CONFESSION AND CONVERSION.

TRANSCEENDING RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, 1560-1700

Maria Crăciun/Jörg Deventer/Martin Elbel

In recent years, research into the pre-modern religious environment has been characterised by a host of attempts at widening, in a thematic as well as a methodical regard, the scope of possible approaches. Crucial questions concerning, for instance, religious practice and experience, in particular in a situation where there is an acute competition between religious orientations and denominations, have been posed with unprecedented urgency. The present contribution deals with a phenomenon which is, one might say, at the focal point of the thematic sphere thus delineated, and with the phenomenon's personification. The phenomenon is “conversion,” the change of religious denomination, and its personification, the convert. The operative question is what findings may be realistically expected by examining across the whole range of central and eastern Europe forms and conditions of becoming a Roman Catholic, and the ways in which this switch of denomination was “staged” with regard to its public effect. The findings are that conversion must not be interpreted as a purely religious or ecclesiastical phenomenon. It has to be approached as a compound of factors also concerning social history and history of everyday life, and it exists in multitudinous forms. Another conclusion is that the figure of the convert is not a marginal phenomenon linked to a chosen few or to some social or intellectual elite — it may be found across the whole range of society.

A FUTILE PLEA: THE LETTER KÄTHE SPIEGEL SENT TO THE RECTOR OF THE GERMAN CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE OCTOBER 11, 1941

Karel Hruza

The author seeks to shed some light upon the final months in the life of the Prague German-Jewish historian and women’s rights advocate, Käthe Spiegel (1898-1942). In 1941, Spiegel was deported from Prague to the Ghetto in Lodz. Her fate beyond this point could not be determined. As a documentary supplement, a letter is reprinted which Spiegel addressed to the rector of the German University in Prague, whom she implored to help avoid her imminent deportation.