

sind Fragen, die sich in jeder Spielart des Christentums in der Moderne stellen und womöglich auch darüber hinaus. Dennoch stand der Protestantismus in dieser Diskussion seit etwa 300 Jahren immer nah an der Frontlinie, und er hat deshalb die Verantwortung und die Chance, in der Debatte weiter eine entscheidende Rolle zu spielen. Gerade in den religiösen Herausforderungen unserer Zeit ist das mit Sicherheit keine verschwendete Mühe.

*Abstract*

The contribution traces the genre of Church history back to its early developments in the period of the Enlightenment. Particular attention is given to motifs of decline and ascent, and hence to the overall theological interpretation of history. Especially in Protestant historiography there is a tendency to see at some point a fundamental decline in history (beginning with Constantine, with the post-apostolic generation, or somewhere else). This is sometimes counterbalanced by the postulate of a small group of «steadfast who did not bow their knee to Baal» (Flacius). On the other hand, the enlightened view of history is marked by a fundamentally optimistic approach, occasionally with almost gnostic traits (progress based on better insight, Semler). In the 19th century, the new discipline of the history of dogma led to a (sometimes radical) criticism of dogma, and ultimately to an almost totally isolated «Jesuanism».

In the conclusion, it is argued that on the one hand the modern «historical paradigm» is influenced by Christian ways of conceiving history, on the other Church history itself is highly emancipated from its theological roots in its methods and implementation. At the same time, theology continues to be an essential «intellectual motor» for this sort of research.

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