form of churching thus does not lack ritual elements homologous with the pre-Reformation form, especially in the practice of the *Wöchnerin* who is churched during weekly worship making a threefold circuit of the altar while reciting a prayer.\(^{65}\)

**Burials and the Dead**

As in the case of churching, examination of Protestant burial practice shows that the Reformation certainly did not remove ritual elements from daily life, nor did it result in complete neglect of the dead, as its early Catholic critics claimed. The earliest evangelical believers did not wish to dispense either with burial in consecrated ground or with a formal rite of separation conducted by the church. Indeed, when evangelical believers were denied Christian burial during the first phase of the Reformation movements, it enabled the charge of impiety to be levelled at the orthodox authorities responsible.\(^{66}\) It did not take long for a specifically evangelical form of

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\(^{63}\) For these beliefs: Samter, *Geburt*, 25.

\(^{64}\) Jobst, *Sammlung kirchlicher Sitten*, 21.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{66}\) As occurred in Ulm in 1524 and Regensburg in 1528.
funeral liturgy to develop, although there was greater variation here than in any other evangelical ritual. What is thought of as the typical form for evangelical burials, the *Leichenpredigt*, did not emerge immediately, and the first evangelical burials took a loose form, with a funeral procession, hymns and prayers, all aimed at avoiding the implication that any liturgical action might contribute to the salvation of the deceased. Interment was to be seen as consolation for the living and as a confession of faith in the hope of resurrection in Christ.  

By the end of the sixteenth century, at the latest, evangelical funeral rites had attained some formal consistency. This consisted of a procession from the place of death to the church or cemetery, led by a funeral cross and accompanied by the tolling of bells and the singing of hymns. There was a formula for the interment, and a ritual streyling of earth over the body. There was an address to the deceased and a blessing, usually with verses from the bible and the sign of the cross. There could also be an address, either at the place of death or in the church, and a funerary sermon. Prayers for the soul of the deceased were not excluded, and from the 1520s onwards seem to have been a matter of free choice in the Lutheran tradition. Evangelical funeral rites developed over the following generations in fluid fashion, which certainly allowed a broad spectrum of popular belief to cohere around what was officially approved in documents such as *Kirchenordnungen* or *Agenien*. Many of these reveal the continuance of a very potent relationship between the living and the dead, even within the parameters of evangelical belief.

At the moment of death, it was customary for Protestants, as well as for Catholics, to open a window in the house to allow the soul to escape (the official view was that this was a means of ventilating the deathroom). The death was announced to all living creatures in the household, including cattle and bees. Neighbours closed their windows to prevent the soul entering their own dwellings. In Württemberg it was customary to read a blessing immediately after the death, usually from the prayerbook: *Der Herr segne Dich und behüte Dich*. It was believed that if this blessing was omitted, ill-willed neighbours could wake the deceased and put to him any question, which he would

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68 Ibid., 354-61.
be forced to answer.\(^{69}\) The corpse had to be washed, otherwise the deceased would have no rest in the grave; the water or spirits used in this washing were held to have healing power. Around Braunschweig it was the custom that the bowl used for this water had to be smashed. Candles were burned beside the corpse while it awaited burial, although in evangelical custom this was done only at night and not during the day as well, as in Catholic usage. All clocks in the house were stopped and were restarted only after returning from the funeral, thus marking out the sacred time of the rite of separation.\(^{70}\)

Many customs were associated either with the notion of assuring rest for the soul or preventing it from returning to its accustomed haunts. In Protestant Württemberg, it was believed that the soul hovered on earth for forty days after death and that prayers offered for it during this period could improve its lot, a clear survival of belief in Purgatory.\(^{71}\) The custom of moving the furniture around, indeed turning around or turning over everything in the house— all tools and everything edible or capable of growth (seeds, grain, flour, vegetables)—, seems to be designed to disrupt the familiar environment to which the soul might seek to return.\(^{72}\)

It was a common belief in most parts of Germany that the dead had the power to call others after them, and numerous practices are founded on avoiding such Nachziehen or Nachzehren.\(^{73}\) It was considered important to avoid the gaze of the corpse before the eyes were closed or covered, the sheet on which the deceased had laid was put in the grave with him, and nothing was to be put into the grave that had been worn by a living person.\(^{74}\) There was even the practice, attested in 1798, of tying down the corpse with bands of straw, a custom which surfaced in Jena as late as 1901.\(^{75}\) Special care was taken with a newborn infant whose mother had died in childbirth,

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\(^{69}\) Höhn, *Süte und Brauch*, 316.


\(^{71}\) Wurster, *Das kirchliche Leben*, 259.


\(^{74}\) Witzschel, *Sagen aus Thüringen*, 253.

\(^{75}\) Berger, *Brauchtum*, 21.
for it was believed that she would return to reclaim her child. A bride should not look back on the way to her wedding, or else she would soon be a widow, a belief founded in the notion that the dead followed behind at weddings, looking for a companion. The danger associated with any rite of passage is emphasized here, where two such rites intersect, so to speak. There is a similar notion underlying the belief that a child should not be carried to its baptism past an open grave.

Such beliefs reflect the active relationship the dead continued to have with the living, most explicitly expressed in the manner in which watch was kept between death and burial, and in the conduct of the *Leichenmahl*. Either an empty chair was set behind the door, covered with a cloth, or an empty place was laid at table, as was the custom in East Prussia. In the Hanoverian Wendtland a *Leichentrunk* was taken in a nearby inn after the funeral, and a glass of beer and a roll were set out on an empty beer tun for the soul of the deceased. This sense of community with the dead also seemed to play a role in the merriment and dancing which accompanied the watch over the dead. This was a practice condemned in several *Kirchenordnungen*, such as that from the county of Hoya in 1581, and which the seventeenth century tried unsuccessfully to outlaw.

Such customs reflected the notion that the deceased had merely altered his state but was still present as a ‘living corpse’ (*lebender Leichnam*) who could see, hear, think, walk, experience emotions and above all, because of his supernatural liminal state, could protect or bring harm. This belief influenced the custom, embedded in both Catholic and Protestant practice, of making offerings to the dead, for example, by placing either money or food in the grave as a *Wegzehrung*. Around Braunschweig, it was a *Terpfennig* given as part of a bargain struck with the dead, expressed in the accompanying words *Ik gewe dik dat dinige, bliif mik von den minige*. In Franconia, the

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77 Gebhardt, *Glaubens- und Sittenlehre*, 70.
Upper Palatinate, Saxony, Württemberg and Westphalia, it was usual to lay a lemon in the hands of the corpse, often with the deceased’s initials picked out with cloves. The mourners, sometimes also the pastor and the gravediggers, were also given a lemon, which was either thrown into the grave or else taken home. The meaning of the custom, which flourished from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, has eluded ethnographic interpretation, although it survived official attempts at prohibition in both Franconia and the Upper Palatinate.  

We have already alluded to the danger involved in the rites of separation, an integral part of any rite of passage. This time of danger is marked by the period between death and interment, when clocks were stopped. It is strikingly expressed in the custom that there should be no activity in the house following a death: no cooking, washing, baking, spinning, cutting of wood, no work in the fields, no digging or putting anything into the earth. The woman of the house was also not to leave it before the burial. There were elaborate ceremonies aimed at protecting the house from the return of danger (in the form of Nachzehren) as the corpse was taken away for burial. In Mecklenburg, ash which was to contain no living matter was strewn between the coffin and the house door; as soon as the coffin had passed the threshold, this was swept up while moving backwards out of the house, and the ash was strewn around outside. The coffin was set down three times on the threshold, or objects were laid in a cross across it. The water in which the corpse was washed was also used in numerous ways to create a boundary over which the deceased could not return.  

Many of these customs and beliefs were common to evangelical and Catholic alike, but there were also specifically evangelical burial customs such as the laying of funeral wreaths, placed both in and on the grave, as well as hung in the church in memory of the deceased. There were typical forms of evangelical foundation for

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82 Kramer, Ansbach, 233; Walter Hartinger, 'denen Gott genad'. Totenbrauchtum und Armen-Seelen-Glaube in der Oberpfalz (Regensburg, 1979), 75; Seyfarth, Aberglaube, 25; Höhn, Sitte und Brauch, 258; Löfler, Totenbrauchtum, 260, note; for the best discussion of this custom: Adolf Schwammberger, Vom Brauchtum mit der Zitron (Nuremberg, 1965).

83 Bartsch, Sagen, 95.

84 For these customs, see Höhn, Sitte und Brauch, 337; Lange, Sterben und Begräbnis, 93-99; Schnippel, Leichenwasser 394. In the same way, an axe could be laid across the threshold to emphasize drawing the boundary: Lange, Sterben und Begräbnis, 79.
funeral rites in the founding of biers, pals and funerary crosses. By the nineteenth century, it was customary to rent a pall from churchwardens, and there were frequent complaints that the pals had become old, dirty and threadbare; founding a new pall served to commemorate the dead in evangelical fashion, to maintain dignity in the rites of burial and to express local pride. The wreaths provide an interesting example of how popular custom could defy official disapproval. Ecclesiastical authorities came to dislike the custom by the beginning of the eighteenth century, either on grounds of cost or because it had overtones of 'superstition'. There was an attempt to replace them with a more durable version, which would be loaned by local officials and hung in a set place in the church when not in use. However, there was great resistance to the removal of the old, dried wreaths, and the new wreaths were so little used that the cost of producing them was not even covered by returns from their rental. The attempt to reform the custom had be given up. The same was true of official attempts to outlaw the custom of the Leichentrunk, prohibited in Ansbach in a Polizeiordnung of 1616, without any lasting effect, for it was still in use everywhere in the land in the eighteenth century, and in 1734 statutes for the celebration of baptism, weddings and funerals were forced to permit it provided that it be celebrated in moderation. Similarly, Protestant authorities in Westphalia struggled in vain throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to control funeral banquets, but were forced by the eighteenth to allow them provided 'superstitious practices' were kept in check. The same occurred with the tolling of bells, which Calvinist reformers attempted in vain to remove from the burial service in the Upper Palatinate, although by 1598 the Visitor virtually admitted defeat by conceding that it remained the custom throughout the entire land. Protestant attempts in Westphalia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to outlaw the use of candles used to accompany funeral processions were no more successful – in the long run, popular desire to use them outlasted official prohibitions.

83 Kramer, Ansbach, 164.
86 Hartinger, 'denen Gott genad,' 76; Kramer, Ansbach, 232.
87 Kramer, Ansbach, 232.
88 Löffler, Totenbrauchtum, 58-66.
89 Hartinger, 'denen Gott genad', 68.
90 Löffler, Totenbrauchtum, 196.
IV

It is clear that German Protestants, no less than Catholics, lived in a sacralized world, indeed even in a form of ‘sacramental’ world, in which mastery over the exigencies of daily life was achieved through recourse to rituals enabling the efficacious wielding of sacred power. Protestants experienced an ‘economy of the sacred’, although it was admittedly underdeveloped by contrast with the rich resources available to Catholics. Within the framework of this Protestant economy of the sacred there developed distinctive forms of Volksfrömmigkeit, often formed ‘from below’ in opposition to official Protestant belief. ‘Popular’ and ‘official’ Protestant belief developed in a process of mutual accommodation, passing through a succession of phases or cycles which renders it extremely difficult to fall back on any kind of ‘regressive method’ to chart their development.\textsuperscript{91} It is a major task for the historian of popular Protestantism to delineate these phases and cycles more carefully, but one feature is clear, the pragmatic nature of popular religious behaviour. Protestants were as ready as Catholics to use whatever was available and whatever seemed to work. The pragmatism or practical functionalism is summed up in two revealing sentences often used to justify recourse to popular rituals: \textit{es hat geholfen and wenn man krank ist, so geht man zum Arzt.}\textsuperscript{92}

The enduring significance of ritual activity is contained in its ability to structure daily life around meaningful events, whether in the cycle of production and reproduction, within the annual cycle or within the life cycle. Structure is also, however, a matter of creating ordered relationships by drawing boundaries; in the case of popular religious belief boundaries between the sacred and the profane worlds. Protestantism may have removed the stronger form of Catholic sacramentalism, in which created things could be the bearers of sacrality, but it did not remove the division of the world into sacred and profane by means of bounding lines and activities. Beyond the safe boundaries of the profane world lurked the unknown, the

\textsuperscript{91} On the ‘regressive method’: Peter Burke, \textit{Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe} (London, 1978), 82-87; for a critique; Chapter 1 above.

\textsuperscript{92} In 1566 a Calvinist Visitor in the Upper Palatinate, anxious to root out recourse to cunning folk, demanded of Hans Pernler from Münchhof bei Floss to know why he kept going to a cunning woman (\textit{Segensprecherin}) in Gleisental and was given the reply: \textit{So er krank sei, laufe er doch auch zu den Doktoren: Hartinger, \textquote{denen Gott genad’ 179.}
liminal realm of the ‘other’, the ‘sacred’. Thus, Saxon belief held that children should not be left on the borders of a field because they might be seized by spirits and replaced by a changeling. The domestic threshold was an all-important boundary, socially as well as sacrally. It was a boundary against evil spirits and pursuit. Women in confinement were not to cross its limits, a coffin was set down on it three times to prevent the return of the dead person, the water used to wash the corpse was to be buried directly under the caves, so creating a boundary the dead could not cross, the apotropaic formula \( K+M+B \) was inscribed upon it. This attests that if there was a desacralized Protestant world, in the sense intended by Weber, it was constantly surrounded by a sacral world, and the borders between them were highly porous.

Even the weaker Protestant form of sacramentalism may not have managed to dispense with a ‘sacrality of object’. Certain objects in daily life performed a recurring ritual function that seem to reveal them as sacramental means of defining, delineating and even crossing the boundaries between sacred and profane, especially the broom and the axe, with their function of sweeping, cleansing, separating, dividing. This has led some folklore scholars to speak of a Dingheiligkeit or, more weakly, a Dingbedeutsamkeit inherent in the form, shape and function of certain objects. The latter term is intended to indicate that such objects have no sense of ‘sacredness’, merely that they can become signifiers in a metalanguage. Thus, the hearth can form, as it did in lower Saxony, the symbolic centre of a household, and the hook on which the house kettle was hung can feature in symbolic action, such as in taking possession of a house on sale or transmission in inheritance.

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93 Witzschel, Sagen aus Thüringen 2, 292.
94 For various examples of boundaries: Will-Erich Peuckert, Schlesische Volkskunde (Frankfurt, 1978), 48 (threshold); Seyfarth, Aberglaube, 57, 85, 215, 220, 250 (Dachtraufe).
95 On the broom: Samter, Geburt, 32-36, 52, 155, 170, 190-91; Bächthold-Staubli, Handwörterbuch 1, 1129-47; on the axe: ibid. 746; Lange, Sterben und Begräbnis, 97-98; Bartsch, Sagen, 233.
97 On the hearth and the kettle hook: W. Bomann, Bäuerliches Hauswesen und Tagewerk im alten Niedersachsen (Weimar, 1941), 75-76; Andree, Braunschweiger Volkskunde, 122, 219.
have a quality beyond the merely linguistic or symbolic, beyond ascribing a semiotic value to objects; they display rather a quality of inner-worldly sacredness, of transcendence, of being set apart from daily life and their mundane function.⁹⁸

Such questions cannot be explored further here in any adequate detail; it suffices to have demonstrated that Protestantism neither desacralized the world in any absolute sense nor created an anti-ritual religion. If we cast our minds back to the incident in Zürich with which we began, we may perhaps reflect that the gravestones were removed precisely because they were so important. In the end, the Zwinglian position proved untenable;⁹⁹ the Catholic chronicler Salat need have had no fears, for the new Protestant world was far from godless and far from merely profane.


⁹⁹ In fact, even the reformed Swiss gradually reintroduced many outlawed customs such as organs, church music and choral music, and created new rites around Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and Confirmation; see Iso Baumer, “Vielfalt in der Schweizer Volksfrömmigkeit,” in Michael N. Ebertz, Franz Schulthers, eds, Volksfrömmigkeit in Europa (Munich, 1986), 102-117, esp. 103-4; and as the pastor Rudolf Gwerb testified in the seventeenth century, magical practices were far from eradicated in the Zürich territory (see note 4).