

Lutheran Religious Life during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648)

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This article examines the impact of the Thirty Years War on Lutheran religious life. Drawing on evidence from Electoral Saxony, one of Germany's most important Protestant territories, it argues that faith played an important role in individual and communal resilience. It uses eyewitness accounts to explore the disruption of everyday religious life, strategies of spiritual survival and the post-war restoration of religious space and ritual. The article emphasises the importance of traditional beliefs and practices and argues that rather than being a crucible in which disinterest in faith was forged, war reinforced religion's role at the heart of pre-modern society.

'I have become [known as] a wonder in the mountains, because of my service, in one place for five and in the other for over fifty years, and because amidst so many plagues of war, disease and travail from evil people, I managed to live, pray, sing, and preach for twenty-four years without teeth.'¹

These words were written by Christian Lehmann, a Lutheran cleric and chronicler who witnessed first-hand the horrors of the Thirty Years War. Lehmann served as a village pastor in the Upper Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains), a remote mining region in southern Saxony, bordering Bohemia. There he lived and worked in the small communities of Elterlein and Scheibenberg for over fifty years from 1632, the year of the first major incursion of the war into this area, until his death in 1688. Lehmann not only served his parishioners assiduously (in his view) for decades without teeth; he also wrote very extensively about the history, natural history and wartime experiences of his community and of the wider

¹ Enoch Zobel: *die fünffache letzte vnd beste Glückseligkeit eines Gottseligen Priesters*, Anna-berg 1688, J4. The quotation is from Lehmann's own account of his life that he wrote for inclusion in his funeral sermon.

region. He meticulously maintained parish registers and financial accounts, sometimes, like other Lutheran pastors of the period, adding brief notes recording the impact of the war at a local level.² He corresponded with his fellow clergy, with church officials and with others throughout the Erzgebirge and beyond.³ Prompted in part, at least, by the war, he also wrote a six-volume poly-history of the Upper Erzgebirge that has been described as the beginning of the august German tradition of regional studies.⁴ Lehmann stated that this history was intended for his children, to show them 'in what harsh mountains and wretched times they had been raised', and his sons published one heavily edited volume after his death.⁵ Lehmann's writings, and the complex of sources surrounding them, enable us to analyse in unusual detail the experiences of a Lutheran pastor and his parishioners during and after the war.

Any study of the Thirty Years War must confront questions of scale and perspective. Alongside master narratives of politics, diplomacy and the waging of war scholars have produced numerous detailed investigations of the war's impact in particular territories, cities and rural regions.⁶

² On the keeping of parish records by Lutheran clergy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries see Stefan Dornheim, *Der Pfarrer als Arbeiter am Gedächtnis. Lutherische Erinnerungskultur in der Frühen Neuzeit zwischen Religion und sozialer Kohäsion*, Leipzig 2013, 136–54. For a detailed history and inventory of the Saxon sources see Franz Blanckmeister, 'Die Kirchenbücher im Königreich Sachsen, Leipzig', *Beiträge zur sächsischen Kirchengeschichte* xv (1900), 27–210, esp. p. 69 on the recording of wartime events.

³ Two collections of letters survive: Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, Nr. 5218, Protokoll, Scheibenberg, 1645–95, and Universitätsbibliothek der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen (UB Giessen), Hs 116: *allerhand Briefe von merkwürdigen Zufällen* / Christian Lehmann. An overview of the Annaberg letters is given in Stephan Schmidt-Brücken and Karsten Richter, *Der Erzgebirgschronist Christian Lehmann: Leben und Werk*, Marienberg 2011, 226–9. On the Giessen letters see Karl Helm-Gießen, 'Christian Lehmanns Episteln', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für sächsische Volkskunde* vii (1916/19), 73–87.

⁴ Stefan Dornheim, 'Das lutherische Pfarrhaus und die Anfänge heimat- und landeskundlicher Forschung in Sachsen (1550–1750)', *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte* lxxix (2008), 137–59 at p. 154. For a full discussion of Lehmann's writings see Lutz Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann (1611–1688) – der Chronist des Erzgebirges im 17. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Lyrik in seinen Werken*, Zwickau 1992, 52–103.

⁵ Christian Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz derer natürlichen Merckwürdigkeiten in dem Meißnischen Ober-Ertzgebirge*, Leipzig 1699, Vorrede, no page numbers. On family members as audiences for accounts of the war and as editors see Benigna von Krusenstjern, *Selbstzeugnisse der Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges: Beschreibendes Verzeichnis*, Berlin 1997, 25. On family relations in the Protestant parsonage see Luise Schorn-Schütte, *Evangelische Geistlichkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit: deren Anteil an der Entfaltung frühmoderner Staatlichkeit und Gesellschaft dargestellt am Beispiel des Fürstentums Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, der Landgrafschaft Hessen-Kassel und der Stadt Braunschweig*, Gütersloh 1996, 287–313.

⁶ For an overview see Peter Wilson, 'The Thirty Years War, 1618–1648: a quatercentenary perspective', *German History* xxxvii/2 (2019), 227–45, and Claire Gantet,

Historical writing on early modern war, like that on modern war, now encompasses analysis of civilian experience, of the emotional and psychological impact of conflict, and of post-war memory and commemoration.⁷ Since the 1990s the study of personal testimonies – self-narratives and eyewitness accounts – has formed a staple of early modern scholarship on the social and cultural history of war.⁸ For seventeenth-century Germany, Hans Medick has advocated an approach informed by microhistory. This places individual accounts of the conflict centre-stage, allowing us to understand the experience of living for decades ‘between everyday life and disaster’.⁹ Most recently, Sigrun Haude has combined eyewitness accounts, many of which were written by men and women of the Church, with institutional records to provide an analysis of the experience of war amongst the civilian population in Bavaria and Franconia.¹⁰ Her work highlights the constant threat of violence, the suffering inflicted by years of insecurity and instability and the prevalence of fear. Haude also, however, emphasises the creative responses of the civilian population to war-time disruption.

In adopting a local perspective this study builds on the work of Medick, Haude and others. Its focus is on the war ‘up close’, on lived experience, and it shares with Haude’s approach a particular desire to understand strategies of survival. How did individuals and groups navigate the vicissitudes of war, and rebuild their lives and communities in its aftermath? Religion had a key part to play here. In the world of politics and diplomacy religion fomented conflict, especially during the war’s opening decade. There were also moments of confessionally motivated violence, for example in the Valtellina in 1620.¹¹ As Peter Wilson notes, ‘advancement

‘Kein Religionskrieg: der Dreißigjährige Krieg, ein Konflikt mit europäischen Dimensionen’, *Historischer Zeitschrift* cccix (2019), 688–79.

⁷ For a recent overview see Thomas Brodie and Bridget Heal, ‘Introduction: houses of worship in times of war’, *German History* xlii/2 (2024), 150–60.

⁸ See, for example, Krusenstjern, *Selbstzeugnisse*, and Geoffrey Mortimer, *Eyewitness accounts of the Thirty Years War, 1618–48*, London 2002.

⁹ Benigna von Krusenstjern and Hans Medick (eds), *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe: der Dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe*, Göttingen 1999; Hans Medick, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg: Zeugnisse vom Leben mit Gewalt*, Göttingen 2018.

¹⁰ Sigrun Haude, *Coping with life during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648)*, Leiden 2021.

¹¹ Peter Wilson, ‘Dynasty, constitution and confession: the role of religion in the Thirty Years War’, *International History Review* xxx/3 (2008), 473–514 at p. 489; Andreas Wendland, ‘Gewalt in Glaubensdingen: der Veltliner Mord (1620)’, in Markus Meumann and Dirk Niefanger (eds), *Ein Schauplatz herber Angst. Wahrnehmung und Darstellung von Gewalt im 17. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1997, 223–39. For a grassroots approach see Hans Medick, ‘Orte und Praktiken religiöser Gewalt im Dreißigjährigen Krieg: Konfessionelle Unterschiede und ihre Wahrnehmung im Spiegel von Selbstzeugnissen’, in Kaspar von Greyerz and Kim Siebenhüner (eds), *Religion und Gewalt: Konflikte, Rituale, Deutungen (1500–1800)*, Göttingen 2006, 367–82.

of the faith' and the restoration of lost Christian unity remained important ideals, particularly for the period's more militant actors.¹² At a grassroots level, however, faith provided orientation and meaning, offering models and language for understanding and expressing suffering and grief.¹³ The fear that is so prevalent in personal testimonies was, Andreas Bähr argues, seen by contemporaries as a divine scourge that could be overcome only through proper religious belief.¹⁴ And institutional Churches prescribed a range of actions in the face of adversity, determined in part by confession. For Lutherans, these actions focused on individual and communal prayer and repentance, while pastors warned against 'superstitious' practices intended to bestow protection upon people and objects.

Lehmann provides a particularly valuable lens through which to examine Lutheran religious life during and after the war. He was a compulsive writer and record keeper, but his background and experiences were, in many other ways, unexceptional for his time. He was part of a Lutheran clerical dynasty: his father, Theodosius (1581–1642), served as pastor in the villages of Königswalde and Elterlein; his second son, Johann Christian (1642–1723), also went into the Church, rising to become superintendent in Annaberg then Freiberg; and all three of his surviving daughters married pastors.¹⁵ As pastor of Scheibenberg, Lehmann was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of his community and shared in their material circumstances. As a minister during wartime, he interceded for his parishioners

¹² Peter Wilson, 'The causes of the Thirty Years War, 1618–48', *EHR* cxxiii/502 (2008), 554–86 at p. 578.

¹³ Erika Kuijpers, 'War and violence', in Susan Broomhall (ed.), *Early modern emotions: an introduction*, London 2017, 202–5 at p. 203. See, for example, Matthias Asche and Anton Schindling (eds), *Das Strafgericht Gottes: Kriegserfahrungen und Religion im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation im Zeitalter des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*, Münster 2001, and Sigrun Haude, 'Life, death, and religion during the Thirty Years War', in Robert Bast and Andrew Gow (eds), *Continuity and change: the harvest of late medieval and reformation history*, Leiden 2000, 417–30, and 'Religion während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges (1618–1648)', in Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Roland Liebenberg (eds), *Frömmigkeit – Theologie – Frömmigkeitstheologie: contributions to European Church History: Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag*, Leiden–Boston 2005, 537–53. On religion and resilience see Benedikt Brunner, 'Dying in communities: the ideal death between individual and communal requirements in early modern Protestantism', in Benedikt Brunner and Martin Christ (eds), *The moment of death in early modern Europe, c.1450–1800: contested ideals, controversial spaces, and suspicious objects*, Leiden 2024, 142–61 at p. 151.

¹⁴ Andreas Bähr, 'Remembering fear: the fear of violence and the violence of fear in seventeenth-century war memories', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller and Jasper van der Steen (eds), *Memory before modernity: practices of memory in early modern Europe*, Leiden 2013, 269–82 at p. 280. See also Andreas Bähr, *Furcht und Furchlosigkeit: Göttliche Gewalt und Selbstkonstitution im 17. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2013, 340–81. ¹⁵ On Lehmann's family see Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 16–17, 104–11.

before military commanders, tended to them during outbreaks of disease and accompanied them through periods of exile. He provides eyewitness testimony to his congregants' suffering, and he was also their historian. Like other Lutheran pastors, he was an expert in memory and commemoration.¹⁶ By foregrounding a figure such as Lehmann we can escape from traditional distinctions between elite and popular religion, and from concerns about centre and periphery.¹⁷ Lehmann was a representative of the Saxon territorial Church, and correspondence and visitation records testify to his role in maintaining orthodox belief and practice and in enforcing morality. He was also, however, deeply embedded in lived and local religion. He experienced alongside his parishioners the prolonged wartime disruption of regular religious practice. His writings testify to the ways in which faith helped Lutherans to understand the war and to the determination with which they overcame the dislocation of religious experience that violence and exile engendered. And his post-war experiences enable us to consider the long-term impact of the conflict on communal religious life.

The disruption of everyday religious life

Historians have cautioned against accepting uncritically the myth of the war's 'all-destructive fury', which derives from reading subjective eyewitness reports and literary sources such as Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* as well as from later interpretations, chiefly those written during the nineteenth century.¹⁸ In terms of demographics, it was without doubt a devastating conflict: estimates of total deaths range from five to eight million, meaning that at least 20 per cent of the Empire's pre-war population was lost.¹⁹ But the war's impact varied significantly from place to place and over time. Electoral Saxony, Lehmann's homeland, provides a case in point. Saxony was spared the worst predations of the opening decade of the war because it maintained its traditional loyalty to the Holy Roman Emperor. It suffered extensively only after 1631, when its elector declared

¹⁶ Dornheim, *Der Pfarrer als Arbeiter am Gedächtnis*.

¹⁷ Andreea Badea, Bruno Boute and Birgit Emich, 'Introduction', in Andreea Badea, Bruno Boute and Birgit Emich (eds), *Pathways through early modern Christianities*, Cologne 2023, 7–32.

¹⁸ Peter Wilson, *Europe's tragedy: a history of the Thirty Years War*, London 2009, 779–86. See also Peter Wilson, 'Atrocities in the Thirty Years War', in Micheál Ó Siochru and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Ireland: 1641: contexts and reactions*, Manchester 2013, 153–75, esp. pp. 153–4.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Europe's tragedy*, 787. On the difficulties of assessing population loss see also John Theibault, 'The demography of the Thirty Years War re-revisited: Günther Franz and his critics', *German History* xv/1 (1997), 1–21.

his reluctant and temporary support for the Protestant Swedish king Gustav Adolph.²⁰ The territory became a thoroughfare during the later stages of the war: transit marches by both imperial and Swedish troops brought billeting, demands for contributions, plundering and disease.²¹ Saxony's pre-war population of around 1,500,000 had been reduced by approximately a third by 1645 and did not fully recover until well into the eighteenth century.²² In some areas the devastation was even greater. Chemnitz, for example, which changed hands repeatedly during the war, suffered a population loss of around two-thirds as well as very extensive material damage.²³

The Thirty Years War was not a 'national trauma'; it was not an ordeal experienced collectively by the German people.²⁴ But we cannot doubt the extent of the disruption and hardship endured by individuals and communities in areas such as Saxony that became theatres of war. Lehmann's life story, which can be reconstructed from the autobiography included in his funeral sermon and from his correspondence, testifies to the ways in which an inhabitant of this region experienced the conflict, and to the disruption of religious life that it engendered.²⁵ As a student in Halle from 1625 to 1628, Lehmann supported himself as a chorister and, according to his own later report, sang 3,000 plague victims to their graves (surely an exaggeration). To escape the disease, he fled north to Guben in Lower Lusatia, moving on again when Swedish troops occupied the city in 1631 and destroyed its school. In 1632, after a period spent studying and working

²⁰ The Saxon experience was particular here: for most of the war, its Lutheran elector resisted calls for confessional solidarity, fighting alongside the Catholic Habsburg emperor. For the region's inhabitants, religious and political loyalties aligned for only a relatively brief period between 1631, when Johann Georg I agreed to an alliance with Sweden, and the Peace of Prague in 1635.

²¹ Axel Gotthard, 'Johann Georg I. 1611–1656', in Frank-Lothar Krell (ed.), *Die Herrscher Sachsens: Markgrafen, Kurfürsten, Könige, 1089–1918*, Munich 2004, 137–47 at pp. 144–5.

²² Alexander Schunka, *Gäste, die bleiben: Zuwanderer in Kursachsen und der Oberlausitz im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg 2006, 154.

²³ Uwe Fiedler (ed.), *Der Kelch der bittersten Leiden: Chemnitz im Zeitalter von Wallenstein und Gryphius*, Chemnitz 2008, 6. By 1647 only 270 of the 960 pre-war houses in the town centre were still habitable. See Irene Crusius, *Atlas Crusius – Bürgermeister in schwerer Zeit: die Stadt Chemnitz nach dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, Chemnitz 2004, 25. On Chemnitz's experiences see also Helmut Bräuer, *Chemnitz zwischen 1450 und 1650: Menschen in ihren Kontexten*, Chemnitz 2005, 314–20.

²⁴ Stephan Sander-Faes, 'The Thirty Years War and German memory: from "Historikerstreit 2.0" to a "new Germany"', *German History*, 6 December 2025 at <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghaf037>>.

²⁵ For other examples see Thomas Kaufmann, *Dreißigjähriger Krieg und Westfälischer Friede: Kirchengeschichtliche Studien zur lutherischen Konfessionskultur*, Tübingen 1998, 102–12.

as a tutor in and around Stettin, Lehmann returned to his native Erzgebirge. Inspired, according to his own later account, by a dream, he arrived back in his father's parish of Elterlein in the wake of the 1632 invasion of the region led by the brutal imperial general Henrik Holck.²⁶

Lehmann's 800-page *Kriegschronik* (War Chronicle), which he started writing during the late 1650s as part of his six-volume poly-history, provides a vivid account of events in Elterlein in December of 1632.²⁷ Holck's 'Croats' (light cavalry) arrived at the village and skirmished with the Swedes billeted there. The Swedes were forced to flee; twenty-six villagers were killed, and a further twenty-five were 'wounded almost to death'. Lehmann's father, Theodosius, was so badly injured that he could not fulfil his pastoral duties for four weeks. His assistant was captured and killed in the churchyard while attempting to flee with the parish records, his head split open with a sword.²⁸ In Elterlein, as elsewhere, memories of this wartime violence lasted for centuries: an account of Lehmann's life written in 1885 records that there was a patch of ground outside the parsonage that was said to turn red when it rained. The congregation still knew, apparently, that 'here long ago a pastor was struck dead'.²⁹

The first ten years of Lehmann's ministry in Scheibenberg were also marked by violence and disruption. Looking back on the period of the war from 1673, during a visitation led by representatives of the Saxon elector Johann Georg II, Lehmann wrote that he had 'stood beside his parishioners

²⁶ Lutz Mahnke, 'Christian Lehmann (1611–1688) der bedeutenste Chronist des Erzgebirges', *Sächsische Heimatblätter: Zeitschrift für sächsische Geschichte, Denkmalpflege, Natur und Umwelt* xxxviii/16 (1992), 363–71 at p. 366. On Saxony during the Thirty Years War see, for example, Andreas Rutz, Joachim Schneider and Marius Winzeler (eds), *Kurfürst Johann Georg I. und der Dreißigjährige Krieg in Sachsen*, Dresden 2024. On the educational expectations of Lutheran clergy during the seventeenth century see Luise Schorn-Schütte, 'Priest, preacher, pastor: research on the clerical office in early modern Europe', *Central European History* xxxiii/1 (2000), 1–39 at p. 20.

²⁷ The manuscript is in the SLUB Dresden, Msc. Dresd. H 1 d. Lehmann, *Kriegschronik*. Parts are published in Christian Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 4th edn, ed. Hendrik Heidler, Scheibenberg 2013. For a full description of the manuscript see Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 66–77. On the dating of part II, which recounts the war in the Erzgebirge, see Johannes Poeschel, 'Über Mag. Christian Lehmanns Kriegschronik und einige wieder aufgefundene Manuskripte', *Jahresbericht der Fürsten- und Landesschule Grimme* (1888–9), 1–48 at p. 15.

²⁸ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 60. See also Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 18. On the so-called 'Croats' see Peter H. Wilson, Katerina Tkacova and Thomas Pert, 'Mapping premodern small war: the case of the Thirty Years War (1618–48)', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* xxxiv/6 (2023), 1043–71 at p. 1053. On parish records during the war see Bridget Heal, 'Lutheran churches during the Thirty Years War', *German History* xlii/2 (2024), 175–6.

²⁹ Johannes Poeschel, *Eine erzgebirgische Gelehrten Familie: Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1883, 14.

like a wall' through thirty-two transit marches, twenty billets of soldiers and countless raids.³⁰ In such circumstances, pastors sometimes played important roles in interceding on behalf of villagers or in leading them to safety. Lehmann wrote that he himself had 'ventured before generals and colonels to pray for his parishioners'.³¹ He and his fellow villagers were frequently forced into temporary exile and hid, sometimes for several weeks at a time, from marauding troops in the densely wooded hills of the Upper Erzgebirge. This was a common response throughout rural Germany.³² In the Erzgebirge the villagers' suffering was extreme. Lehmann reported in his *Kriegschronik* that in 1640, for example, Swedish troops 'dealt barbarically with the people ..., raped wives and maidens' and ruined houses and farms. In their search for booty, they tortured peasants with the breaking wheel, with hanging and with the so-called 'Swedish drink'. Eventually they conducted what Lehmann described as 'a fearful people hunt on both horse and foot' through the woods.³³

It is hard to be sure whether clergymen such as Lehmann were singled out as targets during such military raids, but it does seem likely. Attacks on clergy were sometimes religiously motivated, but in this confessionally complex war pastors and priests suffered as much because they were prominent members of their communities as because they were men of God.³⁴ Certainly most of Lehmann's troubles were inflicted by nominally Lutheran troops. He and his schoolmaster were captured and robbed as they attempted to flee from Königsmarck's troops on 6 March 1640. Later that same month he was captured again, this time with his wife Euphrosyna, his maid and his two sick children. On that occasion the Swedish soldiers left them with nothing but their lives and tried to strip the women of their clothing. Lehmann was able to pay for military protection and the family reached the relative safety of the nearby town of Annaberg, but fear and flight continued to shape their lives.³⁵ Their third child, Theodosius, was born on 30 November 1640 in exile, and Euphrosyna had to hide with the

³⁰ From the *Apologia* presented during the 1673 church visitation, quoted in Schmidt-Brücken and Richter, *Der Erzgebirgschronist Christian Lehmann*, 140. On the 1673 visitation see Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 37–51.

³¹ Schmidt-Brücken and Richter, *Der Erzgebirgschronist*, 140. See also Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 178, on the events of October 1647, when Lehmann interceded before the commander of the imperial army. In a letter from 1669 Lehmann wrote that he had interceded with the enemy three times on behalf of his village: Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 7827, Substitution Christian Lehmann (vol. i) 1669 [IX, 20, 24, Scheibenberg], no. 3.

³² See, for example, Haude, 'Life, death, and religion', 424.

³³ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 118–20; Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 31.

³⁴ Kaufmann, *Der Dreißigjähriger Krieg*, 105–6. See also Nikolas Funke, 'Religion and the military in the Holy Roman Empire c.1500–1650', unpubl. PhD diss. Sussex 2011, 127–8.

³⁵ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 115, 120; on 1640 see Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 31.

newborn baby and their two young daughters in a hollow oak tree for several weeks. In December 1642 Euphrosyna gave birth to their fourth child, Johann Christian.³⁶ According to Johann Christian's biographer, Euphrosyna fell ill and as news of an imminent attack reached Scheibenberg she was unable to flee or to attend church to pray but had to wait in her home 'with trembling and fear'. On this occasion she was protected by a guard sent by her brother-in-law, Heinrich Buschen, a lieutenant in the Swedish army.³⁷ Troop behaviour was, however, incalculable: for most of this dangerous period, family ties to an officer failed to offer any protection from Swedish abuses.

Even if ministers remained unmolested, their ability to provide for the day-to-day religious needs of their parishioners was compromised by the war. The sacraments and rituals of the Church, which were crucial to communal religious life, were interrupted by military skirmishes, raids and foraging expeditions. Lehmann's war chronicle records that in 1632, when Holck arrived in the region, in one village near Chemnitz no service was held for eighteen weeks.³⁸ Scheibenberg's meticulously maintained parish records also testify to the disruption of religious ritual. The accounts for 1640 state, for example, that on a number of Sundays, including five of the six in Lent, the divine office could not be held because of the uncertainty caused by Swedish troops passing through the village 'day and night'.³⁹ In Saxony and beyond, laments about the absence of bell ringing, of church services and of preaching echo through the sources, confirming the importance of ritual to Germany's Lutherans.⁴⁰ The chronicle written by Volkmar Happe, councillor at the small court of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen in nearby Thuringia, provides a lay perspective on the emotional impact of the disruption of Lutheran religious life:

we had a very sad Pentecost. No green branches were put out in the church, but instead it was filled with household goods, stored there by the poor people because of the soldiers. In some villages, the pastors had disappeared entirely, and the churches had been broken into by soldiers and plundered. There was no preaching in

³⁶ On Lehmann's children see Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 105–7.

³⁷ Theophilus Grabner, *D. Christian Lehmanns / Weyl. Past. Pr. und Superintendentis in Freyberg, Göttliche Führungen*, Dresden 1725, 2–3. On pastors' wives and fear and physical violence during war see Johannes Wahl, *Lebensplanung und Alltagserfahrung. Württembergische Pfarrfamilien im 17. Jahrhundert*, Mainz 2000, 177–8.

³⁸ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 50.

³⁹ 'Einnahmen so deß Sontags in der Kirchen gesamelt worden', Pfarrarchiv Scheibenberg, Kirchenrechnungen 1639/1640, no page numbers.

⁴⁰ On Saxony see, for example, P. Uhle (ed.), 'Angustiae Chemnicenses. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen eines Chemnitzers aus dem 30jährigen Kriege', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Chemnitzer Geschichte* xx (1917–18), 4–64 at p. 45.

them, and many villages stood entirely empty ... Many had to observe Pentecost in the wilderness with sorrow, tears, hunger, distress, and great suffering.⁴¹

As Happe's account suggests, churches were attractive targets for soldiers. They offered convenient stabling places for horses and firewood for fuel. Even if Lutheran churches were not, like their Catholic counterparts, furnished with valuable images and relics, they provided rich pickings for looting because villagers often stored their chattels and their seed grain in them for safekeeping. Amid the turmoil, it is hard to determine whether soldiers' attacks on sacred spaces and their furnishings were driven by 'confessional malice' or were opportunistic and simply part of the 'raw fury of war'.⁴² It is clear, however, that supposedly Lutheran soldiers in Swedish service did not spare Lutheran churches. Lehmann reported that in 1640 Swedish troops 'broke into every sacristy, mutilated the altars, tore down the organs, [and] stole the vestments, altar cloths and chalices'.⁴³ For Protestant observers such behaviour cast the Swedes' purported divine mission in Germany into doubt. Arnold Mengerling, Lutheran superintendent in Halle, lamented, for example, that it was the Swedes – the very people who wanted to be famed as defenders of Lutheranism – who were 'the worst attackers and breakers of churches, robbers and plunderers'.⁴⁴

Strategies of spiritual survival

What part did religion play in daily life during these difficult times? For individuals, religion provided consolation and a means of making sense of

⁴¹ Volkmar Happe, 'Chronicon Thuringiae', ed. Hans Medick, Norbert Winnige and Andreas Bähr, in *Mitteldeutsche Selbstzeugnisse der Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*, at <<http://mdsz.thulb.uni-jena.de/sz/index.php>>, i, fo. 76v (1626), accessed 21 August 2025. For an example from Lower Saxony see Haude, 'Life, death, and religion', 424. On the impact of the lack of pastors in rural Nassau see F. Heymach (ed.), 'Aufzeichnungen des Pfarrers Plebanus von Miehlen aus den Jahren 1636/37', *Annalen des Vereins für Nassauische Altertumskunde und Geschichtsforschung* xxxviii (1908), 255–85 at p. 275.

⁴² Funke, 'Religion and the military', 128; Jeffrey Chipps Smith, 'The fate of Jesuit art and architecture in Germany during the Thirty Years War', in Tryntje Helfferich and Howard Louthan (eds), *Beyond the battlefield: reconsidering warfare in early modern Europe*, London 2024, 85–108 at p. 104. On the destruction of the religious landscape in France see Andrew Spicer, '(Re)building the sacred landscape: Orléans, 1560–1610', *French History* xxi/3 (2007), 247–68. On England see Clive Holmes, *Why was Charles I executed?*, London 2006, 64; and on Ireland, John Morrill, 'Civil wars and interregnum', in John Morrill and Liam Temple (eds), *The Oxford history of British and Irish Catholicism*, II: *Uncertainty and change, 1641–1745*, Oxford 2023, 10–34 at p. 16.

⁴³ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 117.

⁴⁴ Arnold Mengerling, *Perversa Ultimi Seculi Militia, Oder Kriegs-Belial, Der Soldaten Teufel*, Altenburg 1638, 169. For a colourful example of Swedish troops plundering the church and possessions of a Protestant pastor see Haude, *Coping with life*, 166–7.

suffering. In Lutheran sermons and in theological and devotional texts war was described as divine punishment for human sin, and this interpretation was widespread even below the level of the clerical elite.⁴⁵ Hans Heberle, Ulm's famous Lutheran cobbler-chronicler, wrote succinctly at the end of his account that 'where there is war, there is God's punishment and wrath'.⁴⁶ Moreover, the writings of both clergy and laypeople are saturated with invocations of divine providence. Lehmann wrote, for example, that he had suffered from hunger during his youth, 'because everything was devastated and laid waste by war and plague' but remarked that he had none the less 'experienced God's holy care many times'.⁴⁷ It was the desire to bear witness to this providential intervention that motivated many of the observers – both Protestant and Catholic – who took up their pens to record their wartime experiences. Volkmar Happe, for example, wrote at the start of his account that:

During the dangerous and wicked war, I experienced perils and difficulties, but my merciful God protected me always in every danger, preserved me with his strong arm and rescued me from every necessity ... The records in this book will show what misfortunes I endured.⁴⁸

Lutherans trusted in God's omnipotence, in his determination to warn and punish sin, but also to reward true repentance, both individual and communal. Lehmann wrote that 'I believe that the general theme of all mankind is the sacred care of God: Your providence father, governs all! And through prayer, the threat of evil can be averted'.⁴⁹

Prayer must, of course, be heartfelt and could not, according to theological understandings, in itself persuade God to show mercy.⁵⁰ But prayer could initiate true repentance and transform Christians' hearts to such an extent that further disaster might be averted.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, therefore,

⁴⁵ Anton Schindling, 'Das Strafgericht Gottes: Kriegserfahrungen und Religion im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation im Zeitalter des Dreißigjährigen Krieges: Erfahrungsgeschichte und Konfessionalisierung', in Asche and Schindling, *Das Strafgericht Gottes*, 11–51 at p. 24.

⁴⁶ Gerd Zillhardt (ed.), *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg in zeitgenössischer Darstellung: Hans Heberles 'Zeytregister' (1618–1672): ein Beitrag zu Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsverständnis der Unterschichten*, Stuttgart 1975, 237.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Schmidt-Brücken and Richter, *Der Erzgebirgschronist*, 9, from an undated letter: Universitätsbibliothek Giessen, Hs 116, allerhand Briefe von merkwürdigen Zufällen / Christian Lehmann, fo. 39r–v.

⁴⁸ Happe, 'Chronicon Thuringiae', 1, 10r.

⁴⁹ Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz*, 747.

⁵⁰ Alexandra Walsham, 'The reformation and "the disenchantment of the world" reassessed', *HJl* (2008), 497–528 at p. 514.

⁵¹ Thomas Marks, 'Sighs of war and peace: feeling prayer through song in Lutheran Germany during the Thirty Years War', in Helfferich and Louthan, *Beyond the battlefield*, 65–84.

calls for prayer and repentance abounded throughout Germany, alongside injunctions for moral reform. Days of repentance and special prayer services became regular elements of Lutheran religious life during and after the war.⁵² Some parishioners took part willingly, presumably finding consolation in their pastors' interpretations of suffering.⁵³ Elsewhere, however, clergymen complained bitterly about parishioners' reluctance to blame themselves and their sins for the war. Attendance at prayer hours (as at most weekday services) was patchy at best and secular authorities often reported general indifference in response to their calls for moral reform.⁵⁴ In 1626, for example, Johann Crebs, Lutheran superintendent in Annaberg, lamented that 'It is true that everyone knows what fearful and dangerous times God lets us live in, in accordance with his just will; but only a few people take this to heart, and no-one reflects properly on such signs of God's wrath; they live rather in constant impenitence and complacency.'⁵⁵

The everyday importance of religion for many perhaps lay less in theological explanations of the war as divine punishment, and more in the maintenance of the regular sacraments and communal rituals of the church.⁵⁶ Baptism was especially key in a period of high infant mortality. An entry in the Scheibenberg baptism book from May 1641 records that in order to baptise a child, Lehmann returned from hiding in the forest to his village church: 'The danger from the war was so great that I had to have myself accompanied from the forest by a [military] convoy at my own cost; there was neither ink, paper nor quill [to record the baptism]; the child died soon.'⁵⁷ If access to a church was impossible, baptisms and other rituals took place outdoors: Lehmann wrote of a spring 'from which children were baptised in times of war'.⁵⁸ Stories of preaching in forests are also common. Lehmann reported that in 1640, when he and his parishioners had fled into Scheibenberg's forest, he preached at the

⁵² See, for example, Carsten Kohlmann, "Von unsern widersachen den bapisten vil erlitten und ussgestanden": Kriegs- und Krisenerfahrung von lutherischen Pfarrern und Gläubigen im Amt Hornberg des Herzogtums Württemberg während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges und nach dem Westfälischen Frieden', in Asche and Schindling, *Das Strafgericht Gottes*, 123–211 at pp. 184–8.

⁵³ On the day of prayer and repentance held in Sondershausen on 29 May 1640 see, for example, Happe, 'Chronicon Thuringiae', i, fo. 316r–v.

⁵⁴ Haude, 'Religion während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges', 543–5. See also Holger Berg, *Military occupation under the eyes of the Lord: studies in Erfurt during the Thirty Years War*, Göttingen 2010, 211–16.

⁵⁵ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 76, Buß-, Bet- und Fastenzeiten, 1625–1725, fo. 1r.

⁵⁶ On the 'resilience enhancing power of community' see Brunner, 'Dying in communities', 152.

⁵⁷ Pfarrarchiv Scheibenberg, Taufanseiger für Scheibenberg mit Oberscheibe von 1630–1696, 1641, 299.

⁵⁸ Lehmann, *Historischer Schaulplatz*, 253.

forge.⁵⁹ Marriages too were performed in exile. In a nearby village a spring became known as the Traubrunnen (marriage spring), because ‘there couples were married during the war’.⁶⁰ Similar stories of improvised liturgy can be found from all areas affected by the war. In Mecklenburg, for example, the pastor of Serrahn moved in 1637 to an island in a nearby lake and held services there in an attempt to escape the disruption, and in Nassau Johannes Plebanus wrote of the difficulty of meeting his sick and wounded parishioners’ desire for communion when wine and bread were not available.⁶¹

When writing about such harrowing periods of exile, Lutherans often invoked Scripture. Old Testament stories of banishment and flight helped diarists and chroniclers to make sense of their wartime experiences. Happe, for example, wrote that during one Swedish attack in 1636, when he was forced to flee with his lord, the duke of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, he was protected by God so that he and his wife and seven children were able to escape unharmed. They went on foot from Ebeleben to Keula ‘in the night with great sorrow, just like David went across the Brook Kidron’ (2 Samuel xv.23, which tells the story of David escaping Jerusalem with his household as Absalom attempted to usurp his father).⁶² Lehmann also compared his own periods of exile to those of the Hebrew people. God offered protection to ‘us poor people’ as he had to David during his flight from Saul (recounted in 1 Sam.), and shelter, as he had to the Jewish priest Mattatheus and his followers in the time of Antiochus iv (1 Maccabees ii.29, 30). This was, Lehmann argued, one of the reasons why God had created the wilderness: ‘to provide retreat, protection and shelter to poor persecuted [people] and to those in flight in times of war, plague and other danger’.⁶³

During times of high mortality, the rites surrounding death and burial were particularly key. The ideal of a good Lutheran death, with proper spiritual preparation, the presence of a pastor to hear confession, grant absolution and administer communion, a gentle and blessed departure and an honourable burial confronted the reality of violent death at the hands of soldiers, and of mass death in times of famine and plague as well as in battle.⁶⁴ A funeral sermon delivered by Lehmann’s father, Theodosius,

⁵⁹ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 7827 Substitution Christian Lehmann (vol. i) 1669 [IX, 20, 24, Scheibenberg], no. 3. See also Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz*, 101.

⁶⁰ Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz*, 253.

⁶¹ Kaufmann, *Dreißigjähriger Krieg*, 110; Heymach, ‘Aufzeichnungen des Pfarrers Plebanus’, 259.

⁶² Happe, ‘Chronicon Thuringiae’, I, 13r–v.

⁶³ Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz*, 4.

⁶⁴ Benigna von Krusenstjern, ‘Seliges Sterben und böser Tod: Tod und Sterben in der Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges’, in Krusenstjern and Medick, *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe*, 469–96. On soldiers’ deaths see Nikolas Funke, *Faith in war: religion and the military in Germany, 1500–1650*, New York 2024, 164–91. On burial during plague see Haude, *Coping with life*, 112.

for two sisters who died during the 1632 imperial attack on Elterlein, attempted to bridge this gap between gap between ideal and reality. The sermon, preached in January 1633, marked Theodosius' return to the pulpit after four weeks spent recovering from his own wounds. He spoke movingly of the deaths and injuries inflicted on his parishioners, and of the almost incurable wounded hearts of the bereaved.⁶⁵ Of the two sisters commemorated, one (Euphrosyna) had died a natural death from illness, the other (Anna) a violent death. As Holck's troops sacked the village, Anna was separated from her husband. Heavily pregnant, she was robbed and stripped of her clothing. Freezing and in labour, she lay in the open, and died along with her child, 'partly from terror and fear and partly from the growing cold'.⁶⁶

The sisters' funeral sermon offered consolation to the bereaved, above all through its insistence that Anna's violent death could not damage her soul.⁶⁷ Increasingly, during this time of unprepared death, sermons emphasised the life well lived over the good death. Theodosius praised the exemplary honesty and virtue of both sisters.⁶⁸ Both had kept God constantly before their eyes, had attended confession and communion, and had spent time reading Scripture, educating their children and caring for the poor. Both were true mirrors of virtue. Anna's manner of death could not damage her soul because she had served God and her neighbours faithfully during her lifetime and because she had received communion two days previously, reconciling herself with God, strengthening her faith and ensuring her salvation.⁶⁹ Theodosius promised that both physical wounds and the wounds of the heart would be healed. Paraphrasing various biblical texts, he wrote:

The just God, who not only smites and wounds us because of our sins, but also dresses our wounds and heals us; who not only kills, but also revives; who not only casts us into hell, but also leads us out again; give us his merciful spirit, so that wounded hearts can be soothed with the precious balm of divine consolation.⁷⁰

In this time of crisis, however, Lutherans turned not only to the Church but also to beliefs and practices condemned by their pastors as superstitious. The 'balm of divine consolation' was not always seen as sufficient, and not all coping methods were orthodox.⁷¹ Omens and prodigies remained an

⁶⁵ Theodosius Lehmann, *Strophoillum Lugentium*, Halberstadt 1633, B r.

⁶⁶ Ibid. E iii r.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ On exemplarity see Brunner, 'Dying in communities', esp. pp. 148–51.

⁶⁹ Lehmann, *Strophoillum Lugentium*, E iii v.

⁷⁰ Ibid. B v.

⁷¹ For a full discussion of Lehmann's writings on magic and superstition see Bridget Heal, 'Lutheran popular belief and practice during the Thirty Years War', in Kaspar von Greyerz and Anselm Schubert (eds), *Reformation und Reformationen: Kontinuitäten, Identitäten, Narrative / Reformation and Reformations: continuities, identities, and narratives*,

accepted part of the Lutheran world view, but war also increased enthusiasm for the unorthodox practices of soothsaying and divination. Lehmann criticised local villagers who crossed the border into Catholic Bohemia to visit wise men and conjurers. And he was harsh in his condemnation of a former professor of Greek who came to ply his astrological trade in the mountains after time spent making predictions for ‘pre-eminent generals and war heroes’, including Wallenstein.⁷² In his poly-history Lehmann also wrote of the use of ‘superstitious charms, characters and amulets’ for protection and for the cure of disease.⁷³ It is impossible to know whether the war led to an increase in the use of such apotropaic objects. But there were certainly popular rituals that attracted particular attention in this period amongst clergymen determined to guard against superstition, for example ‘Festmachen’ or the Passau Art, a method of making weapons and bodies invulnerable to attack.⁷⁴ Such practices were, not surprisingly, very resistant to reform. Into the twentieth century, Lutheran ministers were still warning their congregations against the use of *Schutzbriefe*, protective letters that contained prayers, Bible passages and often also magical formulae.⁷⁵ Against a backdrop of wartime exigency, Lutheran laymen and women continued to reshape religious practices in ways that reflected their own needs.

The new stability: everyday Lutheranism after the war

The peace agreements signed at Osnabrück and Münster in October 1648 were promulgated from pulpits throughout Saxony at the elector’s behest.⁷⁶ In Annaberg, seat of Lehmann’s superintendent, the copper-smith and chronicler Ludwig Kleinhempel recorded that on 26 November it was announced at the Sunday service ‘that peace has now been made’.⁷⁷

Gütersloh 2022, 119–38. See also Britta Echle, ‘Magisches Denken in Krisensituationen’, in Hartmut Lehmann and Anne-Charlott Trepp (eds), *Im Zeichen der Krise: Religiosität im Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1999, 189–201.

⁷² Heal, ‘Lutheran popular belief’, 131

⁷³ Ibid. 132.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 132–3. See Nikolas Funke, “Naturali legitimâque Magica” oder “Teuffliche Zauberey”? Das “Festmachen” im Militär des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts’, in *Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit* xiii (2009), 16–32. On the gendered aspects of such practices see Ann Tlusty, ‘Invincible blades and invulnerable bodies: weapons magic in early-modern Germany’, *European Review of History* xxii/4 (2015), 658–79.

⁷⁵ Owen Davies, *A supernatural war: magic, divination, and faith during the First World War*, Oxford 2018, 187–9.

⁷⁶ Katrin Keller, ‘Das “eigentliche wahre und große Friedensfest ... im ganzen Sachsenland”: Kursachsen 1648 bis 1650’, in Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Der Westfälische Friede: Diplomatie – politische Zäsur – kulturelles Umfeld – Rezeptionsgeschichte. Historische Zeitschrift, Beiheft xxvi* (1998), 661–77 at p. 664.

⁷⁷ Harms zum Spreckel (ed.), ‘Das Kupferschmiedemeisters Ludwig Kleinhempel Hauschronik’, *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte von Annaberg und Umgegend*, 5/16

He thanked God, but in Saxony full celebration was delayed until 1650 when the withdrawal of Swedish troops was completed. The end to what is referred to in some Saxon sources as the Thirty-Two Years' War was marked with elaborate ritual.⁷⁸ On the feast-day of Mary Magdalen (22 July) the festival of thanksgiving prescribed by the elector was celebrated in Anna-berg with trumpets, drums, singing and a procession. Kleinhempel described the morning service, mid-day sermon and evening vespers in detail, noting that at vespers the town's children knelt in white robes and green garlands before the church's altar while a boy dressed in a silver-white dress proclaimed peace.⁷⁹

The process of recovery was lengthy: in many parts of the empire, including Saxony, the war had caused not only huge population loss, but also extensive economic disruption and considerable damage to the physical environment. Both from the perspective of the territorial state and from the perspective of local communities, one of the most pressing needs was the restoration of regular religious life. We know that commissioners were sent out in the 1650s to survey the state of Saxony's post-war Church, but no records survive.⁸⁰ It is therefore very difficult to assess the extent of disruption to the clerical infrastructure of the Church.⁸¹ In Saxony, the provincial estates recognised the need to resume visitations after the 'ruinous and uncertain times of war'.⁸² By the time this finally happened in 1671–3 a lack of clergy does not appear to have been a problem here, perhaps in part because of a ready supply of refugee pastors from across the border in re-catholicised Habsburg Bohemia.⁸³

Impoverishment was, however, an ongoing problem for rural clergy and their parishioners. In 1647, Lehmann lamented in a letter to his superintendent that his village could pay its pastor only a paltry salary, because more than half of it had been reduced to wasteland through plague, war

(1927), 5–114 at p. 50. On Kleinhempel see Krusenstjern, *Selbstzeugnisse*, 137–8. On Saxony's system of superintendents see Ralf Thomas, 'Aufbau und Umgestaltung des Superintendentensystems in der sächsischen Landeskirche bis 1815', *Herbergen der Christenheit: Jahrbuch für deutsche Kirchengeschichte* x (1975/6), 99–144 at p. 120.

⁷⁸ Keller, 'Das "eigentliche wahre und große Friedensfest"', 667. See also Claire Gantet, 'Mémoires du conflit, mémoires conflictuelles au lendemain de la guerre de trente ans', in Reiner Marcowitz and Werner Paravicini (eds), *Vergeben und Vergessen? Pardonner et oublier? Vergangenheitsdiskurse nach Besatzung, Bürgerkrieg und Revolution. Les discours sur le passé après l'occupation, la guerre civile et la révolution*, Berlin 2009, 57–72.

⁷⁹ Spreckel, 'Das Kupferschmiedemeisters Ludwig Kleinhempel', 356.

⁸⁰ Karl Pallas (ed.), *Die Registraturen der Kirchenvisitationen im ehemals sächsischen Kurkreise: Allgemeiner Teil*, Halle 1906, 188–9.

⁸¹ On vacant parishes in Württemberg as a result of war and plague see Wahl, *Lebensplanung und Alltagserfahrung*, 44.

⁸² Pallas, *Die Registraturen der Kirchenvisitationen*, 188–90.

⁸³ Schunka, *Gäste, die bleiben*, 324.

and fire.⁸⁴ Such laments also echo through his post-war correspondence with secular and ecclesiastical authorities. In 1669 Lehmann wrote requesting a substitute to support his work. He had, he said, become 'old, tired and weak' after spending thirty-seven years in office, and surviving the 'most infamous war' from beginning to end. He went on to describe the poverty of his parishioners, which meant that he could not collect his salary and tithes. During the war, it had been difficult for him to cultivate his land; he had lost much of his furniture and clothing; and he had had eight of his cattle stolen by Swedish troops.⁸⁵ Again in 1688, as Lehmann looked to get his son-in-law appointed as his substitute, he wrote of the loss of his library, of the loss of his money, and of the ongoing impact of his parishioners' poverty on his salary. He signed this letter 'Christian Lehmann, old and weak priest in Scheibenberg'.⁸⁶ Some of this could, of course, be exaggeration: tales of loss and destruction were frequently instrumentalised during and after the war for financial gain.⁸⁷ But the visitation confirmed that Lehmann's salary and tithes were not being paid fully or punctually, and that his parishioners were not rendering him the goods and services they owed.⁸⁸

The physical infrastructure of worship – the churches, altars, altarpieces, liturgical vessels and vestments required for worship – presented another problem.⁸⁹ In his *Kriegschronik* Lehmann exaggerated the extent of devastation in the region, claiming that Swedish troops had looted and damaged every church, sparing none.⁹⁰ His own church of St Johannis appears, however, to have escaped largely unharmed. Its chalice was lost to Königs-marck's men, but its pews, altarpiece and other furnishings were still in place after the war when the pastor wrote an account of Scheibenberg's history.⁹¹ Elsewhere, however, wartime desecration and destruction had to be made good, not only for practical reasons but also as a visible sign of the return of God's favour. Across Lutheran Germany responsibility for the

⁸⁴ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 5218, Protokoll 1645–95 [Scheibenberg], no. 8. On pastors' income and their integration into agrarian structures see Schorn-Schütte, 'Priest, preacher, pastor', 21–2.

⁸⁵ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 7827, Substitution Christian Lehmann (vol. i) 1669 [IX, 20, 24, Scheibenberg], nos 2, 3.

⁸⁶ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 5221, Antrag auf Pfarrsubstitut 1688 [Scheibenberg], fos 2r–3v. On old age in the Protestant parsonage see Schorn-Schütte, *Evangelische Geistlichkeit*, 314–28.

⁸⁷ John Theibault, 'The rhetoric of death and destruction in the Thirty Years War', *Journal of Social History* xxvii/2 (1993), 271–90. ⁸⁸ Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 46.

⁸⁹ See, for example, John Theibault, *German villages in crisis: rural life in Hesse-Kassel and the Thirty Years War, 1580–1720*, Leiden–Boston 1995, 198.

⁹⁰ Lehmann, *Die Kriegschronik*, 117.

⁹¹ Heal, 'Lutheran churches'; Lutz Mahnke (ed.), *Chronicon Scheibenbergense*, Scheibenberg 1992, 16.

rebuilding and restoration of churches lay with local communities, and congregations were sometimes aided in their efforts by wealthy patrons or by donations from fellow adherents of the Augsburg Confession from elsewhere in the Empire and beyond. Although ruins sometimes remained due to lack of funds, the generally swift pace of repair underlines the importance that contemporaries attached to rebuilding churches.⁹²

The impact of the war on Protestant theology and spirituality has been described in various ways. Rather than thinking of a monolithic Lutheran orthodoxy during this period between the Reformation and Pietism, church historians now emphasise the importance of the reception of a variety of theological and spiritual impulses, including devotional literature from England and the writings of figures such as Valentin Weigel and Johann Arndt.⁹³ As a parish pastor, Lehmann apparently preached 6,600 sermons over the course of his lifetime.⁹⁴ None survive, but the records of the 1673 Saxon visitation list the books in Scheibenberg's parish library. These were the aids to biblical study that Lehmann would have had at his disposal while preparing his sermons.⁹⁵ The list confirms the impression of an inner pluralisation of Lutheran piety: alongside works by Luther and key representatives of Orthodoxy, the collection included biblical commentaries by Reformed writers and Johann Arndt's *Auslegung des ganzen Psalter Davids* (1617).⁹⁶ Broader studies of Lutheran spirituality show that the war coincided with an increased emphasis on individual piety, and seventeenth-century hymns and devotional texts emphasise suffering, repentance and consolation for the individual believer.⁹⁷ In areas that experienced religious persecution or the threat of recatholicisation there was also, perhaps, a strengthening of confessional consciousness.⁹⁸

At the level of everyday parish life continuity seems, however, to have been key. The records of the 1673 Saxon visitation show a great concern,

⁹² Heal, 'Lutheran churches'.

⁹³ Kaufmann, *Dreißigjähriger Krieg*, 78–82.

⁹⁴ Zobel, *Die fünffache letzte vnd beste Glückseligkeit*, H 2 r. This is not an implausible figure if we assume an average of between two and three sermons a week over the course of a career spanning fifty-one years.

⁹⁵ Mary Jane Haemig and Robert Kolb, 'Preaching in Lutheran pulpits in the age of confessionalization', in Robert Kolb (ed.), *Lutheran ecclesiastical culture, 1550–1675*, Leiden–Boston 2008, 117–58.

⁹⁶ Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, Anlage 11 (no page numbers).

⁹⁷ See, for example, Patrice Veit, 'Musik und Frömmigkeit im Zeichen des Dreißigjährigen Krieges', in Medick and Krusenstjern, *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe*, 507–28. See also Thomas Marks, 'Singing repentance in Lutheran Germany during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648)', *Music & Letters* ciii/2 (2022), 226–63.

⁹⁸ Frank Kleinhagenbrock, "Nun müsst ihr doch wieder alle katholisch werden": der Dreißigjährige Krieg als Bedrohung der Konfession in der Grafschaft Hohenlohe', in Asche and Schindling, *Das Strafgericht Gottes*, 59–122; Kohlmann, "Von unsern widersachen den bapisten vil erlitten und ussgestanden".

apparently shared by visitors and lay respondents, for maintaining traditional teaching and ritual, from doctrinal orthodoxy to the proper administration of the sacraments and the use of traditional hymns. To demonstrate adherence to orthodox doctrine and teaching each pastor and deacon was required to present his Bible, his Formula of Concord and at least half a year's worth of plans (*Concepta*) for his sermons. He was also asked about the supplementary texts – scriptural commentaries – that he used and about his methods for collecting theological commonplaces. Then, in the pastor's absence, the congregation, elders or church wardens were asked a series of questions about his work and behaviour, including whether he allowed new hymns to be sung and whether he had introduced any innovations in church matters.⁹⁹ Congregations' responses suggest that at least in these rural communities, innovations were not welcome. In the small town of Grünhain, for example, the congregation responded that they knew of no innovations, and that all was maintained in the churches 'as it had been in the past'.¹⁰⁰

Another thing that had quite clearly not changed as a result of the war was parishioners' discipline and morality, at least as described by their pastors. The warning signs sent by God – the prolonged suffering – had not led to a transformation of life. Secular officials reported general indifference regarding their calls to greater discipline, and clergy continued to find sin and immorality everywhere.¹⁰¹ Lehmann's *Historischer Schauplatz derer natürlichen Merckwürdigkeiten in dem Meißnischen Ober-Ertzgebirge* (Historical theatre of the natural curiosities in Meissen's Upper Erzgebirge) published posthumously by his sons in 1699, contains a section dedicated to 'Prodigious warning signs on new-born children'. In it the pastor interpreted children born with misshapen heads as punishment from God for the 'bestial ingratitude' of the proud female inhabitants of the Erzgebirge, who after the war had ended began to adorn themselves once again with inappropriate hair arrangements and hats. In a manner typical of Lutheran commentators of period, Lehmann interpreted the misbirths as visual embodiments of the sins of their parents: the children were born with headdresses, caps and plaits made from flesh. Lehmann's sons, who edited the text extensively, added further examples. But despite the

⁹⁹ 'General- und Special-Instruction Churf. Johann Georgens des II. zu Sachsen, wie die verordneten Visitatores, Superintendenten und Adjuncten die Visitation verrichten sollen, se Anno 1673', in Johann Christian Lünig (ed.), *Codex Augusteus*, Leipzig 1724, cols 817–26 at cols 818, 820–1. For an equivalent concern with orthodox preaching in Ulm's 1665/6 visitation see Norbert Haag, *Predigt und Gesellschaft: die lutherische Orthodoxie in Ulm, 1640–1740*, Mainz 1992, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Bestand 10088 Oberkonsistorium, Loc. 1979, vol. 1, fo. 349r.

¹⁰¹ Haude, 'Religion während des Dreißigjährigen Kriege', 543–6.

multiplication of such warning signs, the ostentatious display of bonnets continued.¹⁰²

Lehmann's letters to his superintendent in Annaberg are full of more quotidian complaints: parishioners' failure to attend communion and to send their children to catechism classes, conflict over church pews, fornication and babies conceived out of wedlock, and occasional references to superstitious and magical practices. Lehman did not mince his words in such cases, describing one individual as 'my immodest, wilful and obstinate parishioner', and referring to another as a 'child of the devil' (*Belialskindt*) and a 'good for nothing'.¹⁰³ Tensions between pastor and parishioners reached a peak in 1673, when during the visitation, the village council presented a list of complaints, ranging from unnecessary building work carried out on the church roof, to the nature of Lehmann's preaching, his daughters' dress in church and his keeping of geese.¹⁰⁴ The visitation also gave a chance for Lehmann and his son, then acting as his substitute, to give full vent to their feelings, and to criticise in particular their parishioners' failure to attend weekday sermons and prayers, and to observe the sabbath.¹⁰⁵ In 1683, five years before his death, Lehmann warned ominously: 'Sin and faithlessness are everywhere, and God must punish them.'¹⁰⁶

The Thirty Years War was not driven primarily by religious ideologies. It was, however, fought during the confessional age and faith shaped the experiences of all those who lived under its shadow. As we analyse religion's role in this conflict, we need to pay attention to all that historians have learned during recent decades about faith during the post-Reformation period. Scholarship now integrates the study of institutions and doctrine with a wider concern for the religious identities that emerged through ongoing dialogue between ecclesiastical authorities and lay believers. It incorporates records of lived religion, of prayer and liturgy, and of the many rituals that gave meaning to every stage of an early modern life, from baptism to the deathbed and beyond. It directs attention to religious culture as it was felt and experienced. And it emphasises that Protestantism, like Catholicism, was embedded in the material world. Sacred objects and

¹⁰² Lehmann, *Historischer Schauplatz*, 719–22; Philip Soergel, 'Die Wahrnehmung der Endzeit in monströsen Anfängen', in Lehmann and Trepp, *Im Zeichen der Krise*, 33–51 at PP. 45, 49.

¹⁰³ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 5218, Protokoll 1645–95 [Scheibenberg], especially nos 3, 25.

¹⁰⁴ Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 54–8. On the conflicts that arose from pastors' integration into the daily life of the parish see Schorn-Schütte, 'Priest, preacher, pastor', 27–9. See also Jay Goodale, 'The clergyman between the cultures of state and parish: contestation and compromise in reformation Saxony', in C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schütte (eds), *The Protestant clergy of early modern Europe*, New York 2003, 100–19.

¹⁰⁵ Mahnke, *Christian Lehmann*, 45–6.

¹⁰⁶ Ephoralarchiv Annaberg, 5218, Protokoll 1645–95 [Scheibenberg], no. 94.

spaces remained important in Lutheran devotional life, and their destruction or desecration compounded the horrors of war.

No single example can claim to be representative of experiences across Lutheran Germany, let alone across the whole of the confessionally divided empire. But Lehmann's micro-history illuminates patterns of disruption and survival that were widespread. Scholars have sought for – and found – evidence of religious doubt and of a loss of certainty in response to the actions of the *Deus absconditus* who countenanced Germany's long and brutal war.¹⁰⁷ As the conflict continued, some seventeenth-century churchmen were certainly aware that it appeared as though God had abandoned his creation. In general, however, the evidence from Saxony suggests that prolonged suffering did not lead seventeenth-century Christians to doubt divine justice or to abandon their traditional religious observances. Admittedly, it can be hard to see clearly when looking through the eyes of a cleric such as Christian Lehmann: his was certainly a highly confessional reading of the war and its effects. But invocations of divine providence, discussions of heavenly signs and emotive accounts of the disruption of ritual and destruction of sacred objects and space pervade lay as well as clerical writings. Religion provided consolation at an individual level, but also reassurance at a communal level through its emphasis on worship 'as it had been in the past'. The restoration of churches and of proper ritual was therefore an essential part of the process of rebuilding stable post-war life. Of course, the Thirty Years War did not create a newly moral, impeccably pious generation of Christians, as pastors hoped it would. But rather than creating a generation of doubters, it reinforced religion's role at the heart of early modern society.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, on Johann Rist, Anne-Charlott Trepp, *Von der Glückseligkeit alles zu wissen: die Erforschung der Natur als religiöse Praxis in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Frankfurt–New York 2009, 99–106. On doubt and uncertainty see also Antje Ernst and Mathias Ernst, "'Ich habe diese Welt beschawet und bald gesegnet: Weil mir auff einen Tag all Angst der Welt begegnet': Kriegserfahrungen im Spiegel von Andreas Gryphius' Grabschrift für seine Nichte', in Krusenstjern and Medick, *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe*, 497–506.