



## A Franciscan Critic of the Catholic Clergy During the Protestant Reformation: Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* as a Literary-Historical Source

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### Abstract

Church historians have already studied the Protestant Reformation from many different perspectives considering both the years leading up to the publication of Luther's ninety-five theses and following. Although many different textual genres have been scoured for relevant information, literary and didactic narratives have attracted rather little attention. Studying Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522), which was an enormous bestseller for the next centuries, in light of Reformation history, his moralizing and entertaining exempla reflect the contemporary discourse also on the status of the Church and especially the clergy, seen through the lens of a Franciscan preacher, addressing thereby primarily his clerical colleagues high and low in the religious hierarchy.



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### Introduction

Under certain circumstances, literary works can serve historians very well because they tend to reflect popular concerns, worldviews, and opinions, as they were addressed in public or discussed in private. Fictional texts influenced audiences and can thus be analyzed as historical sources as well concerning the conditions of the dominant mentality or the history of emotions. When ego-documents are not yet available, we often cannot help but resort to fictional works as a substitute. The famous and highly popular collection of sermon

tales by Johannes Pauli, his *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522), provides a critical gateway to the ordinary, everyday-history during the early sixteenth century because the author deals with a vast gamut of topics concerning people's ordinary lives in the countryside, cities, at court, and in the Church, considering all age groups and genders, and hence also all social classes (see the contributions to (Johnson *et al.*, ed., 2021).

To state the obvious and address the common understanding, the Protestant Reformation, launched

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by Martin Luther in 1517 with his ninety-five theses, his bible translation since 1522 (New Testament), and with a host of pragmatic catechetic writings, was one of the major watersheds both in the history of Germany and of the entire Western world, in the history of the Christian Church and in cultural-historical terms as well. However, Luther was not the first and not the last one to formulate specific complaints about the shortcomings of religious life, that is, of the various members of the clergy, as the long history of anticlericalism clearly indicates. Already since the eleventh century, the Pataria movement in Milan and elsewhere had launched severe criticism of the established Church and thus became a fertile source for many other reform movements in the late Middle Ages and beyond (see, for instance, the contributions to (Dykema *et al.*, ed., 1993) cf. also (Dixon, 2002) As to the Pataria, see now (Dempsey, 2023).

The paradigm shift with the Protestant Reformation was actually long in coming, if we consider the various reform movements across late medieval Europe, such as in England with the Lollards under the leadership of John Wyclif or in Bohemia with the Hussites under John Hus, not to forget the significant movement of the *devotio moderna* in Northwestern Europe (as to the concept of the paradigm shift and its relevance for the late Middle Ages, see the contributions to (Classen, ed., 2019). Cf. also the contributions to (Janowski, ed., 2013). Broadly for the history of the late Middle Ages, see the contributions to (Lazzarini, ed, 2021). Pauli, the topic of our article, is never discussed in any of those studies). Many critics throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries voiced harsh comments condemning a wide range of shortcomings by members of the clergy, but also by the laity. Numerous times, Church leaders attempted to introduce monastic reforms, but none of those efforts succeeded in stemming the tide of the future reformers (see, for instance, the contributions to (Thurner *et al.*, ed., 2013), and to (Niederle-Korn-Bruck and Gläßner OSB, ed., 2022). Some writers, such as Thomas Murner, were in the forefront of radically ridiculing the hypocrisy of the Church, and this well before Luther (for a variety of perspectives, see the contributions to (Schenk, ed., *et al.*, 2020); cf. also (Classen, 2019). Many Humanists such as Sebastian Brant had blazed a path toward reform of society at large with their satirical narratives, targeting especially the clergy

as morally depraved individuals, so Luther appears to have been just the right person at the right time to formulate the decisive demands for profound changes in the Church, and since those ninety-five theses completed the critical mass, sort to speak, he was, ultimately, enormously successful (Hillenbrand, ed., 2023). But there were many additional factors facilitating this profound paradigm shift at the end of which there were two Christian Churches, a vast body of theological writing, an intensive building program, numerous bitter wars, much destruction in their wake and then also construction, initiating the age of the Baroque.

Numerous scholars have worked on this monumental period because it had such a deep impact on the early modern world in all of Europe and far beyond (Wohlfeil, 1982) (Brady, ed., 2001) (Kaufmann, 2009) (Kaufmann, 2016) (Jung, 2012) (Schorn-Schütte, 2017) (Schilling, 2017). Next to the theological and political issues, the Protestant Reformation was also deeply associated with changes in family structures, gender relationships, artistic styles, travel habits, political associations, and in literature (Karant-Nunn, 2022). But we would have to be careful not to fall prey to a common misconception of the sixteenth century at large as an age profoundly if not exclusively influenced by theological conflicts since the public discourse was not simply determined or controlled by religious questions and concerns.

The vast body of *Schwankliteratur* (literature of jest narratives), for instance, of Shrovetide plays, songs by the craftsmen mastersingers, travelogues, jest narratives (e.g., *Till Eulenspiegel*) and early novels (e.g., *Fortunatus*) speaks a different language concerning public interests in literary entertainment (Classen, 2009). Turning our focus toward that ever-growing corpus of secular, fictional or nonfictional texts makes it possible for early modern historical research to gain deeper insights into mental concepts, value systems, moral and ethical principles, notions of the gender relationships, and the like. Of course, we have to consider these texts with the grain of salt if we want to utilize them also as 'historical' sources since they clearly reflect the poets' personal intentions, ideologies, interests, and arguments, and not necessarily factual conditions. It is, however, always a difficult balancing act when we examine any narrative, whether a public document (letters, wills, charters, etc.) or a fictional work of art.



Pauli mentions, which mirrors his high level of education, such famous figures as Aristotle (no. 611), Macrobius (no. 502), Valerius Maximus (nos. 113, 502 et passim), Aulus Gellius (no. 392), Plutarch (no. 622), and Diogenes Laertius (nos. 471, 475); he drew from the *Vitae patrum*, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, Caesarius von Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*, the *Gesta Romanorum*, Heinrich Steinhöwel's *Dialogus creaturarum*, Geiler's sermons, and the anonymous collection (perhaps by Hermann Bote) of *Till Eulenspiegel*. There is no specific thematic or alphabetical order of the tales apart from larger sub-sections addressing globally truth, friendship, giving advice, deception and lying, patience and laziness. Instead, *Schimpf und Ernst* appears like a literary kaleidoscope, which made it so easy for posterity to enjoy and to draw from it at liberty.

The author only offered the two categories as headings for his individual stories, "Von Schimpff" or "Von Ernst," and sometimes a combination of both. We could call them *either exempla* or *Schwänke*, or simply rely on the terms offered by the writer. For Pauli, judging from this major collection, the world was in very bad shape; people were losing their morality and ethics, and so he regarded it as his urgent task as a public preacher to admonish them to return to the proper path, for which the literary discourse proved to be most effective. As the very first story signals, truth is no longer desired, and those who tell it are badly punished. Hence, this large collection served him as a literary medium to teach, to entertain, and to admonish his clerical contemporaries. He also encouraged others to contribute to future editions and to improve his book (prologue) (Mühlherr, 1993) (Classen, 2023) for a comparative literary analysis, see (Classen, 2003); for recent studies on the comic elements in Pauli's narratives, see (Coxon, 2019) (Wagner, 2018) (Takahashi, 1994).

Pauli was one of young Luther's contemporaries and he seems to have shared many of his concerns regarding the shortcomings of the clergy (Pearsall, 1994) for a succinct introduction, see (Uther, 2000). However, like many other contemporaries (Heinrich Bebel, Sebastian Brant, Thomas Murner, Hermen Bote, etc.; (Gaier, 1967) (Cramer, 1981) (Jarosch, 2006) See also the contributions to (Haye, ed. 2008), Pauli adopted a humorous approach and often

satirized people both within the Church and outside, laughing about wives and husbands, nuns and monks, rulers and burghers, usurers and gamblers, medical doctors and craftsmen, merchants and servants, prostitutes and parents, and all this without any specific distinctions regarding social class, educational level, or level of authority.

### Sermon Literature as Historical Sources?

This discussion will follow a model set up by a number of older and recent historians that is predicated on the notion that the history of everyday life, that is, the ordinary events in the lives of all kinds of people, matter significantly and allow us to grasp the foundations of the existential framework as a valuable complement to the political or religious developments (Borst, 1973); reprinted numerous times; (Esch, 2014) (Schmitz-Esser, 2023). The vast corpus of last wills, for instance, sheds most important light on people's mentality, fears, spirituality, economic conditions, and political status (for a case study illustrating this phenomenon in a specific location, see (Rippmann, 2022). Sermon literature, that is, often entertaining short narratives that served as additional material for preachers to lighten up their presentations and yet also to instruct their audiences by means of practical examples, can shed important light on the popular opinions and the history of mentality. While authors such as Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg (1455–1510) and his follower Pauli primarily aimed at teaching their listeners about human shortcomings and sinfulness, in that process they also drew from the common discourse of their time, combined with a slew of topics and motifs from classical and medieval sources. These sermon narratives thus constitute a combination of learned and pragmatic materials that can serve extremely well for a study of everyday culture during the pre- and early Reformation era.

Altogether, studying Pauli's comments regarding the Church at large and the clergy in particular, sheds new light on an already much researched historical period of German history during the early sixteenth century (to avoid technical problems in the printing process, I have written out all superscripta, which does not change the reproduction of the vowels. As to Pauli's social commentary, see Classen forthcoming). Granted, his narratives tend to be more literary than historical, i.e., they express his personal opinion (satires) about the social, economic, political,

and moral conditions of his time and do not purport to be studious analyses. However, although he drew extensively from classical and medieval sources, ultimately, each tale reflects on particular problems during the early modern period, mirroring general concerns and worries probably shared by both Pauli and his audience, as we can confirm by way of considering the enormous popularity of *Schimpf und Ernst* over the next centuries. Since the majority of his tales are predicated on humorous situations, inviting the audience to laugh about people's actions, words, or ideas, we can be certain that the audience must have been mostly in agreement with the author, or was urged to subscribe to the same values and concepts.

Curiously, however, Pauli does not seem to enjoy significant respect among scholars of the history of religion and does not figure prominently at all in Reformation Studies (there is no reference to him, for instance, in the standard reference work, (Galling, ed., vol. 5, 1961) or in (Eliade, ed., vol. 11, 1987)). The opposite is the case in German Literary Studies where he is regarded as one of the masters of short prose narratives deeply influencing the entire genre of *Schwänke* (sing.: *Schwank*) far into the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries (see, for instance, (Wehrli, 1980/1990, p. 1129–31)). Strangely, Pauli does not figure in (Wellbery et al., ed., 2004). However, since here the focus rests on major historical events that are associated with individual writers, and since 1522 is reserved for Luther exclusively [Lisa Freinkel, 225–30], the huge lacuna of Pauli becomes explainable [not excusable]. But his prose narratives are then not studied as narrative sources reflecting on social or economic conditions).

### Satirical Topics

Pauli addresses the following clerical groups: (V) monks; (VI) nuns; (VII) priests; (XXXV) the pope; (LXV) prelates; and (LXX) a bishop of Trier, and we are regularly invited to laugh and to cry about them, to feel deeply concerned, and to trust them at the same time. To be sure, behind all of his sarcasm, satire, and criticism, the author recognized the members of the clergy as people like everyone else with their personal weaknesses, failures, and lack of wisdom. According to the motto on the title page with a woodcut, this collection served for the betterment of all audiences in general terms. In the

prologue, however, he emphasizes more the need which members of monasteries might feel to read some entertaining material: "iren Geist moegen erluestigen und ruown" (3; so that their mind can get some hilarious relief and rest). Those who live in castles (aristocrats) would be confronted with some frightening tales that would help them to reform themselves. Moreover, the tales would serve the (Franciscan) preachers to enrich their sermons so that the parishioners would wake up from their slumber and be motivated to listen to these texts. He himself had made great efforts to stay away from shameful and indecent stories (4), although that is not always the case.

His *Schimpf und Ernst* was certainly a major literary project launched in the midst of all the excitement, trouble, worries, fighting, and energy evoked by Luther's writings and preaching, and hence his resolute opposition to the Catholic authorities (Reformation scholarship seems to have ignored Pauli; see, for instance, the contributions to (Ozment, ed., 1982) (Pettegree, ed., 2000) (Zinguer et al., ed., 2004) (Eire 2006) (Pitassi et al., ed., 2018), with the collaboration of (Huiban, ed., 2018)). But in order to gain a solid understanding of any historical time period or culture, we really have to consider both historical and literary documents, art works and architecture). It would be a worthwhile project to track down whether this famous Reformer was familiar with Pauli's works, but that would be the task of future research (according to the Index of Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Lunden, 1986, vol. 55, 1986, there is no reference to Johannes Pauli or his *Schimpf und Ernst*. However, Luther was certainly familiar with the jest narratives of *Till Eulenspiegel*, vol. 37: 343 and note 263 and 41: 363 and note 209). We can be certain that Pauli's satire targeted major shortcomings among the clergy, but the humor or comedy appears to have mitigated the real criticism because the various clerics (from village priests to monks, abbots, bishops, and the pope) were simply exposed as frail, immoral, or deceptive, virtually like everyone else. The clergy's hypocrisy was more than obvious, but our author never intended any radical reform, as had been formulated already in the eleventh century by the representatives of the Pataria, by the English, Bohemian, and then German reformers in the late Middle Ages and early modern age.

### The Clergy

In the section dealing with clerics, we first (no. 55) hear of an abbot who is disliked by a nobleman, his superior, although there is no reason for it. To challenge and possibly oust him, the lord presents him with three questions that he must answer or lose his post: First, how he would evaluate the nobleman, then, where the center of the world would be, and third, what the distance might be between fortune and misfortune – this virtually foolish interrogation certainly being a popular literary motif across the world and already utilized by the thirteenth-century Der Stricker in his *Pfaffe Amîs* and by the anonymous author (Hermann Bote?) of the collection of tales about *Till Eulenspiegel* (first printed in 1510/1511). The narrative motif employed here can be traced as far back as to the ninth century when it was first related by Ibn-Abdulahkan, properly called Abu'l Qāsim 'Abd ar-Ra man bin 'Abdullah bin 'Abd al-akam. Many of Pauli's literary contemporaries used this motif for their own purposes as well (see Bolte, ed., 1924/1972, vol. 2, 270–71). The abbot is deeply worried, not knowing how to arrive at the appropriate answer, which the swineherd notices who then offers to answer the questions for his lord. The first answer is, 28 coins because Christ was betrayed for 30, and the emperor would be worth 29, so 28 coins would be just the right amount in this case. The abbey would be located in the center of the world, which the nobleman could measure himself – clearly a reflection that the author and his audience were familiar with the shape of the world as a globe. Finally, the difference between fortune and misfortune would be just one night since he himself was a swineherd the night before and serves now as the abbot.

The nobleman laughs at these witty answers and indeed appoints the swineherd as the new head of the monastery, which could be understood as severe criticism of the abbot and his lack of intelligence. Criticism of the lord for daring to raise such absurd and silly questions and harboring irrationally this anger about the abbot is certainly implied as well. However, we then also learn that "erhielt aber den alten Apt auch in Eeren, als auch billich was" (40; he also treated the old abbot with honor, which was just right). The satire against the abbot is not biting, does not move into sarcasm, although the simple-minded swineherd truly receives full credit for his smarts and intelligent responses.

Already in the following tale, Pauli intensifies his satire, turning to sarcasm. A monk is serving as chaplain at a cardinal's court and hears from his lord one day that whatever the world desires, the monk would copy, trying to be the second in line to enjoy whatever it might be. The conversation is held in Latin. The monk retorts, correcting his lord by saying that the monks want to be first, and this also regarding committing sinful acts. The cardinal can only laugh about it and approves the chaplain's clever response (40). While the cardinal assumed that the monks would easily follow the evil path of people, the chaplain actually admits that they lead the way toward debauchery and evil.

Indeed, Pauli is not always bitter regarding the clerics, as the tale no. 57 illustrates. A monk serves as confessor for a knight, who invites him one day to dinner. The monk arrives early before Mass has been completed and goes to the kitchen, demanding a thigh from a cooked crane. The cook refuses to oblige; she would be fired if the bird were to arrive damaged at the dinner table, but since the monk takes it himself, she feels innocent. The knight, however, immediately notices that the bird has already lost a thigh when the dinner is served, but before he can be angry with the cook, the monk whispers into his ear that he will prove to him that the bird had originally only one leg.

When they go for a walk and notice a herd of cranes in a body of water, all standing on one leg, the confessor points to this phenomenon as proof of his claim. But the knight then claps his hands, the birds get frightened, extend their other leg, and probably fly away. Upon the knight's protestation that the confessor's explanation had been wrong, the latter reminds him that he should have clapped his hands during the dinner, then the other leg would have appeared (41). The narrative criticizes the monk's gluttony but softens that criticism by adding this facetious reply, which demonstrates the monk's ability for a rapid repartee.

Pauli abstains from developing a frontal attack against all monks and abbots and picks out only extreme cases that deserve to be highlighted, sort of as the black sheep in the Church's flock. In tale no. 60, an abbot displays utmost greed and has the poor people taxed to an extreme. At the same time, he appoints harsh and mean monks to serve in various

roles related to hosting guests and to provide charity. Once a man arrives at the monastery at night and requests to be accommodated. The administrator cannot refuse him, but he has him housed in a miserable room where he is served nothing but bad food. The traveler is deeply disappointed but thinks of a good revenge, criticizing the monastery only indirectly, though thus much more effectively. The next morning, when he is about to depart, he comes across the abbot and profusely expresses his gratitude for their amazing generosity, speaking, of course, satirically. The abbot does not realize it, calls in the administrator and has him beaten badly for having squandered the property of the monastery on this guest, although that was not true at all. In the following tales, we hear about all kinds of conflicts, including corruption in the process of electing a new abbot (no. 62), but the narrator tends to paint a mostly positive image of smart abbots, while castigating bad characters among them.

In other contexts, however, the narrator's comments can grow much sharper, even if they are thinly veiled by humorous statements. In the section dealing with lawyers and judges, a very successful attorney decides to leave his profession behind and to join a monastery because most of his successes had been the result of deception and lying (no. 127). The abbot soon appoints him as the legal representative of their monastery, assuming that the man's previous career would prove useful to him concerning their own legal suits. However, the opposite is the case: "aber er gewan selten ein Sach an dem Rechten" (86; but he rarely won a case at court). The abbot is surprised, if not disappointed, and asks him why this change of condition has come about. The former lawyer simply explains that his previous victories at court had been the results of lying, which he would no longer want to do, for which reason he had joined the monastery.

There are no further comments by the narrator, but the criticism of this story is directed both at legal representatives at large and at the abbot who wanted his new monk to perform the same way as he had done before and win in lawsuits for the monastery, and this at all costs. This is not so clearly spelled out at the end, but certainly implied because the former lawyer turned monk has to teach the abbot a clear lesson as to the reality at the legal courts.

Many people in the late Middle Ages assumed that monasteries were filled with whores who only pretended to be nuns, and that monks operated more like frivolous gentlemen abusing women, as we can hear many times in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and in similar collections of entertaining tales. The conflict in story no. 65 directly plays on this public reputation of the members of the various Orders, although the outcome does not confirm it fully. A nobleman wants to withdraw the financial investment in a women's convent which his parents had granted. The abbess and four of her prettiest fellow sisters attempt a counterstrategy and go to see the prince at his court. The latter inquires first about the number of their members, which is twenty-four. Then he wants to know how many priests and chaplains there are, which is twelve. Laughing out aloud about this misappropriation, he suggests that the numbers should be the opposite, meaning that he assumes that the women are all just prostitutes and would serve the male clerics to provide them with sexual favors. The abbess immediately realizes this evil mockery and retorts wittily that each priest would have one of the women in her convent while the remaining twelve nuns would serve their guests (48), again, meant in sexual terms.

The abbess explains the situation in her monastery that way not because the charge against them would be valid but because she just has to play the same rhetorical game to outwit the prince. The latter laughs heartily, indirectly acknowledging that he had resorted to a sordid sexual joke and that she had defended herself well, extending the joke in an unexpected fashion. As a reward, he sends her home with the assurance that he would help them and take care of the nobleman's unjust attempt to retract the money given to the monastery by his parents.

All that matters here is that Pauli reiterates the common assumption about nuns who only pretend to lead a religious life but are in reality simply prostitutes. The abbess plays along with the prince and can thus undermine his stereotypical opinion about them, which then rewards the entire institution. Nevertheless, this exemplum confirms indirectly the public notion about the hypocrisy of nuns whose morality was most dubious and could not be trusted. Of course, the author's deep sense

of humor softens the criticism, and we are supposed to admire the abbess for her smart response, but she also maligns her entire convent that it is, even if implied only facetiously, a brothel. In this story, Pauli picks up on common opinions and plays with them in a sophisticated and elegant fashion, not denying at all that women's convents could be secret brothels, though he denies it clearly in individual cases. In all likelihood, this is yet another myth about *medieval* and early modern society because male audiences, in their patriarchal thinking, could not imagine, and this already in the late Middle Ages, that cloistered women could control their sexual instincts and observe strict chastity. Protestant propaganda was most effective in spreading that notion to support their demand that all monasteries be dissolved and that the nuns ought to marry so as to control their sexuality (Reformation research has mostly focused on outstanding women as nuns, abbesses, poets, artists, and wives; see, for instance, Jung, 2002). Cf. also the contributions to (Wiesner-Hanks, 1996). The institution of prostitution has already been discussed from many perspectives, but nuns normally do not figure in that context. See now (Page, 2021).

Behind Pauli's superficial attempt to entertain his audience with funny accounts about people's misbehavior we easily recognize his deeply moralizing concerns. In story no. 66, the religious teaching pertains to the meaning of committing deadly sins. It would not matter whether one would be guilty of one or many such sins. The result would still be the same: eternal condemnation. He drew the following account from the Humanist Felix Hemmerlin (ca. 1388/1389–1466), but the conclusion still reflects our writer's perspective.

A nun is having a sexual affair with an unspecified man, which she keeps a secret. One day, however, when she is visiting a burgher in the city, who owns a magpie, the bird calls out identifying her as a whore. She is deeply frightened and takes it as a divine warning that no sin can ever be fully hidden. Consequently, she reforms and abstains from ever sleeping with that man again (49). Again, the comic element covers the deeper social issue addressed here, that is, the common assumption that nuns would certainly seek out sexual pleasures if they could. Pauli warns his female audience about such transgressions, but he also concludes his tale with

the assurance that the nun learned her lesson and was saved.

The seeming banality of Pauli's texts actually speaks volumes about the deeper concerns hidden behind the comic elements. In a brief account of a priest, for instance (no. 67), we learn that he regularly paid four ducats to his lord to have the privilege of sleeping with one of the female servants. Once he has grown old, however, he is losing interest in sexual intercourse and no longer requests the woman for his pleasure. The count still wants to collect the money, but since the priest is no longer able or willing to ask for the prostitute's service, he refuses to pay: "Ein anderer hat sie jetzt, den heissen euch Die fier Guldin geben" (49; another man has her now, so demand from him the four ducats). We are supposed to laugh about the turn of events and feel relief that the priest no longer breaks his vow of chastity.

However, here, as is often the case, the narrator tells us much more about the common conditions that determine the situation. No one seems to worry about the fact that the priest entertains a concubine; only when he is no longer physically able to have sexual intercourse, does he return to the clerical vow of chastity. The lord did not care about this profound transgression and actually happily 'rents' out this servant woman. Pauli thus provides extensive narrative fodder for the wide-spread anticlerical attitudes, although he himself was a Franciscan preacher.

In tale no. 68, a village priest has children, that means, also a 'wife,' though she is not mentioned. We are also told that he is a gambler and, at the same time, a good preacher (49). The parishioners, however, follow his deeds more than his words, i.e., they imitate his evil behavior, which troubles the priest. The latter ignores his own faults and blames the villagers for their moral shortcomings, so he tries to demonstrate to them what would be the better way through life. Carrying the sacraments one day, he leads a procession to a sick person. Everyone follows him, except when they come to a muddy spot. While the priest walks through all the "Treck und Kat" (49; dirt and mud), the villagers take the high ground and stay dry and clean. When the priest realizes that they did not follow him after all, he turns to them and advises them in his impromptu sermon

that they should henceforth also not follow him "in dem unreinen Weg der Laster" (49; the unclean path of vices) since they would know the path of virtues.

However, as the narrator had already indicated, the parishioners tended to take him as a role model, so the priest suddenly appears as the true source of the moral decline in the village. His words in the last scene sound hollow, and he actually appears as the worst sinner, being stuck in the mud himself, being a hypocritical priest. Pauli's criticism of his own colleagues must have incensed them considerably. While his protagonist deliberately turned toward the muck, the people behind him realized in time the problem ahead of them and selected another road, which the priest identifies as the path of virtues. We are certainly invited to laugh about this dubious protagonist although at the end he found the right words to address the villagers.

Story no. 69 casts an even worse light on all the clergy because we are told that there is much hatred between the monks and the priests, i.e., the Franciscan and Dominican friars (50). Several times we hear in other tales (nos. 70 and 71) of various priests who deviate from the path of virtue and are publicly shamed. They easily prove to be weak and corrupt, and hardly better than the lay people. This finds excellent expression in the tales no. 72 (51–52), which has an important parallel in a similar tale in the French *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (96), among other story collections (for a recent introductory article, see Albrecht Classen, "Anonymous, *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*," 2023).

Here, a priest is burying his most beloved pet dog in the cemetery, which the bishop finds out to his great consternation. He summons the priest and is about to impose a hefty fine on him, when the priest addresses the bishop and tells him about the dog's smartness and its last will in which it had assigned a considerable amount of money as a gift to the bishop. The corrupt bishop happily accepts the bribe and agrees that the dog had been a really intelligent animal.

In Pauli's version, some aspects have changed: the narrative structure has become more complex, but the negative comments about the Church hierarchy have not. First, here a farmer and his wife are the owners of that beloved dog, and they pay the village

priest four ducats for the permission to bury the dog in sacred grounds. They believe that the dog was more like a human being and had been wiser than other dogs (51). The price is right for the priest, so he instructs his gravediggers to bury the dog in the cemetery. When the bishop learns about this 'scandal,' he orders the priest to appear at his court, which scares the poor man for he is afraid that he might lose his sinecure because of his sacrilegious transgression regarding the dog interred in sacred ground.

To protect himself, he adds two more ducats to the money and explains to the bishop that the dog had left that money behind for him as spelled out in his last will. The bishop, however, is greedy and demands six more ducats, but now because the priest had not buried the dog with the proper Christian rituals, using a cross (52), certainly a most cynical argument. But the priest has no choice and has to pay, which moves the narrator to comment that money rules the world. Sarcastically, Pauli remarks that if he had enough money he would "corrupieren mit Geld" (52; corrupt people with money). If one person would not take a cut, another one would be more than willing to do so.

The laments about evil clerics continue to pinpoint money as the major source of their wrongdoing, as we hear in story no. 74. There, a priest has amassed a lot of money and worries about where to put it safely. Finally, he decides to place it next to the host in the tabernacle, and places a piece of paper on it, writing the formula in Latin that the Lord is located here. A clever rogue breaks open the tabernacle, steals the money, and writes on the paper, also in Latin, that the Lord has risen: "Surrexit, non est hic" (53). The narrator only comments that the priest was deeply grieved when he realized his loss, although the entire story implies a significant criticism of greedy priests and their power to amass money.

In another story (no. 75), we hear of two priests who make a bet regarding who might be able to complete his mass faster than the other. Both try their best, and one of them wins because he cut it really short, and both subsequently discuss how they had proceeded in that matter. Nothing else is said about these two priests, except that the narrator comments, "Das waren ellend Priester" (53; Those were miserable priests). Pauli does not characterize all the clergy as

reprehensible, and he does not question the status of priests or monks at large – he himself belonged to that group – but he highlights individual cases that deserve explicit criticism as a warning for the audience at large and the clergy in particular.

In other tales that follow in this section, the narrator presents a variety of abbots who are either unlearned or simply foolish, and yet manage to maintain their posts. Pauli does not hold back with negative comments, but he also acknowledges that there are many extenuating circumstances that would excuse so many an incompetent clergyman. Most curious, however, then proves to be tale no. 79 in which a priest loses his mind, as we would say today, and desperately needs spiritual help. According to the narrator, an evil spirit has entered his body and is not willing to depart until a priest who has never lost his celibacy would have read three Masses. The priest's friends then go around and ask at many different monasteries whether they might have a truly chaste priest, but they cannot find anyone. Each time they knock on a monastic door, they are given nothing but excuses, and it seems that there are no priests who can truly claim to have been celibate their whole life (55). Thus, the sick man does not receive the necessary help, though we do not know whether he manages to survive.

In his commentary, the narrator formulates the mysterious sentence: "Man het sie vileicht wol funden, *Die* nie kein Frawen hetten gehebt, sie waren darumb nit Junckfrawen" (55; It might have been possible to find one of them who had never had any woman; but they were not chaste for that reason). The narrator drops a variety of hints regarding the deadly sin of lust, but he keeps a lid on those topics, reserving them to the confessional. Nevertheless, it would be important to talk about the experience with sexual lust so that people (priests?) would know what it would mean to lose one's chastity due to that desire inherent in every adult. The loss of one's flowers, i.e., one's chastity, appears to be a widespread phenomenon, also among the clergy, as Pauli seems to imply. In other words, the poet acknowledges that the monastic ideals seem to be very difficult to uphold; hence the necessity to address the great impact of human sexuality also on the members of the clergy. Although the comments leave open many questions, the narrator certainly addresses human fallibility in face of the sexual

urges most people feel, and there are clear indicators that according to Pauli it would be a typical human failure if a young cleric would fall prey to the sexual desires. In fact, it appears that most monks would not be able to claim virginity, which is then not discussed further.

Moreover, in tale no. 80, which appears to be inspired by Dante's first part of the *Divina Commedia* (ca. 1220) in which a hermit monk is allowed to wander through *Inferno* – a form of catabasis – the poet reflects, somewhat in a disjunction of the actual narrative, on priests' performance of reading the Mass. Only those who have started with that career would truly feel an honest piety. As soon as it would have become a boring routine, then most steps taken during mass would then constitute nothing but an empty routine (56). Pauli's criticism thus aims at those clerics who would perform their services only perfunctorily and forget the central need to live out the spiritual ideal of the Christian faith. Here we might be able to identify one of the most critical points raised by Luther and other reformers who insisted on a renewed form of spirituality, as expressed most famously by Luther's statements, "sola fides" and "sola gratia" (see, most recently, the contributions to (Gordon *et al.*, 2018).

Pauli's deep frustration with the contemporary clergy also finds a vivid expression in tale no. 450 where a foolish priest has moved his parishioners to tears with his sermon on Christ's Passion. In order to calm them down and to bring them back to reality, he reminds them that this holy event had taken place 1500 years ago, in a very distant city, Jerusalem, and, to add insult to injury, "Man luegt doch von einem Haus in das ander, wie dan erst so ser! Es moecht auch nur Red sein" (270; people spread lies from one house to another, as it happens all the time. It [the story of Christ's Passion] might well be nothing but idle talk). This priest simply lacks faith, sincerity, and empathy, and regards his task as preacher to be that of an orator. Worst of all, the words that he presents to his audience, i.e., the biblical text, mean nothing to him, and he even urges the listeners to treat that account as a simple fictional narrative. Indirectly, Pauli might have reflected here on his own approach as a preacher since he skillfully weaves jest together with earnest, jovial entertainment with jokes with serious teachings, so *Schimpf und Ernst*. Not surprisingly, in the following tale, no. 460, he

refers back to Geiler von Kaysersberg's famous and most effective preaching, limiting his sermons to one hour and not more, whereas many other preachers would try to outdo each other in the time that it took them to complete their mass. Long sermons would achieve nothing, but that people fall asleep, that women begin to urinate, and the preacher becomes tired (270; cf. also tale no. 461).

Pauli was also, like many contemporaries, deeply worried about the problem with simony, as the story no. 465 briefly indicates (for a theological discussion of this sin, see the article on "Simony," 1997, 1504. Relevant for our context would also be the study by (Dürr, 2004, p. 269–93). Here, a man leaves a bequest of 300 ducats as a gift to an abbey, as documented in his last will. After his death, the son takes the money to the abbot and asks that all members of the convent assemble so that he can hand over the bag with the ducats. The abbot responds to the gift with the Latin formulation, "Requiescat in pace" (273; rest in peace), which satisfies the young man only partially. He wants the monks to read Masses for his father in perpetuity, but the abbot then demonstrates to him the true weight of his statement, writing the words down on a piece of paper, which is placed on one of the plates of a scale. The money is put on the other plate, but the words prove to be stronger, which satisfies the son.

As much as this account is predicated on the firm belief in the spiritual meaning of the abbot's words, the narrator's final comment actually addresses the opposite situation, simony. Pauli formulates deep worries about the omnipresence of simony, although the abbot in his story would not be a victim of this sin. However, simony is "jetz Gewonheit" (273; now a habit).

A much softer criticism against clerics is raised in the following tales, many of which actually present positive examples. But in "Schimpf" no. 474, we encounter a curious situation because a friar appears in a village but fails to get any alms through begging. Eventually, he goes to a church and rings the bell. When the sacristan arrives and asks him who might have *Died*, as signaled by the bell, the friar declares angrily that divine love has *Died* because the people had not helped him out in his need. Immediately after their conversation, the sacristan rings a bigger bell and then explains the reason for it: "Deiner Patientz

und Gedult, *Die* du soltest haben, *Die* ist auch dot" (277; your patience and submissiveness which you ought to have are also dead).

We should also briefly consider the tale no. 513 in which a bishop of Trier encounters a man while he is traveling to Frankfurt. The man wears little clothing although the weather is cold and uncomfortable. The bishop is surprised and inquires why he the other does not seem to feel the cold. After the bishop has given him a ducat, the other man explains that if he were to wear all his clothes, he also would no longer shiver. He himself has put on all the clothes that he owns and would thus be sufficiently protected. The bishop ought to follow that advice, which is, of course, impossible because the horse would then not be able to carry him (294).

The following exemplum, however, adds another angle to this exchange (no. 514) because the bishop wonders about the poor man's profession. He is an eyeglass maker, but his craft is no longer needed anywhere. The bishop finds this surprising since people at large have vision problems. The fellow retorts, exposing a general critical perspective toward the clergy, that the old priests and monks do not pray – hence they do not read their prayer books. Some would know their prayers by heart so they would no longer read and simply replicate what they have retained in memory. Then he turns to the highly ranked Church administrators and comments, which makes the bishop laugh: "ir grosen Herren sehen durch *Die* Finger, darumb so sol unser Hantwerck nichtz me" (295; you great lords look through the fingers, hence our craft is no longer needed; i.e., you ignore shortcomings and accept bribes). The metaphorical meaning of this expression implies that the bishops or cardinals ignore problems in the Church, permit other people to bribe them for favors, and do not protect the traditional norms and values.

As a reward for this witty remark, the bishop takes the eyeglass maker with him to the imperial *Diet* in Frankfurt where he pays for his room and board at his own expense. Despite this rather sharp criticism, the bishop welcomes this fellow who offers him good entertainment with his satirical comments. The story itself indicates that there was considerable disrespect for the clergy among the ordinary people who held the members of the Church responsible for taking bribes and hence being corrupt. Instead of

living up to the expectations, they would all perform their duties only perfunctorily and without any true faith.

Nevertheless, Pauli turns this sarcastic comment around and has the bishop laugh about it, although he and his colleagues are really the butt of the joke, which eases all tensions and also undermines any calls for reform internally or externally. After all, Pauli too was a clergyman and could not afford, or did not want to, as Luther had started to do in a startlingly effective manner, to criticize the other members of the clergy too directly.

This is also well expressed in "Schimpf" no. 499 in which several princes meet during an imperial *Diet* and compete against each other about who would have the strangest or most amazing things in their territories. While the Duke of Bavaria brags about marvelous sculptures, others refer to amazing bridges or palaces. Finally, the Duke of Saxony speaks up and tells them a "Schimpf," or a *Schwank* within this *Schwank*, an impressive literary strategy which Pauli employs. According to the duke, in his city of Leipzig, the monks would produce only marvels. The monks of the Dominican convent would sell grain all year around and yet would not own any fields. The Franciscans would erect great buildings without paying for them. The Augustinian canons would rule over all the parishes in the town, and they would produce many children and would not be married. The storyteller bluntly concludes: "Das sein seltsame Ding" (288; Those are strange matters). In this case, Pauli went so far as to ridicule even members of his own Order. But the worst monks would be the Augustinian canons since they would break their vow of chastity and sleep with all the women under their control. The other dukes listening to this story break out in loud laughter and accredit him with having won their competition, although the account implies, of course, that monks in other cities would demonstrate to be equally depraved and utterly sinful, badly abusing their spiritual authority for economic gains and sexual pleasures.

In the tale no. 500, a worthy monk enjoys great respect because of his seeming piety and devotion, always looking demurely down to the ground. However, as soon as he has been elected as an abbot, his entire deportment changes, he enjoys concubines and displays the greatest possible

luxury, which makes everyone wonder greatly, although there are no words of criticism directed against him. A knight, however, questions him about his radical change of behavior, and learns that before this monk had always looked down to search for the key to gain access to the abbey, that is, the post of the abbot, and now, having found it, there was no more any need to turn his head toward the ground. Pauli, however, as the narrator, has nothing but contempt for this hypocrite and ridicules all those people who, once suddenly raised to the position of a lord, would demand to be pampered in every respect: being dressed by servants, getting their bread cut by others, and no longer walking because they would travel on horseback. When we pay close attention to the deeper meaning of the various jest narratives, we recognize behind all the comedy a specific bitterness and anger directed against pervasive corruption among the clergy, high and low.

In one section (XXXV), Pauli also offers a number of *Schwänke* (pl.) about the pope, but they all tend to characterize him as a friendly, intelligent, and even jolly person who enjoys witty comments by his guests and praises them for smart responses. Only in a few cases does the tone change radically, revealing that there were some good reasons to criticize him and to raise complaints, such as in story no. 344. Here, an old beggar woman approaches the pope when he is traveling through the land, asking him for some alms. But he refuses, not even willing to grant her the smallest coin. Finally, having given up, she requests a blessing from him, so he makes the sign of the cross over her.

However, in her deep disappointment and bitterness, she comments that if his blessing would have been worth for her even in the amount of just a penny, the pope would have refused to grant it to her (210). In tale no. 346, a rich man bribes the pope with a large amount of money to favor his legal case. He places the money in the ossuary, and the pope then remarks, shaking the vessel, that it would be impossible to resist those fleeting objects, i.e., coins (211).

Otherwise, there are only hilarious stories about this dignitary, such as no. 347, borrowed from *Till Eulenspiegel*, in which this prankster enters a wager with the female innkeeper in Rome that he would be able to secure an audience for her with the pope.

Relying on a trick, he manages to do so, and the woman then has to pay the trickster the money she had promised. The final story, no. 348, however, turns the table on the pope and false absolutions. A pope who feels his death coming authorizes a chaplain to take his confession, whereupon he receives his absolution and *Dies*. Soon thereafter, however, the pope appears to the chaplain in a dream, miserably dressed, telling him that he has ended up in hell because Christ did not accept his indulgence letter and refused to place His seal on it (the author explicitly refers to his source, a story told by Jacobus de Clusa (ca. 1381–1465).

The narrator thus expresses considerable doubt about the entire ritual of confession, repentance, and absolution, and then also the institution of indulgence letters. However, both here and throughout, all of Pauli's comments remain anecdotal. There is no systematic attack against the Church, and while he satirizes many clerics, especially members of monasteries, the targets tend to be individuals. Hence, throughout *Schimpf und Ernst*, the author views the entire world through a comic lens; he recognizes shortcomings, failures, weaknesses, and transgressions, but he does not turn his satire against the entire institution; instead, the various critical comments expose so-called 'black sheep,' whereas the entire flock remains intact. However, in Schimpf no. 83, for instance, the entire institution of indulgence letters is rejected as useless and foolish. The way how Pauli discusses the case of two men who purchase such a letter in Rome and later end up in hell, would have certainly met Luther's approval.

### Conclusion

It remains somewhat uncertain whether these exempla would fall into the category of historical sources or of literary works. Their universal intention is to instruct, teach, warn, expose, and then also to urge the listeners/readers to abstain from their sinfulness and to search for a better path through life. In that process of entertaining and instructing, however, Pauli also established a narrative platform to reflect on virtually every aspect in early modern life, to address private and public matters, spiritual and economic concerns, to meditate on the meaning of truth and to expound on the conflicts between marriage partners.

As our analysis has demonstrated, here we also encounter most valuable narrative comments about the situation within the Church, as Pauli addresses shortcomings in monasteries, among high- and low-ranking clerics, with the pope, and problems with the institution of indulgence letters. Pauli notably does not comment on the Protestant Reformation at all as it exploded right around him. Instead, he drew from a wide range of classical and medieval sources, and obviously only from his own experiences or hearsay to examine wrongs within the Church. He was not a radical critic; instead, he exposes individual culprits, charges transgressors with breaking their vows, and then allows his audience to laugh about those situations.

Although he would have certainly agreed with many points raised by Luther, he was much too comfortable with his own position as a Franciscan preacher and would not have wanted to destroy his Order or the Church at large to achieve a radical reformation. We could not identify Pauli as the absolute opponent to Luther since he realized just too much that the Catholic Church badly needed some reform. But he never argues theologically, and refrains from any systematic analysis.

*Schimpf und Ernst* is a most valuable source for the history of mentality and everyday life during the early sixteenth century since the author transforms a large corpus of classical and medieval narratives into exempla or Schwänke for the entertainment and instruction of his audience. Pauli's criticism is a soft one, informed by humility and humor, which was certainly no longer enough for the radical opponents. He would have liked to see reform at many levels, as the countless approaches to people's vices and sinful behavior indicate, but for him, the culprits in the Church were ordinary human beings with similar weaknesses and evil drives as most other people. Thus, it proves to be fitting to associate him closely with the satirist Thomas Murner, although, once again, Pauli did not embrace the same bitterness and sarcasm as Murner did. The central conclusion here is that this author provides a first-rate window into the ordinary conditions in his society during the early sixteenth century, and Reformation scholars would certainly profit from acknowledging the documentary value of those didactic and entertaining tales. They

certainly mirror the common discourse at that time, bring to light the many different *gravamina*, but all those perceived through a humorous narrative lens.

While many of Pauli's contemporaries resorted to pamphlets, tracts, treatises, or broadsheets to engage with each other over the contentious religious issues concerning everyone, Pauli relied on the tradition of the sermon tale and apparently achieved a huge success with his texts. He was not a radical defender of the Catholic Church; he did not take Luther's side; instead, Pauli reflected on daily events, problems, conflicts, legal cases, and traditional literary accounts adapted to early-modern conditions, basically exposing the facetious dimension in those human affairs, offering thus also moral and ethical instructions.

Oddly, he did not linger on religious topics and rather intended to address ordinary, daily aspects most of the listeners or readers could probably easily associate with. In this regard, Pauli was a humorous reformer, that is, a soft, humble critic, which secured him a major position in the public discourse of his time and during the entire sixteenth century and far beyond. His *Schimpf und Ernst* hence deserves to be included in the list of sources relevant for the scholars focused on the history of the late medieval Church

and the Protestant Reformation. Undoubtedly, most of his criticism fits into an older tradition going back at least to the works by the Middle High German poet Der Stricker (esp. in his *Pfaffe Amis*, ca. 1220), and, globally, to various classical antique authors. However, what is so remarkable about Pauli's work in the early sixteenth century was that he picked up many of those motifs and applied them to his own time. Of course, he could not prevent the Protestant Reformation from coming, which was in fact already fully in bloom when his *Schimpf und Ernst* appeared in print (1522). But his collection of tales dramatically illustrates that the concerns about the moral and ethical decline both of the clergy and society at large were shared by intellectuals on both sides of the theological divide.

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