

THE PULPITS AND THE DAMNED
WITCHCRAFT IN GERMAN POSTILS, 1520-1615

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I owe an enormous debt to my entire family; but my greatest debt is to my maternal grandmother Jacqueline Williams. Her love and teachings were instrumental in making me who I am today. Unfortunately, she passed away during the early stages of this project and is unable to share in the joys of its completion. My only hope is that whatever I become and whatever I accomplish is worthy of the time, treasure, and kindness she gave me. It is with the utmost joy and the most painful sorrow that I dedicate this work to her.

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List of Abbreviations

- LW *Luther's Works*. Ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes and James L. Langebartels vol. 56-82. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013-.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*. 65 vols. in 127. Weimar: Bohlau, 1883-1993.
- VD16 *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Digital ed: <http://www.vd16.de>.
- VD17 *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Digital ed: <http://www.vd17.de>
- Malleus* *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*. Trans. Christopher S. Mackay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Note on translations and usage:

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. All English Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless the passage is contradicted in an original source or differs dramatically from the Vulgate. I have rendered original languages as they appear in the sources when possible. I use the term Germany to describe all German-speaking lands in Europe between the years 1200 and 1700. I have capitalized Devil when referring to the alternative name for the Christian evil archetype Satan. This has been done because it is more representative of late Medieval and early modern Christian understandings of the figure. Additionally, I refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament when discussing Christian interpretations of its contents.

THE PULPITS AND THE DAMNED: WITCHCRAFT IN GERMAN POSTILS, 1520-1615

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Abstract

This thesis explores discussion of witchcraft in German postil sermons circulated between 1520 and 1615. The introduction discusses my methodology, changes to historiography between 1900 and present day, and the history of the role of witchcraft in Christianity to the fifteenth century. Chapter one explores the changes to discourse between 1520 and 1560 and concludes that in this period discourse on witchcraft developed from the perspectives of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*. Ultimately, Lutherans endorsed a providential perspective, which held that witches could do no harm. While Catholics expressed caution discussing witchcraft in public, they ultimately held that all witches were in an explicit pact with Satan and had the power to harm others. Chapter two discusses the later developments of discourse as was related to both religious changes after the Council of Trent and the Schmalkaldic War, as well as changes that occurred as responses to the “Little Ice Age.” Lutherans and Catholics both argued that changes to the climate came from an angry God. However, they disagreed on the method through which God expressed his anger. For Lutherans, God did not use secondary causes to inflict suffering; instead, he interfered directly. For their part, Catholics argued that God allowed Satan to share his powers with witches, who could in turn cause suffering. In the conclusion I discuss the limits of this work and the potential future studies that can be explored. Most notably, the work that can be done on the religious responses to climate change.

INTRODUCTION

THE PULPITS AND THE DAMNED

In 1583 Georg Scherer examined Anna Shuttlerbauer, a young woman from a small Viennese suburb who suffered seizures after moving in with her husband. Scherer, a Jesuit priest, was well-read on the causes of such ailments and he immediately began the accepted spiritual treatments. He spent hours simultaneously performing exorcisms and questioning Anna. He knew to ask who had possessed her, what curse had been said, and who else might have been involved. Scherer knew, as did every learned person of the time, that only the darkest powers could cause such harms. It was not enough for him to cast the final demon from young Anna's body: he had to find the source of her affliction, to ensure that no one else suffered the same fate. After hours of interrogation, Scherer reported that he had cast out over 12,000 demons from the woman, and more importantly, that he had found the source of young Anna's possession: a witch.

Elizabeth Plainacher was widowed three times, had outlived all her children, and had only one living grandchild: Anna Schuttlerbauer. Following hours of torture, Elizabeth confessed that she had not only cursed her granddaughter, but also caused the deaths of each of her husbands, her daughter, and her three other grandchildren. She was burned at the stake and her ashes were cast into the Danube soon after.¹ Elizabeth

¹ Georg Scherer, *Christliche Erinnerung Bey der Historien von jüngst beschehener Erledigung einer Junckfrawne die mit zoefffauset seches hundert zwey und fünfzig Teufel besessen gewesen Geprediget zu Wien in Oesterreich Anno 1583 an dreyzehenden Sontag nach Pfingsten uber das Evangelium vn der Gnadenreichen Gesund und Heymachung deß Stummen und Gehoerlosen Menschen Durch Georgium Scherer Societatis IESU Teheologum*, (Ingolstadt, 1584). Accessed VD16 S 2685. This story has been recounted several times, most notably in Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The*

Plainacher was the only person ever executed for the crime of witchcraft in Vienna. Her story, however, matches the most famous cases of the period that has been unfortunately labeled the “witch-craze” or “witch-panic.”² Approximately forty thousand others met the same fate as Elizabeth.³ Scholars have been puzzled as to what sparked these events. Why were people of all walks of life so eager to expose witches? And moreover, why did such fears penetrate both the most learned and the least educated levels of society? Was the entire idea of witch hunting just a response to apocalyptic theology? If so, why were old women the most likely to be targeted? These are the questions that have been at the center of research for over a century.

In this thesis, I will explore exactly what was said about witchcraft in Reformation-era sermon collections known as postils. My goal will be to demonstrate that the postils were an important and useful tool for disseminating ideas about witchcraft to both literate and illiterate populations. In doing so, I will examine the presence and persistence of specific ideas as well as how they changed over the course of several decades. The need to disseminate these ideas was in response to more than just

Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 404.

² Although it would be easy to criticize specialized works by historians for the use of this term, I think it is better to point out that this reduction has been perpetuated by other non-specialists in the field of late medieval and early modern scholarship. See for example Tom Scott, *Society and Economy in Germany, 1300-1600* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 262-268.

³ The number of people executed has been highly controversial; with some arguing for numbers as high as 100,000 and others as low as 40,000. I follow Wolfgang Behringer who used trial data to determine the most likely number of people executed. See Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe*, trans. J.C. Grayson and David Lederer (German, 1987; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 45ff.

confessional conflicts that arose from the Reformation. Discussing the continuities and changes in postil discourse, I will argue that apocalyptic anxieties peaked in these sources in the second half of the sixteenth century. This period also saw some of the most drastic shifts in the climate during what scholars now refer to as the “Little Ice Age.” While the “Little Ice Age” peaked, so too did the witch persecutions in Europe. At the same time postils, notably those of Georg Scherer, were immensely popular. The presence and persistence of this discourse demonstrates that what have previously been described as elite understandings of witchcraft, were actually disseminated in a manner that was meant to reach larger portions of society.

Historiography

An attempt to synthesize the vast body of witchcraft scholarship would take more space than is allowed for a monograph, let alone a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation. I have, therefore, only included a number of influential works here.⁴ The works discussed below are those that had the greatest influence on modern scholarship.

Modern studies of witchcraft still owe much to the work of the nineteenth-century German archivist Joseph Hansen. He proposed that the origins of witch persecutions lay in mountainous regions where folk customs had long involved phantoms, spirits, and magic, and were linked to the Dominican domination of the inquisitions. More

⁴ For the best English review see H.C. Erik Midelfort, “Witchcraft,” in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. David Whitford (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008) 355-395. For the best survey of witchcraft in early modern Europe see Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 4th Edition (New York: Longman, 2016). For a complete overview of the widest variety of topics see Richard Golden, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. 4 vol., (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

specifically, Hansen pointed to the handling of heretical groups as the starting point of the witch persecutions. The late middle ages saw the growth of several heretical movements that all operated in large groups. Inquisitors, accordingly, imposed these collusive habits onto other types of heresy. When learned men combined their scholastic understandings of demons with their fears of heretical movements, the diabolic witch (one that had made a bargain with Satan in exchange for power) was born.⁵ Most famously, Hansen pointed to the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) as the event that introduced the diabolic witch to the public.⁶ The fear of the witches' sabbath, he argued, was rooted in the perceived presence of heretical groups in the late fifteenth century. As these ideas were shared with the masses, they were combined with older folk customs and sparked a panic amongst the larger population. Accordingly, the witches' sabbath existed only in the popular imagination of late Medieval Europe. Combined with the devastation felt after the Hundred Years' War and the Black Death, peoples' anxieties reached a peak, the result of which was the so called "witch-craze."

The American anthropologist, archeologist, and historian Margaret Murray challenged Hansen's claims in 1921. Murray proposed that the witches' sabbath was, in fact, a real pagan ritual that survived from at least Greco-Roman times.⁷ Murray argued

⁵ Joseph Hansen, *Zauberwahn Inquisition und Hexenprozen im Mittelalter und die Entstehung der großen Hexenverfolgung*, (Munich: Drud und Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1900; reprint Munich: Scientia Verlag Allen 1960).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921). While no serious scholar accepts Murray's thesis today, her work fits into the larger cultural anthropological movement of her time. She often quotes and cites the works of nineteenth-century social anthropologist James Frazer.

that the oppression of such cults had little to do with apocalyptic anxieties and more to do with the formation of paternalist society. For Murray, witchcraft was not something forced on innocent women; instead, the women accused of these crimes were actually part of a pre-Christian religion that had persisted secretly for centuries. The religion, according to Murray, was polytheistic and contained both male and female gods to whom the practitioners (mostly women) devoted rituals, often in the form of cloaked sabbaths. The religion had once been spread all across Europe and was subdivided into covens (a term that Margret Murray created to describe what the witches' sabbath "really" was). Once it was revealed that there were still people worshipping fertility goddesses, they embarked on a crusade to snuff out these pagan practices once and for all. Murray's thesis was met with intense hostility. Few could find any physical evidence that what she said was true. Only trial records could confirm her conclusions. Since these confessions were obtained under torture, however, the sources could not be taken at face value.

Between 1921 and 1970, the debate was between those who supported Murray and those who held to Hansen's thesis. Hugh Trevor-Roper argued that Murray was reading too much into disconnected sources, and that her conclusions were nothing more than the formulations of an amateur historian.⁸ Trevor-Roper dismissed entirely the idea that witch cults ever existed in Christian Europe. Instead, he supported Hansen; the "witch craze" originated from folklore in the Alps and Pyrenees, and the Dominican reaction to it.⁹ When Dominican inquisitors launched their crusades against the heretics,

⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries," in Trevor-Roper, *Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1967) 108 n.45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

who hid themselves in the European mountains, they also uncovered the stories of those who possessed special preternatural abilities. Trevor-Roper did not stop at saying these thoughts originated in the late Middle Ages, however: he argued that these ideas arose due to the irrationality of pre-Enlightenment people. By his logic, people were not equipped with rational (read: scientific) thought and were thus inclined to respond with solutions based on superstitious (read: delusional) methods of dealing with crisis. Trevor-Roper pointed to the exceptional cases of men who opposed witch trials as proof that the majority of intellectual thought in the later Middle Ages was irrational and reactionary. The problem with modern liberal historians such as Hansen and Trevor-Roper, was that such conclusions had an inherent bias towards secular modernity (and in Trevor-Roper's case secular western democracy). They reveal little about the context in which these events occurred. These conclusions were the targets of Stuart Clark for two decades.¹⁰

Clark's seminal work, *Thinking with Demons*, finally put to rest the liberal modernist historians' conclusions that the witch trials were the result of the irrational delusions of pre-Enlightenment peoples. Instead, Clark argued that demons and witches

¹⁰ Trevor-Roper's position has seen a resurgence in recent years with the reemergence of the "general crisis" debate. While none of the works on the "general crisis" have engaged works specifically dealing with witchcraft, it appears to be a subject that needs to be dealt with in a more proper way. While witchcraft studies on their own have made great progress since the 1960s, the information contained in the "general crisis" debate is far behind. Note the most recent work by Geoffrey Parker, which assumes Trevor-Roper's irrationality thesis is correct. Parker, using the term "Witch Craze" to describe the events, presents the period as an irrational response to climate change. See Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War Climate Change & Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For the early debate see Theodore K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Rabb provides what is still the best synthesis of the early debate, which was primarily between historians of the *Annales* school and Marxists.

provided intellectuals with valuable explanations for events in the natural world.¹¹ Clark, having already published an article on Protestant demonology, created one of the densest but most fruitful works on witchcraft.¹² Clark's central premise held that belief in witchcraft and magic was central to early modern thought and understanding. These ideas could not be disproven, due largely to the axiomatic understanding of the Bible at the time. Demons also proved to be valuable for explaining current events, whether they were natural, spiritual, or social. Witchcraft beliefs, according to Clark, had little or nothing to do with the witch trials.¹³ Instead, the two discourses were relatively independent of one another, and had limited importance in each other's developments. Hence, the intellectual understanding of witches as demonic creatures who sought to destroy Christian society was different from the folk customs. The witch trials were, accordingly from the folk tradition, which emphasized that witches sought to physically harm people. Clark's work has been upheld for over two decades, and remains a standard in intellectual thought on the subject of witchcraft.

As for those who supported Murray's idea of an ancient agrarian cult, only Carlo Ginsburg found anything remotely close: the *Benandanti*, men and women from the Friuli region of Northern Italy who were said to be born with special preternatural abilities.¹⁴ The *Benandanti* originally stated they were defending fields and crops against demons.

¹¹ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, ix.

¹² Stuart Clark, "Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition, and Society (c. 1520-1630)," in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 45-82.

¹³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 210.

¹⁴ Carlo Ginsburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Italian 1966; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

The Inquisition later convinced them that they were actually witches serving Satan. While Ginsburg's research showed a connection between Murray's and Hansen's previous conclusions, scholars were quick to note that the *Benandanti* were not as socially connected as they were presented. None of the Inquisition records indicated the various members were aware of each other, and most of the "battles" were in the form of dreams.¹⁵ Still, Ginsburg's method was universally applauded, and his work remains a standard in the study of literate and illiterate cultural interactions.¹⁶

1971 saw the most significant rejoining of history and anthropology in Keith Thomas' most famous, and still influential, work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. While Thomas' work proved to be controversial, its contributions to historical scholarship were immense. Thomas' close focus on non-traditional sources, much like Ginsburg, allowed him to break new ground. Despite their similar goals, Thomas was critical of Margaret Murray's "groundless" conclusions.¹⁷ Murray, he argued, had too readily accepted the findings in trial records and pamphlets. Instead, Thomas focused on lesser known writings such as personal notebooks, folklore, and rural village records. All previous scholars had ignored these types of sources. By mining from below, Thomas traced the understandings of *maleficium* from locality to locality to observe where and

¹⁵ See the reviews by E. William Monter, in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 15 (1984), 250; H.C. Erik Midelfort, in *The Catholic Historical Review*, 72 (1986), 648-650.

¹⁶ Ginsburg's popularity was no doubt helped by the success of his later work *The Cheese and the Worms*, which further encouraged the study of common society. See Carlo Ginsburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Italian 1976; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), 615.

how the demonic could be compounded with the occult. While earlier works fell into the categories of confessional history when they attempted to explain the growth of the witch trials, Thomas found that local customs were more powerful tools of explanation. In this scenario, the Reformation was not the watershed moment people had believed it to be, but rather just a turning point in a continuous struggle between ancient pagan practices and Christianity. Who then became the target of these trials? For Thomas, and those who shared his functionalist perspective, the targets of persecution were those in the lowest economic classes.

Thomas contended the witch trials began targeting poor old women because they were the most likely to ask for alms. Having eliminated the “magical” powers of almsgiving, English Protestants became suspicious of those who sought help.¹⁸ Alan Macfarlane had posited this conclusion a year earlier. He stated that the economic changes were the main source of this psychological panic.¹⁹ Thomas and Macfarlane have had the strongest staying power, particularly when the subject matter is witchcraft in the English-speaking world.²⁰ There was, however, one major problem with Thomas and Macfarlane’s conclusions: they were limited to the Anglosphere. When examining continental Europe, these conclusions did not hold up. More important than Thomas and Macfarlane’s conclusions, however, were the methods they chose to employ.²¹ The

¹⁸ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 586.

¹⁹ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1970).

²⁰ See for example: Richard Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²¹ Cf. E. William Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands during the Reformation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Behringer, *Witchcraft*

examination of anthropological sources opened a new path of analysis that all future studies have had to take into account.

Perhaps the most important work on witchcraft came in 1972 with the publication of Erik Midelfort's *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*. Midelfort did not have a singular concern; instead, his book focused on all intellectual and social foundations of witchcraft in the German southwest, the largely Protestant region in which the most complete records of the witch trials survived. Midelfort consulted a vast array of sources including treatises, catechisms, trial records, and pamphlets to contextualize and understand the witch trials. This work also introduced several terms that would become engrained in the scholarship. The work focused on what caused the "large trials," which Midelfort defined as those that executed more than twenty individuals in a month. Additionally, Midelfort noted that there were two intellectual foundations for beliefs in witchcraft: a providential understanding that held witches had no powers and could do no harm, since all disaster and strife was punishment from God for the wickedness of people; opposed to this was the belief in *maleficium*, which held that witches' powers were real, and that they could do harm. While these two understandings of witchcraft existed in both confessions, Midelfort argued that after 1600 Catholics began emphasizing *maleficium* whereas Protestants endorsed the providential view.²² Although he was unable to draw a causal connection between these two views, Midelfort proposed that further studies of the intellectual foundations of witchcraft discourse would need to

Persecutions in Bavaria; William Christian Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²² H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562-1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

focus on the medieval influences that promoted each of these two ideas. Stuart Clark also noted that there needed to be further research into the role of the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* in discussions of intellectual foundations.²³

Unlike previous works, Midelfort did not proposed a grand theory as to what caused the witch hunts, or why people believed the stereotypes of witches. Instead, he argued that there were no grand theories or generalizations that fit the witch hunts. While in most places women were targeted, there were a number of territories that targeted men at much higher rates. Even broad generalizations regarding southwest Germany, where large witch trials were most prevalent, were difficult to prove. While Protestants did engage in small trials regularly, they only held large ones after the turn of the century. Accordingly, Midelfort recommended that instead of sweeping generalization, local studies should be the main focus of scholarship in the future.²⁴

Midelfort's work inspired the extensive study done by Wolfgang Behringer in *Witch Persecutions in Bavaria*. Behringer's work represents the most complete social history of the witch hunts available. Analyzing all the available data on witch trials in Bavaria, a predominately Catholic region of southeastern Germany, Behringer concluded

²³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 452. Clark indicates hesitancy to limit understanding to these terms as he found Thomist and Augustinian to be just as effective in conveying these ideas.

The *via moderna* and *via antiqua* were two epistemological movements in fifteenth century universities. The ancient way (*via antiqua*) emphasized realist epistemology from Thomas Aquinas; meanwhile, the modern way (*via moderna*) emphasized various nominalist forms of epistemology. For more information see: Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) and William J. Courtenay, "Antiqui and Moderni in Late Medieval Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1982): 3-10.

²⁴ I recognize the irony of stating this in a work that in itself makes sweeping generalizations. See the conclusion for further discussion of this problem.

that the bloodiest phase of the trials occurred between 1560 and 1590, when most of the executions occurred. Behringer argued that it was after 1560 that local authorities began to accept works like the *Malleus Maleficarum* as standard for dealing with witch trials.²⁵

Behringer was not content to present his findings to academics alone, for he followed his magisterial work with a microhistory that further explained the origins of the Bavarian witch trials. Like Ginsburg before him, he argued against the findings of Hansen and his followers that elites created understandings of witchcraft and forced them on common people, and further challenged the elite/popular dichotomy.²⁶ Like all other aspects of Christianity, Behringer demonstrated that witchcraft beliefs were not just the creation of the Christian clergy but a continuous exchange of ideas between literate and illiterate culture. Like Clark, it would seem Behringer presented two discourses that existed independent of one another. For Behringer, however, the discourses met and began to meld into one, new, discourse: one not solely based on scholastic demonology, rather it was the product of interaction between “popular” and learned discourses.

Recent scholarship has tended to accept Midelfort, Behringer, and Clark’s works as the standard for social and intellectual explanations of witchcraft beliefs. More recent studies have focused on the psychological and legal impacts of the witch trials. Gender has often, although not always, been the focus of these studies. This is because a disproportionate number of women were accused and executed during the period.

²⁵ Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria*, 104.

²⁶ Wolfgang Behringer, *The Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoekhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H.C Erik Midelfort (German 1994) (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

Early works often avoided or ignored gender altogether. As was the case with many fields, this all changed in the sixties and seventies with the emergence of feminist scholarship. Works ranged from thoughtful and useful critiques of the whiggish histories of Hansen and Trevor-Roper to the ahistorical works of Mary Daly, who argued the witch trials were part of a Christian conspiracy to eradicate the world of strong women.²⁷ More recently, scholars have moved away from these radical positions, while still denying the functionalist-inspired approach of Thomas and others.²⁸ In doing so these histories attempt to place women back in the center of discussions on witch trials.

Lyndal Roper's collection of essays, *Oedipus & the Devil*, attempted to explain the role of sexuality, delusion, and religion in early modern thought. Roper opposed those who ascribed to an anthropological approach (Thomas, Macfarlane, Midelfort, and Behringer) because she wanted to "argue against an excessive emphasis on the cultural creation of subjectivity, and to argue that witchcraft and exorcism, those most alien of early modern social phenomena, or courtship and ritual, those seemingly irreducible collective early modern social events, cannot be understood without reference to their psychic dimensions."²⁹ This change in approach was systematically done in her later

²⁷ Mary Daly, "European Witchburnings: Purifying the Body of Christ" in Daly, *GynEcology: The Metaethic of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 178-222; Dyan Elliot, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, & Demonology in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999). A full critique of the lack of scholarship on women can be found in Elspeth Whitney, "The Witch 'She'/ The Historian 'He': Gender and the Historiography of European Witch-Hunts," *Journal of Women's History*, 7 (1995), 77-101.

²⁸ Laura Stokes, *Demons of Urban Reform: Early European Witch Trials and Criminal Justice, 1430-1530* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

²⁹ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus & the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, & Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994) 3.

work, *Witch Craze*, which is well researched and offers a good synthesis of two otherwise separate historiographical movements (feminist psychoanalytic histories, and cultural/anthropological histories). Methodologically, however, Roper's work is flawed.³⁰ Its dependency on Freudian psychology leads to anachronistic understandings of sex and gender. Her desire to emphasize individual psyches ignores the fact that people viewed society as communal at the time. Despite these methodological shortcomings, *Witch Craze* offers an important insight. Like Midelfort, Roper notes that local and familial conflicts reigned supreme in spurring on witch trials.

We have learned much from the growing body of scholarship over the last hundred years. All of these works, however, have one thing in common. Although there are those who consulted an array of evidence, none explored the one source base that may give us an idea of what people heard about witchcraft on a regular basis: the postils.³¹ By turning to the postils, we turn to a source base that was created to teach the masses about various complex topics, from theological understandings to social discipline.

The Pulpits

The later middle ages witnessed a preaching renaissance. It was not, however, until recently that preaching became the subject of academic studies. Instead, preaching was almost always presented as a Protestant propaganda tool. This was particularly true of intellectual historians, who favored treatises, commentaries, and pamphlets as the

³⁰ See review by Wolfgang Behringer in *Historische Zeitschrift* 262 (1996) 590-591; H.C. Erik Midelfort, "Witch craze? Beyond the legends of panic." *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 6 (2011), 11-33.

³¹ In *Thinking with Demons*, Clark's included Georg Scherer's postils in his bibliography; however, they are neither cited nor discussed in the book.

primary sources of intellectual thought. With the development of the so-called social history of ideas, however, intellectual historians were encouraged to look to new source bases. Catechisms and sermons were soon thrust to the center of scholarship.³² A breakthrough came in 1978 with the publication of Gerald Strauss's *Luther's House of Learning*. Strauss examined both Lutheran catechisms as well as the visitation records from several northern German states. He concluded from the visitation records that the Lutheran reformation had failed to make any real catechetical progress after several generations.³³ While Strauss's conclusions were contentious, his method was applauded and became the standard for generations. Works from historians such as H.C. Erik Midelfort, Susan Karrant-Nunn, Amy Nelson Burnett, and John Frymire all continued to

³² See for example: Oberman, *The Harvest*; Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

³³ Strauss' work sparked a heated debate amongst Reformation scholars. See Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past & Present*, 67 (1975), 30-63; Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); James K. Kittleson, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation: The Report from Stausbourg," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*, 73 (1982), 153-174; Susan Karrant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernstine Countryside* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978); Thomas Robinsheux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Geoffrey Parker, "Success and Failure During the First Century of the Reformation," *Past & Present*, 136 (1992), 43-82; Bruce Tolley, *Pastors & Parishioners in Württemberg During the Late Reformation, 1581-1621* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); C. Scott Dixon, *Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Robert J. Bast, *Honor Your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany, 1400-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation: Ministers and their Message in Basel, 1520-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

examine more than so-called “elite” sources and have further bridged the gap between social and intellectual history.³⁴

John Frymire proposed that postils were a genre that was central to both the dissemination of ideas, and the institution of confessionalization and social discipline.³⁵ Postils were a Medieval development, dating as far back as the Carolingian period. Postil sermons were based on the liturgical calendar, and divided into three groups: Winter (Advent to Easter), Summer (Easter to Advent), and *de Sanctis* (special holidays and feast days).³⁶ Each day was assigned a New Testament passage, known as a pericope, which was then followed by a sermon or sermon outline that interpreted the passage. Additionally, if a postil author had a particular topic they wished to discuss in a sermon, such as the Turkish invasion, then he could attach these occasional sermons to his postils.

During the Reformation, postils as a genre were transformed into one of the main theological battlegrounds. They came in various sizes, ranging from small collections with only one short sermon for each day (thus encouraging the clergy to use the postils as a model for future sermons they would author), to large volumes containing multiple long vernacular sermons meant to be read verbatim. Within these works there were

³⁴ See for example H.C. Erik Midelfort, *History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Susan Karant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors*; Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*.

³⁵ John M. Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Frymire's work is one part of a larger trend in scholarship, which focuses on the role the clergy had in disseminating ideas and helping institute reform. See note 32 above.

³⁶ *De Sanctis* were not always separate volumes of postils. Often, they appeared in the Sunday Summer or Winter volumes.

discussions of various thematic topics that modern scholars often have assumed were found only in the highest intellectual circles. Among these topics was witchcraft. It is here that we turn to the main research question of this work: What was said about witchcraft in the postils? When was discussion of witches most prevalent? And what, if anything changed over time in this discourse?³⁷ These questions will then answer the larger question of how (or if) the postils disseminated sophisticated understandings of witchcraft to the populace. Answering these questions may, perhaps, help us understand how the idea of diabolical witchcraft became a major concern for the common people. Sermons were, after all, incredibly popular and regularly attended. And, as stated above, witchcraft scholars have made no use of the postils. Instead, when discussing preaching and witchcraft, scholars have only consulted special collections of witchcraft sermons that were published separate from the postils. These volumes were often only printed once or twice and were of limited use to their owners. While their sermons may have contained longer explanations of witchcraft, they were far less accessible than the sermons contained in the postils. After all, when a clergyman purchased a set of postils, or was given one by his secular ruler (as was sometimes the case), he had a collection of sermons to preach for nearly his entire tenure. When the same clergyman purchased a set of witchcraft sermons, or any other special collection, he had sermons that had only one (temporary) use. The financial investment was almost never worth the information gained from the sermons, especially if the same information was often contained in the postils.

³⁷ Frymire noted the discussion of witchcraft in his conclusion. However, he only provided a quick survey of preaching about witchcraft. It is the goal of this work to build on these broad statements. Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 439-443.

As mentioned above, the postils followed the liturgical calendar. Each pericope also offered a chance to discuss themes.³⁸ As a result, postil authors often included discussion of witchcraft and the Devil's powers in their sermons. I therefore began my study focusing on occasional sermons about natural disasters and disease, two events that were often blamed on witches, and regular sermons that dealt with the Devil's place in the world.

Satan was mentioned regularly in sermons, but his role as "Prince of the World" was central to two weeks of the year, while magic in general was discussed regularly once a year. *Epiphany* (Three Kings Day), *Invocavit* (*Quadragesima*), and *Oculi* serve as the three most likely regular Sunday sermons to contain mention of witches or magic.³⁹ *Epiphany* occurs on the first Sunday of the new year and commemorated the birth of Christ and the visit of the three Magi. The pericope (Matthew 2:1-12) lent itself to discussion of acceptable and unacceptable uses of astrology:

When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of Herod, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? And Herod hearing this, was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the prophet: And in Bethlehem the land of Juda is not the

³⁸ I have chosen to use the term regular to describe sermons that are part of the liturgical calendar (i.e. part of the Winter, Summer, and *de Sanctis* volumes). I use the term occasional sermons for those sermons that are not a part of the regular calendar.

³⁹ Postilators used the terms *Invocavit* and *Quadragesima* interchangeably. I will only use *Invocavit*.

least among the princes of Juda: for out of there shall come forth the captain that shall be ruler to my people Israel. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the stars had appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said, “Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him.” Having heard the king, they set out; and behold the star which they had seen in the East, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him: and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having received an answer while asleep that they should not return to Herod, they left for their own country.⁴⁰

The use of the stars to tell the future or explain events was a controversial, and regularly discussed, topic in the postils. The discussion of how the wise men were learned in reading the stars enabled discussion of acceptable uses of astrology. These discussions were always linked to causal theory (instrumentality). While most of the discussions of magic and sorcery in *Epiphany* sermons were concerned with folk practices, not demonic magic, there were some discussions of those who had entered into agreements with Satan.

⁴⁰ When discussing pericopes in the future, I will refer readers back to these pages, unless a different passage is quoted, in which case I will again quote the pericope.

Of particular concern were those who claimed they could predict the future by reading the stars, and those who claimed to summon images of the dead (necromancy).⁴¹

Invocavit, the first Sunday in Lent, recounted the three temptations of Christ in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). These temptations served as examples of how the Devil attempted to sway Christians into his service:

Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the Devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry. And the tempter came to him and said: If you are the Son of God, command these stones be made into bread. Jesus answered and said, "It is written, not in bread alone does man live, but in every word that proceeded from the mouth of God." Then the Devil took him up into the holy city, and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down for it is written: 'that he has given his angels charge over you, and in their hands shall they bear you up, unless perhaps you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again: 'You shall not tempt the Lord thy God.'" Again, the Devil took him up into a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. And he said to him, "All these will I give you, if you fall down and adore me." Then Jesus said to him: "Begone, Satan. For it is written, 'The Lord thy God shall you adore,

⁴¹ The summoning of images was controversial but in the Middle Ages the general consensus was that it was always done with the assistance of the Devil. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 112.

and him alone shall you serve.” Then the Devil left him; and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

This pericope had the most potential for discussion of witchcraft of any I have found. Each of the Devil’s temptations would have easily lent itself to discussion of specific types of magic. First, he tempts Christ to turn stone into bread to satisfy his hunger. The Medieval understandings of witchcraft held that Satan gave witches the power to manipulate nature and change the form of materials.⁴² Next the Devil takes Christ to the top of the temple in Jerusalem, tempting him to cast himself down and be rescued by angels, thus awing all and proving he is truly God in the flesh. Medieval thinkers often emphasized the idea of flight in witchcraft discourse. This passage confirmed that the Devil had the power to transport people through various methods.⁴³ Finally, and most importantly to those studying witchcraft, the Devil offers Christ power over all the world in exchange for worship.⁴⁴ It was universally agreed that such a compact constituted a gross violation of the First Commandment. Thus all witches had committed a spiritual crime. Debate always occurred when discussing whether Satan’s deals were actual exchanges or only tricks played on weak-willed people.

The pericope for *Oculi*, the third Sunday of Lent, (Luke 11: 14-28), discusses possession, exorcism, and the Devil’s kingdom:

⁴² See for example questions nine and ten of Part I in the *Malleus*, which dealt with conjuring specifically. *Malleus*, Pt. I, 173ff.

⁴³ See *Malleus*, Pt. II. Question 3, 292ff.

⁴⁴ There does seem to be some debate as to where the Devil takes Jesus. Matthew indicates it is simply a high point, possibly implying a mountain, while Luke 4:9 specifies that Christ is taken to the top of the temple. For the purposes of this study, however, it is more important that the Devil elevated Christ to the top of some point. Luther does engage this debate in his *Invocavit* sermon. See below.

And he [Christ] was casting out a Devil: and the same was done. And when he cast out the Devil, the dumb spoke: and the multitudes, were in admiration at it. But some of them said, “He cast out Devils by Beelzebub, the prince of Devils.” And others tempting, asked of him a sign from heaven. But seeing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation; and house upon house shall fall. And if Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say that through Beelzebub I cast out devils. Now if I cast out devils by Beelzebub, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I, by the finger of God, cast out devils, doubtless the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keeps his court, those things are in peace which he possesses. But if a stronger man comes upon him, and overcomes him, he will take away all his armor wherein he trusted and will distribute his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that does not gather with me, scatters. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through places without water, seeking rest: and not finding, he says, ‘I will return into my house from which I came out of.’ And when he is come, he finds it swept and garnished. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself: and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting her voice, said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that

fed you.’ But he said, ‘Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.’

While demonic possession and witchcraft do not appear to modern readers to be connected, sixteenth and seventeenth century Christians saw a clear link between the two.⁴⁵ Possession was but one of the topics that led to discussions of witchcraft and demonic magic. The *Oculi* pericope also allowed for discussion of Satan’s control over the material earth, and as a result, his ability to cause chaos with the one aspect that connected all fears of the Devil and witches: the immediate coming of the Last Days. With the end approaching, it was believed that Satan, knowing he would be defeated, would attempt to take as many souls with him as he could. What then was a witch? To fully understand those who turned to Satan for power, we must examine long and complex linguistic developments, which predate all contemporary understandings of the witch. We must turn our story from salvation to damnation.

The Damned

The English word “witch” is an umbrella term that has lost most of its meaning. Whether it be because of new religious movements that use the term to describe their pseudo-pagan beliefs, or popular culture’s portrayals of witches as angsty high schoolers, the term is no longer synonymous with those who practice an occult form of magic with the Devil’s assistance. It is even further removed from the way sixteenth and seventeenth century clergy used it: with those who worshipped Satan. To better understand the

⁴⁵ See the discussion in *Malleus*, Pt. II Question 9, 334-343; Levack, *Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 11; Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 274-275.

meaning of the various Latin and German terms that describe witches in the postils, we must first return to their original source: the Bible.

The modern Bible translates Exodus 22:18 as “Do not allow a sorceress to live.” This translation is true to the Classical Hebrew, where we find the phrase *לֹא תַחֲיֶה מְכַשְׁפִּים*, *mekashfim la thechie*), the operative word for our examination being *מְכַשְׁפִּים* (*mekashfim*). The word’s root, the verb *כָּשַׁף* (*kashaph*), translates to the practice of sorcery (read: harmful magic). At no point, however, is this expanded upon. We are left to assume what this means. The *Babylonian Talmud* proved to be a controversial source for scholars seeking to examine exactly what constituted “good” and “bad” magic. A quick survey of secondary literature finds the debate is quite heated. Here the works of anthropologists and archeologists have aided our understanding of what exactly this word meant to this society.⁴⁶ Fifth century pottery recovered from Iraq in the 1960s demonstrated that the primary concern people had for *kashaph* was their ability to possess innocent hosts.⁴⁷ Rebecca Lesses has addressed the ways these archeological finds demonstrate that what were once believed to be “rabbinic lore” were actually reflections of “knowledge in a wider community” of Jewish practitioners in the period.⁴⁸ More importantly to the study at hand, these bowls indicate that there was a clear divide between rabbinic magic and *kashaph*. We must assume, therefore, that the use of the term *mekashfim* was not meant to

⁴⁶ For a full overview of Classical/Biblical Hebrew see P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible from Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁴⁷ Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001), 343–75.

⁴⁸ Lesses "Exe(o)rcising Power," 346.

encompass all those who practiced so-called magic. Rather, it was a word used to describe a particularly heinous act. Even more specifically, the term meant someone from within the Jewish community who had betrayed *misvot*. Further confusing the matter, is the gendered depiction of women as the main practitioners of *kashaph* while also serving the necessary role of teachers for male rabbis who sought their knowledge to further their struggle against such practices.⁴⁹ Despite the direct connection of the Hebrew to the modern translation of the passage, the Greek — and therefore the forerunner to the Latin translation— used a different word in this passage.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, commissioned some time under the reign of Ptolemy II (d. 246 BCE), substitutes “sorceress” with the word *Φαρμακουσ* (*pharmako/s*) or “poisoner” in English. This is the same word that occurs repeatedly in the Euripides’ *Medea*. The crime was a vengeful one, which not only harmed individuals but also entire communities. Already in the Greek, the meaning of the word was expanded beyond the occult and into the want to harm. This ambiguity was continued in the Latin tradition.

The Vulgate translated the passage as “*maleficos non patieris vivere.*” Here we see the emergence of *maleficium*, a word that on its own simply means wrongdoing. Yet in the language it was used, it had a much more complicated meaning. It suggested not just wrong doing, but also the use of diabolical powers. To clarify what exactly was meant here, we can turn to a later passage in the Bible.

In 1 Samuel 28, King Saul calls upon the Witch of Endor. Yet once again, our English translation does not fully explain what the woman was. *בַּעֲלַת-אוֹב* (*ba’alat ob*)

⁴⁹ Lesses, “Exe(o)rcisiong Power,” 366.

seems to have no English equivalent. Literally the phrase means a woman who possesses an *ob*, an object used to summon images. Her skill was said to be summoning images (divination), and in this case it was summoning images of the dead (necromancy). Such was a common feature of witch stereotypes throughout the Middle Ages. Not only was this passage a possible origin for the understanding of the witch as a hooded hag, but also as someone who used objects (whether they be mirrors, crystals, or orbs), to summon the dead from their final rest. The passage also connected the instance back to Mosaic Law. After learning that the man she had aided was Saul, the great persecutor of sorcerers, the woman reacted in terror. Saul had previously punished the magicians and seers (*magi et arioli*), yet now was calling on their assistance. After consulting the witch of Endor, Saul was defeated and lost his kingdom to David, a painful reminder to readers that consulting a sorcerer or soothsayer was against God's law.

Malefica was not, however, the only term that could be used to describe witches. *Venefica*, *saga*, *lamia*, *praecatrix*, and *incantatrix*, were also terms that were associated with witches. All these terms tended to have one of two associations. *Venefica* (poisoner, sorceress, and hag), *saga* (soothsayer), and *lamia* (demonic woman): all three meant a woman who used bad magic. *Praecatrix* and *incantatrix* both have sexual connotations and support the stereotype that witches engaged in obscene sexual practices. Although the crime of witchcraft was always portrayed as feminine, witches could be both men and women. Hence the German tendency to only use the term *Zauberer* (sorcerers) when describing groups of witches. Still, German authors used other terms as well. *Unholden* (idolater) was used to describe those who had forsaken Christian baptism for service of the Devil. *Teufelsbanner*, which has no clean English translation, meant one who directed

demons to possess another person. And of course, *Hexen*, which is the closest word to witch in the German language, describes women who took part in the Devil's pact. All of these terms appear in sermons regularly, with *Zauberer* being the most commonly used. Each appeared in index entries and were discussed and defined in postil sermons. These terms, with all their complexities and nuances, served as the foundation for the language used to describe those who joined Satan to harm God's people. It was in these terms that medieval scholastics began their discussions of witchcraft.

Peter Lombard discussed witches and demons in his *Sentences*. Book II, *On Creation*, dealt with magic and its origins in chapter two distinction seven. The Master's *Sentences* were among the main starting points for all medieval theologian. He stated:

That the magical arts are effective by the power and knowledge of the Devil. This power and this knowledge have been granted to him by God either to lead evil men astray or to admonish or train the good ones. It is also by the knowledge and power of these evil spirits that the magical arts are practiced. And yet, both the knowledge and power have been given to them by God, either to deceive the deceitful, or admonish the faithful, or train and test the patience of the just.⁵⁰

Lombard noted that God's permission was required, but once given, individuals, not God, wielded these powers. Lombard, like Augustine before him, noted that the faithful did not participate in such practices. From here the Medieval debate began. Why did God allow the Devil to operate in a harmful way on Earth? What about those the Devil had ordained

⁵⁰ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book II, Distinction VII, ch. 6, trans. Guilio Silano (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 30.

to use his power? Could they really cause bodily harm? These were the questions that would drive discourse over the next two and a half centuries.

Thomas Aquinas would become one of the most influential theologians on the matter. Aquinas noted that the use of magical words came from neither the heavenly bodies nor human intellect.⁵¹ Because the powers of such words could not originate from the heavens or one's own intellect, they had to be from some other, preternatural, source: Satan. Only those lacking virtue practiced such arts, according to Aquinas.⁵² Magicians violated social norms when they engaged in these activities and tried to elevate themselves over their Divinely-ordained superiors. Much has been written on Aquinas's distrust of magicians, with scholars noting that Aquinas and his contemporaries extended this distrust, not only to those who practiced difficult illusions and potions, but also to those who practiced what today we call stage magic (card tricks and juggling).⁵³

Aquinas expanded his discussion of the subject in the *Summa theologiae*, where he first dispelled the idea that all temptation stemmed from God alone. Instead, he argued, God only tempted people to love him, while demons tempted them to sin. Furthermore, temptation was natural to demons, as they were incapable of knowing a person's soul in the way God could. Thus, they had to tempt them with fleshly

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Book ii part 2, ch 104-106 in *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Document History*, 2nd edition, ed., Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96. For discussion on Aquinas and medieval magic see Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," in *The American Historical Review* 99 (1994), 813-836; Michael Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76 (2001), 960-990.

pleasures.⁵⁴ Aquinas noted that while the Devil was the origin of most sins, free will was as much to blame. There was, however, “no kind of sin which is not sometimes due to demons’ suggestion.”⁵⁵ According to Aquinas, a person did not necessarily need the Devil to commit sin, but the Devil could lead a person to any sin imaginable. Even more strongly put, demons were capable of tricking people with false miracles such as summoning the images of the dead. Furthermore, because God had created the Devil before he created the sacraments, the Devil was superior to all Divinely-ordained institutions. Aquinas used the example of marriage to discuss this point.

The Devil could cause impotence, itself an impediment to the consummation and fulfillment of the sacrament of marriage. This connection was made because, while marriage was a Divinely-ordained institution, so too was the Devil. Hence, he could impede in other divinely created institutions, so long as the Devil was a greater power of the two.⁵⁶ This would indicate that the Devil was a greater power than even the sacraments of the Church. If Satan could corrupt the holy sacraments, where then could a person turn to overcome the ancient trickster? Aquinas answered this question in his commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences*.

The Angelic Doctor noted that only God’s intervention could overcome the powers of sorcerers, because they had gained their capacities from the Devil. In the commentary, Aquinas noted that counter-magic was ineffective in combating a sorcerer’s curse, since it too came from the Devil. Instead, only God could remove the damage done

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Part II Question 94. in *Witchcraft*, ed. Kors and Peters, 98-99.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

by the Devil's power.⁵⁷ It can be assumed that Aquinas was aware of the differences between counter-magic and Church rituals such as exorcism, which were geared towards invoking God's power to counter demonic magic.

Johannes Nider O.P. (d. 1438) further explained witches and sorcerers' abilities to harm in his work *Formicarius* (1435-1438). The work was among the most influential on its subject in the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ Among the many stories, Nider recounted the tale of a servant who was arrested and confessed to causing a hailstorm. These findings were reported with the assumption that such acts did cause harm.⁵⁹ Weather magic was a major concern at the time.⁶⁰ Michael Bailey has noted that Nider was amongst the most important fifteenth century authors of witchcraft discourse. Bailey points to the seven editions of the *Formicarius* (a number that pales in comparison to the editions of postils that cite the same information).⁶¹ Despite its popularity, however, *Formicarius* was not readily accepted in clerical circles. In fact, Nider was banished from Nuremberg shortly after its publication, with the work cited as one of the ways in which Nider was inciting panic.⁶² It is better judged by its influence on a more famous Medieval work.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences: Demons and Sorcerers*, in *Witchcraft*, ed. Kors and Peters, 105.

⁵⁸ See Michael Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

⁵⁹ Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, in *Witchcraft*, ed. Kors and Peters, 159.

⁶⁰ Stokes, *Demons of Urban Reform*, 28-29.

⁶¹ Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 91.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.

There is of course no more famous, or infamous, work about witchcraft than the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of [Female] Witches*).⁶³ Composed in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer O.P. and Jacob Sprenger O.P., the *Malleus* functioned as both an explanation of witchcraft, as well as a manual for how a witchcraft trial should be conducted. Highly influenced by scholastic theology, particularly the earlier mentioned works of Thomas Aquinas, as well as Nider's *Formicarius* (especially in Part II), the *Malleus* proved popular in the immediate years following its release. It was in the *Malleus* that the proper method of prosecuting witches was first laid out, including the suspension of laws limiting torture. The *Malleus* also noted that the laity was also responsible for bringing justice to those who joined in a pact with the Devil. Much has been written on the *Malleus*' influence in the time immediately after its publication compared to its influence during the later period of mass witch persecutions. We know the work was not reproduced in any significant numbers during the early years of the Reformation. Our investigation, however, may shed light on how influential portions of the *Malleus* may have influenced the ways witchcraft was discussed.

To this point, it would appear that only what has been termed the *via antiqua* (especially those who followed the *via Thomas*), provided explanations for how humans aligned themselves with the ancient trickster. Followers of the *via moderna* also presented an understanding of what those who traded salvation for the promise of power

⁶³ Despite being one of the most infamous treatises of the late Middle Ages, the *Malleus* was never fully translated into English. There were German editions, but few have survived. Only recently has a full – and excellently rendered – translation been made available. See Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, in Christopher S. Mackay trans. *Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarium*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Mackay provides an excellent overview of language and philology in his introduction.

actually did.⁶⁴ Martin Plantsch (d. 1533), a student of Gabriel Biel at Tübingen, examined witches' powers in his 1507 commentary on the book of Job. To date, only three scholars have addressed this work and its connection to the intellectual development of witchcraft discourse. Midelfort first examined it as a predecessor to what he termed the providential understanding of witchcraft. In Midelfort's analysis, Planstsch's commentary was a predecessor to the Protestant emphasis on God's complete sovereignty.⁶⁵ Heiko Oberman addressed Plantsch's works in the context of the dissemination of ideas on the eve of the Reformation, noting that he was the final pre-Reformation nominalist to widely circulate his ideas.⁶⁶ Stuart Clark referenced Plantsch as a pre-Reformation thinker who relied on the providential understanding of witchcraft. In summarizing Plantsch's work, Clark noted:

There was no inherent power to cause *maleficium* in the means employed by witches, just as there was no inherent power in the Church's own sacramental tools or the good works of pious Christians; efficacy was in each case granted for a providential purpose. The afflicted thus had nothing to fear but God's righteous judgement on their conduct. They

⁶⁴ Scholarship on the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* is abundant and at times extremely technical. Instead of providing a lengthy footnote of major works on the subject, I instead offer one source that provides the best overview. See Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 1-182.

⁶⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 35; see Martin Plantsch, *Opusculum de sagis maleficis Martini Plantsch concionatoris Tubingensis* (Pforzheim: Thomas Anshelm, 1507; VD16 P 3201).

⁶⁶ Heiko Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe*, trans. Dennis Martin (German 1977; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 164-165.

should certainly not resort to the remedies of popular counter-witchcraft, nor (Plantsch seems to imply by omission) the destruction of witches.⁶⁷

Plantsch's providential understanding offered another interpretation of what witches did in society. It also gave postil authors another source to turn to in order to explain people's suffering. His commentary, which had a limited audience of mostly priests and learned men, noted that personal piety and devotion and fear of God were key to avoiding suffering, and nothing else. Plantsch was a nominalist. He was, however, also a Medieval Catholic. Like Gabriel Biel before him, he accepted that Church tradition was dogmatic. Thus, his nominalist understanding was limited. Protestantism removed these limitations when it rejected the primacy of Church authority. These were the two major schools of thought taught to students in the universities of late medieval Germany. And it was from these teachings that they began their work as authors of postils.

My intent is to present an analysis of how postil authors used the medium as a means to disseminate learned understandings of witchcraft to the masses. I ask, in terms of witchcraft, "what did it mean to them."⁶⁸ I do not believe it is possible to know the psychological state of individuals who saw a world completely different from my own. For example, Georg Scherer did not advocate for Elizabeth Plainacher's execution

⁶⁷ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 453.

⁶⁸ My methodological approach is influenced by the so called "Cambridge" school, although, modified to fit the study of religion. See Brad Gregory, "Can We 'See Things Their Way'? Should We Try?," in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. Alistar Chapman, John Coffey, Brad Gregory (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2009) 24-45; Brad Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 132-149.

because he hated his mother or women in general. Nor did he believe that a witch trial would signify his power as a Catholic priest. He truly believed that the Devil was attempting to infiltrate society, and it was his responsibility as a priest to protect his flock. Georg Scherer went on to become one of the most famous witch-hunters in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, despite the fact that he never again presided over a witch trial. His most famous treatise on the subject recounted Elisabeth Plainacher's story. It spread throughout Germany with at least three editions. Scherer was a favorite source for how to perform an exorcism and catch a witch. Yet even more popular than his tales of exorcisms and interrogation of witches were the works published in the final years of his life. These came in the form of his postils. Scherer's and other authors' postils allow us to examine the point at which literate and illiterate culture met and how they might have informed one another. We have rightly pointed out that witchcraft, while prosecuted as a secular crime, was a religious concern. While changes to legal codes were significant to the persecution of witches, these ideas were presented to the population in the form of sermons since at least 1521. They could not use legalist or theological discourse either. For when they spoke of witchcraft, eternity was on the line. They had to fulfill the spiritual needs of the people.

Examination of the postils confirms earlier suspicions. While there was no standard, dogmatic interpretation of witches' powers prior to 1590, Lutherans and Catholics began to formulate discourses based on the two different Medieval intellectual traditions.⁶⁹ Chapter one will discuss the early foundations of these two discourses from

⁶⁹ I have omitted discussion of Reformed (Calvinist) sermons. This omission was done for a variety of reasons, the first being that reformed churches, for the most part, rejected the use of postils. Only German reform postils existed, and they were quite

1520-1560. For Lutherans this was founded in the nominalist teachings of the *via moderna*, which after removing the authority of Church tradition was able to reject the idea that God always worked through secondary causes. Catholics maintained a discourse deeply rooted in the *via antiqua* and *via Thomas* even before the Council of Trent, and their discourse was more sustained and structured than that of their Lutheran counterparts. While Lutherans did mention witches in early postils, it was not until after 1538 that a clear definition of condemnable practices were stated in sermons. For Catholics, discussion of witchcraft and its evil nature dated back to at least 1530. After the Council of Trent, Catholic discussion of *maleficium* was more urgent, authors declared that all who practiced occult magic were in an explicit pact with Satan.

Chapter two discusses the changes to discourse after 1560 through the early years of the most intense witch trials. Lutherans doubled down on the providential understanding of witchcraft at this time. Catholics continued to emphasize the Devil's wish to make more and more people turn from God as the Final Days approached. Additionally, discussions of witchcraft in their later postils provided explanations of the dramatic shifts in the European climate: for Lutherans, climate change was punishment from God for the sins of the people; for Catholics, it was one of the ways the Devil and his minions terrorized society. In both cases, it confirmed theologians' fears that the end was near. The presence of witches explained why the climate was shifting. Whether one

limited in availability. Furthermore, the inclusion of Reformed discourse would have required more time than was available for this project. For reformed postils see Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 225-253. For development of Reformed clergy see Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*.

was a Lutheran or a Catholic, they knew that witches' presence was a sign of an angry God who was preparing to welcome the holy and damn the rest.

CHAPTER I

DIVINE REDEMPTION AND EVIL MALICE: THE FORMULATION OF DISCOURSE, 1520-1560

Witchcraft was of little concern to Lutherans in the early years of the Reformation. This neglect was likely due to the fact that reform required they focus on more pressing doctrinal issues. For Catholic authors, however, witchcraft occupied an important space in postils from the start. In all cases discussion of witchcraft was always linked to understandings of the End of Days.¹ In doing so postil authors often included this information in *Epiphany*, *Invocavit*, and *Oculi* sermons. This chapter examines the sermons of three Lutheran authors (Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and Johannes Brenz) and three Catholic authors (Johannes Eck, Fredrich Nausea, and Johannes Hoffmeister) all of whom published prior to 1560. In addition to the regular mentions of witchcraft in the three previously mentioned Sunday sermons, I have also focused on one occasional sermon composed by the Lutheran Württemberg preacher Johannes Brenz (d. 1570) that discussed witchcraft specifically. This special sermon is of particular interest as it demonstrates the changes to discourse that serve as the forerunner to Lutheran understandings in the later centuries.

¹ For a synthesis of Apocalypticism in the Reformation see Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Despite its title this work only focuses on Protestant Apocalypticism. If my thesis shows nothing else, let it be that Catholics were just concerned and convinced of the immediacy of the End of Day as were Protestant.

Protected and Persecuted by Providence: Lutheran Discourse to 1560

Discussion of Reformation era postils must begin those composed by Martin Luther (d.1546). Luther was not concerned with witchcraft, at least not in a structured manner. As a result, his thought on the subject was at times jumbled and contradictory. By examining the changes that took place in the later editions of Luther's postils, however, we find important steps towards a more systematic understanding. Luther ultimately concluded that the "true" Christians should not dwell on Satan's power, but on the power of God.

Luther's postils are a complicated web as there were two sets that were continuously undergoing revisions. The *Church Postil* began its development in 1521 as the *Epistles and Gospels from Advent until Easter* and *from Easter until Advent* and was revised throughout Luther's life.² It took its common name only after Veit Dietrich published Luther's *House Postil* in 1544.³ The *House Postil* had little to say about those who served the Devil. These sermons were also different from those contained in the *Church Postil*, as they were meant to be read aloud verbatim. Additionally, they were not

² Luther's first postil was not intended to be read aloud verbatim. In fact, that it was originally a manual for the newly founded evangelical ministers to learn about the importance of the word. After the Peasants' War, however, Luther had to provide ministers with a work that properly explained the role of preaching in society. Hence the need to remind the ministers of their role as God's shepherds. Likewise, after 1555, Luther's position on images and icons was modified so it was not confused with Calvinist views. See Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 28-33.

³ *Haußpostil D. Martin Luther*, ed. Veit Dietrich, Nuremberg: Berg & Neuber, 1544. VD16 L 4833; WA 52:10-827; trans. *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or Sermons on the Gospel for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*, trans. Matthais Loy, 4 vol. (Columbus: J.A. Schulze Publisher, 1884). An improved English translation is forthcoming in LW vol. 80-82.

actually composed by Luther. Instead, they were composed from Dietrich's notes on sermons Luther had delivered in his own home. Luther's *Church Postil* is, therefore, more useful than the *House Postil* when attempting to understand the early developments of Luther's thought, and what later Lutheran ministers learned from it.

While Luther approved the *House Postils*, they did not necessarily constitute his precise thought on subjects. Additionally, the notes Dietrich composed were from sermons delivered to a specific crowd of people. Rather than targeting the ministry, it was for the fathers of the house (*Hausväter*), i.e. the volume was for more than just the Sunday pulpits: the *Hausväter* was to deliver them to his wife, children, and servants. These volumes did, however, make their way into the ministries' pulpits. Due in no small part to their availability in folio volumes, giving the ministers even more for their money, the *House Postil* was the bestselling work Luther ever published in his lifetime.⁴ As far as discourse on witchcraft, however, the work said nothing. By saying nothing, we see that witchcraft was not among the top priorities of Luther when addressing his household. This was not the case in the older *Church Postil*.

The *Church Postil* was intended to help guide the new Lutheran clergy in composing their own sermons and in understanding the doctrinal issues suggested by the pericopes. It was also in these sermons that Luther addressed those who served Satan. Prior to the 1540 edition, witches were considered a separate group from magicians and soothsayers, who also made a pact with the Devil. In an attempt to separate the Magi of the Bible from the soothsayers and fortune tellers of his own time, Luther stated in the early editions (1522, 1528, 1532):

⁴ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 94.

Those whom the evangelist calls “Magi” were in German called ‘soothsayers’ (*Weissager*) not in the same way that the prophets predicted but through the black arts as the Tatars or gypsies practice them; therefore, we call them ‘wise men’ and ‘wise women’ who can tell people all kinds of things, who know a great deal about the occult arts and engage in dangerous things. The art of such people is called magic and it is accomplished by the black arts sometimes; but not altogether as the witches and sorceresses do.⁵

This is how the passage appeared prior to 1540. Important changes were made following the 1540 edition:

Those whom the evangelist calls “Magi” were in German call ‘soothsayers’ (*Weissager*) not in the same way that the prophets predicted but like those whom call them ‘wise men’ and ‘wise women’ who can tell people all kinds of things, who know a great deal about the occult arts and engage in dangerous things. The art of such people is called magic and it is accomplished by the black arts sometimes, and *by dealings with the Devil*; but not altogether as the witches and sorceresses do.⁶

The addition of the six words “and by dealings with the Devil” is significant. It seems subtle when reading. These changes, however, completely change the alignment of those who practiced the occult arts. Prior to these revisions, these were people using unholy, although not demonic, practices. They were to be avoided, but they were not committing

⁵ Martin Luther, *Epiphany Sermon*, in LW 76, 72:6; WA 10/1.1: 561.

⁶ *Ibid.*, LW 76, 72. n. 9; WA 10/1.1, 561 (Italics mine).

mortal sins. By connecting them to the Devil, Luther placed these groups in a category of idolaters that were considered especially heinous: those who worshiped Satan. Their pact was, however, implicit in origins, hence the clause separating them from sorceresses and witches. Luther described the origins of the pact later in the sermon. He noted that in the past there had been great healers and scientists who used the natural arts to cure diseases and ailments, and it was done with honor and care. However, that all changed at some point:

They went too far astray and mixed this noble art with trickery and sorcery. They wanted to imitate [this noble art] and equal it. But when they could not do this, they abandoned the real art and became tricksters and sorcerers, prophesying and doing miracles through the Devil's works, though sometimes through nature. For the Devil has retained much of this art and at times uses it through the Magi. Thus "magus" has become a disgraceful name and means nothing more than those who prophesy and do miracles through the evil spirit.⁷

This passage remained unchanged in every edition of the *Church Postil* thereafter. For Luther, the problem arose when natural solutions were either abandoned or combined with demonic magic as a means to expedite the desired results. Once a person accepted these practices, they were, according to Luther, also engaged in the Devil's pact. These pacts were, however, implicit not explicit. An implicit pact did not require a person to know that they were using Satan's power; instead, they were unknowingly dealing with the Devil. And perhaps more worrying for people in the late Middle Ages, these people

⁷ Ibid., LW 76, 73:10; WA 10/1.1, 563.

did not know that they had exchanged salvation for these powers. This distinction demonstrates that there was complexity in Luther's thought on the subject. It is not accurate to say that Luther, or someone preaching these sermons, believed every natural philosopher was a magician or sorcerer. It appears that this section of the sermon was directed at the appropriate uses of astrology more so than natural philosophy as a whole.

Luther agreed with the scholastic tradition, which stated that God could interact with the world through the stars, if God chose to do so. In turning their eyes to the heavens, the Magi had received, as opposed to deduced, such a sign from God. Luther expanded that God did use the stars, sun, and moon to give people signs. Thus, God could, and would, interact with people through the stars and weather. Citing Luke 21:25, Luther explained what a person could deduce from God's signs. People could learn that their actions angered God. They could then change their behavior to appease God. Under no circumstances, however, could a person use the stars to predict the future.⁸ Hence, the soothsayers were nothing more than fools that the Devil had tricked into believing they possessed special abilities. The Magi the Bible told of were, therefore, not the same as the *magi* who purported to know the future from the stars. The Magi were, according to Luther, some of the last truly wise men of science. While Luther's main focus was astrology, he also discussed other marginal practices.

In the same sermon Luther addressed summoners such as the Witch of Endor, whom Saul sought out to bring back the spirit of the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament (1 Samuel: 28). While Luther mentions the story to criticize the doctrine of

⁸ Ibid., LW 76, 78-79: 27; WA 1/1.1, 571.

Purgatory, he later addresses all who claimed to contact the dead.⁹ Luther distinguished four groups within what others considered under the umbrella of “black magic.”¹⁰

[First,] the “soothsayers” (*weissager*) are those who speak of the future, like the stargazers [astrologers] (*Sternkucker*) and false prophets, by inspiration of the Devil. [Second] the “day-choosers” (*Tagweler*) are those who designate some days as unlucky and others as lucky for journeying, for building, for marrying, for wearing fine clothes, for battle, and for all kinds of transactions. [Third] the “spirit friends” (*Geistgenoffen*) ... are those who conjure the Devil in a mirror, picture, stick, sword, glass, crystal, finger, nail, circle, rods, and the like, and in this way try to see secret treasures, events and other things.¹¹

While Luther’s early critique of the natural arts and natural philosophy was vague in regard to where the line was drawn, the inclusion of astrologers and conjurers with groups that all considered, at best, marginally acceptable in society indicated that they were not to be trusted.¹² Even worse, those who practiced such “arts” were guilty of doing the Devil’s work. They were, however, distinct from those whom Luther considered witches and sorcerers. Their works were “inspired” by the Devil, an important

⁹ Ibid., LW 76, 90-91: 57-60; WA 10.1, 585-587.

¹⁰ See the discussion of necromancy in Christian and Jewish traditions above in introduction, and in the discussion of Eck’s postils below.

¹¹ Luther, *Epiphany Sermon*, in LW 76, 90: 60; WA 10/1.1, 590.

¹² For details on the role of trickery and magic in the later Middle Ages see Richard Kieckheffer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 85.

distinction from saying they were doing the Devil's work. Those who were in an explicit pact were part of another group:

[Fourth] the “sorcerers or “witches” (*Hexen*)¹³ are the Devil's whores who steal milk, cause storms, ride on goats and brooms, go about in cloaks, shoot people,¹⁴ cripple, wither and torment infants in the cradle, bewitch body parts.¹⁵

Luther continued, listing charmers, diviners, and “those who practice sorcery” (*Zauberer*) as the remaining groups. His point was clear: all of these practices distracted from God's Word.¹⁶ According to some, all of these statements, especially the one about witches causing such devastating events as storms, impotence, and disrupting lactation (thus causing infant death) link Luther to the more popular understanding of witches, and not elite discourse on demonology.¹⁷ But these are, in fact, medieval scholastic traditions.¹⁸ Luther's position did incorporate “popular” concerns and it used the terminology of “elites.” But we must remember that this was a sermon. The genre was meant to be accessible to many, even if, as was the case with the *Church Postil*, the

¹³ Luther only mentions *Hexen* in the sermon. However, the English translation has both sorcerers and witches listed in this place. For comparison Compare Luther *Epiphany Sermon*, in LW 76, 90: 60 and for German *ibid.*, WA 10/1: 591. The word *Zauberer* does not appear in this passage. The conflation of sorcery and witchcraft seems to have been common in this context.

¹⁴ German *schliessen*. The current English edition has chosen the term shoot. Luther likely was conveying the suddenness of the witch's actions (curses).

¹⁵ Luther, *Epiphany Sermon*, in LW 76, 90: 60; WA 10.1/1, 591.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, in LW 76, 91: 61; WA 10/1.1, 591.

¹⁷ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 119.

¹⁸ These are the same concerns found in Aquinas, and the *Malleus*. See above pages 27-31.

reader or preacher was supposed to simplify points. Luther's understanding of how to deal with those who served Satan followed the descriptions of their crimes. All of these discussions were included in the earliest editions of the sermon. These passages appear in the earliest editions of the Church Postil. Their presence is significant to understanding that these ideas about the presence of witches in society were expressed as early as 1521. With the addition of six words in 1540, these passages became even more important.

Just prior to discussing the specifics of these unholy peoples, Luther warned that the faithful would not be susceptible to their curses and tricks if they remained true to the Word. He noted that if the true Christian crossed paths with the Devil or his followers, they should "make the sign of the cross and take your faith to heart. If God has inflicted him on you to chastise you, like godly Job, then be ready to endure it willingly, but should it be the spirit's own sport, despise him with strong faith and depend on God's Word."¹⁹ It was only with the permission of God that such spirits were capable of afflicting a person. While this was foundational to all thought at the time, it presented an understanding that held the Devil was, at most, only capable of harming those who had already rejected the Word. Any ambiguity was removed when Luther stated, "I hold that none of these poltergeists (*Poltergeist*) were appointed by God to chastise us, but it is their own mischief to terrify the people, in vain, because they no longer have the power to harm."²⁰ The Devil's minions wielded no power. They could only trick a person, who was weak in faith, into believing they had caused such problems.

¹⁹ Luther, *Epiphany Sermon*, in LW 76, 88: 54; WA 10/1.1, 588

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Epiphany was not the only time Luther discussed those who served Satan. He did so as well in the sermons that were read during the Lenten season. Luther's *Invocavit* sermon discussed the temptations of the Devil. The sermon remained substantively the same for the entire publication of the *Church Postils*. Therefore, all information was in circulation from its original publication date in 1522. When addressing the third temptation – Satan offering Christ control of the world in exchange for worship – Luther specifically noted that it was an exchange of power for worship, a deal that by the standards of the time constituted idolatry. This was the crime that all witches committed when they worshiped the Devil. Just as the magicians and sorcerers Luther mentioned in his earlier sermons had done, these people had traded their souls for material comfort. It was the frustration of being imperfect, rather than a malice for others that drew people to Satan's offer. The Devil offered an easy remedy for such frustration. In exchange for worship, he promised people magnificent powers and material comfort.²¹ All these "powers" came at the cost of salvation, which according to Luther could only be obtained through reliance on the Word. This position seemed to imply that a person was not necessarily responsible for falling into the Devil's pact. In fact, if taken to a logical conclusion, a person might not even know they served Satan, and in accordance with the legal codes, might not be subject to the same punishment as a person who willingly submitted to the Ancient Trickster.

The most significant point that one finds in reading Luther's *Church Postil* is the fact that much of this information was present in the original 1521 edition and, therefore, in circulation prior to the outbreak of the large witch trials. While significant changes

²¹ Luther, *Invocavit Sermon*, in LW 76, 373; WA 17/2: 186-197.

were made, most notably including all magical practitioners in the demonic pacts, Luther had always maintained that the Word protected people from Satan's powers, as well as those of his followers.

Despite being the father of the Reformation, Luther was not alone, nor was he the easiest to follow. This is especially true when we consider that the new generations of clergy did not have the same level of theological training as Luther. They likely would have struggled to create sermons from Luther's *Church Postil*. No newly ordained minister would be able to pick up the *Church Postil* and quickly compose simple but informative sermons. They needed better training, something simpler. Philip Melanchthon, Luther's chief lieutenant in reform, knew this. That is why when Melanchthon composed a very different type of sermon for his postils.

Melanchthon's postils, the 1544 Latin editions especially, are quite simple in format. They began with the pericope, followed by a small outline and then the sermon, which was brief compared to other postils. These sermons were originally composed to be used as college textbooks. For this reason, Melanchthon – a humanist skilled in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew – composed them in simple Latin to ensure they could reach a wider audience. Within a year, he translated them into German, increasing their usefulness in the Lutheran pulpits.²² While Luther's postils may have been a bit dense and overwhelming, Melanchthon's were the opposite. They were short and required the reader to fill in gaps and create their own sermons based on these outlines. The staying power of these postils was a testament to their popularity. By 1620, the 1544 postils had

²² Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 495.

received seven editions.²³ Melanchthon had little to say about magic or witchcraft in his *Epiphany* sermon. He, unlike Luther, was not an opponent of astrology.²⁴ This left him in a peculiar position when addressing the subject of magic and witchcraft. To remedy this conundrum Melanchthon focused his Lenten sermons on Satan and his followers.

Melanchthon's *Invocavit* sermon spoke of the ways in which the Devil was more menacing to society than he had been in past generations. He claimed this was obvious because of the presence of "papists and Turks."²⁵ Such people were proof that the Devil was succeeding in turning Christians against the "true" faith. Like Luther, Melanchthon wrote that a person had to study and understand the Word if they wanted to resist Satan's temptations. In his *Oculi* sermon, Melanchthon discussed those whose bodies the Devil afflicted. The Devil could, indeed, infiltrate an individual's body. Satan relied on his superior intellect to weaken humans so that he could possess them. Not only were humans more susceptible to the Devil's tricks because of their weaker wills, but the Catholic Church had also fooled them into believing they could defend themselves from Satan on their own. The strongest force, Melanchthon argued, and the one more people should concern themselves with, was the power of God. By understanding God's Word, people would be protected by God from Satan and his followers.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Melanchthon was a noted proponent of the uses of astrology, although he kept his discussion of the topic to a minimum during Luther's life. See Robin Barnes, *Astrology and the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 139-152.

²⁵ Philip Melanchthon, *In evangelia, quae usitato more in diebus dominicis, et festis proponuntur, annotations*, (Frankfurt a.M: Christian Engenolff, 1544; VD16 E 4529), 60a, 62a. Henceforth, Melanchthon, *P-W* (Latin).

Word choice is particularly important when examining Melanchthon's *Oculi* sermon. While the Latin edition used only the terms Devils/demons (*diaboli*), tricksters (*praestigiatōres*), and imposters (*impostores*), the German edition used the words tricksters (*Künstlern*),²⁶ sorcerers (*Zauberern*), and "directors of the Devil's demons" (*Teufelsbannern*).²⁷ These terms were used to discuss those who, with the assistance of Satan, performed false miracles, including exorcisms, and who had the power to cause demonic possession. Without close study of the Word, Melanchthon noted, one could more easily be led astray. Still, Melanchthon's sermons would only serve their users to a point. The postils were useful for students, but the rural minister would find the one sermon short and vague. What were they to do in order to explain devastating events such as hailstorms? For this, they could turn to the postils of another of Luther's early followers.

Johannes Brenz (d. 1570) was one of Luther's earliest supporters, as well as one of the last of that first generation of Protestant Reformers to die. Many have noted Brenz's works with local Church ordinances, catechisms, and treatises.²⁸ As a preacher, he was also incredibly popular due in part to his close connection to both Luther and secular rulers. His 1550 Winter and Summer postils received thirteen editions, while the

²⁶ The word *Künstlern* today would translate to artists. However, in Medieval German, the term also referred to those who manipulated the senses. The most famous example of this was the term *Tausend Künstler*, a nickname commonly attributed to the Devil in German speaking lands.

²⁷ Philip Melanchthon, *Postill ... Vber die Euangelia vom Aduent biß auff Pfingsten: Verdeutsch / vnd jetzt auff's new vbersehen*, trans. Johannes Pollicarius, (Nuremberg: Ulrich Neuber & Dietrich Gerlach, 1566; VD16 ZV5557) 90a. Henceforth Melanchthon, *P-W* (German); Melanchthon *P-W* (Latin), 65b.

²⁸ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 152.

de Sanctis volume received ten editions between 1553 and 1588.²⁹ Those studying witchcraft know Brenz best for his sermon on hailstorms. At the order of his secular ruler, Brenz composed a sermon to be preached in response to a devastating hailstorm in 1539, but the sermon was not formally published until 1557. This sermon is one of the most cited in secondary literature. No one, however, has discussed Brenz's postil.³⁰ The sermon was published in multiple works, including several collections of witchcraft sermons and treatises. A closer examination reveals that Brenz's hail homily was first published in his 1558 Latin *de Sanctis* postils, appended to them with a sermon on dealing with the Turks.³¹ This postil had a wider circulation than any of the other works in which this sermon was published. Receiving seven editions by 1578, the sermon was also republished in later compilations of Brenz's homily and in Abraham Saur's *Theatrum de Veneficis*, a collection of Protestant treatises, pamphlets, and sermons on witchcraft published during the early outbreak of Protestant large hunts.³² While Midelfort and Behringer were aware of Brenz's sermon, no one noted the wide

²⁹ Ibid., 473.

³⁰ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 36, n. 25.

³¹ I have not found a 1557 *de Sanctis* postil containing the sermon. This is likely because of the limits of digital sources at this time. However, I cannot corroborate nor reject the 1557 publication date.

³² Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 473 n. 33; Johannes Brenz, "Ein Predig von den Hagel vnd Vngewitter / Wo es hehr kommt / vnd wie man sich darbey Christlich halten soll / Gepredigt." in Johannes Brenz, *Kirchen Postilla über die Euangelien / so mann durch das gantze Jar auff die fürnembste fest vnd feyrtage der Heyligen / nach alter Christlichen gewonheyt / dem Volck Gottes pflegt fürzutragen / Fein ordenlich gezogen / vnd in Teutsch spraach gebracht*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Christian Egenolff d.Ä. (Erben), 1567; VD16 B 7830). Henceforth *P-dS.*; Abraham Saur, *Theatrum De Veneficis. Das ist: Von Teuffelsgespenst Zauberen und Gifftbereitern, Schwartzkünstlern, Hexen und Unholden, vierler fürnemmen Historien und Exempel, ... Sampt etlicher hingerichtten Zäuberischer Weiber gethaner Bekantnuß, Examination, Prob, Urgicht und Straff, etc....* (Nikolaus Basse: Franckfurt am Main, 1586; VD 16 S 1938) 1329ff.

distribution it had as a sermon. Where then did this sermon fit in the Lutheran understanding of witches? And what connection does it hold to dissemination of a Lutheran understanding of witchcraft? Midelfort noted that this sermon is the best example of the providential understanding of witches' power, or perhaps better said, their lack of power. Since, according to Brenz, witches were not capable of inflicting harm, why worry about their presence? The answer was that their crime offended God and incited his wrath upon the community.

While witches were idolaters for worshiping Satan and criminals for wanting to harm their neighbors (for which they deserved execution), they did not cause storms. Instead, the storms were punishment from God for the sins of the community. The witches were deceived by Satan, who through his more advanced foresight was able to know that God was going to punish the community via catastrophic weather events. He would then instruct the witches to say their spells in a particular place, at a particular time, and they would then observe the hailstorm. Because they believed the ancient trickster, the witches thought they had been granted special powers.³³ Brenz came to his position honestly. His position was close to the one Martin Plantsch posited thirty years earlier. The two nominalists, however, disagreed on what to do with the witches. For Brenz, God mandated a punishment for such cases of idolatry.

Brenz's sermon is also one of the few I have found in these sources that cited Exodus 22 directly:

In Exodus, God said to Moses, "You shall not allow the witch amongst you to live." If no witch can interfere in the workings of nature, and if it is

³³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 34; Brenz, *P-dS*, 1331.

not their ability or power to create hailstorms, why are they to be punished by the [secular] law and especially by the law of Moses, which came from the Holy Spirit? Here we must observe that the witches are punished by laws and by the law of Moses not because they cause or made hailstorms of their own, but because they gave themselves to the Devil...³⁴

The sermon no left doubt as to what should be done with those who worshiped Satan. They were to be put to death for their worship of the Devil and their want to do harm. After declaring witches powerless, Brenz explained the true origins of storms. Here the sermon shared many characteristics with Planstch's *Commentary on Job*. It was only with God's permission that Satan could do anything, and he could never give his power to another:

For when the Devil is allowed by God to awaken or cause a hailstorm, he immediately goes to his witches and tells them to use their evil magic and to attack their neighbors by causing strife. And when the hail begins to fall, it does not come from the witches but from the Devil, whom God gave control and permission. This is how the witches are deluded by the

³⁴ Brenz, *Hailstorm Sermon*, in *P-dS*, 1331. "Et Mose Exod. 'Vigesimosecundo: Maleficis non patiaris vinere. Si non essent maleficae, et si nihil possent damni inferre,' cur leges punirent, ac praesertim Lex Mosi, cuius certus autor est spiritus sanctus et hic est obseruandum, quod Leges puniant incantatric, non quod ipse possunt pro sua libidine elementa turbare, Sed quod tradiderunt sese totas Satanae et spiritum Satanae ita hauserunt, ut non cupiant nisi hominum exitia, putentquo; se facere quod permittente Deo a Satana fit." At the time of the final draft of this thesis, I learned that Erik Midelfort had translated Brenz's sermon years prior. I have, however, not altered my translations or consulted the translation.

Devil to think that their work causes the evil things to happen. It is actually the Devil who causes these things at God's wish.³⁵

It was only through the power of God that such devastating events could be caused. Brenz went on to explain that God inflicted such devastation on society because he wanted to test the faithful and punish those who had violated sacred laws.³⁶ In this scenario, the suffering caused by the storms had to be endured.³⁷ The people did not, however, have to endure Satan's servants.

Midelfort noted these ideas as foundational to the Lutheran providential understanding of witchcraft. For this, he credited Johannes Brenz, not Martin Luther, as their origins. The ideas were, however, disseminated before Brenz's sermons. This does not take away from the importance of Brenz's sermon, which was the sermon that best formulated the Lutheran position on witchcraft. Luther and Melanchthon were, after all, the two most prominent figures of the Lutheran movement. Their words were second only to the Word. The Wittenbergers also included their information about witchcraft in their regular Sunday sermons, not an occasional sermon like Brenz. Thus, their

³⁵ Ibid., 1331. "Nam cum Satanae permissum fuerit excitare Grandinem tunc Satan monet incantatrices sibi denotae, ut maleficia sua parent. Hinc excitatur Grando non quia maleficae coxerunt sua veneficia, Sed quia hoc ita permittente Deo futurum erat, itaque decipiuntur incantatrices a Satana, ut putent se facere, quod tamen administraten De sit."

³⁶ Ibid., 1331. I have been unable to consult Brenz's Winter and Summer Postils, as there are no digital copies available in the U.S. I have, therefore, focused on the only Latin *de Sanctis* volume I have found available with the hailstorm sermon. It is known, however, that the sermon was available in the German *de Sanctis* volume by at least 1558. See Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 36.

³⁷ On suffering see Ronald Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108.

information was preached more often than after devastating storms. Like most doctrinal topics, Luther began the process of formulation, while others later approached the subject in a more structured manner, which made formulating official doctrine easier. Still, Lutherans were new game. The Catholic tradition, which accounted for more witchcraft executions than any other confessions, developed its own understanding of the dark art.

Wicked Deviance and Maleficent People: Catholic Discourse through Trent

From the outset, it must be noted that prior to the Council of Trent it is difficult to discuss “Catholic Orthodoxy.” This is especially so if one accepts the idea that a universal orthodoxy was never the intent of the Medieval Church. Rather it was a conglomeration of Christians with their own local and communal customs placed under the umbrella of an ambiguous Greek term, “Catholic.” German Catholics did discuss witchcraft in their sermons. And unsurprisingly, they had a variety of opinions on the matter.

Johannes Eck, the most prominent German Catholic theologian of his era, made several references to witchcraft in his postils. Eck has been described as a “brilliant yet aggressive, hard drinking, and brutish opponent of anything that smacked of the evangelical movement,” while another referred to him as Luther’s most “powerful opponent north of the Alps.”³⁸ There is little doubt that Eck, who held degrees from Heidelberg, Tübingen, and Ingolstadt, could hold his scholarly weight with the best Lutherans could offer. Trained as a nominalist, Eck positioned himself in a more

³⁸ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 4; Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 152.

moderate position closer to the Scotistic school of thought in his older age.³⁹ Yet his position on witchcraft stemmed directly from Thomas Aquinas and the *via antiqua*. When the Reformation began, Eck was teaching theology at the University of Ingolstadt. Eck produced his postils in three different volumes between 1530 and 1531: Summer, Winter, and *de Sanctis*.⁴⁰ Like most postils of the period, Eck's works provided a detailed Old and New Testament exegesis in each sermon. Additionally, the collection contained extensive indices. And perhaps more importantly, Eck's collection was easy to navigate and contained at least four different sermons for each pericope, as well as sermons for special circumstances and events. Thus, with Eck's postils in hand, a priest had – at minimum – four years' worth of sermons at his fingertips. With some creative combining, these four sermons could easily serve a preacher for a lifetime. While there were no entries for witches in the indices, the term sorcery (*zauberey*) contained two. In these two sections, both within the *Invocavit* sermons, Eck discussed the nature of witchcraft and sorcery, as well as prescribed actions for dealing with such acts.

Eck took a staunchly anti-magical stance in his second *Invocavit* sermon. After discussing how to overcome the Devil's temptations through an exegesis of Job, Eck turned his attention to those who were weak – or foolish – enough to accept the Thousand

³⁹ Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 153.

⁴⁰ Eck also published two other volumes of postils. One on the seven sacraments and one on the Ten Commandments. I have not consulted these two postils. A future study will need to consult these – particularly the latter – as well. See Johannes Eck, *Der viert tail Christenlicher Predigen von den siben H. Sacramenten nach außweysung Christlicher Kirchen vnd grund Byblischer gschrift / den alten frummen Christen zu gut*, (Ingolstadt: Alexander Weissenhorn, 1534; VD16 E 288); Eck, *Der Fünfft vnd letst Tail CHristenlicher Predig von den Zehen Gebotten / wie die zü halten / vnd wie die übertretten warden / Zü wolfart den frummen Christen des alten glaubens*, (Ingolstadt: Georg Krapff, 1539; VD16 E 289).

Trick Artist's empty promises. This sermon contained the idea the people who partook in occult and esoteric practices were untrustworthy. According to Eck, Satan had tricked them into serving him.⁴¹ By magicians, Eck did not mean Lutherans. He never hesitated to criticize Luther and his followers, especially in his sermons. One need only consult the index to find that preaching against Luther and other Protestants was one of Eck's favorite pastimes and he saw no reason to use metaphors to criticize the Evangelical movement.⁴²

In the final section of his *Invocavit* sermon, Eck discussed how those who attempt to use the Devil's powers should be expelled from society. Eck referenced several Old Testament passages and explained that rulers should follow the example of Saul, who cast out "sorcerers and soothsayers." It should be noted that Eck did not use a single term to describe any of these people. Instead, he used several specific terms (*Warsager*, *Zauberer*, and *Necromantici*, but never *Hexen*).⁴³ Eck's use of the specific terms seems to be an expansion on the term used in the Vulgate (*maleficus*). While the biblical passage does reference fortune tellers (*aut qui ariolos sciscitetur et observet somnia*), there is no specific mention of necromancy.⁴⁴ It would seem that Eck's inclusion of this crime

⁴¹ Johan Eck, *Christenliche Außlegung der Evangelienn vonn der zeit / durch das gantz Jar / nach gemainem verstand der Kirchen unnd heiligen vätter von der selbigen angenommen / Auß befelch der durchleüchtigen hochgebernen Fursten vnd H.H. Her Wilhelmen vnd Herr Ludwigen pfal: bey Rhein / Hertzogen in Obern vnd Nidern Bairn etc. Gebrüder. Der Erste Tail vom Advent biß Ostern* (Ingolstadt: [Peter & Georg Apian], 1530; VD16 E 282), *Second Invocavit Sermon*, 94a. Henceforth, Eck, *P-W*.

⁴² Eck's indices contain over fifty entries for Lutherans, Luther, Zwingli, and "New Christians."

⁴³ Eck, *Second Invocavit Sermon*, in *P-W*, 94a.

⁴⁴ On medieval fears of necromancy see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 38-40.

reflects the medieval concern for summoning the images of the dead. We can estimate from Eck's sermon that concerns over necromancy had not eased as much as was once thought.⁴⁵ And much like the debate over the existence of witches, while there were those who would argue that necromancy was a legitimate scientific practice, they were a minority. Most, however, agreed with Eck that those who summoned the images were a moral threat to Christian society because they sought to use demonic agency to deceive others. Eck echoed the concerns stated in his *Epiphany* sermon that those who attempt to predict the future or conjure the dead were especially dangerous.⁴⁶ Intellectually, this places Eck firmly within the late medieval intellectual context with which he has often been, rightfully, associated. His thoughts were not new, nor were they "elite." He held the same concerns as the commoners in Swabia – he was, after all, one of them. Eck was simply more adept with language than the average Swabian peasant. He was also a medieval theologian. Exegetically, this passage would lend itself to discussion of not only the witches of the past (most notably the Witch of Endor) but also those in sixteenth century society. This one passage is brief, yet it provided the building blocks for a much more intense attack on those who practiced the "dark arts."

Eck's fourth *Invocavit* sermon contained a more expansive discussion, and explanation, of witches and their likeminded allies. While the second sermon dealt with the duty of secular rulers to cast out those practicing the "dark arts," the fourth provided an explanation of the Devil and his followers' motivations:

⁴⁵ Necromancy and the late Medieval and early modern debate over its validity has been covered in: Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 234ff. Clark points out that there were those who considered necromancy a legitimate form of science.

⁴⁶ See, Eck, *Epiphany Sermon*, in P-W, esp. 37c.

This is the hope of the Devil: that for once he is the same as God and [he] pushes for that. It is thus idolatry to court his image and worship him as God. He hopes in this way, as he desires for people to worship and remember him. He is hopeful that the people will adore him and do his biddings and adore none but the Devil, and that is what they do today: the black magicians, sorcerers, witches and blithe people. They shall do that and serve the Devil. Nothing is such a great dishonor to God as to attempt to do magic.⁴⁷

Eck also mentioned the commonly held belief that witches desecrated holy objects, stating that witches trampled on the cross.⁴⁸ Eck clearly relied on the medieval stereotypes of witches, which had been formulated by Aquinas and disseminated via the works of Nider and the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Desecration of holy objects was not the only stereotype that Eck noted. He also noted, in Latin, that there were also those who did not “have an explicit pact with the Devil but had an implicit one involving this evil.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Eck, *Fourth Invocavit Sermon*, 96c. “Das ist die hoffart des teufels: dise ein mal furgenumne hoffart/ die er Got gleich sey/ treibt er fur unnd fur: dann darumb hat er die abgotterey/ das er sich in den bildern entheilt und fur Got angebet wurd. Diser hoffart gieng er hie auch nach / da er begert der herr solt in anbeten: und merck eben/ vall nider und bet mich an: dan keiner bet den teufel an / er velt vor / und ist nun rein grosser val. Und das thun heut den tag noch die schwarzkuster / zauberer / hexen / und dasselbig leichtfertig volck: Dann das sie das und das thun sollen zu vor / ist alles dem teufel gedient und in anbet: hillft nichts das will gutes darein vermisch ist ye ein grossere schmach Gottes/ als wenn sie die stuck nemen darmit sie zaubern wollen: ist an einem morgen graben worden/ auff den tag vor der sonnen auffgang / nichts darzu geredt / unnd dar nach under das alteruch gelegt/ dz man dreissig Meß darauff leß/ das ist alles teufels ding: dar er macht / das der tag der allein Got zugehort/ das er dem teufel zu geordnet wirt mit dem graben.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 96 c-d.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 96d. “licet non habeant pactum expressum cum deamone, habent tamen pactum tacitum, seu implicatum.” The 1534 Latin edition of the sermon contains this mention (albeit in the third sermon as the translator did not include all four sermons).

Here we see discussion, with the clergy only – hence the use of Latin in the German collection – on the nature of the pacts with the Devil. It was the duty of the priests to explain how these agreements could be both explicit, the stereotype of a *quid pro quo* transaction (often involving a sexual relation in medieval literature), and the implicit, the use of something that one knew was wrong but was unaware of the origins. This is an important similarity between the Lutheran and early Catholic ideas about witchcraft. The pact with Satan did not only include those who had explicitly entered into a *quid pro quo* transaction, but also those who had engaged, unknowingly, in an act against God. This seems today to be semantic and small. However, in the sixteenth century we must remember that common practices included counter-magic, fortune-telling, and healing magic to name a few. Yet according to Eck’s sermon, one did not have to have an explicit pact, and simply practicing harmful magic was enough to be considered aligned with the Devil. How then could the priests reading the sermon be sure what entailed bad magic? It does not appear that that particular question could be answered from Eck’s sermons. As was the case with many sermons, it was up to the clergy to, for lack of better terms, fill in the blanks with their congregations.⁵⁰ Eck did, however, address why such undesirable people were around in the first place.

Johannes Eck, *Homiliarum sive sermonum doctissimi... aduersum quoscurique nostril temporis haereticos, supet Euangelia de tempore ad Aduentu usque ad pascha* (Cologne: Eucharius Cervicornus, 1534; VD16 E 405), 343. Henceforth, Eck, *P-W* (Latin). While I am terming this the Latin edition of Eck’s postil, it was not as expansive as the German edition. Several of the sermons are absent from this edition.

⁵⁰ Such questions have been a topic of discussion in different contexts. See Amy Nelson Burnett, “Basel’s Rural Pastors as Mediators of Confessional and Social Discipline,” *Central European History* 33 (2000), 67-85. Burnett notes that the trend of understanding confessionalization as a purely top down event is not supported by the sources. Instead, the pastoral class was capable of finding a middle ground between elite concerns and the wants of the popular masses.

Drawing on Isaiah 14, Eck used the Old Testament prophet to discuss the Devil's goal in attacking God's followers. The conclusion was that the Devil was preparing for his final assault. Satan, in his futile attempt to raise himself above God and the heavens, would consort with sorcerers and witches and "turn them to violence."⁵¹ Here the maleficent nature of witches and sorcerers can be seen. Like Augustine and Aquinas, Eck emphasized the Devil's growing frustration with his inevitable defeat. Like Luther, and most theologians, Eck believed the End of Days was upon the world. And while he did not agree with Luther's rhetoric and method of drawing his conclusion – after all, Eck would argue that Satan was influencing Luther– he was well aware of the turbulent times in which he lived. In drawing people to his side, the Devil was preparing to take as many Christian souls with him as possible in his final defeat. Eck's discussion of the Devil and his worshippers is therefore as much about eschatology as it is demonology. If there is still any doubt about whether Eck meant witches as a metaphor, his Latin editions answer the question clearly when he discussed punishing those who violated God's law. In Latin, Eck continuously referred to these people as witches and ventriloquists.⁵² The practice of inclusion of a Latin explanation in a vernacular sermon was a common practice for Eck. These sections were not meant to be read aloud to the people; they were, instead, meant to inform a learned priest of how to approach a topic. Eck described what should be done with those who joined Satan: they were to be burned for committing crimes against

⁵¹ Eck, *Second Invocavit Sermon*, in *P-W*, 96d.

⁵² Eck noted that while his contemporaries identified the person Saul consulted as a witch (*maleficius*) she was actually a ventriloquist. Like necromancy, the ability to deceive others by throwing your voice or impersonating others was considered demonic. See Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 95ff.

Christ.⁵³ Still Eck acknowledged a need to be cautious when dealing with the masses in his sermon:

The Incubus should not be discussed in public, in front of women, who are always curious. For it may lead them to give themselves over to the Devil, so that they may gain the knowledge of these evil powers. Only discuss this to describe the enormity of this crime.⁵⁴

Two points stand to be made from Eck's inclusion of this warning. First was the discretion that he emphasized needed to be taken before discussing such topics. For Eck, witchcraft was yet another topic that should only be discussed in detail in small circles. It was, after all, a crime that preyed on the weak, and teaching people about it ran the risk that the simple would attempt to harness these powers. Second, is the emphasis on gender. Eck's fear was that women (*mulier*) would be swayed by preaching against witchcraft into committing the crime. Just like the *Malleus*, Eck held that women were more susceptible to joining with demons. Eck did not provide any explanation for his position. It would be tempting to draw more from this than actually can be proven. All it tells us is what we already know: Eck adhered to the medieval understanding of witchcraft, which held that women were more susceptible to demons and the Devil.

⁵³ Eck, *2nd Invocavit Sermon*, in *P-W* (Latin), 343. "Quid quo leges comburere uel capitibus plectere illos imperant? Artes autem istae impurissimae, ante Christi quod natiuitatem apud ethnicos asseruntur ab Augusto fuisse prohibitae, ut recte deinceps canones etiam eas varei prohibuerint."

⁵⁴ Eck, *Sixth Invocavit Sermon*, *P-W* (German) 101d. "Incubi non est bonum quo multum dicat de hoc vicio in publico, coram simplicibus mulierculis : quae sunt curiosae : et ita possent assentire diabolo, ut experirent hanc maliciam: sed solum detestando enormitatem criminis." Eck cites Augustine's *City of God* Bk 15 ch. 23 for further discussion of women's inquisitive weakness.

More importantly, the ideas in Eck's postils were in circulation before Luther included this type of information in his 1540 *Church Postil*. While we cannot say for sure that the sermon was preached regularly, there is no doubt that the sermon was used: this passage was read aloud at some point, and priests would have read Eck's private Latin passages when preparing to read the sermon or while crafting their own. We can also safely assume that this passage informed many priests in Southwestern Bavaria and Swabia pre-Trent. Eck was not alone in his assault on the Devil's followers. The Mainz cathedral preacher, and later bishop of Vienna, Frederic Nausea also wrote about how to deal with these "evildoers."

Nausea, like Eck, was amongst the first to engage in what we might call a Counter-Reformation in the pulpits; that is to say, he published a collection of sermons that argued against the positions of the early evangelical movement.⁵⁵ By the 1530s he too was publishing massive volumes of sermons. Nausea's were highly accessible to the early modern priest who picked them up. Divided into four sections of one hundred Latin sermons in each, Nausea engaged a variety of topics in his discussions of the gospel. He also included occasional sermons within each set. Unlike other postils, Nausea did not include the pericopes in his sermons. Instead, priests would have to consult the Vulgate, or their lectionaries and "mass books," for the exact passages, which were listed at the beginning of the sermons. Due to the enormity of the volumes, Nausea also included extensive indices. The indices in the first (1530) edition did not contain mentions to witches or diabolic magic (that would change – see discussion below). He did, however discuss these topics in his sermons.

⁵⁵ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 52.

When addressing which of the “natural arts” were acceptable to use, Nausea noted that the Magi, who were exemplars of not crossing into magic “practiced astrology, the most noble of pursuits of knowledge (*sciencia*).”⁵⁶ Unlike Luther, Nausea was an adamant proponent of the use of observational astrology.⁵⁷ Despite his acceptance of astrology, he did express a similar position as Eck with regards to those who practiced other forms of so called magic. However, his definition seems to have been broader than those of Luther or Brenz.⁵⁸

Nausea’s 1530 index had several entries about evil acts and evildoing, most of which led readers to his third *Invocavit* sermon. Due in part to the ambiguity of the Latin terms, or lack thereof, for “witch,” it is difficult to say if Nausea is referring to a special

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nausea, *Evangelicae veritatis homiliarum centuriae tres ... Addita est in hac secunda aeditione, quarta in ordine centuria, quae in prima aeditione non habetur* [1530-1532]. (Cologne: Peter Quentel, 1532; VD16 N 227) henceforth Nausea, *P-W*. “Magos: et sunt qui sapientia pollent, et bonarum scientiarum studio sunt addicti, maxime astrologicae disciplinae, cuiusmodi Persae plerunqua. Nausea was an extremely learned man in terms of the sciences of his time. His sermons demonstrate that. See discussion and quotes in John M. Frymire, “Pestilence and Reformation: Catholic Preaching and a Recurring Crisis in Sixteenth-Century Germany,” PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 2001 (UMI 3016499), 151-152.

⁵⁷ Views of astrology in the later Middle Ages and early modern period are complex and require their own study to fully provide readers with adequate understanding of practices. Needless to say, I am over simplifying the subject here. There were numerous types of astrology, each of which had their own justification and opposition. Here Nausea seems to support the use of astrology to understand God’s plan or use it for medical purposes (balance of humors). Unacceptable forms would be those that dealt with the use of astrological signs and day choosing for reproductive purposes. For example see Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 254; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 224 ff.; Cunningham and Grell, *Four Horsemen*, 306-307.

⁵⁸ See J. Brenz, *Catechismus pia et utili explicatione illustratus*. ed. Kasper Gräter (Frankfurt am Main 1555; VD16 B 7546) 436. Brenz shared Luther’s distrust, although he was not as extreme.

group of those who follow the Devil or just all wrongdoers in general. Yet, the ambiguity could have lent itself to different discussions. While the German terms found in Eck are more precise, Nausea's language could have been changed to fit the circumstances. After all, few sermons would have been delivered in Latin. Instead, a priest almost always read a vernacular translation or summary of Nausea to their parishioners. Therefore, an "evildoer" may well be *Hexen*, *Zauberer*, or *Unholden* in a time of great anxiety over witchcraft. Yet it is equally as likely that the same evildoer would be a Lutheran, Reformed, or Anabaptist in a time of confessional disputes. However, since Eck and other notable theologians also published their own German sermons, which included the aforementioned terms, we can safely assume that Nausea's "evildoers" were in some way taken to be part of a pact with the Devil. This understanding was clarified at Trent.⁵⁹

Following the Council of Trent, postils underwent major revisions throughout Catholic territories. A new generation of priests began publishing their own postils, and also revising those of the previous generation. Nausea's postils did not change, but their indices did. Revised and reissued in 1557, five years after Nausea's death, the postils now had an even more extensive index. New editions were without printer's abbreviations and were put in column form (which required fewer folios and thus reduced prices) but maintained the original sermons verbatim. The postils circulated once more and printed eighteen more times before 1620.⁶⁰ Nine mentions of *maleficium* or a term derived from it were added to the new indices, most directing readers to an *Invocavit* or *Oculi* sermon.

⁵⁹ I have not compared Nausea's Latin with his German sermons. However, half of the *Centurea* were translated into German in 1534. Further studies will need to examine these alongside their Latin counterparts.

⁶⁰ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 497-498.

We can imagine that a parish priest would have been easily able to open Nausea's postil and combine paragraphs from each of the *Centuria* and create the perfect sermon for addressing growing concerns for temptation from the Devil. But Nausea's postils are not the most significant postil changes we find post-Trent. After all, the information contained within them did not change.

A significant change to discourse occurred in the postils of Johannes Hoffmeister O.E.S.A. (d. 1547). Hoffmeister's postils provide us not only an insight into how discourse changed in volumes published after the convening of the Council of Trent, but also a look at the way a Catholic monk approached the subject.

Like Martin Luther, Johannes Hoffmeister was an Augustinian monk. Unlike Luther, he remained loyal to the Church. Hoffmeister also differed from Nausea and Eck, both of whom were members of the secular clergy, in his approach to dealing with the evangelical movement. Instead of deliberate attacks that named reformers and confessions, Hoffmeister took a subtler approach, discussing doctrines and flaws with particular ways of thinking. While his defense of Catholicism was adamant, so too were his feelings about those who aligned themselves with Satan. Hoffmeister's postils contained extensive indices and numerous marginal citations. If one consults their indices, they will find two direct mentions of sorcerers and idolaters (*Unholden*). Both entries lead the reader to the *Oculi* sermon.

The most significant aspect of Hoffmeister's postils lay in his understanding of what the pact with Satan was. Prior to the *Oculi* sermon, Hoffmeister had little to say about the people who served Satan. Instead, he focused on the Devil himself in the *Invocavit* sermon. He noted that the Devil was extremely powerful on earth and he would

become enraged when people turned to Church ritual to defend themselves from his tricks.⁶¹ Two weeks later, for *Oculi*, Hoffmeister painted a bigger picture of the Devil's world and included more discussion about those who served the Devil. Discussing the role of Baptism in preventing the Devil from possessing individuals, it was noted that the Devil had enlisted many others:

Unfortunately, we do not think about it often [Baptism], but Satan does not forget, and he seeks his enemy so that he can harm him. And it is therefore, very much to be alarmed by those who do not fear making themselves familiar with him, those who give in to his offers of comfort and help: and they want to sway others to become servile spirits.⁶²

Hoffmeister noted more precisely in the margins that “Those who gave themselves to Satan did so willingly.”⁶³ The index entries revealed who made up this group of people; they stated that these included dark artists, idolaters, and sorcerers. When delivered from the pulpit, we can see that these issues could become important. People were now being

⁶¹ Johannes Hoffmeister, *Invocavit Sermon*, in *Predig vber die Suntäglichen Euangelien des gantzen Jars*, trans. Leonhart Haller, (Ingolstadt, 1575; VD16 ZV 8074), 51d. Henceforth, *P-W&S*. Hoffmeister used the Devil's transportation of Christ to emphasize that the Devil was an artist of a thousand tricks (*Tausend Kunstler*). Hoffmeister had nothing to say about astrology either. His *Epiphany* sermon focused on Christ and Mary, not the Wise Men.

⁶² Hoffmeister, *Oculi Sermon*, in *P-W&S*, 58b-c. “Wir haben ihm je inn dem Sacrament des heiligen Tauffs wider saget: un ob wir schon / laider / wenig daran gedencken / so vergisset doch der Satan desselbigen nicht / sunder suchet seine feind / wo ihn muglich / ihn zu schaden. Und es ist derhalben sich hoch zu verwundern ab vil menschen / die sich nit allain nicht vor ihin forchten / sonder machen freundschaftte mit ihm / geben sich inn sein Gefellschaftte vertrauen im alles guts suchen trost und huelff bey im: und wollen darnach ander leut bereden/ es seyen gute und dienstbar geister.”

⁶³ Hoffmeister, *Oculi*, *P-W&S*, 58c, “Menschen geben sich mütwillig in des Satans geselschaft.”

told that all those who summoned images in mirrors, or called upon the dead, had entered into an explicit pact with the Devil.

What seems like a small mention today may well have been a key moment in the history of Christian, and more specifically Catholic, discourse. Unlike Lutherans, who maintained that summoners and magicians were part of an implicit pact with Satan, a point that even his opponent Eck agreed with, Hoffmeister argued that all pacts were entered into willingly. Therefore, there were no crimes that involved Satan's works that the guilty party partook in accidentally. Hoffmeister's postils saw seventeen editions between 1547 and 1576.⁶⁴ Sustained discourse was key to disseminating ideas over time. In Hoffmeister we see that one of the most popular Tridentine postils significantly changed Catholic discourse on the subject of witchcraft. Whereas medieval thinkers approved of magic with varying degrees – consciously using ambiguous language where needed – these views were no longer an option after the Council of Trent.

Conclusions

It would appear that Catholics were more unified in their discourse on witchcraft than their Lutheran counterparts. This is better understood when we consider that Catholics, for their part maintained the *via antiqua's* interpretations of witchcraft, which dated back at least to Thomas Aquinas. As for who witches were, Catholics prior to Trent were amenable to the idea that not all who used the Devil's powers were in an explicit agreement with him. While they maintained that certain types of practices, mostly necromancy, should be punished with expulsion or death, they did not dwell on the

⁶⁴ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 487.

subject. Furthermore, prior to Trent we see that discussion of witchcraft was considered taboo and should only be approached with caution in Catholic circles. This was reflected in the period's relative calmness regarding witch trials and witch hunts. When Catholics such as Hoffmeister removed the possibility of implicit pacts with the Devil, it became impossible to say that a person unknowingly used Satan's powers.

Meanwhile, Lutheran authors took the *via moderna's* interpretation to its logical conclusion and neutered witches of all power, leaving nothing more than foolish individuals. Questions about witches' powers were most often linked to discussion of causality, and thus were focused on God, not those who claimed to use the Devil's powers. Catholics seemed to have ignored causality in early discussions, assuming that witches existed, for which reason there was no reason to prove their powers. For this was explained by their close connection to other *via antiqua* sources as well as some level of hesitancy to discuss witchcraft publicly at the time.

In both cases, however, discussions of witches and witchcraft were present in early Reformation postils. These findings challenge the widespread assumptions that discourse did not intensify until after 1562.⁶⁵ While works such as the *Theatrum de Veneficis* contained important information, the postils offered plenty of material for preaching on witchcraft in a genre that was more readily available, affordable, consumable by all.

⁶⁵ See for example Midelfort, *Witch Hunts*, 67; Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecution in Bavaria*, 121. Both Midelfort and Behringer begin their analysis of witch persecutions in the late 1550s.

CHAPTER II

WEATHERING A STORM: CONFESSIONALIZATION AND THE LITTLE ICE AGE IN WITCHCRAFT DISCOURSE, 1560-1615

The Reformation proved to be both a physically and spiritually destructive force in Germany. Over the course of a generation, thousands lay dead in the wake of rebellions and wars. Division and conflict were not unique to Catholics versus Protestants, nor limited to the magisterial versus radical reformers. Inner-confessional conflicts were also common. Religious struggles were not, however, the only disasters facing Germany in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. After 1560, the climate changed drastically. Recently many scholars have turned their attention to the role the “Little Ice Age” played in what can only be described as an extended period of crisis in Europe (and the world).¹ What actually caused the “Little Ice Age” is not my concern here; instead, I wish to know how it shaped the way people discussed witchcraft. Europe suffered widespread famine and even larger plague outbreaks than had previous generations. Winters were not only long; they seemed to never end. While the modern mind wishes to turn its eyes to the science of climate change, such was not the case in the early modern world. Instead, to find answers, the people turned their eyes to the heavens and their ears to the pulpits where the postils were read.

¹ See Wolfgang Behringer, *Kulturgeschichte des Klimas* (Munich: Dtv, 2007); Dagomar Degroot, *The Frigid Golden Age: Climate Change, the Little Ice Age and the Dutch Republic, 1560-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Geoffrey Parker, *General Crisis in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Older works also dealt with the subject such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate Since the Year 1000* (French, 1967; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).

The Bible told, on multiple occasions, of the signs of the End of Days. Famine, disease, strife, and war would all precede the return of Christ and his final defeat of Satan.² Two of these passages, Matthew 24: 1-22 and Luke 21: 25-36, were used as pericopes. According to common understanding, these disasters were signs of the coming End of Days. Catholics and Lutherans disagreed on what the cause of these were. What followed was a continuation of the medieval scholastic debate about causality. For Lutherans, there was no need to consider secondary causes such as witches or the Devil. Instead, only the primary cause (God) was responsible for the disasters they faced. Witches and magicians indeed existed, but they were only capable of harming people through natural means. For Catholics, God caused suffering and strife; however, he chose to work through secondary causes. Witches were therefore capable of harnessing preternatural powers and inflicting harm, because God had allowed them to do such; or, at least he had created the Devil who then shared his powers with them. Since they held that witches were powerful entities, Catholics also discussed the need, and mandate, to execute those who practiced such arts. By the turn of the century we see that discussion of diabolic witchcraft and magic had all but halted in Lutheran sermons, while Catholic postils began to expand discussion to include the need to punish those who served the Devil and harmed their neighbors.

² Most famous are the accounts in the Book of Revelation. However, many Old and New Testament passages were used to describe these events. Most notably, and often cited, are the following: Old Testament Isaiah 24-27; 33 34-35; Jeremiah 33:14-26; Ezekiel 38-39; Joel 3:9-17; Zechariah 12-14; Daniel 7-12. New Testament: Matthew 24: 1-22 (quoted below); Mark 13: 1-24; Luke 21: 25-36.

The Suffering Servants of God: Lutheran Sermons

There were fewer explicit mentions of witches in Lutheran sermons after 1560. Instead, Lutherans focused on the absolute power of God and the need of individuals and communities to uphold the covenant. Accordingly, all struggle and strife came directly from God. I have found no instances of special witchcraft sermons attached to later Lutheran postils, nor were there occasional sermons for times of strife in these collections.³ Instead, authors included this information in their regular Sunday or feast day sermons. When discussing those who served the Devil, Lutherans emphasized divine providence over human malice. All the authors surveyed chose to focus on the primary cause of strife and struggle – God – rather than the evil doings of witches. Their emphasis was on the depraved action of individuals and how personal actions offended God and invoked his wrath. The Mecklenburg cathedral preacher Simon Pauli (d. 1591) best demonstrates this understanding. Pauli first published his postils in 1567, likely having written and preached them at least a year in advance. By 1591, there were twelve editions in circulation.⁴

³ There were occasional references to accusations of sorcery and witchcraft in past times see below n. 6. Simon Pauli noted that the Arians accused Athanasius of witchcraft. However, these mentions were more defenses of Nicean Christianity than a condemnation or means of identifying sorcery or magic. See below n. 11. For full discussion of early Church conflicts and such accusations, see Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 501. For information on publication data see *ibid.*, 71 n. 195.

Like the postils of Philip Melanchthon, Pauli's were meant for students who would one day become ministers.⁵ First and foremost, it would be their job to ensure that their congregations were ready for the End of Days. For Pauli, the signs were clear that the end was nearing. Pauli's indices contained three mentions of sorcery, one of demonic possession, and four on disaster, famine, and strife across all three volumes. One entry is most telling of Pauli's, and most Lutherans', opinions on witchcraft. Pauli declared that sorcerers could not harm anyone.⁶ Sorcerers and witches were but one sign of the End of Days, as were the continued presence of Anabaptists and Catholics, as well as the particularly difficult winters Germany had faced. This toxic mixture told Pauli and others that the end was near. On the twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity, the pericope was Matthew 24: 1-28, which discussed the signs that would proceed the Final Judgment.

As Jesus came out of the Temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them "you see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that

⁵ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 169; Simon Pauli, *Postilla. Das ist: Außlegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien / an Sonntagen vnd fürnembsten Festen ... Ander Theil / von Ostern / biß auff den Aduent*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Schmidt, 1577; VD 16 ZV 29195) henceforth, Pauli, *P-S&SdS*.

⁶ Pauli, *P-S&SdS*, Dddd 6a.

you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs. Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of your name. Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come. So when you see the desolation of sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken by the prophet Daniel, then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; the one on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath. For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!' – do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Take note, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Christ’s description of the world before the end matched the one Pauli saw around him:

The neighboring kingdoms and Germany itself burn like a fire from war, and the great shout of war is heard everywhere. The powerful cities are plagued and [spiritually] ruined by internal revolts. Never has pestilence raged so horrifyingly in these places, and been more horrible in its consumption than this past year. Never have these lands been more terribly scarce in grains, and all other things, than they are at this time.

There are devastating earthquakes that arise from horrible and violent windstorms.⁷

War had devastated Germany in Pauli’s lifetime. The Schmalkaldic War (1546-1547) politically devastated the Lutheran territories of the Empire, not the least of which included the *Capitulation of Wittenberg*, which transferred the electorship of Luther’s home territory to the Margrave of Meissen Maurice – who Protestants referred to as “the

⁷ Pauli, *Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity*, in *P-S-dS*, 397b. “Die benachbarten konigreiche / und Deutschland selbes / brennen wie ein feuer von kriegem und wird uber alle groß geschrey von Kreigen gehoret. Die gewaltigen Staette warden durch innerlichen Auffruhr geplagt und verdorben. Niemals hat die pestilentz in diesen ortern gewlicher gewutet unnd mehr Leut gefressen/ den diese nehsten Jar. Niemals ist diessen Landen schrecklicher Thewerung gewesen/ am Koern/ unnd an allen andern dingen/ den dies zeit ist. Es sind gewliche Erdbeben/ so von gewlichen und hefftigen Stormwinden entstehen.”

Judas of Meissen.” Maurice’s defection from Charles then led to the Second Margrave War (1552-1555) and the Princes’ Revolt (1552-1555). Pauli noted that, “In the last twenty years many large-scale wars have been fought in Germany, France, Spain, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, and other kingdoms and lands.”⁸ The world in which Pauli was writing was difficult enough on its own. While the Religious Peace of 1555 would halt the wars, war was not the only devastation that affected Mecklenburg. In the Middle Ages, the territory had been a top German wine producer. After 1550, however, the territory saw drastic decreases in its production year after year, until it halted entirely in the later years of the sixteenth century.⁹ Pauli mentioned that the winters were difficult, and the pestilence that accompanied them was far worse than any seen before. While today we can blame the dramatic cooling patterns, Pauli did not have such science. Instead, he used the knowledge he had obtained from his study of the Bible, which told him that the world he lived in matched the one described in Christ’s words. What then were people supposed to do in these difficult times? They were to hope that “God has mercy on us.”¹⁰ There was nothing people could do to stop the struggles they faced. Some might tell them otherwise, but these were the false prophets that Jesus spoke of; Pauli noted that “the false prophets were many in the time of the Apostles, most

⁸ Ibid., 399b. “Also sind nun die nehesten zwentzig Jarher/ viel grosse und schwere Kriege gewesen/ in Deuschland/ franckreich / hispanien / Welschem Lande/ Ungern/ Dannemarcken/ Liffland und Nidern Deuchland und in andern Konigreichen und Landen.”

⁹ Behringer, *Klimas*, 72. It should be noted that, as a result of Global Warming, Mecklenburg is once again producing wine for the first time since the sixteenth century.

¹⁰ Pauli, *Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Trinity, P-S&SdS*, 399b. “Gott erbarme sich uber uns.”

notably, Simon the Sorcerer, Cerinthus, and others.”¹¹ Pauli’s time was just as dangerous, as “the [supposed true] Christians are cozying up to the Turks, Tartars, Russians, and Papists.”¹² Unlike his Catholic counterparts, Pauli never associated witches with these “causes.”¹³ Pauli believed witches existed. However, he held the same position as Brenz previously stated; witches were evil, Christ-haters who wanted to physically harm others. The cathedral preacher devoted a significant amount of space to the subject of witches’ powers in another Trinity Sermon.

For the fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, Pauli gave a sermon on Galatians 5:16-24. This sermon proves to be doubly useful. Pauli addressed various groups of sinful and evil people, and provided readers with the proper remedy for each.¹⁴ The pericope was as follows:

I say to you, live by the spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.
For what the flesh desires is opposed to the spirit, and what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the spirit you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious:
fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness,

¹¹ Ibid., 398b. “Auch sind zur Apostel zeiten viel falscher Propheten gewesen/ nemlich/ Simon de Zauberer, Cerinthus/ und andere.”

¹² Ibid., 401b. “Turken/ Tartern/ Reussen und die Papisten/ mit den Christen hand halten.”

¹³ See discussion of Johannes Nas below.

¹⁴ Pauli, *Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity Sermon*, in *P-S-dS*, 281a-282b. Pauli notes the adulterers (*hureren*) the unclean (*Unreing keit*), fornicators (*unzucht*) idolaters (*Abguetteren*), and sorcerers and magicians (*zeuberer*).

carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Pauli's sermon served as an excellent example of the intersection between pastoral care and social control. It clearly established that people's desires, whether physical or material, were always against God and spirit. The flesh may well want to break free of its oppression on earth. Doing so, however, was against the spirit's will, which required only the Word for nourishment. Amongst the people who sought to become prisoners of the flesh were sorcerers and witches. The section devoted to sorcery and witchcraft described what exact crimes were committed:

Sorcery is also a sin against the First Commandment, through which people make a pact with the Devil, and via the Devil's Powers, harm others. What can be worse than for one to abandon his true, living God and make a pact with the Devil, depend on him, and give themselves over to him in body and in soul? — to that Devil who is a sworn enemy of God and men! But the man who is most malicious and audacious can make the evil lust of his flesh, which attracts and drives all evil. But sorcery has been very common among heathens and Papists both, and wherever the Papist still rule. But among those with whom the gospel is regularly heard, sorcery is rarely heard of. According to the Gospel, the Devil takes his

power from the unbelieving. I wish to offer that all the sorcerers' words and curses will not harm you; they can only harm you with the poisons they wish to put in your body. Also, the unfaithful cannot harm me if I am faithful. Therefore, the sorcerers often say that they are trying all sorts of tricks on ordinary people, but they have never been able to harm them. However, when the sorcerer poisons wells, bodies or livestock, it is possible for them to do harm.¹⁵

Pauli took a position similar to Brenz's two decades earlier. While all sorcerers and witches were guilty of idolatry, their physical crimes were entirely natural. While some attributed preternatural powers to witches, Pauli did not. They could only harm a person with physical poisons; but they could not use spells or the occult, as these were beyond

¹⁵ Pauli, *Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity Sermon*, P-S&SdS 280b-281a. "Zaubery ist auch eine Sunden wider das erste Gebott/ dadurch die Menschen verbundtniß mit dem Teuffel auffrichten / und ander Leuten durch den Teuffel schaden thun / welches uberraus schrecklich ist. Was kan schrecklicher seyn / den seinen waren lebendigen Gott... verlassen/ und mit dem Teuffel welcher Gottes und aller Menschen abgesagter feind ist bundtiss machen/ sich an in hengen/ und sic ihm mit Leib und Zeel ergeben. Das aber ein Mensch so boshafftig unnd so verwegen seyn kan/ machet die boese lust seines fleisches / welches zu allem bosen locket reizet unnd treibet. Die schreckliche Suende aber der zauberey ist bey den heyden und beyden Papisten sehr gemein gewesen / und ist noch gemein/ wo das Bapsthumb regieret. Bey uns aber/ da das Evangelium im schwange gehet / hoeret man selten von zauberey. Denn durchs Evangelium wirt dem unglouben gestentet / dadurch der Teuffel seine gewalt uber. Ich wil allen Zauberer erorz bieten das mit ihren Worten / Creutzent und andern zauber / schen werken mirsolten schaden ihun / wo sie mir nicht Gifft eyngeben / oder durch Giffe meinen Leib verlezen. Eines andern Unglouben kan mir nicht schaden wenn ich recht glaubig bin. Daher bekennen offt die Zauberer iso da getodtet warden die sie an erlichen leuten alle ire Kunst versucht aber den noch inen keinen schaden haben zufegen konnen. Ein andern aber ist wen die Zauberer einem Gifft beybrigen / oder im da durch am Leibe oder seinem Vieh schaden zufangen / kan man doch wol on zauberey durch Gifft todten und schaden thun."

their control.¹⁶ Pauli also mentioned that Catholic territories were the places where witches could be found. Here we see the confessionalization of witchcraft discourse. Witchcraft was not a crime committed in territories where the Word was proclaimed.

Simon Pauli's *Invocavit* sermon discussed the Devil's role as a trickster. Trickery and manipulation were the Devil's strongest skills: he had tricked Adam and Eve into committing original sin; he next used his tricks to convince Cain to murder Abel; he made David violate his marriage, Solomon make unwise decisions, and led Delilah and her servants to cut Sampson's hair.¹⁷ They did not come up with these ideas, however. Unlike Christ in the pericope, they allowed earthly desires, not the spirit, to lead them. If Christians wanted to combat the Prince of the World, they would have to do so through the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Thus, the fast of Lent was not about the abstention from foods. Rather it was to be about the guidance of the Spirit. The fast was still necessary as it helped reveal those who had fallen to the Devil.

The Spirit says clearly that in the Last Days, many of the faithful will fall and cling to the seductive spirits and teachings of the Devil...¹⁹

¹⁶ It would be tempting to read this as a sort of Weberian "disenchantment of the world." Doing so would, in fact, indicate the opposite. Pauli believed, like Brenz, that witches made a real agreement with Satan. He otherwise had no reason to say that people "aligned with the Devil." See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (New York: Scribner, 1958).

¹⁷ Simon Pauli, *Postilla. Das ist: Außlegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien / an Sonntagen vnd fürnembsten Festen / ordentlich vnd richtig / nach der Rhetorica gefasset: Neben einer kurtzen erklerung des Textes. Vnd jetzund aber / mit etlichen Episteln vnd Euangelien gemehret vnd gebessert ... Das Erst Teil / vom Advent biß vff Ostern.* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Schmidt, 1577; VD16 P 999), 168b-169a. Henceforth Pauli *P-W*.

¹⁸ Pauli, *Invocavit*, in *P-W*, 169b.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170b. "Der Geist saget deutlich/ daß in den letzten zeiten warden etliche von dem Glauben abereten/ unnd anhangen den verfuhrischen Geistern/ unnd Lehrender der Teuffel."

Echoing his understanding that the End of Days was upon the world, Pauli cited 1 Timothy 4 as scriptural proof. The end was near, and the Devil would be hard at work swaying as many to the side of the damned as he could. Although the Devil was stronger than humankind, Pauli noted that he could not overcome one thing:

The Lord Christ met the Devil with God's Word and used it against him. He [Christ] teaches us what to do when tempted by the Devil. Let us do the same when we are tempted by the Devil. We should wield the sword of God's word and always pierce and beat him [the Devil], so that he flees, and we overpower him.²⁰

Hence when Christ said, "one does not live by bread alone," Pauli noted this meant the Word nourished the human spirit. This was the same point Luther made forty years earlier. While witches were powerless to Pauli, their master had two very powerful abilities. Satan could operate as a great trickster, and he could direct the demonic spirits that possessed the body.

Satan's power to cause possession was extremely limited, however. The Devil could only possess individuals who were not protected by the Word.²¹ Once a person had truly embraced the Word (that is, the Lutheran understanding of the Word) Christ protected them from all of the Devil's powers.²² Readers should also notice that Pauli

²⁰ Ibid.. 171b. "Der Herr Christus beget dem Teuffel mit Gottes Wort/ und wehret sich darmit wider ihn / Lehret uns hiermit / wie wirs machen sollen / wenn wir vom Teuffel versucht warden / Nemlich / daß wir sollen ergreifen das Schwerd des Gottlichen Worts / und immer auff ihn stechen und schlagen/ daß wir ihn also von uns abkehren unnd überwinden."

²¹ Pauli, *Sunday after the Circumcision of Christ*, in *P-W*, 71a-71b.

²² Pauli, *Oculi*, in *P-W*, 189a-190a.

said nothing about the ability of those who served and worshiped the Devil to cause possessions. The conclusion must, therefore, be drawn that Pauli did not ascribe this ability to witches and sorcerers. Instead, the Devil's followers often performed false exorcisms, presenting themselves as people who could solve the problems afflicting people.²³ This point further emphasizes the Lutheran position that the Devil's followers could do nothing to harm people. These points were upheld in other Lutheran sermons.

Johannes Heune (d. 1581) made his name publishing in the Bohemian city of Joachimsthal. Unlike many Lutheran authors, who were famous for their catechisms, Heune made his name authoring hymnals. While his hymnals were of limited use, and limited in their dissemination, he also authored a set of postils.²⁴ Johannes Heune's Winter and *de Sanctis* volumes each received eight editions, while his Summer postils received nine editions by 1596.²⁵ His postils contain only a few mentions of witches; what mentions were made reinforced the already stated position. The Bohemian minister did, however, provide a few different explanations for God's providence.

On at least two occasions Heune noted that God controlled the climate. First in his Second Advent sermon, which used an apocalyptic pericope (Luke 21: 25-36), and again on the sermon on Paul's conversion, it was noted that God alone could change the actual physical state of nature.²⁶ The woodcut that preceded the Second Advent sermon also

²³ Ibid., 189b.

²⁴ See Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 46.

²⁵ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 486.

²⁶ Johannes Heune (Gigas), *Postilla Der Sontags Euangelia und der Festen durchs ganze Jar/ sampt ander Predigten. Iohannis Gigantis Northusiani Alles Jerzt zum lerzten mahloom Aurer schlbst corrigter und gemeticher*. (Johann Eichorn: Frankfort an der Oder, 1575; VD16 H 3233) 8a ff. Henceforth Heune, *P-W*.

emphasized Heune's point. The image shows raging waters and four distraught individuals pleading with God, who has appeared on his throne in the sky.²⁷ To further the point, the pericope that accompanied the image discusses the signs of the End of Days. Wars, famine, and plague would descend upon the people before the final judgement.²⁸ All the suffering the German people had endured, Heune stated, were signs that the end was upon them.²⁹ These signs came directly from God. The Devil was only mentioned as God's primary adversary on earth. Similar to the way the Turks were often addressed, he was an outside threat that was secondary to God. He was nothing more than a rebellious angel who sought to prey upon the spiritually weak.

Heune wrote that it was God that interrupted Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus. Here listeners were told that God alone could disrupt the natural world and reveal himself to people through these means.³⁰ The Bohemian minister never mentioned what the Devil could do. Instead, he focused solely on God. It was not until his *Invocavit* sermon that he described the Devil's cunning abilities. The Artist of a Thousand tricks was a master deceiver, skilled at tricking people into worshipping him. Such an understanding left room for an interpretation that returned to the same problem earlier generations faced with the idea of implicit versus explicit pacts. It seems that he was not ready to classify all those who served the Devil's plans as one idolatrous group. Instead, he noted that if someone was truly repentant, they could again enter God's good graces. If the Devil and his

²⁷ Heune, *Second Sunday of Advent, P-W*, 9a.

²⁸ Luke 21 is a retelling of the same instance in Matthew 24 quoted above. Heune did reference the Matthew passage throughout the sermon. See pages 19-20.

²⁹ Heune *Second Sunday of Advent, P-W*, 9b.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 101a.

temptations ever confronted people, they were to remember three things: God's Word, their catechisms, and the *Augsburg Confession*. If these three things were remembered, the Devil's fiends could not harm an individual.³¹ It is here that Heune's postils demonstrate an important point that scholars have overlooked. His sermons contained information from all three of these pieces of literature. Aside from the numerous biblical citations, Heune cites and quotes the *Augsburg Confessions* as well as information from Luther's *Small Catechism*. Scholars have been quick to cite low attendances at midweek and Sunday evening catechisms as proof that the Lutheran Reformation "failed."³² Information from the catechisms was, however, included in the regular Sunday and feast days sermons.³³

When Heune briefly addressed witchcraft in his *Reminiscere* sermon, he explained the lesson people should learn from the pericope (Matthew 21: 33-46):

When the woman sought someone to assist her daughter, whom did she seek? How did she ask? She did not seek the help of the sorcerers, nor the deceased saints, nor blessed salts and water. She sought Jesus Christ...³⁴

Reiterating Luther's *Small Catechism*, Heune emphasized that only God could save people from the Devil's torment. Like Pauli, Heune agreed that the Devil could possess individuals, so long as God had not chosen to protect them. This point was explained in

³¹ Ibid.

³² See note 32 above in Introduction.

³³ All scholars have conceded that sermons were regularly attended and, in many cases, demanded sermons be preached.

³⁴ Heune, *Reminiscere Sermon P-W*, 106a. "Bey wem suchet sie hulffe? Wie bittet sie? Sie suchet nicht hulff ben den Zuaberern / oder verstorbenen heiligen / oder den dem gewiheten Saltz und Wasser / sondern ben Ihesu Christo"

the *Oculi* sermon the following week: in his two capacities the Devil could sway people to his side, and he could infiltrate their bodies; however, he did so only to those who were not faithful and did not know God's Word. Furthermore, Heune noted to the ministers that the Devil had greatly exaggerated his powers to others: "the Devil has the will to injure us, but not the power."³⁵ If the power to harm was not the Devil's, it must be God's. Heune confirmed this in his Summer postil.

On the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, he explained the origins of pestilence. Luke 17:11-20 served as the pericope and recounted Christ's healing of ten lepers. An entire section of this sermon was dedicated to answering the question, "Where is pestilence from?" His sermon answered this question:

Holy Scripture calls these epidemics the work of God's hand. Pestilence, war, and strife are God's rods for punishing us. The Latins call these plagues from God for the sake of our own sins.³⁶

At no point in the sermon were witches, sorcerers, or even the Devil given credit for anything. Instead, all strife and struggle were the products of a vengeful God. For all who heard Heune's sermons, if they sought someone to blame for their problems and the difficult times, they had no farther to look than themselves. It was their depravity and

³⁵ Heune, *Oculi Sermon P-W*, 110b. "Diabolus habet voluntatem nobis nocendi, non potestatem."

³⁶ Johannes Heune, *Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity*, in *Postilla oder Auslegung der Sontags Euangelien vnd fernemsten Fest durchs gantz Jar Nicht allein allen Pfarrherrn vnnnd Predigern Sondern auch allen Christen zu lesen vnd zu hoeren sehr nuetzlich vnd heilsam Durch Herrn Johannem Gigantem geprdiget vnd mit fleiß beschrieben etc.* (Nikolaus Basse: Fankfurt oder Main, 1575; VD16 H 3232), 122a. Henceforth, Heune, *P-S*. "Aber heilige Schrifft nennet diese seuche Gottes hand / schwerdt / rute / auch krieg und thewring Gottes besem sind / dabei bleib ich auch / her die Latiner die Pestilentz luem (seuche) nenne das is Gottes staffe umb unser Sunden willen."

weakness that had angered God. Such a position was not unique to the Lutherans discussed here. It was universal in Lutheran discourse.

While Pauli and Heune hailed from areas where the relationship between secular and religious leaders were at times turbulent, we find a different case in the east. Simon Meusel (d. 1582) was the spiritual voice of his prince. Meusel was the superintendent of Mansfeld, the birth place of Luther, when he composed his postils in 1575. He noted in his introduction that he had composed his postils as a response to the lack of attendance at weekly catechism lessons. While he was not nearly as focused on witchcraft as Heune or Pauli, Meusel did mention those who worshiped and served Satan. Meusel was also well aware of the devastating effects of the “Little Ice Age.” The cooling period devastated his native Jena. Like Mecklenburg, this once renowned wine producing city saw its vineyards vanish over the course of a few decades. These changes left the university and printing press as the main sources of the city’s revenues.³⁷

Simon Meusel’s *Invocavit* sermon discussed what people needed to do when faced with famine and struggle: “look to God no matter what you are facing, whether you be alone, amongst poltergeist, hunger, pestilence, or temptation.”³⁸ In Meusel’s account, it did not matter what the struggle was, for the only thing people needed to remember was that God could solve any problem. Echoing Luther, Meusel called for people to turn to

³⁷ Parker, *General Crisis*, 212.

³⁸ Meusel, *Postilla / Das ist: Außlegung der Episteln vnnd Euangelien / welche durch das gantze Jar / an allen Sontagen / vnd andern namhafften Festen / in der kirchen vblich vnd bräuchlich sind / mit sonderem fleiß / wie menniglich erkennen kan / herfür gebracht / Geprediget / Das erste Theil. Vom Aduent biß auff Ostern*. Frankfurt a.M.: Nicolaus Basse, 1590. VD16 M 5056. *Invocavit Sermon*, 112b. Henceforth P-S. “Nacht in einem wilden Walde / mitten unter den Poltergeistern / Kurden / Kriege / hunger / Pestilentz / oder geistlichen Anfectungen.”

the Word for protection. The Devil could do nothing if a person had a skilled understanding of the Word; this understanding was obtained through hearing sermons and studying the catechisms.³⁹ At no point in the sermon did Meusel address those who served the Devil. Instead, he focused on what individuals could do to protect themselves.

Meusel's only direct mention of the Devil's servants was in his summer postil, where he described the Devil's preparation for his final battle with Christ. The *Ninth Sunday After Trinity* sermon discussed those who "zealously await him [the Devil]: Necromancers, sorcerers, and those who direct the Devil's demons (*Teufelsbanner*)."⁴⁰ These people were especially horrible; they were unforgivable because they violated the first commandment and swore their service to the Artist of a Thousand Tricks. While they believed their partnership to be fruitful, the Devil knew it was futile. He also knew that Christ would defeat him, Meusel wrote, but he would take as many Christian souls as he could in his final defeat. For an author such as Meusel, this was the reality of the world around him. The Devil had tricked these ignorant souls into worshiping him in exchange for a share of his power. These people were, however, only given damnation, as they had been tricked into committing mortal sins. There would be no redemption for the Devil's followers. Judgement would be passed in the Final Days. Until then, people should not fear these wicked people; rather, they should look to the cross, because it "offends the Devil."⁴⁰

Meusel's postils accepted the same providential understanding as those of the Devil's power, although not as explicitly stated, as those of Pauli and Heune. The Devil's

³⁹ Ibid., 112b.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 110a.

followers would be repelled if a person turned to the Word. The logic was simple: if God was angered with the way people were behaving, he would allow the Devil to be successful in his attempts to harm them. This position is not as extreme as those of Pauli or Heune. It also matches, to a degree, the position many Catholics held. Unlike the Catholics, however, Meusel made no attempt to describe those who served the Devil. The omission of such information implies that it was believed that people were to concern themselves with their actions, not those of others.

These Lutheran authors present us with discourses formulated in two places that have had few extensive studies conducted. It is difficult to say what the witch trials in eastern Germany looked like, as their records have not survived the ravages of time. We know that between two and four thousand people were tried for witchcraft in the area during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.⁴¹ We know that northern and eastern Germany partook in the burning of witches in mass trials. However, we cannot from any source draw definite conclusions about who the targets of these trials were. Our assumptions can only be drawn from the generalizations based on the trial records from surrounding areas. The Lutheran postils do not help us draw more satisfying conclusions about who the northern and eastern hunts may have targeted. They do, however, help us understand, perhaps, why these trials did not equal their southwestern (Catholic) counterparts. Lutherans were focused on individual sins, not the acts of others. People were encouraged to look inwardly rather than around them. The struggles they faced were their fault. Only the removal of their sins, and the hope that others did what was

⁴¹ Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Malden: Polity, 2004) 124. Behringer notes that Mecklenburg was economically an eastern European region. Thus, I have categorized it with Bohemia.

necessary to remove their sins, would ease the strife. These were all common themes in Lutheran postils published in the era.⁴²

Suffering the Servants of Satan: Catholic Sermons

Catholic sermons from the period discuss witches far more than their Lutheran counterparts. Catholic authors, while not as uniform in their message, shared some qualities in their discussions of those who practiced the dark arts. Catholic positions on the subject were more reliant on the Medieval treatises that had influenced works such as the *Malleus* and the *Formicarius* than their Lutheran counterparts. Stereotypes such as pacts and weather magic were all present in postils from the period. Again, we find specific descriptions of who was susceptible to the Devil's temptations. Not only did Catholics hold that those weak in faith could be most easily swayed to serve Satan. They also held that women, because of their weaker wills, were the most susceptible to forming pacts with the Devil. For this section I have chosen to focus on the two most popular

⁴² See Johannes Habermann, *Postilla / Das ist: Außlegung der Sontags Euangelien / wie sie durchs Jar vber in der Kirchen gelesen vnd gepredigt werden / Mit sonderm fleiß vnd treuwen beschrieben*. 2 vols. Jena: Donat Richtzenhan, 1575. VD16 H 52; Jerome Menzel, *Postilla Das ist Außlegung Der Euangelien so auff die Sontage Heubt vnd andere Fest durchs gantze Jahr in der Christlichen Kirchen gelesen werden. ... Durch M.Hieronymum Mencilium der Grafschafft Mansfelt Superintendenten. Der Erste Theil ...* (Eisleben: Urban Gaubisch, 1583; VD16 M 4738); Jerome Menzel, *Postilla Das ist Außlegung Der Euangelien So auff die Sontage / Heubt / vnd andere Fest / durchs gantze Jahr in der Christlichen Kirchen gelesen werden. Fürnemlich auß Gottes Wort / vnd D. Luthers Schrifften zusammen getragen... Der Erste Theil. Vom Aduent biß Ostern*. (Eisleben: Urban Gaubisch, 1588; VD16 E 4605); Menzel, *Postilla. Das ist / Außlegung Aller Euangelien / so auff die Sontage / Von Ostern biß auff's Aduent / in der Christlichen Kirchen gelesen werden. Fürnemlich aus der heiligen Schrift / vnd D. Luthers Büchern zusammen gezogen. Der Ander Theil*. (Eisleben: Urban Gaubisch, 1584; VD16 M4738).

Catholic authors from the period: Jakob Feucht and Peter Canisius S.J. I have also included the postils of Johannes Nas O.F.M. due to their peculiar nature and their specific inclusion of discussion of witches.⁴³ After examining these developments, we can return to the works of Georg Scherer – the famous witch hunter discussed in the introduction – that were published just after the turn of the century.

Johannes Nas O.F.M. (d. 1591) is perhaps one of the most understudied converts of the Reformation. Coincidentally, what little work has been done on Nas has focused on his *Corpus Christi* sermons.⁴⁴ Nas was not destined for the Church; instead, he spent his youth as tailor. The son of Lutheran converts, Nas returned to the Catholic Church after reading Thomas Kempis's *De Imatatio Christi*. The young tailor was not content with simply becoming another Catholic apologist; instead, he entered the Franciscan order and began ascending the ranks, eventually becoming Rector of Ingolstadt and later the Bishop of Brixen. As a vehement supporter of Tridentine Catholicism, Nas took to the pulpits to disseminate his vision of "true" Christianity. To do so the former tailor put down his sheers and picked up his pen. Among his most popular works were his *Centuria*, which provided collections of one hundred sayings from Luther that were each followed with a satirical explanation of where the Wittenberger erred. Nas also authored less satirical

⁴³ The publication for these three authors is as follows: Johannes Nas Summer/Summer *de Sanctis* had three editions between 1571 and 1576; Winter/ Winter *de Sanctis* had two editions between 1572 and 1576; Jakob Feucht Winter-Summer-*de Sanctis* postil had five editions between 1576 and 1606; Peter Canisius *Summarien* had seven editions between 1570 and 1623, Postil Winter & Summer had two editions 1591 and 1595, *d-S* had two editions 1593 and 1595; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, Appendix 2.

⁴⁴ See Richard Ernest Walker, *The Corpus Christi Sermons of Johannes Nas (1534-1590): An Edition with Notes and Commentary*, (Göppngen: Kümmerle, 1988). Walker's main concern was for the literary quality of Nas' sermons. He does, however, provide basic biographical information that helps to piece together Nas' life.

works including a popular catechism. His postils combined both of these authorial skills. Instead of composing all new postils, the satirist priest reworked a previously published set of Lutheran postils by Anton Corvin. His postils had been first published in 1535 and included a preface from Luther praising the collection. Luther saw the value in Corvin's sermons, which unlike Luther's own could easily be read in their entirety to the masses from the pulpits.⁴⁵ Nas also saw the usefulness of Corvin's style but corrected the postils to include his famous satirical tone and orthodox Catholic teachings.

While Nas' regular sermons are of particular interest to those seeking to understand the differences between Catholic and Lutheran nominalists, those interested in his opinions on witchcraft will find little in the regular sermons. Nas did, however, include a special sermon in his postil for times of war, pestilence, famine, and strife that included some discussion of witchcraft. Stuart Clark has pointed out that Franciscan understandings of demonology and witchcraft were incredibly complex in their own time.⁴⁶

The scholastic tradition influenced Nas' understanding of witches' powers. As a nominalist Franciscan inspired by Thomas Kempis, his intellectual foundations were focused on primary cause (God). However, as a post-Tridentine Catholic bishop, Nas sought to uphold Church tradition. In doing so he was forced to concede that God

⁴⁵ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 78-79. I have not used Corvin's postils in this work as he did not discuss witchcraft. Instead, his postils had more anti-Jewish descriptions than later postil authors. Antonius Corvinius, *Kurtze vnd einfeltige Auslegung der Episteln vnd Euangelien / so auff die Sontage vnd furnemisten Feste durchs gantze jar / inn der Kirchen gelesen werden. Vor die arme Pfarherrn vnd Hausveter gestellt.* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhaw, 1539; VD16 C 5350), 51ff.

⁴⁶ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 452.

allowed the Devil and his followers to do harm.⁴⁷ As a result, this point was emphasized in Nas's sermon:

This is what we are supposed to realize in the first place, that these are sent by God as the prophet says: There is no evil which is not from God. Understand that the evil of hunger and grief, death and poverty, disaster and war, and when such things come, we should not turn to the evil witches of the Devil, the planets and the stars; We simply need to say that God has given; therefore, God has willed it to be. They can do nothing without the permission of God.⁴⁸

Nas' position was close to that of his Lutheran opponents on the subject. Because of tradition, however, Nas had to concede that Satan and his followers were capable of harming others. This passage was to be emphasized according to Nas' marginal notes.⁴⁹ It

⁴⁷ This is similar to late Medieval nominalists such as Gabriel Biel. Note that Biel's position on transubstantiation held that God could mandate that consubstantiation was true and necessary. However, since God ordained Church tradition, Biel conceded that transubstantiation was the true doctrine. See Oberman, *Harvest*, 275-276.

⁴⁸ Johannes Nas, *Postilla minorum, Das ist / Die klainer Postill vnd kürtzeste Außlegung der hailigen Euangelien / so auff die Suntäg vnd fürnembsten Fest / vom Aduent biß auf Ostern / Catholisch geprediget werden. Sambt etlichen besondern Aduentspredigen. Für die armen Priester vnd Haußvätter gestalt* (Ingolstadt: Anne Weissenhorn & Son, 1572; VD16 N 128 456), Henceforth Nas *P-W*. "Das sollen wir zwar erstlichen erkennen / das es von Gott uber uns geschickt sen / wie der Prophet Spricht: Es ist nicht böß in der Statt / das nicht von Gott ist / verstechet das böß der straff / hunger und kummer/ todt und not/ sterb und Pestilentz Thewrung und krieg / und was dann solche krüthen mehr seind / diß sollen wir nit den bösen zauberin/ nicht dem Teuffel / den Dieben / den Planeten oder Sternen zumessen / sunder schlecht sagen / Gott hat geben / so hat es Gott gefallen / dann dise / ohne zülassung und verbenckmuß Gottes / nichts vermügen."

⁴⁹ Nas place the letters N.B. indicating *nota bene*, in the margins

was important for the masses to know that all of their struggles were originally ordained by God, although they could be inflicted by other means.

When discussing what a person should do in difficult times, Nas preached that people should imitate Christ. The sermon quotes Luke 19:41 verbatim, saying that the peoples' enemies will surround and destroy them, but that they should nonetheless endure.⁵⁰ Such a position would seem almost identical to the Lutherans. This position, however, ignored an important distinction between the two's understanding of the solution to confronting struggle and evildoers.

Johannes Nas held that in order to overcome the difficult times, people had to turn to their actions. Through their own prayers, people could receive God's forgiveness and protection. Nas' sermon emphasized the role of the Father, with the term being used over twenty times in the short sermon. According to Nas, people could do nothing except turn to God when they were faced with trouble; however, they could pray for protection from God. As for those evildoers on Earth, Nas said nothing about what their punishment would be. Instead, he emphasized the need for people to endure these hardships and turn to the Church and God.⁵¹ His paternalist emphasis, however, makes an important point. The father of society (the secular ruler) had the power to punish those who had done wrong.

Nas' support of an at least quasi-providential understanding of witches' powers was common in Catholic circles at the time. Jakob Feucht (d. 1581) was amongst the most popular Catholic authors of his generation. While never reaching the status of

⁵⁰ Nas, *Strife Sermon*, in *P-W*, 456b.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 460b.

Nausea or Eck, nor as long lasting as his Jesuit counterparts, Feucht proved a capable opponent to Lutherans in the second generation of reform. His success was even more impressive when we consider he died at the age of forty.⁵² Feucht authored his postils while serving as the auxiliary bishop of Bamberg. While Midelfort noted that Feucht was a proponent of the providential understanding, his postils reveal a bit more complexity.⁵³ His smaller collection of thirty-nine sermons did explain the need for people to turn to God in the times of disasters and other troubles.⁵⁴ This volume, however, pales in comparison to Feucht's postils. Midelfort used the *Thirty Nine Catholic Sermons* to discuss how Feucht shared the Lutheran idea of providence, to an extent. Here we see a shortcoming of an otherwise excellent work. While Midelfort consulted Feucht's occasional sermons, which only had two printings, his postils were printed five separate times over the course of thirty years, and surely were used by generations of preachers in their pulpits. Midelfort's reading of Feucht's occasional sermons is correct. Most Feucht-authored sermons that people would have been exposed to, however, do not convey the same message. His 1577 *Invocavit* sermon provides a clearer insight:

The Devil makes the same pacts with witches or idolaters, the dark artists,
and the spell-casters, and these desperate people gather more. But all the
Devil has to offer them is worthless, he gives them chaffs of grain, the

⁵² Little is known about Feucht's early life. However, all sources estimate he was born around 1540. See Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 166; Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 304.

⁵³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 60.

⁵⁴ Jakob Feucht, *Neun und dreissig Cathlische Predigens*, 422-424 cited in Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 60 n.136.

sound of gold coins and for these temporal services, they receive their eternal damnation.⁵⁵

Feucht made four important distinctions that make his interpretation different from the Lutheran position. Like Nas, Feucht held that God had ordained the Devil who could therefore inflict harm. But these pacts were the Devil's doings. This is the same position taken in the *Malleus*, which cited Aquinas's discussion on the Devil's interference with the sacraments. Next he noted that those who accepted Satan's offers were given material benefits for their service. While the item received (eternal damnation) was beyond the world, there was no statement that said their material benefits were delusions. In fact, the passage implies that the people serving the Devil did in fact make a material gain. Thus, the people who embraced the profane and rejected the sacred would only be punished after they were executed. Feucht stated that these people not only existed in society, but that they were attempting to grow their numbers. Here we see the medieval fear of the witches' Sabbath. It was not just the singular witch that people had to fear amongst them; it was witches. The large trials were dependent on the idea that one witch could expose

⁵⁵ Jakob Feucht, *Postilla catholica euangeliorum de tempore totius anni. Das ist: Catholische Außlegung aller Sontäglichen Euangelien durch das gantze Jar. Darinnen vber jede Euangelien zwo Predigen begriffen. Deren allwegen die erste / das Euangelium in dreyen Stücken abgehandelt: In der andern aber / wirdt ein fürnemer Punct jeder Euangelien / je den Glauben / je das Leben betreffend / in zweyen Theilen außgeführt ... Der erste Theil begreiffet alle Euangelien vom Aduent biß auff das H. Pffingstfest.* (Cologne: Gerwinus Calenius und die Erben Johan Quentels, 1577; VD16 F 841), 323. Henceforth Feucht *P-W*. "Dergleichen Pact machet der teufel mit den hexen oder Unholden/ mit den Schwarzkuenstlern und Teufelsbeschwerern uns was dergleichen versuechte/ verfluechte und verzweifelt Leut mehr send. Alles aber was ihnen der Teufel verheisset/ ist nichts und erlogen/ gibt ihnen fur korn Spreuwer/ fuer das Gelt den Klang/ fur die zeitliche Dienst die Ewige Verdammuss."

another. There was a need in this understanding to find and punish all witches, not just the one presented before you.

Also important was Feucht's inclusion of the gendered term *Hexen* in his description of those who followed Satan. I have found no examples from Lutheran authors of the period that include this term. Additionally, the term is attached to *Unholden*.⁵⁶ Witches were not just folk creatures in Feucht's estimate: they were demonic and given some kind of power from the Devil. While Lutherans presented witches as a single group of evildoers serving the Devil (*Zauberern* and *Teufelsbanner*), these groups followed Satan but had no power. Feucht and his Catholic brethren noted that Satan's followers entered into an active agreement with him. The active pact, as Hoffmeister previously emphasized two decades earlier, was what made a witch a witch. The explicit pact was not the only Medieval stereotype that Feucht endorsed; he also mentioned that women were more likely to fall for the Devil's tricks.

The use of the term *Hexe* instead of *Zauberer* is significant. While sorcerers can be both male and female due to the plural status, grammatically *Hexe* could only be female. This was not a stylistic choice. It reflected Feucht's, and the clear majority of his Catholic contemporaries', understanding of the sexes. The Devil was a great trickster, and he knew that women had weaker wills. It was, after all, Eve who ultimately caused the fall of man and angered God.⁵⁷ The portions of the postils discussed here do not tell why intellectuals believed women had a weaker will and intellect than men. The absence of such topics leads to the assumption that this was believed to be a truth of the time.

⁵⁶ See discussion of terms in the introduction.

⁵⁷ Feucht, *Invocavit*, in *P-W*, 322-325.

Lyndal Roper has explored these differences, albeit using a different set of sources.⁵⁸ In Roper's estimates, the interpretation of the body played the deciding role in how contemporaries dealt with exorcism and witchcraft.⁵⁹ Amongst the Catholic authors Roper discussed, was the Dutch Jesuit Peter Canisius (d. 1597).

While in Augsburg, Canisius was involved in a series of exorcisms. The possessed individuals were all servants of the Fugger household, and Canisius's personal correspondence indicated he was hesitant to partake in the process. Canisius eventually relented and conducted the exorcisms. The Fuggers, for their part, used the episode to demonstrate their piety. For Canisius, however, the exorcisms were proof that the Catholic faith was superior to the Lutheran and Reformed confessions. Yet he remained hesitant to admit that demons had really possessed the Fugger servants. Roper states that, "Both Canisius's precise attitude to exorcism and his theory of demonic possession, are difficult to reconstruct."⁶⁰ However, Roper did not consult Canisius' postils, in fact she only looked at Canisius' personal correspondences. If she had, she would have found that Canisius's *Oculi* sermon does discuss exorcism and demonic possession.⁶¹ And in doing so, they revealed that he did believe the Devil assaulted physical bodies.

⁵⁸ Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*; Roper, *Witch Craze*.

⁵⁹ Roper, *Oedipus & the Devil*, 177.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶¹ Canisius titled his postils *Meditationes*. Despite the different name, Canisius followed the same lectionary and style of all other postils. As was the case with Luther, I have consulted both the original published version of Canisius's postils (that fit within the publication constraints of this chapter) and the critical edition of his works. I provide citation to both where needed.

Canisius explained the *Oculi* pericope through an exegesis on the origin of the demons, and that “the leader of all those demons is Lucifer, the highest of all Angels.”⁶² All demons came from, and served, Satan, and were the soldiers in his demonic army assaulting Christendom. To understand these demons, Canisius had to first explain the origins of their leader. God created the Devil then allowed him to interfere in the world and disturb human and natural occurrences. Thus, he was the preferred secondary cause. Here, unlike Nas and Feucht, the eventual saint took a vehemently Aristotelian approach to explaining the causes of struggle. Like Aquinas, Canisius emphasized that God had created the Devil and as a result had allowed him to wreak havoc in society. In his attempt to destroy all earthly creation, Satan would also employ others to assist him. Just as the Angelic Doctor had noted that the Devil could interfere with the sacraments, Canisius noted that the God made him powerful enough to cause humans physical harm.⁶³ If the Devil was powerful enough to interfere with a sacrament, then his ability to interfere with the human body was an easy position to formulate. The reservations that Roper noted in Canisius’s letter were based on a specific (political) situation. His more “generic” position on exorcism and demonology aligned with his fervent Counter-Reformation, Catholic identity. He noted that the Devil employed many others to assist him in reigning over the world.⁶⁴ Many historians have noted that exorcisms were a

⁶² Peter Canisius, *Meditationes de Dominicis*, in *S. Petri Canisii Doctoris Ecclesiae Meditationes seu Notae in evangelicas lectiones*, vol 2, ed. Fridericus Streicher S.J. (Bello Destructa: München, 1939), (VD16 E 4426), 222. Ac mundi quidem princeps omniumque daemonum caput (Apostolus et ,huius saeculi Deum’ appellat) est Lucifer supremae quidem hierarchiae superemus angelus.

⁶³ See discussion of Medieval developments in the Introduction above pages 27-29.

⁶⁴ Canisius, *Meditations*, ed Streicher, 224.

favorite method of proving the powers of the truth of the confessional faith.⁶⁵ But, the discussion of these events must be done by understanding what the masses were informed of, not what individuals thought in closed circles. Canisius may have been suspicious of the Fuggers; he may have thought going along with the exorcisms was a good way to convert more to Catholicism. All of these possibilities have one shortcoming: we cannot know Peter Canisius's private thoughts. While historians like Roper may wish to psychoanalyze historical figures, they can only do so through the lenses of modern psychology. Doing so, they ignore the worldview of the time – that is, a world in which all was Divinely-ordained, and no coincidences existed – and substitute it with one where the individual mind and random circumstance dominated. The people knew that the Devil was active in the world. Canisius's sermons were not supposed to reflect a concern with how to deal with disputes with a powerful family: they were meant for the people. Thus, the people were told that the Devil could, and would possess them and that only someone who was ordained in God's true (Catholic) Church, could cure them of their possession.

No postil discussed thus far has dealt with witchcraft in a way that would guarantee that the only solution was to execute them. Instead, these sermons emphasized the need for God, whether it be his word or mercy, to prevent the Devil and his evildoers from harming people. Such was not the case with Georg Scherer, whom we first met in the introduction of this work.

⁶⁵ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 118; Roper, *Witch Craze*, 186; Cf. H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). It appears that the use of exorcism as a means of reconverting society was a largely German phenomenon. Other areas seemed to have little interest in using exorcism to legitimize their authority. See Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland*, 58-60.

Scherer was not only a Jesuit who authored treatises on witchcraft, he was a self-proclaimed witch-hunter and the author of some of the most popular postils at the turn of the seventeenth century.⁶⁶ Within twenty years, over seven thousand copies of Scherer's postils were in circulation in Germany.⁶⁷ Scherer left no stone unturned in his sermons. He made sure to include lengthy biblical citations, both Old and New Testament, as well as extensive passages from the Church Fathers and Canon Law. At every possible opportunity, he made sure to explain the errors of the Lutheran faith. In doing so, he specifically noted the errors in both Luther's *House* and *Church Postil*. In true Jesuit fashion, Scherer attacked Luther's postils point by point, even quoting Luther's postils verbatim in sections before refuting their errors. Scherer's postils were not just about rejecting the Wittenberger; he was also concerned with pastoral duties in his sermons. Among these was dealing with the Devil's temptations and tricks.

Scherer mentions sorcery and witchcraft often in his postils. He offered five *Invocavit* sermons, the third of which dealt almost exclusively with those who served the Devil. In his assessments, all of the Devil's skills were from his ability to use magic (*Zauberkunst*).⁶⁸ The Devil's tricks were tempting. But while what he offered seemed to

⁶⁶ Canisius' postils had more printings overall. However, most of these printings came well after Scherer's postils (most after the seventeenth century when Canisius went through the beatification process) were out of circulation. Scherer's postils were printed more in seventeenth century, which coincided with large scale witch persecutions.

⁶⁷ Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils*, 395.

⁶⁸ Scherer, "Invocavit" in *Postilla / Das ist / Predig vnd außlegung Nach Catholischer Lehre der Sontäglichen Euangelien durch das gantze Jahr: Widerumb mit vielen neuwen Predigten gemehret / vnd sonst in viel weg Corrigert / gebessert / Vnd zum letztenmahl in Truck verfertiget*. (Cologne: Anton Hierat, 1614. VD17 547:630368W), 333a. Henceforth Scherer *P-W&S*. "auff einem Zauberkunst zuwegen gebracht / daß etliche hudertmal Tausent / ja etliche Million Teuffel in gestalt der Natur und Schlangen..."

be of minor consequence, once someone was in his service, they could never leave, one sin would lead to another: “Soon, Satan will lead your flesh to whoring and then to adultery, from adultery to incest, from incest to sodomy and bestiality and unspeakable sins, and finally to the point where you are fucking the Devil himself.”⁶⁹ Mosaic law had a direct influence on Scherer’s thoughts on the subject. After all, Exodus listed sorcery and bestiality next to one another (Exodus 22: 18-19). Fornication with animals was also an important aspect of Medieval discourse on witchcraft.⁷⁰ Scherer combined Old Testament crimes with signs of the Apocalypse from the New Testament. Those who wanted material comforts committed these unforgivable crimes regularly.

Later in the same sermon Scherer discussed the initial pact with the Devil. According to Scherer, the pact between witches and the Devil was inherent. Every mention of the pact included the phrase “with the Devil’s help” (*mit dem Teuffels huelff*), as though the priest should continuously remind the congregation that soothsayers, sorcerers, and witches were all using satanic magic to perform their tricks. It would appear that Scherer was particularly concerned with the practices of soothsaying and fortune telling. Nearly the entire sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent (*Judica*) was dedicated to telling people to avoid sorcery and divination. Included among these people were also those who summoned birds (*Vogelgescherey*).⁷¹ While many have looked at

⁶⁹ Scherer, *Third Invocavit Sermon*, in *P-W&S*, 349b. “Balddt darauff restzet dich der Sathan unnd dein Fleisch gar zu der huererey / von dannen zum Ehebruch / von Ehebruc zur Blutschandt / von der Blutschandt zum Sodomitischen unnd Bestialischen wesen unnd zu stummen Sünden / biß du dich etwa mit dem Teuffel selber vermischest.”

⁷⁰ Bestiality was accordingly a similar, if not at times the same crime, as sodomy. See Stokes, *Demons of Urban Reform*, 75-77.

⁷¹ Birds were associated with famine and crop destruction. The ability to summon swarms of birds had been long associated with witchcraft. See Adolf Franz, *Die*

these types of discussions as forms of folk or “popular” practices, Scherer linked them directly to the Devil. This was the same claim that Thomas Aquinas had made two and a half centuries earlier. More precisely, Scherer cited the same passage from Augustine when he declared that all forms of magic required a pact with the Devil.⁷² Scherer’s line between demonic and acceptable magic was clear: there was none. Those who used magic were to be avoided as we learn, that one’s soul “was stained and made unclean when they chose to follow sorceresses and soothsayers.”⁷³ Scherer was not content with simply warning the masses that all those who practiced divination were knowingly using the Devil’s powers. He also included discussions on the need to punish those who served Satan.

While we previously saw that Johannes Eck encouraged rulers to heed the example of Saul in the Old Testament and cast all sorcerers and necromancers from society, Scherer took his prescribed punishment from an older book of the Old Testament. Sorcerers, witches, soothsayers, and magicians were to all be put to death in accordance with Mosaic Law.⁷⁴ “Be aware, God does not hold that the sorcerers and witches, the soothsayers and wise women, are worthy of the soil they walk on,” Scherer

kirchlichen Benediktionen des mittel alters, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1909), 2:624.

⁷² Scherer, *Judica*, in *P-W&S*, 435a. Marginal citation to Augustine, *City of God*. Scherer also cited Augustin’s *Contra Faustum* in the Fifth *Invocavit* Sermon, 362b.

⁷³ Scherer, *Judica*, *P-W&S* 433a. “wann man den Zaubern unnd Wahrsagern nachlaufft / welche durch den bösen Geist den sie haben / alles wissen / und zuwegen bringen wöllen / gehet ihrer müßig / wil der herzsagen / entschlaget euch ihrer gantz und gar / habt ewer zuflucht allein zu mir und nicht zu den Teuffeln / Ich bin HERR ewer GOTT.”

⁷⁴ Scherer, *P-W&S*, 433a.

warned.⁷⁵ The Jesuit's message was clear: if people turned to soothsayers, they were partaking in the works of Satan. And by doing so they were inciting the wrath of God.

Catholic discourse was not as clear about witches and their powers until after the turn of the century and the publication of Scherer's postils. However, they were united in their agreement with Medieval causal theory. God may not have needed secondary causes, but he nonetheless used them as an expression of his ordained powers (*de potentia ordinata*). Particular to Catholic discourse was the expression of the need to punish those who used Satan's powers, as well as those who sought to benefit, or encourage, the use of such powers.

Conclusions

A survey of later sixteenth and early seventeenth century postils confirms many of the conclusions of previous scholars. Erik Midelfort was correct when he said that there was no united Catholic discourse until after 1600.⁷⁶ He, however, missed just how severe the discourse became after the turn of the century. Catholics were not only fixated on the reality of witches' powers, they also emphasized the need to punish them for their acts. Once more, while Scherer's sermons were published after the turn of the century, this does not mean they were not preached prior. In fact, Scherer had likely circulated his sermons for some time before they were collected and published. For Lutherans, the need to punish witches was not of concern for the ministry. Instead, the emphasis was on the

⁷⁵ Ibid., "Sihe/ Got helt die Zauberer und Zauberin / die Wahrsager unnd Wahrsagerin nit werth / daß sie der Erdboden tragen solt."

⁷⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 60.

need for individuals and their communities to change their actions and repent to their vengeful God in the lead up to the Final Days.

The specifics of sermon discourse also allow us a better understanding of why Catholics may have reacted more harshly than Lutherans. The descriptions of witches' qualities were more present in Catholic sermons than in those of their Lutheran counterparts. Catholics emphasized the explicit pact. Even if the authors held that witches were only working as secondary causes, as Nas and Feucht had, they had to concede that witches were diabolical individuals with real powers. The authority of Catholic tradition left these authors no choice. Lutherans took a more cautious approach. There was nothing in Lutheran sermons that would lead readers or listeners to believe that witches operated in groups. Instead, they were always a plurality with no connection other than their worship of Satan. There was no immediate risk of a witches sabbath in Lutheran discourse. Indeed, witches were described in similar manners to groups such as the Jews and Turks. For Catholics, they were lumped with heretical groups and other damnable types. Because of their demonic powers were real, the risk of cooperation and conspiracy was always present.

CONCLUSION

A TALE OF TWO COVENANTS

Discourse on witchcraft was in a continuous state of evolution from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century. By the time of the Reformation, concern for witches was secondary to concerns for heretical groups. This concern changed after 1560. Shifts in climate, the increased virulence and frequency of plague, and the persistence of confessional division shifted witchcraft discourse. After 1560 both Lutherans and Catholics began to formulate discourses that explained these changes to the laity. While discourse from 1520-1560 was not always linked to causality, after 1560 it was.

Early on, Lutheran authors had little concern for witchcraft. Instead, witches were only present as one of several groups associated with the Devil. Although postillators disagreed on the extent of their powers, they insisted that witches were never capable of harming those who were faithful to God's Word. The most prevalent discussion of witchcraft in Lutheran postils was in its relation to causality. According to Lutherans, God did not work through secondary causes such as witches. Instead, he intervened himself to punish people for their sinful ways. This did not mean that witches did not exist. In fact, Lutheran authors acknowledged the reality of witches and the need to punish them. Their punishment was, however, for violating the First Commandment and worshiping Satan, not harmful deeds. While discussion of witches increased in Lutheran postils between 1540 and 1590, it all but vanished afterwards, with minimal mentions and

no real discussion after the turn of the century. Oddly, this coincided with an increased number of witch trials for Lutherans.¹

If we expand our source base, this apparent paradox may be better explained. The fact that Lutheran territories faced greater confessional division in the seventeenth century than their Catholic opponents likely relates to this contradiction. While Catholics often grouped all Protestants into the same heretical group, this was not the case with Lutherans. Calvinists, Catholics, and even Anabaptists often remained in Lutheran cities and territories, creating multiconfessional states, and thus more confessional division. While Lutherans such as Simon Pauli attempted to confessionalize witchcraft discourse – that is to say, they portrayed witchcraft as a crime that only occurred in Catholic territories – this attempt failed.

For Catholics, witches were guilty of both idolatry and violating secular laws. Their discourse dated back further than that of Lutherans to at least 1530 with the publication of Johannes Eck's postils, and continued well into the seventeenth century with the circulation of postils such as Georg Scherer's. Although many Catholic authors emphasized that God did directly punish people for their sins, they maintained that he also ordained Satan to create followers; who could, therefore, use these abilities to wreak havoc on communities. This constant discussion and dissemination of ideas, as well as the more intense language used in Catholic sermons, helps us understand why Catholics in Germany executed more witches than their Lutheran opponents.

While the postils have their limits, they are an excellent source with which to examine subjects that have previously been considered exhausted. Whereas previous

¹ Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria*, 393.

studies have indicated that the ideas of the *Malleus Maleficarum* were absent in the early Reformation, as evidenced by the lack of reproduction of the work, the postils would indicate otherwise. While new copies of the *Malleus* were not circulating, sermons that supported its conclusions were, and these ideas were being read aloud to congregations. As apocalyptic anxieties grew in the clergy, they began to disseminate these concerns to their congregations, who shared the concern for the End of Days. Southwestern and southeastern Germany, the epicenters for large witch trials, were also home to the Catholic authors that had the longest staying power: Johannes Eck and Frederick Nausea, who between them had 11,250 postils in circulation by 1630. Both men maintained that witches could, and did, harm people. They also maintained that the Devil was becoming more prevalent in society and would be attempting to sway more people to his side in preparation for his final battle with Christ. Such sentiments intensified when authors such as Johannes Hoffmeister proclaimed that all who used magic were in an explicit pact with Satan.

While the postils reveal the complexity of how learned ideas of witchcraft were disseminated to the largely illiterate population, they do not provide scholars with the comprehensive explanations for which they have so often hoped. Further studies are needed to better understand if postils fall into a larger discourse, or if, like most other points made about witchcraft, they are limited to space, time, and culture. There will need to be specific studies of regions that consider legal mandates about preaching, which then compare what was said in postils printed in these regions during witch trials. Such a study would allow for close examination of territories, or even individual dioceses and cities.

Perhaps our best hope to answer broader questions would be a comparison with other geopolitical areas. Spain perhaps would be the most fruitful geographical region to compare to Germany. Like Germany, Spain maintained local customs that were dependent on religion.² Unlike Germany, Spain remained loyal to the Catholic Church. Despite its Catholic ties, Spain executed an insignificant number of witches.³ Simply being a Catholic country did not mean that the region was guaranteed to execute a large number of witches. If I were to guess, based on my findings in German postils, I would suspect that Spanish sermons would say little about witches, but would emphasize stereotypes of Jews and *moriscos*. This would demonstrate once again that the presence of other marginal groups was a response to apocalyptic anxieties more than some need for an “other” to punish.⁴

Similarly, this work has said little about gender. Women accounted for nearly eighty percent of those executed. The omission of gender as a topic of discussions is because the sections of the postils consulted said little about gender. This does not mean that the postils said nothing about gender. The opposite is true. Further studies will need

² See William Christian Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

³ Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 270-271; Levack, *Witch Hunts*, 113. Indications are that while Spain had one large series of accusation from the Basque territories, no large trials ever occurred. In total, the kingdom executed eleven people for the crime of witchcraft.

⁴ I speak of course of those who so willingly follow the conclusions of Michele Foucault. See Michele Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (French, 1973; New York: Random House, 1975) 3-4; R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecution Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 56. Cf. H.C. Erik Midelfort, *History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

to examine passages about motherhood, fatherhood, and marriage, all subjects that will likely shed light onto the nature of patriarchal society.⁵ If the goal is truly to understand why women were viewed in such a way that their weakness was perceived as a threat to both society and salvation, then we must explore these topics. Further studies of the postils can help us understand how these patriarchal ideas were disseminated.

Finally, the postils are not only useful in studying the distant past, they may also help us understand a progression in human society. Today we are confronted by the most dramatic climatic changes since the “Little Ice Age.” Once again religious understandings of the world have informed people’s reactions to these changes. Whether it be rejection of science as extrabiblical, concern for future generations, or rejoicing in apocalyptic prophesy, people’s religious worldviews have proven to be fundamental to how they approach the topic of climate change. This was no different in the early modern world, although their solutions appear strange to us, they are merely an enchanted form of our own solutions. Take, for example, a modern “solution” to climate change, such as purchasing a hybrid car, which was created using rare earth minerals mined by near slave labor. Why is this more rational than believing that a person had put a spell on the earth, thus causing a drought? Like the early modern responses to the Little Ice Age, modern responses are no more rational: they are simply more disenchanting. That is, we place our hope in modern science to solve a problem created by consumer capitalism, but in doing so the only proposed solution is to buy and consume more. Perhaps the only difference is

⁵ Much like this project, these studies will have an excellent body of literature dealing with catechisms to start with. See Robert J. Bast, *Honor Your Fathers*.

that while at least 40,000 unjustly died during the witch persecutions, the stakes will be a millionfold in the future.

When confronted with the age-old question of continuity and change, it is often the historian's instinct is to assume that the latter is responsible for dramatic outbreaks. This reaction is especially true when the subject is extremely foreign to our understanding of the world, as is the case with witchcraft. Yet, after examining the postils, it is alarmingly clear that witchcraft actually belongs in the category of continuity with the middle ages.⁶ While the witch trials themselves intensified only after a number of external factors imposed themselves (climate and confessional strife were chief amongst these factors), the learned interpretations of them were disseminated through a medieval discourse. Although they manifested themselves as Lutheran and Catholic on their surfaces, these categories were much older. The understandings of witchcraft in the Reformation were continuations of the debates between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*. It was in these perspectives that thought developed.

Religious ideas *sine qua non* in the sixteenth century, they were so important that there was a need to ensure they were presented to all members of society; hence the need for postils. Once the postils presented these understandings, they were disseminated for generations. The ideas within the postils outlived their original authors and their original contexts. In doing so, they were easily adapted to new contexts, and could be combined with other works to help their listeners understand how and why certain events were happening.

⁶ This discovery is by no means in and of itself original. See Robert Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief" in *Religion and culture in Germany (1400-1700)* ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 52-82.

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