

Book Review

Chaoluan Kao, *Reformation of Prayerbooks: The Humanist Transformation of Early Modern Piety in Germany and England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). Hardback. 232 pp. £76.77.

Traditional prayer books were manuals meant to guide the personal devotion of the Christian laity. These manuals existed during the medieval period, but in the early and post Reformation eras, Protestants transformed the medieval model of prayer books into a way to disseminate and reinforce their developing theology. Chaoluan Kao has provided an in-depth study of the shape of prayer book piety in the early modern period using prayer books both from England and Germany. This is a finely-written study that helpfully explores an often overlooked aspect of the Protestant Reformation, namely its reception among the laity. It is, of course, absolutely necessary to consider the Protestant movement, in all its divisions, through academic works on theology and biblical studies. Kao, however, argues that another crucial inroad into Protestant history is to examine works that were intended for lay use, which gives insight into how piety was shaped in the Protestant home. This book is an excellent combination of social and theological history that makes use of sources in multiple languages and has an obvious mastery of the secondary literature on the topic. It is a helpful guide to what prayer books were, how Protestant prayer books transformed traditional models of personal piety from the medieval period, and how these prayer books functioned in household use. The study does not address the significance of texts like the Book of Common Prayer because the focus is on prayer books intended for private use rather than on the liturgical texts of institutional churches.

Kao seeks to demonstrate ways that Renaissance, humanist culture played a significant role in the shaping of Protestant prayer books, which

in turn shaped Protestant piety. An obvious way that these prayer books reworked medieval prayer books was the removal of images from the manuals, which indicates one simple way that traditional models of dissemination, the prayer books themselves, were used to promote the growing Protestant movement. The first chapter surveys the primary texts cited in this book, and explores their prefaces and distinct features to show the diversity of Protestant prayer books. Chapter 2 looks at the sources used in composing the new prayer books, which included, in addition to Scripture, ancient, medieval, and contemporary material. Sometimes even classical philosophy was incorporated. These sources were transformed from their use in medieval prayer books to present a new approach to spirituality. Chapter 3 shows how Protestant prayer books contained written texts that were typically modeled on the pattern of the Lord's Prayer, which are instances of reading texts as prayers. Chapter 4 demonstrates that Protestant prayer books changed the focus on love from medieval prayer books to the necessity of faith in prayer, which was a central theological transformation. Chapter 5 argues that Protestant prayer books focused on glorifying God through engaging in worldly vocations with prayer as a foundational way to improve personal piety in these endeavors, which contrasted with the medieval focus on monasticism as the path of holiness. Chapter 6 explores prayer books intended specifically for use by women, and the implications of these feminine prayer books for our understanding of early modern society. The final chapter looks at how prayer books show that Protestants thought of reading itself as an act of piety and personal devotion and the spread of vernacular prayer books and the translation of other Protestant prayer books indicates the deep connection between literary and theological culture in the early modern period.

This book has many strengths. Kao cites sources from several languages, and so this is not a one-sided work, and it does not default to being a collation of book reports on English texts. There is deep social analysis here that gets into the concerns of lay Christians. As important as historical analysis is of properly academic theological works from the early modern period, an unbalanced consideration of those might give the impression that every Christian in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras was a scholar. Kao's work reminds us that there had to be a process of disseminating ideas from the theological academy to the masses, and one of the mechanisms used to inculcate the burgeoning Protestant theology was the prayer book. Further, so many studies that examine gender studies in historical work deficiently read historical texts simply in light of modern

issues. Kao's consideration of women and prayer books avoids that error and helpfully describes what prayer books entail for our understanding of women's role in Christian society during the early modern period and how that was changing.

On the other hand, however, this is not a perfect work. The alternation between footnotes and in-text citation is not only distracting, but confusing. This reviewer thinks that in-text references need to be scrapped altogether, and citations moved to footnotes. It would have streamlined the body of this text. Further, although this book offered a rich intersection between theological and social history, this reviewer is not sure Kao delivered the social analysis promised. She demonstrates how prayer books shifted from the medieval to the Reformation era, but the full details of what that meant for early modern society are not spelled out at length, save perhaps in the chapter about women's prayer books. Still, overall, this work will be a helpful guide to those who are interested in the personal devotion of early Protestants

—Harrison Perkins, *Queen's University Belfast*