MYSTICISM & CONFESSIONAL CONFLICT IN POST-REFORMATION GERMANY: THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY OF VALENTIN WEIGEL (1533-1588)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the writings of the 16th century Protestant theologian Valentin Weigel, focusing on the relationship of this early modern writer to his pre-modern sources, Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart. The prevailing reception history for these two authors claims that, though they were influential in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, they fell out of favour in the early modern era. Instead, I find that, although these two are pushed out of the mainstream of Western theology, they continue to be read outside the centre. That is, I argue against a periodization that posits a clean break between medieval and modern thought.

Asserting that Weigel did draw substantively on Eckhart and Dionysius corrects an imbalance in modern scholarship on Weigel that does not credit the crucial role that Weigel’s pre-modern sources play in his oeuvre. Weigel was keenly interested in what these texts had to say about what I term indifference, manifested in Eckhart’s work as Gelassenheit, and in Dionysius’ as apophasis. Indifference is the key element of Weigel’s response to the theological and ecclesiological challenges of his time. In the sixteenth century, Luther’s reform movement transformed not only doctrine but also the configuration of religious leadership and secular government (i.e. confessionalization), leading to a lack of consensus about fundamental issues of church governance: how should decisions about religious life be made, on what basis, and by whom?

In observing how confessionalization reshaped the Lutheran Church in Saxony for the worse, Weigel concluded that fighting against it was fruitless, and that the most principled response was to cultivate an attitude of indifference. His explicitly stated conviction is that true faith resides solely in the heart, and that this true faith need not find expression in a material religious practice. Weigel argued that he would not achieve meaningful institutional reform by taking action and defending his beliefs to the death as a martyr, but instead advocated radical inaction, choosing to keep silent about his true beliefs even while holding an office in the Lutheran church whose theology he disagreed with and whose methods of generating consensus he found oppressive.
Valentin Weigel in Confessional Germany

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INTRODUCTION

ES IST DIR NICHT BEVOLEN, ZU REFORMIREN: MARTYRDOM, CONFESSING, AND INDIFFERENCE

Keeping Quiet

On July 15 in 1577, a group of theologians and jurists arrived at the Lutheran Martinskirche in the Saxon city of Zschopau to speak with its minister, Valentin Weigel (1533-1588). The reason for their visit was to request that Weigel sign and approve a new and, at the time, unusual document they brought with them: a document entitled the *Formula Concordiae*. It was called a “charter of concord” because it was meant to clarify and affirm the theological ideas that all Lutherans held in common, but in 1577, this concord was still a wish rather than a reality. Having weathered the turmoil that split the Catholic Church in the first part of the sixteenth century, and despite the Protestant faction officially having been granted toleration by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the Lutheran Church had not been as successful as its founders might have hoped.\(^1\) In

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\(^1\) On sixteenth century opinions about the failure of the Reformation (from both the Catholic and Protestant sides), see Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past & Present 67* (May
particular, starting in about 1550, Lutheran theologians had become involved in a series of increasingly vitriolic controversies that undermined the cohesion of the church body. The *Formula Concordiae* was intended to smooth over these disputes and focus instead on the unity of the Lutheran church, strengthening it against opponents within and without.

Instead of seeing the *Formula Concordiae* as an attempt to set aside differences, as its authors proclaimed, Valentin Weigel thought that the document was intended to silence criticism by force, as ministers were pressured to sign the document under threat of losing their positions. Moreover, in previous decades in Saxony (where Weigel’s parish was located), theological disagreements had not infrequently been punished by imprisonment or exile; Weigel saw the *Formula Concordiae* as merely a continuation of the same trend. Not only did he reject the principle of the FC project (i.e. producing a document to be subscribed), he also rejected much of document’s theological content.

Throughout his life, Weigel had a strained relationship with the Lutheran church. The outer facts of his career suggest a loyal son of this new church: he studied theology at Wittenberg (Luther’s own university), was ordained a minister in 1567, and was charged with the spiritual care of the city of Zschopau in Saxony, where he worked until his death.

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1975): 30-63. The *sixteenth* century Reformers’ argument focused mainly on the uptake of the Reformation by parishioners, but later Protestant apologists also found themselves defending their Church against accusations from other dissatisfied Protestants that, ultimately, the new church had proven no better than the Roman one it claimed to supplant. Christian Groß (1601-1673), for instance, denied that the legitimacy of a church could be measured by the personal moral worth of its ministers, advancing this argument against the charge of hypocrisy and spiritual pride by those who argued otherwise. To defend the “ordentliche Lehrer und Theologen,” he argued that God *does* speak to and through them regardless of how well or poorly they behave, and therefore God desires no supplemental Reformation of the Reformation, as it were, by so-called “WunderMänner” (for him, “fanatics” like Weigelians and Enthusiasts). Christian Groß, *Nothwendige, gebührliche Ehrenrettung des Evangelischen Predigampts, Wider die Newe Prophetische Hohnsprecherey* (Alten Stettin: Georg Götzken, 1644).
mostly undisturbed by his Lutheran superintendents. His writings (none of which were published in his lifetime, apart from a single sermon) suggest a different figure altogether. Weigel rails against almost every aspect of the Lutheran Church, declaring it spiritually corrupt, in thrall to worldly rewards and the schemes of worldly rulers, given to cruel persecution of dissenters, and disgraced by the same bureaucratic spirit that Luther had so hated in the Roman Church. As I discuss in the following chapters, Weigel continued to think of himself as a Lutheran, but ultimately rejected many of the ideas that are characteristic of Lutheran theology—the very ones laid out so clearly in the document he was asked to sign.

And yet, Weigel signed the *Formula Concordiae*. Moreover, as he records the incident in his *Dialogus de Christianismo* (1584), he signed the document without making a fuss, or even voicing his opposition to those who collected his signature. This *Dialogus* stages a quasi-theatrical debate between a *Concionator* (the Preacher) and an *Auditor* (the Layman), mediated by *Mors* (Christ’s representative). The Preacher is a

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3 Weigel’s most explicitly anticlerical piece is his *Dialogus de Christianismo*, to which I will return throughout this dissertation. Valentin Weigel, *Dialogus de Christianismo*, in *Valentin Weigel: Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Alfred Ehrentreich, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Friederich Fromman Verlag, 1967). Weigel’s works have been issued in two modern critical editions. The first was edited by Will-Erich Peuckert and Winfried Zeller in the 1960s and 1970s, but is incomplete. The critical edition was continued by Horst Pfefferl starting in 1996. Pfefferl first published the works that were not included in the older edition, and will eventually re-edit the seven volumes that made up the older edition, bringing them up to the new editorial standard that incorporates more recent archival work. In this dissertation, I will cite Weigel’s works by their title rather than by volume after the first citation.
4 That signature has survived on the original subscription page from 1577. As it happens, this disingenuous autograph is one of the few snippets of Weigel’s own handwriting that have survived. Almost all the writings in which he expressed his true beliefs have only survived in printed editions or in copies made by others (with a few exceptions). Horst Pfefferl, "Das Fragment einer lateinisch-deutschen Passionsharmonie von der Hand Valentin Weigels," in *Wissenschaftsgeschichte zum Anfassen: Von Frommann bis Holzboog*, ed. Günther Bien, Eckhart Holzboog and Tina Koch (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 2002), 233.
5 The work begins much like a playbill, with the list of characters who appear (“Personen in diesem Gespreche”). One manuscript is even furnished with an ink sketch of the three main characters (the preacher, the layman, and Death) that might even be seen as a rudimentary *Bühnenbild*. Though the
spokesman for the state-sponsored Lutheran Church, whereas the Layman voices Weigel’s own beliefs as the pious layperson, and Mors speaks for Christ. As their debate unfolds, the Preacher finds himself rhetorically out-maneuvered by the Layman and Death, but declares that he is unable to deviate from his theological positions because he has sworn an oath to uphold the teaching contained in confessional books and theological treatises, and does not want to be “vorketzert und zum Lande ausgetrieben” for breaking his oath. The Layman has little sympathy, as he had also once signed under duress (“aus beweglichen Ursachen”), but dismisses his “Verschreiben” on the grounds that the oath he made did not pledge loyalty to “Menschenbücher” but rather to the writings of the Prophets and Apostles alone. Others are loyal to mere men (the Pope, Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, or Mohammed), but he is only loyal to Christ: “An Jesum Christum hange ich mich, bei den Schrifften der Aposteln und Propheten bleibe ich bis in den Tod.”

Curiously, Weigel imagines himself not as the ordained minister and servant of the state (as he in reality was) but rather as a member of a congregation; not as a university trained theologian but rather as an Autodidact, as the Concionator scornfully calls him. Weigel, Dialogus, 42. Chapter 4 of this dissertation will discuss this text in much greater detail, showing how Weigel transferred all spiritual power and responsibility away from ordained clergy over to laypeople. This shift in perspective in his final text is indicative of Weigel’s changing allegiance, from the church that employed him to the congregation he ministers to.

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7 Weigel, Dialogus, 58.

8 Ibid., 59.
yet have signalled his assent with a signature. The Layman’s casuistic reply distinguishes between the content of the *Menschenbücher* and Scripture that they claim to explicate, and it is only to the latter that the Layman pledged his oath.⁹

The Layman also claims mitigating circumstances, emphasizing that he was harried and pressed by those collecting the signature to decide quickly (“es [war] eine schnelle Überhuiung oder Übereylung, das man nicht ettlische Tage...solche Dinge...zu überlesen vergönnete, sondern nur in einer Stunden dem gantzen Hauffen vorgelesen und drauf die subscription gefodert”¹⁰). And even if he had had time to think things over, the Layman claims he would still have signed the document, to avoid having to openly declare his unusual theological beliefs and thus expose himself as a heretic to those who would trample and maul him.¹¹ Of course, he does not believe that he is a heretic; in fact, he is the one who adheres to the “unbeweglicher apostolischer Grund” while his would-be persecutors are the ones who have a “vorlogene Lehre, welches Gott nicht gefellig.”¹² They are the swine before which his pearls would be cast, the dogs to which sacred things would be unjustly given.¹³ All the same, however, the Layman does not want to risk persecution by testifying to his true beliefs.

Finally, there is not even anything to be gained by risking either persecution or profanation by what he calls his “unzeitiges Bekennen,” since nobody would have given up his false beliefs as a result of hearing Weigel’s testimony. Indeed, nobody can be persuaded by any verbal testimony, by a preacher’s sermon from the pulpit, or even by Christ’s own preaching: after all, Weigel points out, the synagogues were not converted

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⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Weigel, *Dialogus*, 59.
¹¹ Ibid, 59-60.
¹² Ibid, 60.
¹³ Ibid.
when they heard the Lord himself speak, so why should he expect his fellow theologians to be converted by his own merely human preaching.\textsuperscript{14} Through the Preacher, Weigel asks if he is betraying his own beliefs. The Preacher suggests that the Layman should regret making an oath he did not believe, citing Christ’s command (once in German and then pompously repeated in Latin) that his disciples acknowledge him publicly on \textit{Earth} in order to be acknowledged before God in \textit{Heaven} (Luke 12:8): “Wer im Herzen gleubet und mitt dem Munde bekennet, der wirdt seilig: \textit{Qui me confitetur coram hominibus etc.”} \textsuperscript{15}

The question of Weigel’s cowardice comes up often in the secondary literature. August Israel is quick to defend him (“Es war nicht Mangel an Mut, der ihn abhielt, auch nach außen hin und streitbar aufzutreten”) and offers the reader only the explanations that Weigel gives in his own defence (the time was not right, he would only have harmed himself, etc.).\textsuperscript{16} Rufus Jones is less considerate, writing that there is “one blemish on his really beautiful character...[namely that] he lacked that robust, unswerving conscience which compels a man who sees a new vision of the truth to proclaim it, to champion it, and to suffer and even die for it when it comes into collision with views which his own soul has outgrown.”\textsuperscript{17} Although I agree with Weeks that “our object can hardly be to pass judgment on his behavior,” since Weigel’s moral fibre is hardly a historical question, nevertheless, the historical and intellectual context of Weigel’s very agitated \textit{inaction} is certainly a fascinating one to investigate, because Weigel offers a theology of non-action

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{15} Weigel, \textit{Dialogus}, 61.
\textsuperscript{17} Rufus Matthew Jones, \textit{Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries} (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 139.
in a context where action is expected and privileged.\textsuperscript{18} As Hans-Joachim Müller points out, intentions and feelings are lost to historians, but texts do allow access to the rhetorically constructed expression of those feelings.\textsuperscript{19} To focus on intention and character as August and Jones do is to miss the constructedness (and hence social embeddedness) of these expressions. Should Weigel have expressed his sincerely held convictions, even if it might have meant losing his post, imprisonment or exile? Or worse, since he believed that mainstream Lutheran theology was the theology of the antichrist, had he not failed to witness to the truth of Christ as the early martyrs did?\textsuperscript{20} I have dwelt on this episode because it crystallizes the key question that Weigel wrestles with throughout his oeuvre in various guises: how should a Christian reach a decision about how to act? Specifically, how can (and should) written texts function as a guide to right action?

In reconstructing Weigel’s decision not to speak out, as well as the terms in which he frames his decision, I found that Weigel drew support from an intellectual tradition that is not considered influential on his early modern Protestant milieu, namely medieval mystical writers, and in particular those belonging to the tradition of negative theology as it was expressed by Meister Eckhart (late thirteenth century) and Dionysius the

\textsuperscript{18} Weeks, \textit{Religious Dissenter}, 15. In a sense, Weeks does not get away from questions of character and intention entirely either, because even as he chooses to withhold judgement he does not investigate further the many things that Weigel himself had to say on the subject of taking action.

\textsuperscript{19} Müller here is speaking about those involved in an attempt to unify various Christian denominations in the mid-seventeenth century (the Irenic movement), but his words might also well apply to Weigel: “Irenik wird so...zu einer Frage der Bewertung der Intentionen derjenigen, die in den interkonfessionellen Diskurs eintreten. Eine solche Auffassung birgt viele Probleme in sich: Nicht nur, daß man sich anmaßt, aus der Retrospektive die Intentionen und Motivationen der handelnden Theologen, Gelehrten und Politiker moralisch zu bewerten, es besteht in der Reduktion auf ihre Gesinnung auch die Gefahr, den Regelhaftigkeiten, Verhaltensweisen und Strategien in der interkonfessionellen Auseinandersetzung zu wenig Bedeutung beizumessen.” Hans-Joachim Müller, \textit{Irenik als Kommunikation: Das Colloquium Charitativum von Thorn 1645} (Göttingen: Vandenhoec & Ruprecht, 2004), 30.

Areopagite (late fifth or early sixth century). Getting to the bottom of Weigel’s unwillingness to testify to his true beliefs publicly, then, will answer the primary question of this dissertation: what is the afterlife of medieval mystical texts, and of negative theology in particular, in the early modern period? That I describe this connection between Weigel, Meister Eckhart and Dionysius as unusual is mainly due to the way that both mysticism and the medieval period have been historically characterized. Mysticism, it is said, is medieval: Denys Turner has claimed that negative theology is a thoroughly medieval phenomenon, a tradition that does not cross the threshold into modernity, and whose subsequent nineteenth century revivals can chiefly be described as a misapprehension of medieval thought. Others say mysticism is Catholic: the twentieth century Lutheran theologian Emil Brunner has argued that Protestantism cast off mysticism when Luther turned away from superstition and speculation. In writing the reception histories of both Eckhart and Dionysius, historians have mirrored these ideas, claiming that Eckhart and Dionysius fell out of the mainstream of theological thought in the early modern era and the Enlightenment, returning to prominence only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finding a sixteenth century reader of negative theology such as Weigel might therefore seem surprising.

The choice to focus on just these two figures is fruitful because Weigel himself cites German mystical writings (Tauler, Eckhart, and the Theologia Deutsch) together with Dionysius’ as texts his readers should consult for confirmation of his ideas or for further reading. In fact, Weigel was not wrong to link the fifth century Greek writer and the fourteenth century German one, since Eckhart’s work was deeply influenced by Dionysius’ writings. That is, this dissertation follows Weigel’s lead, acknowledging that these two theologians share a set of concerns that makes it appropriate to discuss the two figures together as representatives of an important strand of negative theology. For an overview of the relationship between Eckhart and Dionysius see Kurt Ruh, "Dionysius Areopagita im deutschen Predigtwerk Meister Eckharts," Perspektiven der Philosophie 13 (1987): 207-223; Paul Rorem, "Negative Theologies and the Cross," Harvard Theological Review 101, no. 3-4 (2008): 451-464. Tracing Dionysius’ influence on western Christian theology, leading through Eckhart and up to Luther is the subject of Chapter 3.

Protestant Mysticism: Not a Contradiction in Terms

Although scholars have recently challenged the idea that the phrase “Protestant mysticism” is a contradiction in terms, it had long been assumed that Martin Luther swept aside all things medieval, and therefore mysticism as well. For instance, Brunner defined the options thus: “Entweder die Mystik oder das Wort.” The epigram to Brunner’s work (by Luther, of course) firmly aligns Protestantism with the Word: “Verbum est principium primum, Luther.” With the weight of Luther’s authority behind him, Brunner suggests that mysticism is somehow not quite Christian—or at least not quite biblical—and thus has no place in Protestantism, which purports to be firmly rooted in Scripture, as Luther’s principle of sola scriptura has it. Brunner writes: “Gott kommt zu uns, indem er spricht. Die Taten Gottes sind Kund-machungen, Euangelia. Das ist die Gegenwart des ‘Numinosen’: daß seine Gedanken kund werden. Das ist das Mysterium tremendum, daß er uns anruft.” God does not make himself available to Christians via special experiences of the numinous and the mysterium tremendum (these words describe his understanding of mystical experience), but rather is only present through God’s call, his word and his Euangelia. To belong to Luther’s “evangelical” camp is to repudiate mysticism and respond solely to the Word.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 “Evangelical” was the preferred self-designation of Luther and his followers, whereas “Protestant” and “Lutheran” were other designations. Emphasizing the primacy of the Euangelia is another way that Brunner indicates that Lutheran theology is true, and moreover, true because it is based on the evangelical speech act. Diarmaid MacCulloch, Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years (New York: Viking, 2010), 608.
27 Brunner also insists that union (a central theme in mystical texts) is nothing more than hearing and responding to God’s word: insofar as a Christian accepts God’s words, they become part of his person, which constitutes a kind of union. “Dieses Rufen hören, diesem unauffähren Sprechen Glauben schenken, diese Wahrheit, die all unsere Wahrheiten außer Kraft setzt…diese uns Fernste…als unsere geltende
As Brunner’s choice to introduce his argument with Luther’s words suggests, the Wittenberg Reformer’s opinion on mysticism (as with so many of Luther’s opinions) cast a long shadow. Luther, it is true, read many of the texts now considered “classics” of the mystical canon—texts by Dionysius the Areopagite, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Jean Gerson, the (anonymous) *Theologia deutsch*, and Johannes Tauler—but his relationship to these medieval authors is perhaps best characterized as ambivalent. Common features between these mystical texts and his own writings are counterbalanced by the elements that Luther either rejects or transforms so greatly as to make a break with the medieval sources. For instance, Luther reports reading Tauler’s sermons with avid

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29 Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 140. Oberman points out that it is not clear that Luther even thought of them collectively as “mystical” authors belonging to a coherent body of thought, the category of **mysticism** being a much later invention. Consequently, Luther could be said to have had no opinion on mysticism per se, but rather only on the individual writers. Luther describes, for instance, a “mystical sermon” by Tauler, presumably to distinguish it from Tauler’s non-mystical sermons (Ibid., 140-141).

30 A number of scholars have argued that, on the contrary, there are many mystical elements in Luther. Berndt Hamm, for instance, argues that “Lchers ausgereifte Theologie, die man im Volksinn des Wortes als ‘reformatorische’ bezeichnen kann, hat nicht nur eine mystische Seite oder Dimension und rezipiert nicht nur traditionelle mystische Motive, Bilder und Begriffe, sondern zeigt in ihrer Gesamtkomposition mystischen Charakter.” (Hamm, “Wie mystisch,” 242.) However, Hamm then states that his argument depends on his redefinition of mysticism, a specifically Reformation faith-mysticism: “Man wird sich umgekehrt darauf einlassen müssen, bei Luther einem neuen Typ von Mystik, einer reformatorischen Glaubensmystik, zu begegnen, so wie es im Mittelalter wiederholt frappierende Neuaufrüche der Mystik gab.” (Ibid., 243.) In particular, Hamm suggests that an inability to see that Luther’s theology is fundamentally mystical is due to a view of mysticism that relies too strongly on Dionysius and Meister Eckhart. That Hamm argues for a constantly evolving mysticism, rather than a universal or transcistorical one, is interesting; however, Hamm is asking a different question (whether Luther pioneered a new kind of mysticism) than mine (how Luther related to medieval negative theology). Berndt Hamm, “Wie mystisch war der Glaube Luthers?,” *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren: Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther*, edited by Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 242-243. See also Carl E.
interest, and praised the *Theologia Deutsch* for being more sound than scholastic theology, while at the same time rejecting the idea of the *Seelenfunke* (*synteresis*)—so crucial to Tauler’s theology and anthropology—that leads the soul to union with God. Likewise, Luther praised Dionysius for articulating a negative theology that seemed to coincide with his view of God’s hiddenness, but then sharply criticized the same writer for his presumptuous speculations that seem to bypass (or to simply ignore) the crucified Christ.

As important as Luther was for Protestantism, the fate of medieval mystical writers in the early modern era does not begin and end with him. Widening the scope of research on the sixteenth century in Germany, in particular to take in the comparatively neglected second half of that century, shows that mystical texts did indeed find many passionate readers, both in orthodox and heterodox contexts, as we will see in Chapters 1 (in the case of Eckhart) and 3 (in that of Dionysius). Furthermore, much of the previous scholarship on Protestant mysticism has proceeded by designating a certain set of ideas or motifs as mystical (elevated as paradigmatic), and then trying to detect the presence or absence of these ideas in texts written by Protestants. This approach does not do justice to the complexity of the source text, whose ideas appear as a simplistic caricature or

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34 Paul Rorem, "Luther's Christocentric Critique," 291-292.
overlaid with modern preconceptions of what mysticism is. More importantly, such a method neglects the simple fact that early modern readers did not read a modern critical edition of the works of Dionysius or Eckhart. While these critical editions attempt to do justice to their respective authors, they are not the same texts that Weigel sat down to read in his study or his university library. In referring to modern critical editions rather than the editions that the early modern writer might actually have used, much of the context of Weigel’s reading practice is lost, a context that is invaluable to historians seeking to understand how ideas travel from one person to another. Thinking about texts in this way places ideas firmly in the material world, where they rely not only on parchment and quills or paper and printing presses but also on the bodies and minds of readers for their existence and transmission.

A far more fruitful approach, and the one I use in this dissertation, is a close reading of texts by Protestants that document an engagement with medieval texts, to discover how those medieval texts are retained or transformed, reclaimed or reappropriated. In this dissertation, then, I study the textual network of one Protestant reader of mystical writings, Valentin Weigel, focusing on his engagement with the tradition of negative theology in his reading of Meister Eckhart (Chapters 1 and 2) and Dionysius the Areopagite (Chapters 3 and 4). Thinking of reception history as a textual network, it is perhaps useful to imagine this network as a piece of cloth: on a superficial level, one can note the finished product (the cloth fashioned into a coat, for instance), or

35 Even Hoffman, who explicitly rejects this approach of dealing with mysticism en bloc (Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 37-38), as he calls it, ultimately does just that, in statements such as “we are pointing out the essentialness of the mystical in the Reformer’s justification experience” (Ibid, 218). Moreover, Hoffman defines mysticism as the “‘experimental’ and ‘experiential’ apprehension of God” (Ibid, 16) and sets out to document Luther’s “experiences of the invisible” (Ibid, 218). To define mysticism as experiential is already to exclude the consideration of certain mystical writers from discussion—Dionysius and Eckhart in particular—whose writings, as Denys Turner argues, are chiefly to be understood as a critique of experientialism and mystical experiences (Turner, *Darkness of God*, 258-273).
one can observe the texture of the fabric, the composition of the fibres, and how the
individual threads are woven together in specific ways to create the piece of cloth.\textsuperscript{36} I refer back to the texts that Weigel cites and use these texts to retrace the material path along which ideas travelled to Weigel. I look, for instance, at the circumstances in which it was first edited and printed, by observing who else in Weigel’s extended network read and cited those texts in order to establish how and why Weigel might have first approached these texts. I then follow the ways that Weigel deploys the ideas he took from Dionysius and Eckhart in the course of his oeuvre, showing how these ideas change as he adapts them, and how they in turn shape his work. Weigel’s corpus presents an additional challenge because it is split between Weigel’s original works and his “derivative” ones, in which Weigel seems merely to collate his reading notes from various texts, adding a title and few introductory remarks of his own. These so-called derivative texts have generated relatively little interest in the few scholarly works on Weigel, as described above, other than to note that Weigel did indeed know the author in question, whereas Weigel’s very practice of excerpting is interesting in its own right.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Jane Newman’s \textit{The Intervention of Philology} is an exemplary demonstration of how much is to be gained by studying the relationship between texts and the world of their sources without relying too heavily on modern critical editions. Newman describes her approach as “reading slowly,” which, in the case of the Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein (1635-1683) plays she studies, means taking the time to explore the densely populated footnotes appended to the text and the numerous references embedded in the text itself. (Newman, 12) Thus, even though a given text may only be mentioned in the footnotes, and might therefore have been accorded only a secondary status, for Newman the learned apparatus is a way for the text to open itself up to its context, rather than independently assembling a context the scholar believes to represent contemporary ideas on whatever subject is being investigated. In addition, Newman’s “slow reading” is a more sensitive measure of influence that does not depend on sheer numbers of citations. Newman’s “excavation” of Lohenstein’s textual world represents an attempt to avoid “‘asymmetric’ narratives about [the past’s] relationship to the present,” in which the past is simple and the present is complex. (Newman, 10) Jane O. Newman, \textit{The Intervention of Philology: Gender, Learning, and Power in Lohenstein’s Roman Plays} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{37} Another problem with relying on modern critical editions is that texts are not always transmitted whole and perfect, and acknowledging this fact opens up new landscapes to investigate, such as a text that is considered minor by virtue of being mere “copying.” As Ann Blair’s media-historical study \textit{Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age} makes clear, it is important to recognize that note-taking and excerpting were important and legitimate practices in pre-modern writing, rather than
In attending to Weigel’s use of Dionysius and Eckhart, I will be arguing against the prevailing reception history for these two authors, which claims that, though they were influential in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, they fell out of favour in the early modern era, finding that, although these two are pushed out of the mainstream of western theology, they continue to be read outside the centre—a readership which is by no means less interesting for being less well known to twenty-first century readers.

Asserting that Weigel did, in fact, draw on Eckhart and Dionysius also corrects an imbalance in modern scholarship on Weigel. Horst Pfefferl, the editor of the critical edition of Weigel’s works concludes that Weigel promulgated a “progressive humanist message [my italics and translation],” naming Paracelsus as Weigel’s primary influence, mentioning only in passing that Weigel read Eckhart and Dionysius but not acknowledging their importance. Moreover, according to Pfefferl, Weigel can be regarded as a precursor to the Enlightenment, or as having anticipated Enlightenment ideas. However, I would argue that Pfefferl’s aligning of Weigel with the humanist tradition rather than with the tradition of mystical writers leads him astray. Weigel’s conception of the individual is not a humanist one, even though what might be termed Weigel’s “policy suggestions” in favour of absolute tolerance and abolishing the death penalty bear a superficial resemblance to other progressive ideas. Weigel’s writings do not celebrate the dignity and the capacity of the human intellect, or the value of public derivative or sub-literary. Although the art of memory as a substitute for writing is much celebrated into the early modern era, Blair finds note-taking to be a “central but often hidden phase in the transmission of knowledge.” (Blair, 85) Blair’s work therefore also corrects Weeks’ and Pfefferl’s relative neglect of Eckhart and Dionysius, since viewing these texts of Weigel’s in the context of contemporary practice gives them a more prominent place in his oeuvre. Ann Blair, Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).


39 Wollgast also detects “humanist” ideas in Weigel’s writing from the very beginning. Siegfried Wollgast, Philosophie in Deutschland 1550-1650 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 514.
discourse and reasoned debate, or the civic responsibilities of the individual. Nor does he express, with the humanists, a respect for learning, or place any hope in the educability of man. Rather, he professes a deep pessimism about the moral and epistemological capacities of the individual, and therefore seeks to minimize the role of the individual as much as possible. As I will show in this dissertation, Weigel argued that the ultimate (and optimal) state for which the individual should strive is to relinquish her individuality so completely that God takes over as the sole epistemological subject. Only in the absence of the individual can harmony, concord and unity be achieved—a position that can hardly be termed humanist.

Likewise, the most recent monograph on Weigel by Andrew Weeks only mentions Eckhart and Dionysius briefly. He mentions Dionysius once, as part of a group of patristic sources (Origen, Dionysius and Augustine), noting that Weigel’s sources also include both the *Theologia Germanica* and the Basel edition of Tauler, and that Weigel cites Eckhart by name. Weeks groups Eckhart together with Tauler, the *Theologia*, Nicholas Cusa and Hugh of St. Victor, lumping them together as “medieval mystical literature” which served as a source for Weigel. The nineteenth century scholarship on Weigel is similarly vague on the question of what Weigel took from medieval and

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40 Weigel even goes so far as to claim that Christ did not take on Adam’s flesh, and that Adam’s flesh will not be redeemed; instead, Christ took on a “heavenly flesh” from the Holy Spirit, which then became mortal but not corruptible (*verweeslich*). This is how the Resurrection was possible, because Adam’s flesh will not be redeemed and resurrected (“daß bluet und fleisch von Adam ist gantz verwörfflich, kommet Nimmer mehr Inn Himel”), and Adam, therefore, will be transposed or implanted (*versetzen werden*) into Christ’s heavenly flesh. Valentin Weigel, *Vom Leben Christi*, in *Sämtliche Schriften: Neue Edition*, Vol. 7, ed. Horst Pfefferl, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 31.

41 Weigel’s conception of scholarly community is hardly complimentary; I will discuss this further in the Chapter 2.

42 Andrew Weeks, *German Religious Dissenter*, 44.

43 Ibid, 51.
classical sources.\textsuperscript{44} Julius Otto Opel mentions Dionysius once, and discusses Tauler’s influence on Weigel but does not mention Eckhart;\textsuperscript{45} August Israel does not discuss Weigel’s sources at all.\textsuperscript{46} An exception is Alexandre Koyré’s essay on Weigel, which acknowledges that mystical ideas are important for Weigel, but refers to mystical ideas in general and is limited to drawing comparisons, rather than tracing the source and method of influence (that is, he talks about the influence of ideas on Weigel, rather than the texts that transmit those ideas).\textsuperscript{47}

Influence, of course, is hard to detect and hard to quantify. Citations of names alone can only be the roughest of guides, and do not account for how newly received ideas circulate once they have been absorbed. True, in one sense, Eckhart-in-Weigel is no longer strictly Eckhart, but this is perhaps too narrow a view of authorship—one that, ultimately, worries about the purity and the faithful reception of a certain set of great or classic authors, in contrast to which other authors are merely derivative and therefore minor.\textsuperscript{48} Looking beyond the first point of contact or where the source appears in its purest form allows the complex interaction between Weigel and his sources to emerge. From this big-picture point of view, the relationship between Eckhart and Weigel then continues beyond Weigel’s lifetime, as Weigel’s work is then included in compilations that reprint mystical texts, such as Eckhart legends, or is copied in manuscripts alongside

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Opel and Israel are perhaps less interested in Weigel’s sources because they are more concerned about his influence, specifically his intellectual kinship with the Pietists and German Idealism. Julius Otto Opel, \textit{Valentin Weigel: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Culturgeschichte Deutschlands im 17. Jahrhundert} (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1864), 52 and 273; Israel, \textit{Leben und Schriften}, 3 and 32.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Opel, \textit{Valentin Weigel}. The Dionysius reference is on page 263, the Tauler reference on page 264.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Israel, \textit{Leben und Schriften}.
\item \textsuperscript{48} I will discuss Eckhart’s status as a classic within the German canon, and what this means for a reader of Weigel, in the first chapter.
\end{itemize}
with fragments of Eckhart and Taurer sermons. (This last statement does not apply to the relationship between Dionysius and Weigel.)

Sara Poor’s study of the complex reception of Mechthild of Magdeburg’s book *Der fliessende Licht der Gottheit* has served as an important methodological model for this dissertation, even though the body of texts addressed differs greatly.49 Addressing the issue of the exclusion of women’s writing from the literary and theological canon, and moreover the double exclusion resulting from the marginalization of pre-modern works in the modern academy, Poor attends to the afterlife of Mechthild’s book in all its forms: from a complete text that names Mechthild as the author, to the inclusion of anonymous excerpts in compilations of devotional texts, to a few remaining traces of Mechthild’s name and work in printed sources from the early modern era, to Mechthild’s appearance and positioning in contemporary teaching anthologies and reference works. Taking a diachronic perspective allows Mechthild to resurface as an author worthy of study, rather than limiting that status to those who have become greats, if greatness is attributed solely to those whose name/fame lives on and whose texts survive intact. Moreover, Poor’s book allows the reader to observe influence across time, and suggests that an author’s afterlife is rarely simple; the reception of an author is not divided into a true reception and a false one, and a work may persist without the author’s name or in fragmentary form.50 In my opinion, Poor’s approach steers a steady course between the New and Old Philologies by thematizing the way that Mechthild’s authorship is *constructed* (by

50 Admittedly from the perspective of the author, as Poor points out, this can be a bad thing as it leads to a weakening of authorship to the point of her disappearance. Poor, 13.
“interrogating the category of tradition itself,” as she puts it), allowing her to look at both the variance and stability in the manuscript tradition.\textsuperscript{51}

Finally, discussing the influence of Eckhart and Dionysius in particular calls for some ground-clearing, since these figures occupied a much different cultural space in the \textit{sixteenth} century than they do in the \textit{twenty-first}: that is, Weigel was certainly interested in Dionysius and Eckhart, but not necessarily for the reasons a modern scholar might imagine, making it also necessary to discuss the reasons why Weigel was \textit{not} interested in Eckhart and Dionysius. First, Weigel was not interested in Eckhart and Dionysius because they were considered great heretics by his contemporaries. Rather, in the \textit{sixteenth} century, Eckhart’s name was not nearly so well known as his \textit{twentieth} century reputation might suggest. Though some writers who mention his name also seem to have known that he had once been suspected of heresy, they do not seem to be much bothered by it or even to know his ideas enough to know why he was investigated by the inquisition. The story of Dionysius’ fate around 1500 is rather different, in that he had been read intensively throughout, but his authority was increasingly called into question in the early \textit{sixteenth} century, when Desiderius Erasmus first voiced his serious doubts that the author was not, in fact, the Dionysius whom the Apostle Paul converted in the Areopagus as he claimed, but rather a Greek or possibly Syrian Christian, later hypothesized to be a disciple of Proclus writing around the turn of the \textit{sixth} century, for whom Dionysius was simply a literary persona.\textsuperscript{52} Because the weight of Dionysius’ authority resulted from his proximity to the Apostle, the role he played in mainstream theological discourse was impaired when it was suggested he was not. In short, both

\textsuperscript{51} Poor, \textit{Mechtild}, 15.
Dionysius and Eckhart (for different reasons) had been pushed out of the theological mainstream by the late sixteenth century when Weigel was writing, either as great heretics or as great authorities.  

Secondly, Weigel did not value Dionysius’ and Eckhart’ writings because they were voices from the past. Although in this case the argument can only be based on negative evidence, Weigel does not mention the age of his sources, either positively or negatively. That Weigel does not profess an interest in the “medievalness” or “antiquity” of his sources is curious, because historiography was a particularly pressing problem for the Protestant movement, which struggled to position itself as a departure from the (corrupt) theology of the Roman Church but without suggesting that it was thereby a novelty—and settled therefore on the self-description as a return to the purity of the early Church. Caught between calling itself both old and new, the Lutheran movement’s attitude towards the intervening centuries is often at odds with itself. On the one hand, Luther was by no means shy about expressing his dislike of (medieval) scholasticism or anything he considered “speculation,” but he was more ambivalent about mystical texts written in the Middle Ages. Again, this might sounds strange to modern ears because mysticism is, more often than not, prefaced with the attribute “medieval,” and therefore Luther ought to have thrown it out along with other the medieval ideas he rejected.

53 Etymologically, orthodoxy means right or correct thought, but now also refers to ideas that have become rigid, inflexible and confining. The OED records this extended use of the word, listing synonyms for orthodoxy as “conservative” and “conventional”. "orthodoxy, n.". OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132809?redirectedFrom=orthodoxy (accessed July 18, 2013). Moreover, it seems to be a peculiarity of post-Enlightenment culture to love the heretic precisely for being a heretic, rather than in spite of it. Highly praised are original thinkers who overturn stale certainties, whose vibrant new ideas shake up stagnant thought patterns.

54 Although Dionysius, properly speaking, belongs to the 5th century, his writings only became visible in western Christianity in the 13th century, such that the height of the influence of both Eckhart and Dionysius on the tradition that Weigel belonged to, dates back to the Middle Ages. In other words, Dionysius only “came alive” as a theologian in Europe in the Middle Ages.
Alternatively, some Lutherans took it upon themselves to ferret through the theological writings of the Middle Ages in search of documents that agreed with Luther’s new theology, thus proving that Luther was only the latest in a line of witnesses to the Truth, and that true theology could not be extinguished even under the tyranny of the papacy.55 But whereas the question of how to value the theological writings of the Middle Ages was an important issue for many Lutherans (regardless of how they answered the question), it seems that history was not a pressing question for Weigel.

In short, Weigel was interested in Eckhart and Dionysius neither because they were considered heretics nor because they antedated Luther’s writings. He did not turn to these texts because they formed part of an anti-canonical list of books that pious Lutherans ought to stay away from; if anything, Eckhart and Dionysius would have been part of the eclectic reading list of a learned sixteenth-century reader. Rather, I argue throughout this dissertation that Weigel was keenly interested in what these texts had to say about indifference. The concept of indifference is the key element of Weigel’s response to the theological and ecclesiological challenges of his time, namely a lack of consensus about fundamental issues: how should decisions about religious life be made, on what basis, and more importantly, by whom? Indifference became key for Weigel because the sixteenth century saw not only doctrine transformed in the wake of Luther’s reform

55 The most famous of these projects was headed by Matthias Flacius Illyricus, producing the Catalogus Testium Veritatis, qui ante nostram aetatem reclamarunt Papae (1556), reprinted in 1562 and translated into German in 1573; and then the monumental Ecclesiastica Historia, better known as the Magdeburger Centurien, published between 1557 and 1574. A good (albeit partisan) overview of Flacius’ enormously interesting work is Oliver K. Olson, Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2002); see also Bruce Gordon, “The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century” and Markus Wriedt, “Luther's Concept of History and the Formation of an Evangelical Identity”, in Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, ed. Bruce Gordon (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1996); Martina Hartmann, “Matthias Flacius Illyricus, die Magdeburger Centuriatoren und die Anfänge der quellenbezogenen Geschichtsforschung,” in Catalogus und Centurien: Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Matthias Flacius und den Magdeburger Centurien, ed. Martina Hartmann and Arno Mentzel-Reuters, 1-17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).
movement, but also profound shifts in religious leadership and government, a process that modern scholarship calls confessionalization. Confessionalization standardized and bureaucratized religious life, and increasingly brought worship under the oversight of secular power, both of which Weigel found extremely troubling. In observing how confessionalization reshaped the Lutheran Church in Saxony for the worse (in Weigel’s opinion), he concluded that fighting against it was fruitless, and that the most principled response was to cultivate an attitude of indifference.

Confessionalization

In order to understand the radical quality of Weigel’s advocacy of indifference, we must delve deeper into the tensions between Church and State that characterize this period of confessionalization. Generating and maintaining doctrinal conformity became an urgent problem in Europe beginning in the sixteenth century, and modern scholarship has attributed this development to the increasingly close integration of Church and State that arose after the Lutheran schism left the Church in strongly Lutheran areas without an administrative head. The term used to describe this logic is confessionalization, and modern historians argue that, although religion and politics had always been “structurally interlinked” in European society, in the early modern period, religion came to play a role in all areas of society, functioning as the “central axis” connecting state and society.56

The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 allowed the head of each territory in the Holy
Roman Empire to decide which religion would be permitted in his land (summed up by
the phrase *cuius regio, eius religio*), but even before 1555, the evangelical movement
had, after parting ways with the church in Rome, begun to transfer the administration of
religious affairs over to secular rulers in the so-called *Landeskirchen*. In the case of the
Protestant churches in the Holy Roman Empire, the administration of the Church was
taken over by the princes of certain territories, meaning that as doctrine became tied to
particular territories under the formal leadership of secular rulers, doctrinal disagreements
came to bear political consequences, and, conversely, that doctrinal conformity was
sought in order to maintain political unity. This meant giving the Prince oversight over

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57 The Peace of Augsburg did not propose to settle any doctrinal questions, but rather mandated peace in a
provisional fashion, until the Schism could be resolved. As Schmidt writes, “die Wahrheitsfrage wird aus
dem Friedensabkommen ausgeklammert.” (Schmidt, *Konfessionalisierung*, 4) For a summary of the terms
of conditions, see Heinrich Richard Schmidt, *Konfessionalisierung im 16. Jahrhundert* (München:
Oldenbourg Verlag, 1992), 4. See also Robert von Friedebug, “Church and State in Lutheran Lands, 1550-

58 The confessionalization literature takes all three confessions together as belonging to the same
“gesellschaftlichen Fundamentalvorgang” of the Early Modern Era (i.e. the developments affected society
as a whole rather than religious practice, organization and doctrine on its own). The implication is that
differences in theology and doctrine do not affect the trajectory of social and political development of the
territory in question. Though Catholic areas did not become *Landeskirchen* in the same way, constrained by
their continued allegiance to the Pope, the confessionalization thesis also argues that secular rulers
implemented the Catholic Reformation (i.e. the Counter-reformation) in a way that had similar results as in
Protestant territories (the classic example is Bavaria). This dissertation focuses on the Lutheran
*Landeskirche* in Saxony, and a discussion of the three confessions in parallel is beyond its scope. For a
clear summary of confessionalization in territories of all three confessions, see Schmidt,*Konfessionalisierung*. See also the article on confessionalization in Anette Völker-Rasor, ed., *Frühe

59 The extent to which the agency for the reforms is given to the Prince or to his subjects is disputed—i.e.
whether confessionalization was a top-down or bottom-up process. This debate is not so important to this
study, and perhaps it need not be a contentious point at all. It seems that confessionalization was, most
likely, the result of negotiated cooperation between the Prince and his subjects, the balance of initiative and
enforcement differing according to contingent circumstances. Whether the people banded together and
lobbied their Prince to accept reforms and helped him carry them out, or the Prince implemented them out
of personal conviction against the wishes of his people, or again whether the Prince (sincerely or
opportunistically) anticipated the wishes of his people by calling for reform but limited their participation
beyond that, these configurations might affect the character of confessionalization in a given territory but
are not amongst the critiques that would call into question the fundamental insight of the
confessionalization thesis. When speaking of the Prince as the actor here, what is designated is his official
schools, as well as universities where ministers and teachers were now trained in the new doctrine,\textsuperscript{60} giving the Prince the authority to organize the finances for the church by dissolving church property, to establish \textit{consistoria} (staffed by both theologians and state-trained jurists) to carry out visitations of all the parishes, synods and superintendents to supervise the training and calling of ministers, and to publish a \textit{Kirchenordnung} for each realm that established a uniform liturgy.\textsuperscript{61} Social functions that the church had previously carried out such as running schools, providing for the poor and marrying couples now fell to secular powers.\textsuperscript{62} The Prince also commissioned confessional documents laying out what was to be believed, which members of the clergy were required to sign, as were some secular office-holders.\textsuperscript{63} That is, confessional documents were not simply theological statements, but also served to regulate access to political and religious leadership in the early modern state.\textsuperscript{64} From this macrohistorical perspective, in a certain


\textsuperscript{61}Anton Schindling, Walter Ziegler, \textit{Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500-1650},” (Münster: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1990). Within this multivolume work, the relevant chapters are found in Volume 4, 21ff and Volume 2, 17ff.

\textsuperscript{62}Schmidt, \textit{Konfessionalisierung}, 7.


\textsuperscript{64}“Konkordienformel und Konkordienbuch bildeten nicht nur ein ‘corpus doctrinæ’...; sie regelten auch gleichzeitig den Zugang zu Ämtern und Diensten des frühprotestantischen Territorialstaates und seiner Kirche.” Schreiner, 351.
sense the actual doctrinal content of a confessional document was irrelevant, what mattered was the fact and method of its production and implementation.65

Though of course Weigel did not use the term confessionalization, he was a keen observer of the effect that confession-building and confessional documents had on his social surroundings, both secular and ecclesiastical. He reports reading reams of theological disputations, and quickly growing tired of these endless quarrels ("scharmutzeln").66 He frankly acknowledges that, rather than clarifying what true doctrine is, these disputations only made him less certain of what to believe. These quarrels, he reports, remind him of the confusion that reigned in Babel ("Ich sahe an wie ein verworren Babel es were bey uns.").67 Weigel’s allusion to the failed tower of Babel is apt, since it points to an example of how the spiritual transgression of the Babylonians had grave consequences for their actual political organization.68 That is, the story of the tower dates, according to the Old Testament, to a time when the whole world had one language and a common speech ("einerly zungen und sprache"), a common speech that

65 Historians of confessionalization devote very little space to discussing the points of theology, which belongs to the discipline of either theology itself, or Church history. Schmidt, Konfessionalisierung, 1.
66 Valentin Weigel, Der güldene Griff, in Sämtliche Schriften, ed. Horst Pfefferl, Volume 8 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1997), 89. I will discuss this passage in much greater detail in the next section.
67 Weigel, Griff, 89.
68 This episode is narrated in Genesis 11:1-9. “Es hatte aber alle Welt einerly zungen und sprache. Da sie nu zuogen gem Morgen, funden sie ein eben Land, im lande Sinear, und woneten daselbs. Und sprachen unternander, Wolauff, lasst uns Ziegel streichen und brennen, Und namen ziegel zu stein, und thon zu kalck, und sprachen, Wolauff, Lasst uns eine Stadt und Thurn bawen, des spitze bis an den Himel reiche, das wir uns einen namen machen, Denn wir werden vielleicht zerstrewet in alle Lender. DA fur der HERR ernider, das er sehe die Stad und Thurn, die die Menschenkinder baweten. Und der HERR sprach, Sihe, Es ist einerly Volck und einerly Sprach unter inen allen, und haben das angefangen zu thun, sie werden nicht ablassen von allem das sie furgenomen haben zu thun. Wolauff, lasst uns ernider faren, und ire Sprache da selbs verwirren, das keiner des andern sprache verneme. Also zerstrewet sie der HERR von dannen in lender das sie auffhorten die stad zu bawen. Daher heyst yhr name Babel, das der HERRE da selbs verwyret hatte aller lender sprach, und sie zerstrewet von dannen ynn alle lender.” Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations are from Luther’s translation. D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1929). Admittedly, in another sense the Babel allusion is not apt at all, since, in fact, the building of the tower was perfectly successful until God took offence. Were it not for God’s intervention, the tower might have been built and the various peoples might have continued to cooperate, aided by their common language.
allowed them to cooperate effectively to build the tower. However, they undertook to build a tower that reaches up to the heavens in order to make a name for themselves (“einen namen machen”), and it is their hubris that God objects to. It is only God who successfully creates, it is to God that all honour is due (i.e. nobody should make a name for himself), and man should not reach up into the heavens on his own, encroaching on God’s domain. In order to prevent their plan from succeeding, God confuses their language so they will not understand each other, and their building work ceases as the people are scattered over the face of the whole Earth (“zerstrewet von dannen ynn alle lender”). Deprived of their common language, humankind can no longer cooperate on common projects. In Weigel’s case, when he refers to the Lutheran Church as a “confused Babel,” he means that theologians had begun resolving their doctrinal disputes by reporting each other to secular authorities, defeating their opponents not in open debate in order to reconcile their differences, but rather by turning them in to face imprisonment or exile. Language, as it was used in theological disputations, sermons, treatises and confessional documents serves to scatter and divide the Lutheran community rather than to unite them. Moreover, as I will discuss later in this section, Weigel had grown increasingly skeptical about whether spoken or written language could ever function as the centre of church life. On the other hand, Luther and many Lutherans considered Bible reading and a spoken liturgy crucial to Christianity, a conviction that Weigel attacked sharply by describing the Lutheran Church as a Babel held back from cooperation by language, and where language is something that divides man from God rather than bringing him closer to God.

69 “Item do sahe ich wie einer den andern fur weltlicher obrigkeitt angabe, Incarcerirte, verlagte etc. von wegen der erbsund, des freien willens, der person Christi etc.” Weigel, Griff, 90.
Doctrinal squabbles intensified in the sixteenth century not simply for their own sake, but also because the marking-out of confessional boundaries became the cornerstone of the state-building process, where the interrelation of Church and State functioned as the “Schlüsselmonopol [key monopoly] within early modern state-building.”70 One crucial tool to achieve this was a new kind of document—the confessional document. The structure of the confessional documents served both to generate cohesion within the confession, and also to delimit one confession from another.

For instance, the articles in the chief Lutheran confessional document, the *Formula Concordiae* (1577), begin by affirming, in the first person plural, what Lutherans believe and confess (“Wir gläuben und bekennen”) and then by rejecting and condemning what other confessions believe (“Dagegen verwerfen und verdammen wir einhellig alle nachfolgende irrige Artikel”).71 This *Formula Concordiae* marked the high point in the drive towards confessionalization during Weigel’s lifetime. A product of the cooperation of many Lutheran territories, the *Formula Concordiae* was meant to unify Lutherans by providing an ultimate authority in matters of doctrine, backed by the authority of secular rulers. Duke August of Saxony, for instance, had the document circulated throughout his domain, pressuring all theologians and pastors to subscribe to it. Refusing to sign, it was

70 Schilling, *Konfessionalisierung*, 514. Schreiner and Schilling both note that the basis for this belief that political unity and societal harmony could be best achieved through religious unity, as summed up in the phrase *religio vinculum societas* (religion is the bond of society). On the development of the first confessional statements in the early Church, and particularly on the Emperor Constantine’s involvement in the Nicaean Council, see Gunther Gottlieb, "Confessio in der alten Kirche: Entstehung, Funktion, Inhalte," in *Bekenntnis und Geschichte: Die Confessio Augustana im historischen Zusammenhang*, 11-30 (München: Verlag Ernst Vögel, 1980). An overview of these disputes can be found in Irene Dingel, "The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548-1580)," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550-1675*, 15-64 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

made clear, would result in dismissal from one’s post, or even exile,\textsuperscript{72} and so Weigel duly subscribed (though with private regret).\textsuperscript{73} In the end, two thirds of German Lutherans accepted the \textit{Formula Concordiae}, falling short of the goal of complete Lutheran unity but generating a large body of people committed to its doctrine and acknowledging its force; Weigel’s signature would have been one amongst more than 8,000.\textsuperscript{74}

The process of confessionalization described here implies a new configuration of this-worldly authority in relation to otherworldly authority, as Weigel notes with displeasure with reference to his own era. However, balancing immanence and transcendence is a challenge for Christianity as a whole, whose main object of worship is, after all, the immanent/transcendent God-Man.\textsuperscript{75} Whether there should be an earthly church, and if so, how it ought to be organized, are questions caught up in this same tension between immanence and transcendence, for although Christ’s physical body departed the Earth at his Ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost put a halo over the dispensing of pastoral care to earthly assemblies (\textit{ekklesia}), no matter how strong the impulse of devout Christians to flee the corrupt world. Christ’s injunction to drink his

\textsuperscript{72} Inge Mager, "Aufnahme und Ablehnung des Konkordienbuches in Nord-, Mittel- und Ostdeutschland," in \textit{Bekenntnis und Einheit der Kirche: Studien zum Konkordienbuch}, (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1980), 274-275. Schreiner observes that the secular and religious leaders of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century likely did not view the obligatory subscription to confessional documents as a measure designed to restrict freedom, but rather as a way to generate both religious and political consensus: “eine religiös und rechtlich qualifizierte Treuebindung gegenüber Gott und dem weltlichen Herrscher.” Schreiner, 355.

\textsuperscript{73} Weigel, \textit{Dialogus}, 59f.

\textsuperscript{74} Schmidt, \textit{Konfessionalisierung}, 13. “Elector Ludwig of the Palatinate [was brought] into concert with the other two leading Evangelical princes of the German Empire, the electors of Saxony and Brandenburg, August and Joachim II. These three, joined by eighty other princely and municipal governments, led 8,188 theologians into subscription of the Formula of Concord by 1580.” Robert Kolb and Timothy J Wengert, \textit{The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church}, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J Wengert, trans. Charles et al Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 2.

\textsuperscript{75} The tension between immanence and transcendence can be seen in the heresies that have dogged the church since the very beginning of its history. A number of the heresies of the early Church were about how the Incarnation was to be understood, given the difficulty of comprehending how Christ could be both human and divine. The temptation was to deny or relativize either one of these natures, where docetism was anathemized for denying Christ’s humanity and Arianism for denying his divinity. An overview of the Christological debates in the early church can be found in Rowan Williams, “Jesus Christus II: Alte Kirche,” Vol. 16, in \textit{Theologische Realenzyklopädie} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986).
blood and eat his body established an equally frustrating cross between earthly wine and heavenly blood, one that required Christians to gather together to carry out an earthly ritual. Moreover, if the Apostles beheld God in the flesh when he appeared on Earth as Jesus Christ, then interpreting the second commandment that made all images of the transcendent God taboo (Exodus 20:4) was no longer an easy matter: did the Bilderverbot apply to images of Christ as well?

And finally, though the world may be sinful, Christ repeatedly refused any involvement in political and social affairs, opening up the disjunction between the secular and sacred spheres when he tells his followers “So gebet dem Keiser, was des Keisers ist, und Gotte, was Gottes ist.” This is easier said than done, given that what is at stake is salvation (what could be more important?) and the absolute claims of an omnipotent God (why should his claims not be absolute?). Confessionalization puts additional pressure on Christ’s commandment, in that the Landeskirche, under the oversight of the Prince, seems to play the role of both Caesar and God. In this tense scenario, it is no easy task to distinguish between the things that belong to God and those that belong to Caesar.

Although Luther does make room for temporal political authority, he still argues for a strict separation of temporal and spiritual government. Temporal authority is charged with restraining the chaos that constantly threatens the post-lapsarian world.

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76 Matthew, 22:21
78 WA11, 251:12-15. Luther addresses this question, amongst others, in a treatise from 1523 entitled Von weltlicher Uberkeytt, wie weyt man yhr gehorsam schuldig sey: “Zum reych der welt oder unter das gesetz gehören alle, die nicht Christen sind. Denn syntemal wenig gliben und das weniger teyl sich hellt nach Christlicher art, das es nicht widderstrebe dem ubel, Ja das es nicht selb ubel thue, hat Gott den selben ausser dem Chrstlichen stand unnd Gottis reych eyn ander regiment verschafft unnd sie unter das schwerd geworffen.. Denn wo das nicht were, Syntemal alle welt böse und unter tausent kaum eyn recht Christ ist, würde eyns das ander fressen, das niemant kund weyb und kind zihen, sich neeren und Gotte dienen, damit
and in these external dealings, the Prince rules with God’s blessing.\textsuperscript{79} However, temporal power must remember its limits, “das sie sich nicht zuo weytt strecke unnd Gott ynn seyn reych und regiment greyffe.”\textsuperscript{80} Luther insists that faith is an act of God alone; over this internal kingdom of the soul God rules with his Word alone, without the mediation of the external sword of temporal authority.\textsuperscript{81} Luther, crucially, also restricts the authority of spiritual government in favour of divine authority over the soul, calling the government (“regiment”) of priests and bishops “nicht eyn uberkeytt odder gewallt, sondern ein dienst und ampt.”\textsuperscript{82} Luther formulated his dialectical “two-kingdoms theory” (as it is often called) when there existed at least a nominal institutional separation between temporal (kings, princes and emperors) and spiritual authority (bishops and popes). A half a century later, Weigel worried that the reordering of the Saxon state in his own time confounded God and Caesar entirely and concluded that such a church could no longer be God’s church: Weigel classed both the Lutheran Church and the \textit{Obrigkeit} in Saxony on the side of Caesar and dismissed them both as lacking authority in matters of faith.

\textbf{Making Decisions and Making Meaning}

Dismissing the guidance of the Church’s authority in religious matters, however, contributed little to solving the dilemma discussed at the beginning of this introduction,

\textsuperscript{79} WA11, 266:9-18.
\textsuperscript{80} WA11, 261:30-31.
\textsuperscript{81} WA11, 263:13-15.
\textsuperscript{82} WA11, 271:11-12.
namely Weigel’s decision to sign the *Formula Concordiae* despite his many reservations. Weigel’s decision-making process and ultimately the decision to keep quiet grows out of his reading practice—and so it is to this question of reading and decision making that I now turn.

Of the thousands of decisions a person must make each day, most normally involve a relatively limited set of options to choose from (writing this dissertation vs. going to the movies; eating chips vs. going for a run), and are geared toward simple goals (professional success; healthy living). In such cases, decision-making is governed by single factors (cost, pleasure, effort) and the evidence needed to decide between the options is easy to assess. Other decisions are more difficult: inscrutable evidence and uncertain outcomes get in the way of clear choices that would leave the conscience unburdened. Making decisions in a complex system proves difficult because complex systems produce unintended consequences, there might not exist a single good or bad outcome, and it is often necessary to make trade-offs between priorities. Observing decisions at the level of individual agency and choice is perhaps not a useful way of analyzing what have been termed “messy” or “wicked” problems. Wicked problems are “unbounded in scope, time and resources,” such that it is difficult even to describe the problem, and therefore even more difficult to gather and evaluate evidence that would guide problem solving or decision making. No doubt any individual decision has an impact on the system as a whole, but it is impossible to say just what that impact might be, since the effect is distorted and filtered through all the other agents operating within the system. One writer has compared simple and complex systems to the difference between throwing a rock and throwing a live bird. Both rock and bird are subject to the
same laws of physics, but while the trajectory of the rock is predictable, the bird’s trajectory is not, because the bird is an agent in the system as well; it is not simply acted upon.\(^{83}\) Considering Weigel’s decision to speak out (or not) in this light, Weigel viewed his decision to testify in the context of the religious system as a whole, taking into account the intended and unintended consequences of his actions, not only for himself, but also for the other agents in the system, such as his parishioners.

Weigel, of course, did not treat decision making in the abstract, but rather within the context of his life as a practicing Christian, for whom the related behavioural ideals of *discipleship* or *witnessing* serve as guidelines for right action. Matthew, for instance, dwells upon the instruction that Christ gives to go out into the world and preach the Gospel: “gehet hin zu den verloren Schafen, aus dem Hause Israel...Gehet aber und predigt und sprecht: Das Himmelreich ist nahe her bey kommen.”\(^{84}\) In carrying out this proselytizing mission, the apostles should expect to be disliked and even persecuted, but should persist to the end (even facing death, if necessary) and, above all, should never conceal their message even in dangerous circumstances, at risk of jeopardizing their salvation: “Darumb wer mich bekennet fur den Menschen, den will ich bekennen fur meynem vatter ym hymel, wer mich aber verleugnet, fur den menschen, den will ich verleugnen fur meynem vatter ym hymel’.”\(^{85}\) This obligation to publicly acknowledge one’s beliefs before others is central to the early Christian martyr stories (and to the saints’


\(^{84}\) Matthew 10: 6-7.

\(^{85}\) Matthew 10: 22 “Es wird aber ein Bruder den andern zum Tod uberantworten, und der Vater den Son, und die Kinder werden sich emporen wider ire Eltern, und inen zum tode helffen, Und mueset gehasset werden von jederman umb meines Namens willen. Wer aber bis an das Ende beharret, der wird selig.” Matthew 10: 32-33.
lives into the Middle Ages). In a public space—before the pagan Emperor, in front of a hostile crowd, or in court—a Christian must not deny Christ, even if adhering to his faith in Christ results in him being subjected to the most gruesome trials.  

A classic martyr story is that of St. Catherine of Alexandria, who speaks so eloquently of her faith before a pagan Emperor and the fifty pagan scholars he called to defeat her in disputation that the scholars are all converted and prefer to be put to death rather than retract their conversion. Her boldness when she speaks to the Emperor is remarkable: “The gods you worship can help neither you nor anybody else.” The Emperor then asks Catherine to marry him and be worshipped as a goddess in his realm, but she answers that she is married to Christ and would rather die than betray her faith. The Emperor then poses the martyr’s question (“Now you choose one or the other for yourself: offer sacrifice and live, or submit to exquisite torture and die!”) but Catherine is defiant: “whatever torments you have in mind, don’t waste time! My one desire is to offer my flesh and blood to Christ as he offered himself for me. He is my God, my lover, my shepherd, and my one and only spouse.” When the time comes for her to be tortured and killed, she is not afraid but rather “raised her eyes to Heaven and prayed.”

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87 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 335. Another such story is the martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna. He is arrested, and the Emperor tries to persuade him to perform sacrifices, but he steadfastly refuses: “If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you request, and pretend not to know who I am, listen carefully: I am a Christian.” (151) Upon hearing that Polycarp openly confessed to being a Christian, the people become angry and demand that he be burned at the stake; even as he is killed he continues to pray and praise God. "The Martyrdom of Polycarp," in *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, trans. Michael W. Holmes after the earlier version of J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Tertullian’s *De Fuga in Persecutione* is another *locus classicus* for the necessity of witnessing, arguing that persecution should be welcomed as a divine test of faith: “For what else is the result of a persecution, what finally is its effect, if not the approval or condemnation, when God puts the faith of His children to the test? In this sense, then, a persecution is a ‘judgment,’ and the verdict is either approval or condemnation. To be sure, to God alone it belongs to judge, and this is His winnowing fan which even now cleanses the Lord’s threshing floor—His Church, winnowing the mixed heap of the faithful and separating the wheat of the martyrs from the chaff of the cowards.”

In Tertullian’s view, Weigel would most certainly qualify as chaff rather than wheat. In fact, Tertullian might have been doubly critical of Weigel for not speaking up, since his public ministry placed him in a special position of authority. As he writes: “But when persons in authority themselves—I mean the very deacons, and presbyters, and bishops—take to flight...When the leaders run away, who of the common crowd can hope to persuade anyone to stand firm in battle?”

Rather than accusing Weigel of cowardice in the face of persecution, as discussed above, perhaps we might analyse his decision not to testify as a decision to admit calculation into religious behaviour, rather than the calculation-free attitude of the martyr (the obligation to testify no matter the cost). Thinking of decision making as risk management is considered a hallmark of the modern and secular world, dating back not much further than the *seventeenth* century, where the modern world is said to think of the world as a complex system that can be (at least partially) known and (to a certain extent)

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90 Tertullian, 276.
managed, whereas the premodern mindset saw the world as providentially ordered, and thus both inscrutable (“nobody knows the ways of the Lord”) and inalterable.  

Nevertheless, Weigel’s world was on the cusp of this transformation, and there is a fascinating possibility (as I will discuss at the end of Chapter 2) that Weigel himself had begun to think of the world as contingent, governed by decisions and calculations. In this context, the logic of Weigel’s self-defence can be reframed in terms of a risk-management calculation: *If* he had testified (contingent decision, risk), *then* there would have been a bad outcome for himself (danger) and not even any compensatory upside (benefits). Furthermore, Niklas Luhmann suggests that the distinction between secular and religious decision making is in fact the extent to which risk is taken into account.  

As he writes, “one can refuse to be guided at all by risk-related distinctions—for instance in the context of primarily religious or otherwise ‘fanatical’ ventures. But when one does take risks into consideration, every variant in a decision making repertoire—that is to say the entire alternative—is risky, if only with the risk of not grasping certain opportunities that could possible [sic] prove advantageous.” In this light, the injunction to witness and testify regardless of the risk to one’s life or safety is marked as a fanatical venture, whereas Weigel accepts that some degree of calculation in religious life is acceptable.  

Nevertheless, Christians who lived long after Christ’s death face a particular problem, namely that the intervening centuries had produced such a flowering of controversy that there was more than one Christianity for which one could offer oneself

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as a martyr. Moreover, Holy Scripture, though many people call it “revelation,” is frustratingly unclear (or at least obscure in parts), as the reams of commentary, centuries of controversy and manuals on scriptural interpretation suggest.\(^93\) Though the decisions Christians make should lead to actions that bear witness to Christ, just exactly what they must witness \textit{to} is contained in a written text.\(^94\) In order to determine how to act, one must first determine how to interpret. In other words, the need for one yardstick generates, in its turn, the need for a yardstick to measure the first yardstick.

Any number of such hermeneutical yardsticks has been proposed in the two millennia since Christ’s death. Augustine,\(^95\) for instance, suggested that, the “rule of

\(^{93}\) Augustine admits that Scripture is unclear, but then stresses the \textit{benefits} of Scripture’s obscurity in the \textit{City of God}, redefining Scripture’s obscurity as bounty and plenitude. Augustine writes: “There is something to be gained from the obscurity of the inspired discourses of Scripture. The differing interpretations produce many truths and bring them to the light of knowledge; and the meaning of an obscure passage may be established either by the plain evidence of the facts, or by other passages of less difficulty. Sometimes the variety of suggestions leads to the discovery of the meaning of the writer; sometimes this meaning remains obscure, but the discussion of the difficulties is the occasion for the statement of some other truths.” (Augustine, \textit{City of God}, Book 11:19.) St. Augustine, \textit{Concerning the City of God against the Pagans}, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 450. McGinn comments that “Gregory [likewise] admitted that sometimes the literal sense was erroneous or self-contradictory and therefore should be abandoned.” Bernard McGinn, \textit{The Growth of Mysticism} (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 42. See also Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, \textit{Apokalypse und Philologie: Wissensgeschichten und Weltentwürfe der Frühen Neuzeit}, ed. Anja Hallacker and Boris Bayer (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2007), 53-78.

\(^{94}\) Of course, the relationship between ethics and interpretation is only pressing for those who believe the content of a written text to be binding—as was the case for many or most forms of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Modern (secular) ethics, as a discipline, might refer to a legal code, or might refer to the books written by other philosophers, but neither set of texts has an equivalently authoritative status as the Bible did for most 16\textsuperscript{th} century Christians, and therefore the connection between reading and action might not seem immediately obvious.

\(^{95}\) Augustine has great confidence in the ability of human readers to interpret Scripture, with gracious divine support, of course. His \textit{De doctrina christiana} presents “certain rules for interpreting the scriptures which...can usefully be passed on to those with an appetite for such study to enable them to progress not just by reading the work of others who have illuminated the obscurities of divine literature, but also by finding illumination themselves.” (Augustine, \textit{De doctrina}, 3.) Augustine is careful to insist on the distinction between finding illumination through rule-guided interpretation and finding illumination “without any human expositor.” (Ibid, 9.) and without rules, inspired directly (as they claim) by God. By means of the rules for interpretation Augustine sets forth, a reader can “unerringly arrive at the hidden meaning for himself or at least avoid falling into incongruous misconceptions.” (Ibid, 11.) Scripture is chiefly characterized by its astonishing abundance (“mirabili abundantia”), which, like the loaves and fish that were distributed amongst the faithful, is only augmented by dividing it amongst many interpreters. (Ibid, 13.) For Augustine, interpretation enriches and augments, it does not encrust and obscure. Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Amongst the better known...
charity” should be applied to the entire project of scriptural interpretation: the correct interpretation is the one that leads a person to behave charitably towards his neighbour and to love God. Others, including Augustine, turned to tradition to interpret Scripture—using, that is, previous interpretations to guide new ones, such that interpretation is never carried out alone and in the abstract but rather collectively and in the context of church life. In fact, von Bormann even suggests that the need for hermeneutics is only felt in times when tradition breaks down and readers feel alienated from the text, which becomes erklärungsbedürftig. That a renewed interest in hermeneutics arose in the aftermath of the Protestant schism would be therefore no surprise, but rather parallels similar hermeneutic turns, for instance in the development of allegoresis in classical Greece to interpret Homer, the Midrash to interpret the Torah, or allegory to interpret the Old Testament.

Examples is the following interpretation of an image from the Song of Songs: “Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes ascending from the pool, all of which give birth to twins, and there is not a sterile animal among them” (Song of Songs 4:2). Augustine is delighted by this passage, which to him is neither in praise of an actual woman nor about actual sheep, but rather a figure for the church: “And it is with the greatest of pleasure that I visualize the shorn ewe, their worldly burdens set aside like fleeces, ascending from the pool (baptism) and all giving birth to twins (the two commandments of love), with none of them failing to produce this holy fruit.” (Augustine, De doctrina, 33.)

According to Augustine, the goal Scripture is to convince us to “love the thing which must be enjoyed.” Hence “anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them.” De Doctrina Christiana, 49. Or as he puts it later in the same treatise, in teaching how to decipher whether the text speaks literally or figuratively: “Therefore in dealing with figurative expressions we will observe a rule of this kind: the passage being read should be studied with careful consideration until its interpretation can be connected with the realm of love.” De Doctrina Christiana, 157. See also Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 23. Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’écriture (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1993).


Alternatively, the so-called four-fold method of hermeneutics—where any line or image might bear up to four layers of meaning, the literal, the allegorical, the tropological (i.e. moral) and the anagogical (i.e. relating to the afterlife in Heaven)—allowed multiple meanings to co-exist harmoniously, such that an obscure passage might be rendered meaningful by abstracting from the literal meaning.\(^99\) Gregory, on the other hand, proposed that Scripture would reveal its meaning according to the needs of the exegete’s audience.\(^100\) Alternatively, Aquinas argued that the interpretation of the text depended on whether one considered the author’s original intention (which was how Aquinas defined the literal sense) or God’s intention, as the ultimate author of both Scripture and the history contained in it (the spiritual sense). The literal interpretation was the only one that could be used as a proof text, although he allowed that the spiritual sense could be used for edification and spiritual improvement.\(^101\)

Martin Luther proposed a radically different hermeneutic, because for Luther, Scripture was *not* obscure, in fact.\(^102\) Or at least, its obscurities were incidental, the result of poor translation and bad editing practices. To this end, Luther commended Erasmus’

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\(^100\) Smalley, 32-33. Smalley writes that Gregory was responding to a need for spiritual guidance at a time “when civilization seemed to be condemned” as the Roman empire was under threat from the “barbarian” armies.


\(^102\) In *De servo arbitrio* from 1525, Luther writes: “In Deo esse multa abscondia, quae ignoremus, nemo dubitat, sicut ipsum dicat de die extremo...Sed esse in scriptura quaedam abstrusa et non omnia exposita, invulgatum est quidem per impios Sophistas...Hoc sane fatare, esse multa loca in scripturis obscura et abstrusa, non ob maiestatem rerum, sed ob ignorantiam vocabulorum et grammaticae, sed quae nihil impediant scientiam omnium rerum in scripturis. Quid enim potest in scripturis augustius latere reliquum, postquam fractis signaculis et voluto ab hostio sepulchri lapide, illud summum mysterium proditum est, Christum filium Dei factum hominem...Res igitur in scripturis contentae omnes sunt proditae, licet quaedam loca adhuc verbis incognitis obscura sint.” WA18, 606:12-31. See also Henning Schröer, *Hermeneutik I*, Vol. 15, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 115.
efforts to produce an edition of the Bible in its original languages, a project that had not been seriously pursued since Jerome’s translation work in the 4th century. As Luther imagined it, the true meaning of Scripture would no doubt shine forth from a New Testament freed of the Latin accretions that encrusted the Vulgate text and restored to its original Greek. Luther participated in the humanists’ project by translating the Bible into German from Erasmus’ Greek edition (completed in 1534), rather than from the Latin vulgate as previous translators had done. Furthermore, Luther polemicized against the four-fold method, arguing that this method generated arbitrary allegorical meanings that strayed too far from the intent of the text, and allowed human invention to take precedence over divine revelation. He did allow that Scripture occasionally used metaphors, but he restricted metaphorical interpretation to cases where the Bible itself signalled that it was using metaphor: Christ’s parables, for instance, were not meant to be read literally, but were acceptable since the text itself provided the key to solving the metaphor.

Luther distinguished between the Gospel (God’s single, unified message of salvation for humankind) and Scripture (its written relic), which meant that no other books or commentaries were, in theory at least, necessary since “das Evangelium selbs

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105 Scott H. Hendrix, “Luther Against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation,” Interpretation 37, no. 3 (1983): 229-231. Hendrix clarifies that, of course, medieval exegetes did not ignore the literal and historical sense, nor did Luther abandon allegory altogether, but rather that Luther had an “aversion to excessive allegorizing and...[a] willingness to find the legitimate meaning in the grammatical and historical analysis of the text.” (234)
tzeyger und unterrichter ist ynn die schrifft.\textsuperscript{106} While such a statement did establish, for Luther, that Scripture was the only book a Christian needed—as summed up in the phrase \textit{sola scriptura}—it is, in a sense simply renaming the unknown element (now called Gospel instead of Scripture): one would now have to ask what exactly the Gospel \textit{is} by which Scripture is so clearly interpreted?\textsuperscript{107} However, even though the Gospel seemed self-evident to Luther, he did, of course, need to do a certain amount of interpretive work to articulate his message for others, namely by establishing that the Bible had a “core,” a centre around which meaning could cohere. He and his co-reformer Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) agreed that the core of the Bible was Paul’s letter to the Romans.\textsuperscript{108} In Romans, the truth of the Bible is most clearly promulgated, and, once the reader had understood this exemplarily clear statement of God’s truth, he might safely venture into

\textsuperscript{106} From Luther’s \textit{Eyn kleyn unterricht, was man ynn den Euangelijs suchen und gewartten soll} (1521). WA10.1.1 17:1-2.

\textsuperscript{107} Although Luther did argue that a return to Scripture was the keystone of the purified church, it is worth considering Kolakowski’s contention that Scripture could never be the foundation for any ecclesiastical institution: as soon as one recognizes the legitimacy of any given institution, there is by definition an authority other than Scripture. As he writes: “Aucune autorité ecclésiastique authentique ne pouvait être fondée sur la principe exclusif de l’autorité de la Bible, du moment que le monde chrétien tout entier acceptait cette autorité; chaque organisation qui voulait se différencier par rapport au monde restant, et qui, donc, tout simplement voulait exister, était contrainte de se définir au moyen d’une Confession particulière...Une alternative se posait à chaque mouvement de réforme : s’en tenir avec esprit de suite au principe de l’autorité exclusive de la Bible, et par conséquent ne pas s’isoler sous une forme organisationnelle; ou bien construire une organisation, et donc établir sa propre Confession sous une forme obligatoire et par là même renier le principe critique même qui avait singularisé le mouvement dans son stade premier.” Leszek Kolakowski, \textit{Chrétiens sans Église: La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionel au XVIIe siècle}, trans. Anna Posner (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 78-79. Weigel, as we will see in the following chapters, recognized very clearly the mutual exclusivity of Scripture and Confessional documents.

\textsuperscript{108} James Simpson, \textit{Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents} (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 115. Simpson draws attention to Luther’s preference for the non-narrative books of the New Testament. Of the four gospels, Luther prefers John’s to the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) because it begins already to shape the story of Christ’s life into theological statements. The Gospel of John was composed last, many years after Christ’s death (perhaps around the year 95), and Paul was converted only after Christ’s death and therefore was not an eyewitness account either. “John, gospel of,” in \textit{A Dictionary of the Bible}, ed. W. R. F. Browning. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 206.
the rest of the Bible without danger of misinterpretation.\textsuperscript{109} As readers, however, human beings are notoriously fractious, and although many agreed that Luther had found the true interpretation of Scripture, others did not. Luther’s early disputations were with those who defended papal authority, but within a few decades, even Luther’s followers began disagreeing with one another about their interpretations of the Bible, or even about \textit{their} interpretation of Luther’s interpretation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{110} Weigel would have encountered this controversy about the true meaning of Scripture when he studied theology in Wittenberg, Luther’s university, and it should be noted that the conflicts Weigel witnessed were all fought amongst Lutherans, all of whom would have shared Luther’s commitment to Scripture as the only true authority in matters of doctrine.

Weigel was acutely aware that the thorny question of biblical interpretation proved an obstacle to moral behaviour for Christians. In his treatise \textit{Der güldene Griff}, Weigel describes an agonizing time before he came to true faith, where he followed his

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  \item \textsuperscript{109} A succinct formulation is found in Luther’s preface to his translation of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “Diese Epistel ist das rechte Heubstück des newen Testaments, und das allerlauterste Euangelium, Welche wol würdig und werd ist, das sie ein Christen mensch nicht allein von wort zu wort auswendig wisse, sondern teglich damit umbege, als mit teglichem brot der Seelen, Denn sie niemer kan zu viel und zu wol gelesen oder betrachtet werden, und je mehr sie gehandelt wird, je köstlicher sie wird, und bas schmeckt.” WA7, 3:1-10. He concludes by remarking: “Also finden wir in dieser Epistel auffs allerreichlichste, was ein Christen wissen sol...Dazu das alles mit Schriften trefflich gegründet, mit Exempeln sein selbs und der Propheten beweiset, das nichts mehr hie zu wundschen ist. Darumb es auch scheinet, als habe S. Paulus in dieser Epistel wollen ein mal in die kürzete verfassen, die gantze Christliche und Euangelische lere, und einen Eingang bereiten in das gantz alte Testament. Denn on zweiel, wer diese Epistel wol im hertzen hat, der hat des alten Testaments liecht und krafft bey sich.” WA7, 27:15-25.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} A classic example is the division between the Philippists (who followed Philipp Melanchthon) and the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans (also called Flacians, after their chief spokesperson Matthias Flacius): their party were \textit{true} Lutherans, who claimed to best represent Luther’s position, even after Luther’s death (in 1546) meant that he could no longer step in to arbitrate this dispute. Robert Kolb, “Dynamics of Party Conflict in the Saxon Late Reformation: Gnesio-Lutherans vs. Philippists,” \textit{Journal of Modern History} 49, no. 3 (1977): 1289-1305. Reprinted in Robert Kolb, \textit{Luther’s Heirs Define His Legacy} (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 1-17. Diarmaid MacCulloch cites two rival editions of Luther’s collected works (the first by the university in Wittenberg, the second produced by the one in Jena) as a tidy metaphor for Luther’s divided legacy: “the two sets of weighty volumes glaring at each other across the floor of the Frankfurt Book Fair symbolized the contested legacy of Luther’s theology, and the uncertain future of Lutheranism as a body of doctrine.” Diarmaid MacCulloch, \textit{Reformation: Europe's House Divided}, 1490-1700 (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 347. MacCulloch also provides a good overview of the complicated rivalries over Luther’s legacy in that same volume, 347-353.
\end{itemize}
fellow Lutherans in studying books about theology. His reading did not strengthen his faith and comfort his soul, and Weigel found himself increasingly disconcerted by the disagreements between the authors. He likens his experience of reading theology to witnessing a battle between two groups of blind swordsmen, who strike out at the darkness around them, killing friends and enemies because they are unable to tell them apart in their blindness. At the height of his distress, he turns to God, begging him to reveal to him the truth. Mercifully, God’s grace descends upon Weigel, showing him a vision of a special book—the Book of Life. This Book allows him to judge all earthly books by its interpretive standard, and gives Weigel the key to resolving the theological disputes that so upset him. Even more amazing, God reveals to Weigel that this Book is available for consultation not just by Weigel, but by every man, woman and child, because it is implanted inside every single person, whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant.

This Book turns out to be not simply an ideal or heavenly correlate of earthly books (the Book of all Books): the Book is God himself. As we will see in the following chapters, the fundamental principle of Weigel’s theology is that God is supremely unified—so unified that God must be identical with his attributes, and all his attributes must then be identical with one another: God is the Word and is therefore also

111 Weigel, Griff, 89. This passage will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
113 Ibid.
114 Weigel, Griff, 90.
115 Ibid. “Dann mir ward ein buch gezeigett...das ich alle dinge sehen urteilen und erkennen konte viel klerer dann das mich alle lerer mitt ihren buchern in der gantzen Welt mochten geleren dann doraus waren alle bucher geschrieben, von anfang der Welt, und dis buch ist In mir und auch In allen menschen, In grossen und kleinen, In Jungen und alten, In gelerten und ungelerten.”
the Book of Life, and conversely the Book of Life must be the Word and therefore God.\textsuperscript{117} Establishing God’s universal presence in all people (if God is everything, how could he \textit{not} be in all people?) is the final move in Weigel’s unusual theology, allowing him to claim that each person carries his salvation within him—this “treasure” must be dug up, to be sure, but in principle nobody is denied the possibility of salvation, whether baptised or not. As we will see in Chapter 2, this treasure is unearthed when each person prevents her own cognitive faculties from standing in the way of God’s own knowledge. That is, every Christian should aspire to quiet his mind and senses completely, so that God can contemplate God’s own self in man.\textsuperscript{118} By suppressing the individual knower entirely, Weigel can eliminate disagreement entirely because there is, on Weigel’s account, effectively only \textit{one} knower—God himself.\textsuperscript{119} Far from the Book of Life being the only criterion for true judgement, the Book rather does away with criteria altogether. But having found this Book, what kind of instruction does it contain for Weigel? Curiously, Weigel concludes that he need not change his behaviour at all: preaching is useless, but that he should continue preaching all the same, reading (physical) books is useless but he should continue reading, performing ceremonies is useless but he should continue performing them.\textsuperscript{120} True believers, that is, should not let themselves be

\textsuperscript{117} Weigel, \textit{Griff}, 92. “Gottes gesetze, gottes wort, gottes willle gottes same gottes sinn bildnis Christus geist finger, gottes reich etc. ein ding sey, und sey In allen Menschen.” This idea that God can be called by all names is omnipresent in Weigel’s work and we will encounter it many times in this dissertation, particularly in Chapters 2 and 4. 
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 53. 
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 49-50. 
\textsuperscript{120} Weigel treats the topic of inaction in numerous places in his work, and this dissertation will deal with all of these texts, particularly in Chapters 2 and 4. Briefly, to offer one such statement here, Weigel writes: “Es seindt hin und her Lehrer heimblich, welche diesem Greuel der Verwustung ann der heiligen Stedte wol erkennen. Doch sitzen sie Beucht, bleiben in ihrem Stande, lauffen nicht dauon, tragen das Creutz geduldig nach dem eusern Menschen. Inwendig klagen sie es Gott und seindt nach dem inwendigen Menschen weder Priester noch Beuchtvater.” (“Ein Gespreche, wie ein Leyhe seinen Beuchtvatter uberzeuget, das der Priester an Gottes Stadt nicht Sunde vorgebe”, 90-91.) Weigel even seems to consider the Priest’s decision to believe in secret and not voice his true beliefs as a kind of devotional suffering—it is a Cross he must
provoked into action unnecessarily, since taking action only rarely brings about improvement: Luther’s attempts at reform, Weigel points out, did not amount to much in the end. In the end, nobody is obliged to reform the church: “Es ist dir nicht bevahlen, zu reformiren die Ketzer noch ein Neues auffzubringen, sondern in der Geduldt Jesu zu wandeln. Gott wird es wol richten zu seiner Zeit ohne dich.”

At first glance, this instruction does not seem to ask much more than the New Testament injunction to turn the other cheek, or even to depart from the Old Testament praise of a God who is slow to anger. However, on closer inspection, Weigel considers it necessary to speak up in only a very few circumstances—so few, in fact, that for all practical purposes, a Christian is entirely relieved of the obligation to witness and confess. That is, Weigel dutifully retains a superficial commitment to the well-established Christian tradition of the witnessing martyr/confessor, while at the same time whittling down the list of circumstances that threaten a person’s faith until he is left with a purely interior faith that is (or can be made) impervious to outer coercion. Such a faith need not be defended by worldly means or by force if threatened. For instance, in one sermon on the subject, Weigel boldly proclaims that in matters of faith, a Christian is not subject to any ruler except God. Should any ruler other than God require a Christian to do anything that goes against his faith, a Christian should be prepared to suffer and even die rather

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122 Ibid.
than submit (he even references the torments of the early martyrs, who were thrown to the lions, or burned to death). However, Weigel then details the Christian’s obligation to be obedient and humble, as God commands in the Bible, an obedience that is mandated only for what he terms the outer man, who must submit to rulers in matters that do not concern the soul.

The practical implications of this obligation to obedience depend entirely on how much is classified as “outer” and how much as “inner”—and Weigel is unusual in assigning all physical actions to the outer man, even those that concern religious practice. Luther, for instance, believed that actions concerning matters of religion and salvation, such as monastic exercises, indulgences and offering masses for the dead could be considered “external” insofar as they actually did not affect the soul as the Roman Church claimed. But these practices ultimately fall under the ambit of the inner man because performing these actions would jeopardize the health of the soul, because doing so would cause the faithful to neglect the true basis of salvation. For example, Luther fought long and hard against the sale of papal indulgences because they misled the faithful into thinking that the indulgence itself caused sins to be forgiven. Insofar as

123 “Gott ist allein in Christo HErr uber die Gläubigen, unnd kein Keyser, Fürst noch Regent auff Erden, er setzet keinen Stadthalter, er lehret den Glauben selbst.” Should a worldly ruler demand conformity of belief (“darumb gläube wie ich und mein gantzes Land glübet”), it is better to let one’s outer body die as the early martyrs did as a way of proving that one’s internal faith cannot be affected by any earthly force: “So aber der gläubig innere Mensche sich unterwürffe der Gewalt, und wolte gehorsam seyn, er liesse ehe seinen eussen Menschen in den Graben für die Lewen, oder in den fewrigen Ofen werffen, anzuzeigen, daß sein innerlicher Mensche niemands untherthan were auff Erden.” Valentin Weigel, *Kirchen- oder Hauspostille*, ed. Horst Pfefferl, Vol. 12, Part 1 (Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2010), 88.

124 As Luther writes in his *Disputatio pro declaracione virtutis indulgentiarum* from 1517 (the so-called 95 Theses): “Opinari venias papales tantas esse, ut solvere possint hominem, etiam si quis per imposibile dei genitricem violasset, Est insanie.” Luther argues instead: “Dicimus contra, quod venie papales nec minimum venialium peccatorum tollere possint quo ad culpam.” WA1, 237:7-10.
masses for the dead (for instance) are ineffective, they are external, but insofar as they cause a Christian to lose his fear of God, they are internal.\textsuperscript{125}

Weigel leans far to the other extreme, arguing that all actions are external, including religious practices. To take one example, Weigel considered private confession to be idolatrous because, in forgiving the sins of the penitent, it allowed the priest to “usurp” Christ’s own office by acting as his regent or vicar.\textsuperscript{126} Both confessor and penitent sin during private confession—the confessor for pridefully believing himself to be sitting on Christ’s throne, and the penitent for idolatrously ascribing the power to forgive sin to the confessor rather than to Christ.\textsuperscript{127} Rather than fighting to reform the Church by campaigning to have private confession abolished (as Luther did in the case of the sale of indulgences), Weigel concludes that Christians have no duty to take up the fight for reform. That is, Weigel argues that whether an action counts as external or internal depends on the attitude of the actor towards the action. In the case of private confession, the confessor and the penitent may safely perform private confession if neither party believes the action to be effective in purifying the penitent’s soul, and if neither party actually believes that the priest has power to forgive sins in Christ’s place—

\textsuperscript{125} The same logic is at work in Luther’s \textit{Tractatus de libertate christiane} (1520). Nothing external can either save or damn (“Et constat, nullam prorsus rerum externarum, quocunque censeantur nomine, aliquid habere momenti ad iustitiam aut libertatem Christianam, sicut nec ad inujustiam aut servitutem parandam”), because even wicked people could perform works and ceremonies (“cum ea quae dicta sunt geri possint a quovis impio”, 27-28). However, insofar as people \textit{believe} that works and ceremonies are effective, then these things do have a negative effect on the inner man: “Ita non cerimonias nec opera contemnimus, immo maxime querimus, opinionem autem operum contemnimus, ne quis existimet illam esse veram iustitiam” WA7, 72:26-28. Those who maintain that Christians must perform works and ceremonies in order to be saved perpetrate a great injustice on Christians: “perversitate factum est, ut penitus interciderit scientia Christianae gratiae, fiei, libertatis et totius Christi, Succeedente in locum eius humanorum operum et legum intolerabili captivitate, factique sumus iuxta lamentationes Hieremiae servi hominum vilissimorum, qui in terra sunt, qui nostra miseria abutuntur in omnes turpitudines et ignominias voluntatis suae.” WA7, 58:25-30.

\textsuperscript{126} Weigel, \textit{Schlüssel}, 33. “Denn du [the Priest] setzest dich ann Christi Stadt und masest dich ahn göttlicher Vorgebung.”

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 55. “In deinen inwendigen Menschen liegt die rechte Absolution oder Loßsprechung, die Gott selber thut, und nicht in eusern Menschen.”
their external persons merely go through the motions, while their internal persons piously beg Christ (and Christ alone) to forgive their sins.\textsuperscript{128} Weigel emphasizes here that this is particularly important if private confession is required of them by outside parties, because they must not wage war within the church or be disputatious, at risk of causing (yet another) schism.\textsuperscript{129} Indeed, the sixteenth century might have looked very different if, instead of regarding the sale of indulgences as an idolatrous abomination and calling for an end to this practice, Luther had allowed that, because the sale of indulgences was mandated by the Church, a pious priest could sell indulgences and a pious Christian could buy them—so long as neither party believed the indulgence to be anything more than a scrap of paper.

To state the problem starkly, Weigel overcomes the problem of decision making and hermeneutics I described above \textit{not} by persisting in the difficult search for the key to unlock Scripture to guide action, but rather by abandoning both action and interpretation altogether. The Book from Weigel’s vision allows Weigel to replace multiple, disputatious readers of Scripture with a single divine reader—a Reader who, it turns out, is actually Scripture itself. If Reader and Text are identical, then there is no need for interpretation, or even the capacity for it. As for taking action, Weigel explicitly departs from the injunction given to Christians to bear witness to their faith in Christ. He cites the


\textsuperscript{129} Weigel, \textit{Gespreche}, 91. “der es vorstehet, hat ein Mißfallen dran und schmirtzet ihn, das er in einen solchen Netze gefangen lieget. Doch lauffet er nicht draus, unterstehet sich auch nicht, solchen Greuel einzuwerfen, denn er wurde nichts ausrichten, nur Zanck, Kriegk und Auffruhr erregen. Drumb bleiben sie unter diesen Creuz biß auff seine Zeit und wartten auff ihres Leibes Erlösung mit Geduldt.”
traditional proof texts about the obligation to confess and witness, but only to urge true Christians to ignore those who accuse them of cowardice for not speaking up.\footnote{Weigel, Dialogus, 60-61.}

**Indifference vs. Martyrdom**

Weigel’s explicitly stated conviction that true faith resides solely in the heart, and that this true faith need not find expression in a material religious practice, is at odds with early modern and modern attitudes towards belief. Weigel’s fellow Protestants spilled much ink, and even blood, to argue that, on the contrary, it was necessary to take action to build the kind of church that reflected one’s beliefs. Luther, for instance, famously declared that he would defend what he believed to be the truth to the death, and would rather see the world returned to chaos and nothingness than deny it.\footnote{This statement is from De servo arbitrio (1525): “Ideo dico tibi, atque hoc sensibus imis reponas oro, Mihi rem seriam et necessariam aeternamque in hac causa peti, talem ac tantam, ut eam assertam et defensam oporteat per mortem quoque, etiam si mundus totus non solum conflictari et tumultuari debeat, verum etiam in unum cahos ruere et in nihilum redigi.” WA18, 625:13-17. Here, he is arguing against Erasmus, whom he accuses of preferring peace and comfort to God himself: “Plane igitur significas, pacem et tranquillitatem carnis tibi longe praestanterem videri quam fidem, quam conscientiam, quam salutem, quam verbum Dei, quam gloriam Christi, quam Deum ipsum.” WA18, 625:10-13. As for just what kind of action was required, opinions differed of course. Luther was clear that a Christian must speak out and assert the truth: “Non est enim hoc Christiani pectoris, non delectari assertionibus, imo delectari affirmationibus debet, aut Christianus non erit. Affirmationem autem voco (ne verbis ludamur) constitueret adherere, affirmare, confiteri, tuere atque invictum preserverare, nec aliud credo, vox ea latinis vel nostro usu et saecul significant.” WA18, 603:10-14. Others were not content to limit themselves to verbal disputes but called for some kind of political and social reform. The most notorious theorist of religious activism in the 16th century was Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525), who was one of the leaders of the so-called Peasant’s War (1524-1526). As Müntzer wrote (in a letter to Melanchthon from March 29, 1522): “Martinus noster charissimus ignoranter agit, quod parvulos non velit offendere, qui iam parvuli sunt sicut pueri centum annorum maledicti. Immo angustia christianorum est, iam in foribus, cur esse expectandum censetis, ignoror. Lieben bruder, last ewer merhen [Zögern], es ist zeyt! Nolite tardare, eas est in ianua. Nolite lobis conciliare reprobus, ipsi impedient, ne virtute magna operetur verbum. Nolite adulari principibus vestris, videbitis aliquo subuersionem vestram.” Lutherans sought to distance themselves as much as possible from Müntzer, and Müntzer’s willingness to resort to violence was a favourite argument for those who condemned the Reformation movement (see Chapter 3, n. 108). Letter originally quoted in Steven E. Ozment, Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 71. The original is found in Thomas Müntzer, Briefwechsel (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig, 2010), 135-136.}

By and large, modern readers find Weigel’s casual attitude towards personal integrity and authenticity
troubling. However, I argue that Weigel’s defence of such a split between a Christian’s inner convictions and his outer actions has less to do with a lack of authenticity or a disowning of responsibility, but instead turns around his favourable attitude towards what I am terming *indifference*.133

Weigel’s library has not survived, so the modern scholar cannot know for certain which books he read, but reconstructing his bookshelf from the texts he refers to throughout his oeuvre shows that he was particularly interested in this positive view of indifference. This seemingly ragtag collection of texts and schools of thought (mysticism, negative theology, stoicism, skepticism and adiaphora) in fact assembles a variety of discourses about indifference that Weigel draws upon throughout his works. With the exception of the central texts of ancient Greek skepticism,134 Weigel took extensive reading notes on the classic texts from all these discourses, focusing particularly on the issue of indifference.135 More importantly, Weigel subsequently appropriated the ideas he gleaned from those texts and gave them a central place in his theological work. These

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132 See the comments of Jones, Israel, and Weeks above (p. 5-6). One reader of my dissertation responded by exclaiming that “all evil requires is for good men to stand by and do nothing”.

133 I am setting aside, for now, the problem of having any kind of attitude towards indifference in the first place (can one believe in indifference without abandoning one’s indifference?), and, moreover in writing about indifference (surely if one is truly indifferent, one is not moved to write about it?). Weigel addresses this difficulty in his own work, as do the sources on indifference that he draws on, so I will take this problem up in subsequent chapters. Briefly, those who defend indifference view it as the end point of a dynamic process, of an attitude to be cultivated via an engagement with one’s passions and desires, or as a self-overcoming attitude that kicks the ladder away (so to speak) once it has reached the top of the cliff.

134 These were newly translated and had become a hot topic in 16th century Europe. While it is possible that Weigel had read—or at least, had read about—Greek skepticism, he did not take notes or excerpt those texts, unlike his reading of Meister Eckhart, Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate the evidence for what Weigel knew about Greek skeptics, though, in my opinion, it is certainly a possibility that he was interested in them and had at least read about them.

135 Weigel’s reading notes are found in two works in particular, both dating from 1570. The first is entitled *Zwene nützliche Tractat, der erste von der Bekehrung des Menschen, der ander von Armut des Geistes oder waarer Gelassenheit* (1570), containing his reading notes on Eckhart and Tauler. This text will be discussed in Chapter 2, as evidence for Weigel’s interest in the idea of Gelassenheit, as the title suggests. The second is entitled *De vita beata, non in Particularibus ab exra quaeerenda sed in Summo Bono intra nos ipsos possidenda* (also from 1570), containing Weigel’s reading notes on Boethius and Dionysius, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.
positive understandings of indifference were mobilized to support his vision of a purely
interior religion whose focal point is neither the exegesis of written texts (as his own
Lutheran Church believed) nor the formal membership in a community that claims a
lineage stretching back directly to Christ (as the Roman Church maintained).

Upon closer inspection, the concept of indifference is a more complex
phenomenon than one might initially credit. On the one hand (the negative view),
indifference is a lukewarm, half-hearted attitude towards what ought to be considered
important—a sinner’s carelessness about the health of his soul, a schoolchild’s reluctance
to learn her lessons, or a wealthy and comfortable citizen’s apathy towards civic duty.
This was the view of the Wittenberg reformers with respect to religious indifference,
by which it was simply bad, and ought to be combated with discipline and education,
using the power of the state if necessary. For instance, Luther and Melanchthon were
appalled when their first parish visitations in 1528 found that, despite the reformers’ own
fervent passion for the newly purified theology, the quality of knowledge and devotion of
both peasants and their pastors outside Wittenberg fell well short of what they desired or
thought necessary.\textsuperscript{136} Indifference in religion signified neglect of this highest pursuit, and
signalled a perilous state for Christian souls. On the other hand (the positive view),
indifference can be legitimated as a cautious, wise restraint in the face of contingency and

\textsuperscript{136} Luther was disappointed at the state of affairs revealed by the visitation in the preface to his \textit{Kleiner Katechismus}, calling it a “klägliche, elende Not”: “Diesen Katechismus oder christliche Lehre in solche
kleine, schlechte, einfältige Form zu stellen, hat mich gezwungen und gedrungen die klägliche, elende Not,
so ich neulich erfahren habe, da ich auch ein Visitator war. Hilf, lieber Gott, wie manchen Jammer habe ich
gesehen, daß der gemeine Mann doch so garnichts weiß von der christlichen Lehre, sonderlich auf den
Dörfern, und leider viel Pfarrherr fast ungeschickt und untüchtig sind zu lehren, und sollen doch alle
Christen heißen, getauft sein und der heiligen Sakrament genießen, können wider [weder] Vaterunser noch
den Glauben oder zehn Gebot, leben dahin wie das liebe Viehe und unvernünftige Säue und, nu das
Evangelion kommen ist, dennoch fein gelernt haben, aller Freiheit meisterlich zu missebrauchen.”
“Enchiridion: Der kleine Katechismus D. Mart. Luthers für die gemeine Pfarrherrn und Prediger,” in \textit{Die
Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche} (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1979), 501.
finitude—the Stoic’s detachment from changeable and uncontrollable worldly affairs (*apatheia*), the Skeptic’s cautious refusal to be seduced by prejudices arising from the limitations of human intellect (*ataraxia*), or the pious Christian’s respect for the greatness of the mysterious and magnificent Godhead who cannot be constrained by human concepts, desires or knowledge (*Gelassenheit*), by language (negative theology) or by invented religious practices (*adiaphora*).

The negative theology of Dionysius the Areopagite (late fifth or early sixth century) and Meister Eckhart (1260?-1327?) encourages detachment, an indifference to both suffering and reward—what Eckhart called *Gelassenheit* or *Abgeschiedenheit*. *Gelassenheit* might also be termed the affective correlate of negative theology, which, as Eckhart and Dionysius develop it, is a spiritual practice that reflects upon God’s own “indifference” (put negatively, God’s lack of distinctions, or put positively, God’s unity and perfection) and the difficulties in speaking of God using words that, by definition, introduce difference into God’s oneness. 137 On such an account, all the names for God that human speech can invent are either equally meaningless or equally meaningful,

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137 The relationship between God’s indifference and God’s unity in Dionysius is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, but see for instance Chapter 13 of his *Divine Names*: “The name ‘One’ means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness...By being the One it is all things. The One cause of all things is not one of the many things in the world but actually precedes oneness and multiplicity and indeed defines oneness and multiplicity.” *DN*, 977C-D. Having praised God by every name, the soul is to “renounc[e] all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible...being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and [one] knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.” All Dionysius citations are from the Luibheid translation, and the individual treatises are named by their shortened title after the treatise’s first mention. *Mystical Theology*, 1001A. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987). As far as Eckhart is concerned, his take on God’s indistinctness is examined in Chapter 2. Of God, Eckhart writes: “Die meister sprechent, gott sey wesen unnd ein vernünfftig wesen, und bekenne alle ding. Aber ich sprich, Gott ist weder wesen, noch vernunftig, noch bekennet nicht diß noch das, hier umb ist gott ledig aller ding, und hier umb ist er alle ding.” Johannes Tauler and Meister Eckhart, *Joannis Tauleri des heligen leers Predig, fast fruchtbar zuo eim recht christlichen leben* (Basel: Adam Petri, 1521), CCCVIIva. The sermon from which these lines are taken is discussed in greater detail below in Chapter 2.
insofar as their imperfection is radically relativized by God’s perfection. Skepticism, whose key texts were rediscovered and revived in Europe in the sixteenth century, encourages the wise man to cultivate a state of ataraxia, an indifference to his fate that stems from a renunciation of the possibility of true knowledge upon which right action could be based.\(^\text{138}\) Stoicism attempted to rescue human dignity from capricious Lady Fortune by encouraging a wise man to moderate his passions and limit his desires so that he no longer seeks to control his fate, which is, after all, not his to control.\(^\text{139}\) The much-desired state of Stoic apatheia might be seen as prudently adopting an attitude of indifference towards the world that mirrors the world’s own indifference towards the individual.

Finally, adiaphora is the name given to the practices described in the context of Paul’s pastoral instructions for convincing converts that their salvation depends on God’s grace rather than on works, which are neither displeasing to God nor required for salvation (fasting on certain days, the colour and style of clerical vestments and so on). These works are “indifferent things,” adiaphora in Greek, or Mitteldinge.\(^\text{140}\) In the sixteenth century, the period that concerns us here, the rites and ceremonies of the Church had been greatly called into question by Luther, maligned as human inventions. To require Christians to observe fasts, remain celibate, buy indulgences, worship saints and

\(^\text{138}\) See for instance Katja Maria Vogt, “Scepticism and action,” in The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism, ed. Richard Bett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165-180. Vogt writes that the “best known anti-sceptical argument in antiquity” was the so-called “Apraxia challenge”, i.e. an inability to act, and objection that arises because of the “Stoic claim that, in action, we assent and thus hold something to be true.” (165)


\(^\text{140}\) The adiaphora were originally a Stoic concept, referring to things or actions that were morally neutral. Excerpts from the debate in translation can be found in Eric Lund, Documents from the History of Lutheranism, 1517-1750 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 187-190. For a brief overview of the controversy, see Timothy J. Wengert, "Adiaphora," The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation, ed. Hans J. Hillebrand, Oxford University Press, 2005, http://www.oxford-reformation.com/entry?entry=t172.e0009.
so on was nothing short of scandalous, since the Pope presumed to wield his authority over a Christian’s conscience when in fact God and Scripture were the only arbiters of Christian behaviour. Moreover, the key feature of Luther’s theology was that faith alone saves, not works (*sola fide*). Primed by Luther’s reflections on works and human traditions, the debate over adiaphora exploded in the mid-sixteenth century when the Emperor Charles V defeated the Protestant princes in battle, imposing severe strictures on the reforms as part of the terms of the peace treaty. The adiaphora debate arose in the context of this crisis about Christian freedom and obedience, in terms that are not too dissimilar from the one about martyrdom discussed above. If a pagan Emperor demanded that Christians deny Christ, the obligation to martyrdom was clear; but what if the Emperor imposes demands about matters considered indifferent—about adiaphora? Melanchthon claimed that, so long as the core message of the Lutheran Reform movement was not prohibited (justification through faith alone), it was not too terrible to give up other Lutheran practices (such as the sacrament of confirmation and others) until conditions improved.  

Melanchthon’s opponents were horrified that he would give in to the Emperor so easily, arguing that matters that would be indifferent in peaceful times are no longer indifferent when they are imposed by force—in such situations, even (especially!) trivial matters must be defended to the utmost.

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142 Melanchthon’s position prevailed for a time and the terms of Charles’ peace were accepted, but ultimately his position was rejected in the *Formula Concordiae* several decades later. The *FC* affirms that
Of these forms of indifference, I focus in this dissertation on the two that belong to the tradition of negative theology, namely Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* and Dionysian apophasis to explore the central question of this dissertation, which is about the afterlife of medieval mystical texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular the texts belonging to this tradition of negative theology. I challenge the idea that there is a decisive break between the medieval and early modern periods, particularly when it comes to mysticism, which is strongly associated with the Middle Ages. Mysticism is also mainly associated with Catholicism, and is thought to be something Luther rejected in his sixteenth century reformation of the Church. And yet, I found that Valentin Weigel, an early modern Protestant, was eagerly reading the mystical writers Meister Eckhart and Dionysius. In fact, I found that Weigel is not alone in reading Eckhart and Dionysius, who in fact were read throughout early modern, even though they were no longer front and centre of theological disputes as they were in the Middle Ages.

A matter of great concern to Weigel was the problem posed by confessionalization. The tight fit between secular and religious authority in sixteenth century Saxony placed Weigel in a difficult position when he found his true beliefs at odds with those of the institution that employed him. This conflict came to a head when he was asked to sign a confessional document or face being removed from his post, potentially imprisoned or even exiled. Under pressure, he signed the document and kept quiet about the fact that he disagreed with much of its content and the fact he was in times of persecution, it is better to testify to their true beliefs even about indifferent matters and to suffer: “Wir gläuben, lehren und bekennen, daß zur Zeit der Verfolgung, wann eine runde Bekenntnis des Glaubens von uns erfordert, in solchen Mitteldingen den Feinden nicht zu weichen...Dann in solchem Fall ist es nicht mehr umb Mittelding, sondern umb die Wahrheit des Evangelii, umb die christliche Freiheit und umb die Bestätigung öffentlicher Abgötterei, wie auch umb Verhütung des Ärgernus der Schwachgläubigen zu thun, darin wir nichts zu vergeben haben, sondern rund bekennen und darüber leiden sollen, was uns Gott zugeschickt und über uns den Feinden seines Worts verhängt.” “Epitome.” *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 815.
required to sign in the first place. As I have discussed above, Weigel found the ideas of Eckhart and Dionysius particularly meaningful in formulating a response to confessionalization, a response that I analyze in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation questions the notion that Eckhart was no longer read either or by Protestants by exploring more specifically how Eckhart’s texts were read in the centuries after he was condemned for disseminating dangerously heretical ideas in the fourteenth century. I show that, by the sixteenth century, many readers acknowledged the papal condemnation but continued to read and appreciate Eckhart’s writings. I then show that Eckhart was read and appreciated by early modern Protestants, particularly by those close to Weigel. I examine closely how Eckhart’s works were transmitted in the early modern era, and analyze the printed edition of Eckhart’s works that Weigel used.

Chapter 2 turns to the relationship between Eckhart and Weigel, arguing that Eckhart’s notion of Gelassenheit is key for Weigel. In this chapter, I show how Weigel’s reading of Eckhart occurs in three stages: the initial stage in which Weigel copies Eckhart’s writings on Gelassenheit, the second stage in which Weigel shows how Gelassenheit can bring about true confessional concord by silencing the individual’s own thoughts in union with God’s mind, and the final stage in which Weigel advises Christians to disengage from confessional conflict altogether by cultivating an attitude of indifference.

Chapter 3 looks at how the writings of Dionysius were read in the sixteenth century, after scholars began arguing that Dionysius was not a first century writer, but rather the pseudonym of a later author. I demonstrate that this new scholarship did not put an end to Dionysius’ readership entirely, though for some it may have been a fatal blow.
to Dionysius’ authority. Two groups in particular read Dionysius with interest, motivated in particular by his writings on the concept of ecclesiastical hierarchy: anti-Lutheran polemicists who rejected claims about his pseudonymity to preserve his identity as an authority from the early church, and alchemists and Hermeticists fascinated by ancient wisdom outside the bounds of the Roman Church. Like the latter group, Weigel was also interested in exploring theories about the church that proposed limiting the power of ecclesiastical authorities.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores how Weigel’s reading of Dionysius led him to discover a second form of indifference after Gelassenheit, namely the indifferent signification of Dionysian apophasis. For Weigel, the practice of apophasis becomes a substitute for more standard forms of religious practice performed within the Lutheran Church, which allows the laity to gain independence from the ordained clergy in spiritual matters. Moreover, apophasis for Weigel serves as an irenic—a way of using language to create peace, much like its antonym, a polemic, is a way of using language to create conflict—because it helps overcome the divisions that doctrine creates within the Christian community.

The analysis of Weigel’s fascinating and intricate re-working of Eckhartian Gelassenheit and Dionysius apophasis in the context of Weigel’s turbulent time unearths a story about a Protestant reformer’s response to the problems that the reform movement had generated. Though Weigel’s denomination was one born of a schismatic—and at times violent—reform movement, Weigel argued that he would not achieve meaningful institutional reform by a call to action (by defending his beliefs to the death as a martyr) but instead advocated a profound and radical inaction. In arguing that inaction was in fact
the behaviour that most profoundly suited the ethical obligations of a Christian, Weigel turned to the writings of two earlier theologians, Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart. In arguing for the centrality of Weigel’s interest in these two figures to his theological project, I am thereby showing not only the profound and important continuities that exist between the Middles Ages and the Reformation, two periods generally understood to be quite distinct, but also providing some new insights into an unjustly neglected moment in European religious and intellectual history.
PART I

VALENTIN WEIGEL AND MEISTER ECKHART
CHAPTER 1

DOCTOR Taulers anDechtiger Lerer: Meister Eckhart in Early Modern Europe

Few readers open up a book with no preconceptions whatsoever, evaluating the volume and its author purely on the basis of the content. The circumstances that led the reader to pick up the book in the first place vary—the reader had heard other people discussing the book, had been recommended it by a colleague, had seen it cited by a respected writer—but even if the reader has never heard of the author in question, a reader can gather a fair amount of information about what the book might contain before even opening the cover: from the publishing house that issued it to the picture on the cover, the size and quality of the binding, the person it was dedicated to, the person who wrote the preface, the books it was next to on the shelf, the compilation it was part of and so on. Likewise, there is much that a historian can glean about both a book from the past and its earlier readers by recovering that same contextual information: asking who else read that book, or commented on it, what the volume itself looks like, who published it and why. This chapter investigates in what form and with what associations Eckhart’s ideas circulated in the sixteenth century. Reconstructing how Eckhart’s image and reputation has been construed from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century reveals how his writings from the Middle Ages were read and understood generally in the early modern period, and by Valentin Weigel in particular. In the case of Meister Eckhart,
investigating his early modern readers counterbalances the impression that Eckhart was entirely unknown until the modern era. Kindler’s *Literaturlexikon*, to start with an authoritative, canon-forming source, describes how Pope John XXII’s condemnation of a series of Eckhart’s propositions as heretical “das Eckhart-Bild immer wieder verdunkelte,” even as Eckhart’s followers Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Seuse continued to develop Eckhart’s ideas.\(^{143}\) After Tauler and Seuse, however, the lexicon simply notes that Eckhart's “Wirkungsgeschichte sich bis zu Beginn des 19. Jh.s nur sporadisch erfassen läßt.”\(^{144}\) Given the importance placed on Eckhart in the *nineteenth* and *twentieth* centuries, as I discuss below, it is important to establish what associations Weigel and his contemporaries might have had with Eckhart’s name and ideas, in order to determine how Weigel came to discover Eckhart’s ideas in the first place. This chapter examines more closely the familiar narrative of Eckhart’s absence in the time between medieval and modern eras in order to bring into focus, by contrast, the prominent presence of Eckhart in Valentin Weigel’s (1533-1588) writing.\(^{145}\) In researching what Eckhart’s name did signify in Weigel’s time, I found that Eckhart was not entirely unknown, but that it was Johannes Tauler’s name that drew most of the notoriety (both positive and negative), with Eckhart relegated to the position of Tauler’s teacher. Through this association with Tauler, Eckhart’s writings made their way into Protestant circles, where he was read and cautiously appreciated by a variety of Protestants both radical and orthodox, and in which

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\(^{144}\) Ibid.

\(^{145}\) Although indeed Eckhart was not very well known in the early modern era, his “absence” during that period is compounded by a more general scholarly neglect of Protestant theology after Luther’s death, which is not considered to be as immediately attractive as the writings of Luther himself. Consequently, mentions of Eckhart during this time and the persistence of Eckhart’s ideas also become less visible in contemporary scholarship. On the neglect of this era, see for instance Winfried Zeller, “Protestantische Frömmigkeit im 17. Jahrhundert” in Zeller, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1971), 85.
Weigel encountered Eckhart’s writings published as an appendix to an edition of Tauler’s sermon. Eckhart’s writings continued to circulate in Protestant circles linked together with Weigel’s own writings, which seventeenth century editors felt were conceptually related and therefore publishable side-by-side. The chapter concludes by contrasting the way that readers in Weigel’s time cautiously appreciated Eckhart’s ideas with the hyperbolic praise heaped upon Eckhart since the nineteenth century, so as to ensure that modern readers do not project this modern Eckhartbild back to Weigel’s time.

**Homo doctus et sanctus: Medieval Eckhartbilder**

The story of Meister Eckhart’s intellectual afterlife begins already during his hotly contested heresy trial, which ended in 1326 with an ambiguous verdict from Pope John XXII, and which therefore left opinion divided on whether Eckhart was a fearsome heretic or a creative and engaging orthodox theologian.146 In the positive reception stream are Eckhart’s students—including the more famous ones such as Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Seuse, as well as almost unknown ones such as Giselher von Slatheim and Florentius von Utrecht—as well as what has been termed a “volkstümliche Überlieferung,” consisting of legends and anecdotes about Eckhart.147 In these, he is mostly represented as a wise teacher and Seelsorger.148

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147 Degenhardt does not seem to think these Eckhartlegenden are of much value, being “anspruchlose Kleinliteratur” (Degenhardt, 26). Whatever their literary value, they were indeed enduringly popular, and do in fact contain Eckhart’s ideas, albeit in a much simplified form. Moreover, as I discovered in my research, these Eckhart legends were transmitted well into the 17th century. Three of these, translated into Dutch, are even included under the heading of a work bearing Weigel’s name, namely a Dutch translation of his *Einleitung zur deutschen Theologie*, published in Amsterdam in 1647. I will discuss the published co-presence of Eckhart and Weigel later in this chapter.
148 Degenhardt, 22.
was a devilish heretic to others (“een duvelijc mensche,” as one writer put it),\textsuperscript{149} whose heretical ideas ought to be pulled out root and branch. The leaders of the Dominican order reaffirmed the papal decision against Eckhart at their general meeting in 1328, warning in particular against preaching dangerous ideas that common people might misunderstand.\textsuperscript{150} Other polemical texts, mostly from Holland and mostly from the \textit{fourteenth} century, also emphasized the need to avoid misleading laypeople.\textsuperscript{151} Vilifications of Eckhart such as these (fearing that Eckhart’s ideas were spreading and gathering followers) might also indicate Eckhart’s popularity and renown across Europe, or might simply reflect a degree of paranoia amongst the clergy.\textsuperscript{152}

Eckhart’s name also appears in a few histories and chronicles from the late medieval and early modern era. Dominican chroniclers attempted a form of public relations, attempting to conceal the “Schandfleck ihrer Ordensgeschichte”\textsuperscript{153} by imagining that the papal bull from 1327 was directed not against Eckhart himself, but rather against Beghards and Beguines. The devoted Dominican reformer Johannes Meyer also included Eckhart in his \textit{fifteenth} century “who’s who” of the Dominican order, the \textit{Liber de viris illustribus ordinis praedicatorum} (1466), where Eckhart is memorialized as a “magister in theologia, homo doctus et sanctus.”\textsuperscript{154} The humanist Johannes Trithemius included Eckhart in a catalogue of his own, the \textit{Catalogus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum} (1531), as a learned man and a good speaker (“in divinis scripturis eruditus et in

\textsuperscript{149} Jan van Leeuwen, quoted in Degenhardt, 37.  
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 31.  
\textsuperscript{151} Degenhardt lists Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, Jan van Ruusbroec, Jan van Leeuwen and Geert Groote. Groote, in particular, was a leading light in the \textit{devotio moderna} movement, and Degenhardt sees his anti-Eckhart writings as a tactical move to distance his movement from a theologian declared suspect by the Pope. William of Ockham and Michael von Cesena also wrote against Eckhart in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century.  
\textsuperscript{152} Degenhardt, 49.  
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, 71.  
\textsuperscript{154} Johannes Meyer, quoted in Degenhardt, 74. 
philosophia Aristotelica...ingenio subtilis et clarus eloquio”) whose over-keenness for philosophy led him to use too many novel terms contrary to the customs of contemporary theology ("novitatem terminorum, contra theologrum consuetudinem").

**In den Schriften Tauleri viel gedacht: Early Modern Eckhartbilder**

After the Reformation, Eckhart is remembered in both Catholic and Protestant chronicles. On the Catholic side, he is included in the *Annales Ecclesiastici*, a project started by Caesar Baronius (1538-1607), in which Eckhart is portrayed as a blasphemer and arch-heretic (*blasphemus* and *haeresiarcha*), whose inexplicable enduring popularity amongst some Christians is to be deplored. Though the Catholic Baronius portrayed Eckhart in a negative light, two Dominicans, Jacques Quétif and Jacques Echard, undertook to boost the reputation of their fellow Dominican, as Johannes Meyer had done in the fifteenth century. In their seventeenth century history of the Dominican order (*Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*), they wrote that, although Eckhart did preach some unorthodox-sounding ideas, he was a great thinker whose greatness caused him to express himself in unusual ways, giving the impression of heresy. They point to Eckhart’s willingness to be corrected as proof that he was ultimately a faithful member of the Church.

Protestant historians, on the other hand, took less notice of Eckhart, taking their cue from Luther’s cautious and selective praise of Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch* and

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155 Trithemius, quoted in Degenhardt, 75, n. 2. According to Degenhardt, his list of Eckhart writings (the ones known to him) served as the only resource until Denifle’s 19th century philological work (Degenhardt, 77).
156 Caesar Baronius, quoted in Degenhardt, 79.
157 Ibid, 84.
his neglect of Eckhart.\footnote{See in particular Heiko A. Oberman, The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986). See also Monica Pieper, Daniel Sudermann (1550-ca. 1631) als Vertreter des mystischen Spiritualismus (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1985).} For instance, the Protestant historian Gottfried Arnold, in his monumental and popular *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie* (1699-1700), lumps him together with another writer and mentions Eckhart only because he makes an appearance in Tauler: “M. Eckhardus, M. Dietrich, deren in den Schriften Tauleri viel gedacht wird.”\footnote{Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie: Vom Anfang des Neuen Testamentsbiiß auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Thomas Fritschens sol. Erben, 1729), Book XIV, Chapter 2, 420.} Arnold does mention Eckhart in the context of Jan Wycliffe and Jan Hus, who were “ein kleines licht des wahren wesens in Christo” who came a little way “auf den rechten weg.” However, it is not Eckhart who is the focus of controversy in the Middle Ages, in Arnold’s account, but rather Tauler. Tauler receives his own entry in the section entitled “Von denen [i.e. fourteenth century] vornehmsten Scribenten der kirchen,” and appears there as the “aus diesem seculo bekannt genug Johannes Taulerus, von dem offt viel streitens gewesen ist;” he is a “wunderbarer Prediger,” and his writings are “sehr nachdencklich zu lesen, und in unserer sprache gar wol zu bekommen.”\footnote{Arnold, Chapter 3, 423.} Tauler, not Eckhart, is the object of controversy and thought provoking, and it is Tauler’s writings whose vernacularity (“in unserer sprache”) Arnold emphasizes.

There are of course exceptions, such that the Protestant world was not entirely ignorant of Eckhart. For instance, Daniel Sudermann (1550-1631), like Weigel and Arnold, called himself an “unparteiischen Liebhaber der göttlichen Wahrheit,” and was interested in spiritual and pious literature, regardless of its source and provenance. He was a passionate collector of manuscripts who, acting independently of congregation, parish and university, travelled throughout Germany, compiling religious writings from
libraries and cloisters. It was in pursuing his particular devotion to Tauler that he
discovered Eckhart, as a predecessor to Tauler. He was aware of Eckhart’s reputation as a
heretic, but dismisses this—given the mistrustful and accusatory attitude he observed and
deplored in his fellow Christians at the time—as an indication that Eckhart’s books were
spiritually improving (‘gar nutzlich, alle tage zu lesen und zu behalten’).”

That Sudermann came to Eckhart via his enthusiasm for Tauler is perhaps no
great surprise, given how Eckhart’s sermons came to be circulating by the sixteenth
century. First of all, a number of Eckhart’s sermons circulated under Tauler’s name. Secondly, the chief source of Eckhart’s writings after the advent of printing was as a sort of appendix to a large edition of Tauler’s sermons, printed in Basel in 1521 and reprinted only a year later, presumably due to its success, in 1522. (This edition is generally referred to as the Baseler Taulerdruck, and I will refer to it as such even though my interest in it is Eckhart’s contribution.) Although the sermons in the third part are attributed to Eckhart by name, his name does not appear on the title page. In other words, the composition of this edition would mean that readers would approach Eckhart only via Tauler.

Unfortunately, as Josef Quint, one of Eckhart’s early editors, notes, the transmission of Eckhart’s sermons is extraordinarily complicated (he describes it as an

161 Daniel Sudermann, quoted in Degenhardt, 92. Sudermann also composed hymns inflected by Eckhartian ideas that can be seen from the titles alone. One is entitled “Hör mein Seel, hast kein warumb!”, another is called “Mensch versenk dich in deinem Nicht”. Degenhardt, 96. On Sudermann and Eckhart, see also Pieper, 56.
162 In the 15th and 16th century printed editions, Sermons 2, 6, 8 and 9 (Sermons 101-104 in the critical edition) were in fact by Eckhart but were printed under Tauler’s and not in the section of Eckhart sermons. “Eckhart, Meister”, Killy Literat urexikon, 2 Auflage, Band 3, 186. See also Henrik Otto, Vor- und frühereformatorische Tauler-Rezeption, (Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 24.
“unheilvolle Kompliziertheit”).\textsuperscript{163} This means that he is unable to say with certainty which manuscripts served as the sources for the printed edition, and also that there is no clear link to the manuscript tradition; perhaps the printer used a single now-lost Eckhart manuscript compilation of Eckhart sermons, or perhaps he gathered together numerous manuscripts.\textsuperscript{164} Eckhart’s work, in other words, was widely known, but by the same token diffuse.\textsuperscript{165} Ironically, the printed edition itself might be why scholars can no longer identify a definite manuscript predecessor for the sermons. That is, once a manuscript master copy had been unbound and marked up by the typesetter, then multiplied and preserved in printed form, it was considered useless and simply thrown away or used for scrap.\textsuperscript{166}

The printer of the Basel Tauler edition was Adam Petri, who was born 1454 in Langendorf, who moved to Basel in 1480, and who took over the printing operation of his uncle Johannes Petri sometime around 1507; he died in 1527.\textsuperscript{167} In Basel, Petri was...
involved with both Protestants and humanists. Petri’s uncle Johannes had initially printed in partnership with Johann Froben, whose press was the centre of the circle of Basel humanists (Froben even hosted Erasmus as a guest). As for Adam Petri himself, he printed the works of Protestant authors (Luther, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, and Spalatin), and employed Hans Holbein as an illustrator. Although printing such popular and profitable Reformation texts likely helped Petri keep his business in the black, Hieronymus points out that Petri personally wrote prefaces to the Reformation texts he printed, which suggests that they also expressed his own religious preferences. Petri even sent his oldest son to study in Wittenberg.

The Basel Tauler edition is a substantial volume—a quarto volume some six hundred pages long. The cover page is illustrated with a woodcut, with eight small capsules arranged as a border, each with a figure inside. The figures in the four corners are symbols of the four Evangelists holding their books, with the apostles Paul (with sword) and Peter (with keys) in between. The remaining four figures are church fathers, including Augustine and Ambrose (in bishops’ hats), Gregory (with a dove by his side)

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168 Winfried Zeller also notes that the Basel edition of Tauler is connected to both the Wittenberg reformers as well as the Basel humanists. Presumably Zeller did not have access to the same archival material as Hieronymus, and so confines his brief article to observing that the editor’s printed marginalia give Tauler’s sermons a more Reformatory slant. For instance, the notes highlight (or perhaps over-emphasize) instances in Tauler’s text that use the formulation “allein,” echoing Luther’s sola-formulations and his famous defence of his addition of allein to his German Bible translation in the Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen (Zeller, “Taulerdruck,” 35). The marginalia also highlight other characteristic Reformation doctrines, drawing attention, for instance, to the importance of faith versus works (37) and the absolute importance of scripture (36). Winfried Zeller, “Der Baseler Taulerdruck von 1522 und die Reformation”, in Theologie und Frömmigkeit: Gesammelte Aufsätze, ed. Bernd Jaspert, (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag), Band 1, 32-38.

169 Reske, 63.

170 See the complete list of titles published by the Petri publishing firm in Hieronymus, 1*. (The star after the page number refers to the pages in the list, rather than the main body of the text.) In this list, for instance, I counted at least 33 texts by Luther published before Petri’s death in 1527.

171 Hieronymus, E5.

172 Hieronymus, E6.

173 Johannes Tauler and Meister Eckhart, Joannis Tauleri des heligen lerers Predig, fast fruchtabar zuo eim recht christlichen leben (Basel: Adam Petri, 1521). Hereafter referred to as BT (Baseler Taulerdruck).
and Jerome (wearing what looks like a cardinal’s hat). All four of these figures hold a book in their hands, and are church doctors. Taken together, these figures add up to a selection of figures from Church history that were particularly acceptable to the Protestant movement. The Evangelists frame and bound the work on all four corners, suggesting a biblical framework for reading; Jerome was the Bible’s first translator, and Augustine’s writings were given pride of place even in later Protestant theology, as the figure from tradition whose role it was to show that Church tradition supported Protestant theology. All six human figures are from the early Church, and notably absent are medieval figures—be they monastic or scholastic—including the founder of Tauler’s own order, St. Dominic, who might be a logical image with which to adorn an edition of one of the order’s most famous figures. That is, even from the title page, the Tauler edition is already reinserted into a Bible-centric reading context. Indeed, Frank Hieronymus has compiled a catalogue of every text printed by the Petri family’s printing operation, and observes that Adam Petri used this same title page illustration for other works he considered particularly “evangelical.” In the catalogue, I found four other instances with this title page in works that Adam Petri printed. The first is a low German translation of the four gospels, the second a German version of the teachings of the Dominican preacher Johannes von Freiburg, the third the Tauler edition, and the fourth a collection of works by Luther in Latin.

174 Melanchthon’s curriculum for the theology department at Wittenberg was almost exclusively a study of the Bible and biblical languages. However, he did allow a short amount of time for reading Augustine, since Augustine’s supposed agreement with the Wittenberg reformers would give students a sense that the Christian tradition confirmed and authorized Lutheran theology. Marcel Nieden, *Die Erfindung des Theologen: Wittenberger Anweisungen zum Theologiestudium im Zeitalter von Reformation und Konfessionalisierung*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 48.

175 Hieronymus, 140.

176 Hieronymus also notes that Petri later used a modified version of this title page without the four church fathers, leaving only the more “evangelical” collection of figures, namely the two apostles Peter and Paul,
Petri explicitly portrays his work as a publisher as being in the service of the spiritual betterment of his Scripture-loving readers: "Alzdan[n] mein sondere neygung bißhar allzeyt gewesen, und noch ist, der heyligen schrifft liebhabern nutz und förderung höher zuo schetze[n], dan[n] alles das so mir sunst zuo eroberung zeitlichs guots villeicht weyter het mögen reyche[n].” As Petri writes, he is not publishing Tauler for financial gain, but rather has “[s]ich alweg geflissen…guote ußerleßne buocher an tag zuo bringen, die einem fro[m]men Christen nit allein tröstlich sunder auch gantz heylsam werendt.”

His preface frames Tauler’s teaching as Evangelical, Pauline and scriptural, his sermons being grounded (“wol gegründte predig”) in these sources. The mention of the specifically Pauline cast to Tauler’s theology brings to mind Luther’s positing Paul’s Roman epistle as the key to interpreting scripture (discussed in the Introduction). Moreover, Tauler’s sermons are classed as a special revelation of true faith (“rechten lebendigen glauben”) in a time when, as Luther emphasized over and over, the gospel message was in danger of being extinguished entirely by Rome’s false theology: “der yetzt garnach allenthalb erloschen were, heet uns der barmhertzig got…nit so gnediglich in disen zeyten angesehen, und diß oder anderley bücher und leren nit geoffenbaret.”

Amidst this praise for Tauler, the layout of the volume does little to draw attention to the fact that a third of the pages in Petri’s edition contain sermons by Eckhart. The running titles across the top of the pages read “Predig Doctor Jo. Tauleri” throughout, even in the third section dedicated to Eckhart’s sermons. Nor is Eckhart’s name on the ame of the four Evangelists. There is an example of this from a 1523 edition of the German translation of the New Testament (Hieronymus, 283).

177 BT, Preface.
178 “Dise hochtreffenliche im Euangelio, Paulo, und an dern bewerten heyligen leren, wol gegründte predig…Joannis Tauleri”. Ibid.
180 BT, Preface.
title page, as mentioned above, despite the fact that Eckhart’s sermons occupy one third of the book. Hieronymus suggests that the publisher attempted to conceal the presence of Eckhart under Tauler’s name for fear of being seen to print the works of a heretic.\footnote{Hieronymus, 140.}

However, the following discussion will demonstrate that it is more likely that the layout of the Basel Tauler edition is simply due to the fact Eckhart was not considered particularly important—or at least was considered less important than Tauler.

In the small paragraph that opens the third part of the edition (the section with Eckhart’s sermons, that is), Eckhart is praised as having been an important source for Tauler. The editor groups together in this third part sermons by a number of theologians, who have in common only the fact that they influenced Tauler: “folgen hernach etlich gar subtil und trefflich kostlich predigen, etlicher vast gelerter andechtiger vätter und lerer, auß denen man achtet Doctorem Tauler etwas seins grundes geno[m]me[n] habe[n].”\footnote{BT, CCXLII va.} Eckhart is the chief amongst these influences, but is limited to being merely an influence nonetheless: Tauler mentions Eckhart “underweylen.” From a \textit{twentieth} century perspective, accustomed to praise of Eckhart as a great theologian, this is hardly a ringing endorsement of Eckhart’s importance.

The editor of the Basel edition goes on, however, to note that Tauler’s source was indeed worthy, a “fürtreffenlich hochgelerter man,” who was “in subtilikeiten natürlicher und göttlicher künsten so hoch bericht, das vil gelerter leüt zuo seinen zeitten in ni wol verstuonde[n].”\footnote{Ibid.} This assessment replicates earlier judgments of Eckhart as too learned for his own good, as ahead of his time and therefore rejected by contemporaries who misunderstood him. The editor goes on to allude to Eckhart’s tangled dealings with the

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181 Hieronymus, 140.
182 BT, CCXLII va.
183 Ibid.
Church: “deßhalb seiner ler ein teyl auch in etlichen stücken und articklen verworffen ist, und noch von einfeltigen menschen gewarsamlich gelesen werden sol.”¹⁸⁴ This representation of Eckhart’s trial diminishes and hedges the significance of the heresy charge, emphasizing that it was only a part (“ein teyl”) of his teaching, “in etlichen stucken” that was rejected. The editor never refers to Eckhart as a heretic, or to Eckhart’s teaching as heretical, even when relating that his teachings were rejected by the Church. It is unclear whether the editor is aware that Eckhart had been scrutinized for heretical teachings and is trying to minimize this for the reader, or whether in fact his knowledge on the subject is simply a bit hazy. Taken on its own, Petri’s edition does not allow us to decide whether the former or the latter is the case, and we will need to consider other Eckhart readers in order to triangulate Petri’s view. However, in the second half of this chapter, we will see that, unlike Eckhart’s readers in the immediate aftermath of his papal condemnation, his sixteenth century readers did not consider Eckhart’s ideas particularly heretical, scandalous or dangerous, unlike Eckhart’s readers in the immediate aftermath of his papal condemnation.

Understanding what sixteenth century readers might have thought about Eckhart requires a small detour into the reception of Tauler in the sixteenth century, because, as I have demonstrated with the Basel Tauler edition, early modern readers would have found Eckhart chiefly because they were looking for sermons by Tauler. What would sixteenth century readers have been looking for, or what might they have expected to find, when they opened a volume with Tauler’s name on it, and who were these Tauler readers? In this section, I focus on what the material history of the books themselves can tell us about Tauler’s early modern reception, confirming the story that the Basel Tauler edition tells.

¹⁸⁴ BT, CCXLII va.
of a respectable though not fanatical interest in Tauler from religious people both loyal to
the Roman pope and sympathetic to Luther’s reform movement. I will then turn to the
readers’ responses to the content of Tauler’s work at the end of this section.

There was still a significant interest in Tauler in the sixteenth century when the
Basel Tauler edition was produced, meaning that making a first printed edition of Tauler
in 1498 was only a small risk for the printer and publisher (Konrad Kachelofen from
Leipzig and Johannes Rynmann from Augsburg).\textsuperscript{185} Tauler’s popularity at the time can
be deduced from the number of surviving Tauler manuscripts, of which more than half
were produced \textit{after} 1450 (71 of the surviving 132).\textsuperscript{186} Moreover, Tauler manuscripts
were quite well distributed over the entire German-speaking region by the fifteenth
century. The printed edition would even have appeared as a familiar format to those who
already knew Tauler’s work, since it was already circulated in manuscript form as large
collections of sermons. Unlike for Eckhart, as I described above, the manuscript the
printer used to prepare the printed edition of Tauler’s sermons is still in existence, and
contains the very same sermons in the same order and even includes what is now known
as the \textit{Meisterbuch}, a biography of Tauler that is now known to have been written by
Rulman Merswin and attributed to Tauler;\textsuperscript{187} only small changes were made to produce
the printed version.\textsuperscript{188}

As for the success of the first printed edition, although there are no records of the
number of copies, the book was popular enough to merit a second edition ten years later.

\textsuperscript{185} Otto, 23.
\textsuperscript{186} Otto notes that this could be attributed the normal vagaries of transmission, or to the fact that the
fifteenth century saw a growth in manuscript production overall. Otto, 21.
\textsuperscript{187} Otto, 24.
\textsuperscript{188} Otto, 28.
of Tauler’s sermons neither flew off the shelf nor were impossible to get rid of. Though, again, the printer’s records are missing here, it has been determined that a normal print run in the first quarter of the sixteenth century was about 1000 copies, so the four printings of Tauler in various editions make for the existence of 4000 copies.\footnote{Otto, 41.} Only the 1521 and 1522 edition of Tauler from Basel contained the appendix of Eckhart sermons, so it might be estimated that 2000 copies of Eckhart’s sermons (in printed, not manuscript form) were circulating in German-speaking lands by 1522.

The original impulse behind the re-publication of Tauler’s sermons was not, strangely, a specific interest in the \textit{content} but rather in the \textit{form}, the sermon collection being a popular form that sold well, and book distributors stood to make a profit by finding new preachers to edit.\footnote{Hans-Jörg Kunäst and Brigitte Schürmann, “Johannes Rynmann, Wolfgang Präunlein und Georg Willer - Drei Augsburger Buchführer des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts,” in Augsburger Buchdruck und Verlagswesen: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 23-40 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 26.} The person behind the three re-publications of Tauler’s sermons was the book distributor Johann Rynmann from Augsburg, and though he mostly published scholarly editions of Latin texts (only \textbf{eleven percent} of books commissioned by him are in German),\footnote{Hans-Jörg Kunäst, Brigitte Schürmann, “Johannes Rynmann, Wolfgang Präunlein und Georg Willer -- drei Augsburger Buchführer des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts,” in Augsburger Buchdruck und Verlagswesen: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, Helmut Gier, Johannes Janota, eds., (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 27.} Tauler fit into Rynmann’s publishing program by dint of having written sermons, and would therefore fit in alongside the other 100 or so sermon collections Rynmann had edited.\footnote{As another measure of Tauler’s popularity in the early sixteenth century are the sales figures that exist for other sermon collections that Rynmann commissioned. The sermon writer who sold the best is one Pelbartus de Temeswar, who wrote in Latin and of whom Rynmann published 53 editions, followed by Michael Lochmair (20), Paul Wann (20) and Michael de Hungaria (13). The only other collection of sermons that Rynmann commissioned was by Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg, (1508), whose works sold much better than Tauler’s such that a second printing followed only two years later, rather than 10 or 13 as in Tauler’s case. That these authors are today all but unknown testifies to the reshaping of the canon of German spiritual writing since the nineteenth century. Otto, 39-40.} Rynmann did not run a printing business.
himself, but rather cultivated partnerships with printers such as Johann Otmar in Augsburg (who published the second edition of the Leipzig text in 1508) and Adam Petri in Basel (who substantially revised the 1508 text, and added the Eckhart sermons, to publish the Basel edition in 1521 and 1522).\textsuperscript{193} Rynmann, for his part, sold the books he had commissioned to be printed, distributing them through his far-reaching network of sales contacts, which stretched as far as Cracow, and possibly into the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{194} Such a large sales network meant that Tauler (and of course Eckhart) would not have been limited to circles around Augsburg and Basel, but would have found their way to German-speaking readers across Europe.

As for the actual readership of the printed Tauler editions, this, predictably, is hard to determine exactly, since only a fraction of the printed copies survive. In the case of the first Leipzig edition, over a hundred copies survive, but this is of a print run that was estimated to be about 1000.\textsuperscript{195} Nevertheless, most of the surviving copies belonged to monastic orders, and only eleven of the 107 surviving printed copies that one historian examined have ownership marks of non-monastic owners.\textsuperscript{196} This does not necessarily reflect accurately the composition of the group of sixteenth-century Tauler readers, since manuscripts in monastic libraries had better survival chances than those in the collections of private owners. Nevertheless the majority of readers were either monastic (or at least those who had access to monastic libraries) or scholars. This is chiefly due to the price tag attached to such a large volume. Though prices varied depending on the market, a customer might have been expected to pay between two and three Gulden but possibly as

\textsuperscript{193} Otto notes that Rynmann was not responsible for the addition of the Eckhart sermons to the Tauler edition, but attributes it instead to Petri’s own initiative. Otto, 40.
\textsuperscript{194} Kunäst, 26.
\textsuperscript{195} Otto, 42.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, 73.
much as five Gulden, and, where the poverty line for the early sixteenth century has been estimated at ten Gulden per year, this constitutes a substantial (but not prohibitive) investment. At the very least, the cost of buying a Tauler edition was high enough that one would have to already be interested or invested in spiritual texts, as one would not idly spend such a sum. Those who read the early printed editions were interested in Tauler first because of the form of his works (sermons), and second because of their content. The publisher and book seller’s contacts extended throughout the German speaking lands, such that, although Wittenberg (where both Luther and Weigel studied) was outside the main publishing and book selling centers (Frankfurt and Basel), Protestant readers would have had ready access to the text.

I now turn to how sixteenth century readers in Wittenberg responded to the content of Tauler’s and Eckhart’s sermons. Since Weigel studied at Wittenberg, it is possible that he heard these responses, or even read them himself, and so the sources discussed here suggest what Weigel’s associations with Tauler and Eckhart might have been. The key finding is that Tauler continued to be read throughout the sixteenth century and, moreover, was read by a broad community of readers, both conservative and radical. In other words, Tauler’s readership was not limited to one particular subgroup of Protestants, and certainly was not limited to those Protestants who supported a more radical or revolutionary religious and political program (i.e. one that did not accept the

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197 Otto, 47. Otto notes further that secular clergy (Weltgeistliche) could expect to earn around 30-40 Gulden per year.
198 Ernst Koch, Taulerrezeption im Luthertum der zweitel Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts, Vol. 2, in “Der Buchstab tödt, der Geist macht lebendig”: Festschrift für Hans-Gert Roloff, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), 1244. The so-called “radical reformers” who supported the fanatical Schwärmer such as Karlstadt and Münzer read Tauler before the Peace of Augsburg (in 1555), as did post-Augsburg Protestant opponents of Lutheranism such as Sebastian Franck and Caspar von Schwenckfeld. By the same token, however, Tauler continued to be read in Wittenberg, and was received by those who identified themselves with the Lutheran mainstream.
church that Luther, Melanchthon and other Wittenberg theologians established). Since Weigel did not himself choose protest or revolution, Tauler’s more “conservative” readers are indeed relevant to a discussion of Weigel’s reception of German mysticism.

For this reason, I focus on two texts that give what might be called the Wittenberg “party line” on Tauler, the first by Matthias Lauterwalt and the second by Michael Neander—both of whom self-identified as mainstream Lutherans who supported the church that Luther had established. Both Lauterwalt and Neander, then, are classified here as “conservative” readers of Eckhart and Tauler, because they worked to sustain the theology developed at Lutheran universities and actively shaped Lutheran confessional documents and the confessional church.

One tract that gives insight into the reception of Tauler in Lutheran circles is a work published in 1553 by the Wittenberg theologian Matthias Lauterwalt199 entitled _Ein bedencken: Was zu halten sey, von des erleuchten Herren Doctor Johannis Taulers (seliger gedechtnis) Offenbarung_, voicing the official or normative Lutheran position on Tauler: “was zu halten sey,” what *is to be thought* of Tauler. Although Eckhart’s name is never mentioned in this tract, I will discuss this text because it is the earliest Lutheran text to genuinely engage with German mystical writing at length. Moreover, Eckhart’s writings circulated almost exclusively in connection with Tauler’s name, and, as I will discuss below, the teachings that Lauterwalt identifies as Taulerian are also those that he shared with his teacher Eckhart. Finally, it was published only a decade before Weigel

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199 Lauterwalt (or Lauterwald as his name is more frequently spelled), studied at Wittenberg, then taught mathematics at the newly founded Lutheran university at Königsberg before losing his teaching post in 1549 on account of his involvement on the wrong side of one of the many theological controversies within Lutheranism in the mid-16th century (one early biography describes him as “ein sehr zänckischer Mann”). He left to continue his studies at Wittenberg again, before accepting a pastoral post in 1551. Johann Samuel Klein, *Nachrichten von den Lebensumständen und Schriften Evangelischer Prediger in allen Gemeinen des Königreichs Ungarn*, (Leipzig: Diepold und Lindauer, 1789), 185.
arrived at Wittenberg, indicating that Tauler’s writings circulated within the circle of Wittenberg theologians around the time that Weigel studied there, and that Tauler’s ideas enjoyed a level of notoriety sufficiently great to have prompted a fifty-page response. Given that this clear exposition of Tauler’s ideas was written so close to Weigel’s intellectual environment, it is entirely possible that Weigel himself read this text, or at least heard it discussed by fellow students or by professors when he was at Wittenberg, even though there is no direct internal proof in Weigel’s writings.

Unusual for a written disputation is the sincere apology that prefaces Lauterwalt’s pamphlet: “man sol sich Christlicher leser, mit den todten, nicht hadern.” Just as it is ignoble (“unadlich”) to kick a man when he is down, argues Lauterwalt, so too is it impolite to mock and abuse the dead. Nevertheless, Lauterwalt notes that although the man himself is dead, his writings circulate in print, and his ideas live on in his readers. Indeed, it is his job to give his opinion on Tauler so that pious Christians are not scandalized by Tauler’s ideas, as the “entzuckten Wesentichter” (the followers of the controversial Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander, who emphasized the indwelling of God over imputed righteousness) seek to give them grave offence by their interpretation of these ideas. Lauterwalt proceeds cautiously in the short preface, and is careful to emphasize that he is only correcting a misinterpretation of Taulerian ideas, rather than reproaching the person himself.

Most of Lauterwalt’s argument against Tauler concerns the question of justification (“wie man in diesem leben Gerecht und selig auff das volkommest werden

200 Matthias Lauterwalt, *Ein bedencken: Was zu halten sey, von des erleuchten Herren Doctor Johannis Taulers (seliger gedechnis) Offenbarung*, (Wittenberg: Veit Creutzer, 1553), 1. (There are no page numbers printed in this text, I have added them myself.)

201 Lauterwalt, 3.
kan”), and specifically the role of what he calls “Entzückung,” which is an ecstatic union with God. Lauterwalt names eight contentious doctrines, and I will discuss them all here to give an idea of what counted as Taulerian in Wittenberg for the second generation of Reformers.

The first is that God, like a fisher, throws the net of salvation towards the poor sinner, desiring nothing more than our salvation, but, because we are disobedient, we refuse to accept the proffered salvation. Second, just as the fish must swim into the net in order to be caught, so too must the sinner contribute to salvation by cultivating a state of detachment and Gelassenheit (“alle seine gedancken in sich abziehe von allen Creaturn, und derer gantz und gar vergesse”) in order to attain the promised salvation. Third, the sinner must also forget himself, which is achieved via “gestrenge ubunge,” by which Lauterwalt means mortification, and self-deprivation through fasting or long vigils. Fourth, when the sinner has become still (“stille ist worden”), gelassen (“abgesondert von allen Creaturn”) and emptied of all creatureliness, then God, being unable to abide a vacuum (“die nature aber und Gott können nichts lehres leiden”) must flow into the soul, resulting in an ecstatic revelation (“das selige stündlin der offenbarung und entzuckung”). Lauterwalt even picks up on the characteristic language of Eckhart and Tauler, noting that this emptying and filling kenosis is described as God pouring himself into the ground of the naked/empty soul (“geusset sich…in den grund des Wesens der blossen Seel”) or giving birth to the Word (“gebiret Er sein Wort, nemlich seinen einigen Son”). That is, God is not present in the soul as God is present to all creatures, but rather

202 Lauterwalt, 5.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid, 6.
205 Ibid, 7.
has a special relationship with the human soul, since the soul is “göttlicher nature,” by its nature (“natürlich”) “nach Gott gebildet.” Lauterwalt does not simply reproduce the language of Tauler’s medieval mysticism, but rather uses another set of terms that Weigel later makes central to his description of mystical cognition of the gelassene Seele—namely the terminology of activity and passivity (wirckend and leidlich). God substitutes for “d[ie] wirckende vernunft” in the perfected soul once a person’s rational faculties become “leidlich.” In this state where our cognitive capacities are rendered passive, we are so absorbed in the divine that we gain no knowledge about God (“gantz und gar in die gottheit gesencket werden…so wissen wir auch nicht was Gott ist”), knowing only what God is not (“alleine das wissen wir, was Gott nicht ist”). Our passivity is complete, and Lauterwalt adds that this also means that the human soul contributes nothing to this “blessed moment” (“selige stündlin”), but rather simply allows God to act (“sondern nur allein thuen lassen an uns”). Fifth, attaining a state of blessedness means leaving all works behind and becoming completely passive: by ceasing to work but rather only being worked upon (“thuen lassen an uns”), the Christian sinks into the Godhead (“in die gottheit gesenckt”) and thus attains the highest perfection. Sixth, the Father gives birth to the Son in the soul. Seventh, by turning to God, the soul is filled with light, and its blessedness is confirmed by the disgust the soul now feels towards whatever is not God (“mit der erleuchtung, das ist so zart und so lustig, das dich alles verdreust, das nicht göttlich ist”). And finally, those who have been united with God in the grounds of their

206 Lauterwalt, 7.
207 Ibid, 8. For a discussion of wirckend and leidlich in Weigel, see Chapter 2.
208 Lauterwalt, 8.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid, 9.
soul become convinced that nothing whatsoever can cause them to fall away from God, and that they are no longer capable of sinning.\footnote{Lauterwalt, 10.}

Lauterwalt’s criticism of Tauler turns on their divergent views about how a person achieves salvation and, crucially, the role of the Church in administering it. Many of the criticisms that Lauterwalt offers of Tauler are levelled at Weigel a century later by Weigel’s own critics, and are worth attending to in detail here. First, for Lauterwalt, the state of Entzückung is not wrong in and of itself, so long as we remember that it is, above all, \\
\textit{exceptional}. There is a big difference between defining ecstatic moments as special dispensations of grace (“solche hohen sonderlichen gaben eines sonderlichen beruffs”) and defining them as a call to salvation extended to \textit{all} sinners (“d[ie] lere, dadurch Gott alle arme sunder zur Busse ruffet”).\footnote{Ibid, 2.} Exceptional cases cannot form the basis of a universally applicable or normative theory of grace and justification. The universal offer of salvation that God extends to all is via God’s word (contained in the Bible and in sermons), whereas the special dispensation of Entzückung does not lead to salvation but rather initiates a special calling. Lauterwalt takes the Apostle Paul as his example, who is said to have become a believer after Christ appeared to him in a vision.\footnote{Paul’s conversion is described, amongst others, in Acts 9: 3-9.} However, Paul was not saved because he had a vision, but rather because he accepted the word of God; his special vision was given by God to mark him out as one of the Apostles (which, presumably, was necessary because he did not witness Christ in the flesh before the Ascension).\footnote{Ibid, 25.} Lauterwalt concedes that it is understandable to desire a close and immediate relationship with God of the kind that John the Baptist enjoyed, where John

\footnote{Lauterwalt, 10.} \footnote{Ibid, 2.} \footnote{Paul’s conversion is described, amongst others, in Acts 9: 3-9.} \footnote{Ibid, 25.}
the Baptist exemplifies the specially chosen and graced layman (“Wer ist auch der nicht begerte in der heiligkeit zu scheinen, darinne Johannes der Teuffer scheinet?”). Alas, Lauterwalt reminds his readers that not everybody can be so lucky or so special as Paul and John the Baptist, and those to whom this special honour is not accorded must content themselves with the measure of grace that God does give them. Although God desires that every soul be saved and blessed, God does not want all people to be Prophets and Apostles.

Lauterwalt’s second critique of Tauler’s view of justification (or rather, of those who misinterpret Tauler in order to claim a special illumination from God) centers on the role of God’s “outer word.” Lauterwalt is suspicious of those who use Tauler’s talk of interiority to denigrate the potency of the outer word. Lacking faith that God’s word could cause salvation in the soul, they make the scandalous assumption that God must enter into us (“er müste denn (ach der lesterung) also in uns faren”). He mocks this idea, asking whether they imagine salvation is like pouring wine into a cup. God is not our righteousness because God is a being in us, but rather because God causes righteousness to be in us (“Gott [heisse] unser Gerechtigkeit nicht darumb, das er ein wesen in uns ist, sondern darumb, das er in uns wircket Gerechtigkeit, das er nicht wircket in den ungleubigen”). Otherwise, Lauterwalt worries that even the unfaithful would be justified. In short, Lauterwalt worries that Tauler could be misinterpreted to say

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215 “Also können wir nicht alle die hohen gaben haben, sondern wir sollen uns an denen genügen lassen, die uns Gott aus gnaden gibet.” Lauterwalt, 2.
216 Ibid, 3.
217 Though the exact meaning of the outer word was contested, the term generally refers to the message of the Gospels as found in the written words of Scripture or preached in Scripture-based sermons.
218 Ibid, 10.
that salvation can be attained through the union of *Entzückung*, rather than through the normal channels supervised by clerics.

Whereas Lauterwalt grappled with Tauler’s ideas and explicitly set out the boundaries between an orthodox and heterodox reading of Tauler, the reading strategy of the second Wittenberg Tauler reader, the theologian Michael Neander (1525-1595), was to select the teachings from Tauler that conformed to orthodox Lutheran theology and simply ignored what did not fit, using the sermons as a spur to devotional meditation. This response to Tauler is documented in his *Theologia Bernhardi ac Tauleri in illis Tenebris Pontificiijs singulari ac magno spiritu Monachorum* (1581).219 I discuss Neander’s work in this chapter because it was composed during Weigel’s lifetime (1581), only shortly after the period when Weigel himself was reading Eckhart and writing about Eckhart’s sermons—but written, however, by a theologian much more comfortable with orthodox Wittenberg theology, if his assistance in composing the *Formula Concordiae* is any indication of his inclinations. Although Weigel and Neander read the very same edition of Tauler and Eckhart sermons, their readings of these preachers were very different. That is, Neander’s work, by very selective quotation and some ingenious glossing, attempts to reduce as much as possible the theological distance between Luther and Tauler/Eckhart. Weigel, as we will see in Chapter 2, uses Eckhart’s ideas to achieve the opposite goal, to criticize Luther and the Lutheran church.

That Neander was involved in writing the *Konkordienbuch* (a document that Weigel greatly disliked, as we saw in the introduction) suggests that reading mystical

219 Michael Neander, *Theologia Bernhardi ac Tauleri in illis Tenebris Pontificiijs singulari ac magno spiritu Monachorum* (Eisleben: Urbanus Gusius, 1581). There are no page numbers in this volume.
texts does not lead straight to radicalism. Neander studied under Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg in 1543, before later gaining some considerable fame as a pedagogue and director of a school at Ilfeld, and as the editor of classical texts.

Although Neander is generally known for his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, Neander’s *Theologia Bernhardi ac Tauleri* is motivated less by his scholarly interests and more by his devotion to Luther. The work was published in 1581 and appended to another work by Leander that lionizes Luther, lavishly praising him in the title as *Theologia Megalandri Lutheri*. That first work is a compendium of quotations from Luther’s work, both in Latin and in German, as well as small texts praising Luther, such as a small poem composed by Conrad Porta, an acrostic poem using the first letters of Luther’s names.

Like the *Theologia Megalandri*, the *Theologia Bernhardi ac Tauleri* is a florilegium of sorts, a compilation of the most attractive sentences from Tauler’s sermons. However, Neander’s text explicitly brings Tauler under Luther’s theological influence. On the title page are two quotations from “Theander Lutherus” (the God-man Luther, only one of Neander’s many affectionate epithets for his teacher) in which Luther praises each of the two medieval figures, presumably by way of authorizing or explaining Neander’s interest in them. For Bernard, Neander quotes Luther, who writes: “S. Bernhard ist ein Mann von grossem Geist gewesen / das ich in schier thurst uber alle Lerer setzen / die da bertumpt sein / beide alte und newe.” As for Tauler, Neander quotes Luther’s praise for Tauler as offering a theology that seems beneficial and salubrious, and,

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220 Koch, 1243.
222 “Mendacia Antichristi Refutavit Tribuit Iesu Nomen Unicum Salutis / Luce Veritatis Triumphauit Haereses Ecclesiae Romanae Verbo Superauit.” This is an acrostic for MARTINUS LUTHERUS.
more importantly, a theology that accords with Scripture (high praise indeed from Luther).\textsuperscript{223}

As for the text itself, Neander offers the reader the fruits of his reading of Tauler, juxtaposed with passages from Luther to interpret Tauler’s meaning. Neander used the 1522 Basel edition of Tauler (the same one that Weigel used), and has commented on the entire work, including the Eckhart sermons published in that edition. This means that Neander’s work can tell us something about the reception of Eckhart in more orthodox Lutheran theology as well, despite Eckhart’s name not appearing in the title of Neander’s work, or Neander being entirely aware that he was not always reading Tauler. What is most striking about Neander’s glosses on Tauler/Eckhart is what he does not say—the passages Neander cites from Eckhart do not express the more daring theological ideas that raised eyebrows amongst his medieval readers (about the uncreated spark of the soul in particular). Take, for instance, the lines he takes from the Basel Tauler edition, which read: “Alles das Gott gefelt, das gefellet im in seinem eingebornen Son, Und alles das Gott lieb hat, das hat er lieb in seinem eingebornen Sone. Nun sol der Mensch also leben, das er eins sey mit dem eingebornen Son, und das er der eingeborne Son sey.”\textsuperscript{224} Neander explains this passage by appending two short quotations from Luther to emphasize the Lutheran position that this union is not essential but rather occurs by faith (“Lutherus: Per fidem Christi efficitur Christianus unus spiritus & unum cum Christo”), and that the union is not an unmediated identity, as Eckhart would claim, but rather more akin to the joining of bride and bridegroom (“Durch Christum ist die CHristenheit und GOTT also vereiniget, wie eine Braut mit ihrem Breutigam, das die Braut recht und macht habe, zu

\textsuperscript{223} “Ac de Tauleri concionibus: Necque ego nec in Latina, graeca aut hebraea, uel nostra lingua, Theologiam uidi salubriorem & cum Evangelio consonantiorem.”
\textsuperscript{224} BT, CCLXXXIVvb. 
des Breutgams Leibe, und allem was er hat”). Neander, however, stops quoting from Eckhart just before Eckhart states plainly that man and God are identical in the soul (“Zwyschen dem eingebornen sun unnd der sele ist keyn underscheid.”), suppressing Eckhart’s most controversial idea without explicitly engaging with it.225

I have discussed various Protestants who encountered Eckhart texts in the early modern period, either as readers, commentators or editors, including the editor of the first printed Eckhart edition with Protestant sympathies and humanist connections, to a Lutheran pedagogue and Hebraist firmly committed to the confessional Church. What their reactions to Eckhart’s ideas share is a measured response: if they did know of Eckhart’s trial for heresy, it is duly noted but then set aside in favour of what is useful and pious in his work (as Adam Petri and Matthias Lauterwaldt did), or is not mentioned at all and is pushed into the background by excising the controversial sentences (as Neander did).

Moving from Eckhart readers in Weigel’s time, the final section of this chapter looks at the Eckhartbilder of the seventeenth century, where Eckhart-related texts were linked in various ways to Weigel’s own writings, and then beyond that to the Eckhart “revival” of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Having been pushed out of the mainstream of theological discourse in the early modern era (though neither forgotten nor rejected, as I have demonstrated), Eckhart’s writings were returned to the canon of German literature, theology and philosophy in the early 19th century. I now turn to this modern Eckhart reception so that readers will see the contrast between this view of Eckhart and the early modern one I have just recounted.

225 BT, CCLVVVIVvb.
Weigel’s writings, following his death, were occasionally transmitted alongside Eckhart’s texts—or texts related to Eckhart’s ideas—in the seventeenth century. In one case, the editor of one compilation gathered together Weigel-related material and Eckhart-related material, publishing them together presumably because he felt them to be related. In another case, a work on Gelassenheit by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (a Protestant theologian) was misattributed to Weigel and published under Weigel’s name at the end of the seventeenth century. That Karlstadt’s work on Gelassenheit is published under Weigel’s name with a different title suggests that Gelassenheit, a distinctly Eckhartian concept, was linked to Weigel’s name to the extent that a work on the subject was attributed to him, whether purposely or accidentally.

The first example of Weigel and Eckhart material being published together is a Dutch edition of two works by Weigel that was published in Amsterdam in 1647, translated by Abraham Willemszoon van Beyerland.226 The first hundred pages of the small book are taken up by the works advertised on the title page, Weigel’s Van de Betrachtingh des Levens Christi and his Korte In-leydinghe Tol de Duystche

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226 Abraham Willemszoon van Beyerland (1586?-1648) was a wealthy and successful merchant, who took an interest in mystical, hermetic and spiritual writings. He is chiefly known as a translator and publisher of Jacob Böhme (and as a collector of Böhme manuscripts), but also translated Hermes Trismegistus (see Chapter 3) and Weigel, among others. Both his first and second wives came from families involved in the publishing industry (bookbinders and papermakers), whence his connection to editing and publishing. Either through his reading interests or his commercial ones (Amsterdam being an important trading city), he participated in an international network of like-minded readers from England to Germany. The child of Protestant refugees from the Catholic city of Antwerp to (Protestant) Amsterdam, he served as an elder in the Calvinist church, but his reading interests nevertheless encompassed orthodox and heterodox works; from an inventory of his library, he owned several hundred titles by authors from Augustine, Boethius and Eusebius to Calvin and Luther to Agrippa von Nettesheim, Sebastian Franck and Weigel. Frank van Lamoen, "Mit dem Auge des Geistes: Hintergründe zu den Übersetzungen des Abraham Willemz van Beyerland," and Govert Snoek, "Die Bibliothek von Abraham Willemz van Beyerland laut dem Inventar seiner Witwe," both in Jacob Böhmes Weg in die Welt: Zur Geschichte der Handschriftensammlung, Übersetzungen und Editionen von Abraham Willemz van Beyerland, 169-212 (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2007).
These are then followed by Dutch versions of three of the so-called *Eckhartlegenden*, elliptical fables featuring Meister Eckhart as a character. All three little tales share a common structure, in which the learned *Meister* speaks with an unlearned layperson who, in the end, proves wiser than the Master. For instance, in “Meister Eckharts Tochter,” a “goede Suster” approaches the Porter of a cloister asking to speak to Meister Eckhart. When the Porter asks whose name he should announce, she responds that she is “geen [i.e. *kein*] Maeghdeken, noch geen Vrouw, noch geen Man, noch een Wijf, noch geene Weduwe, noch eene Jongh-vrouwe, noch een Heer, noch eene Dienst-maect, noch een Knecht.” She explains her cryptic answer to the Porter’s simple question, mimicking Eckhart’s language of negative theology, saying that she is neither one thing nor the other, and then disappears (“en loope [i.e. *laufe*] daer heen”). Eckhart returns to his students, declaring that he has met “den alder-loutersten demoedigsten mensch...dien ick oyt hebbe ghevonden naer [i.e. *nach*] mijn goet-duncken,” presenting her to his (male) students as exemplary.

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227 Actually, Pfefferl notes that what is printed is not simply a translation of Weigel’s *Bericht zur Deutschen Theologie*, but rather a “grundlegende Umarbeitung” of Weigel’s work as it is translated. The first work, however, the *Betrachtung des Lebens Christi*, is a “wortgetreue Übersetzung.” Valentin Weigel, *Schriften: Neue Edition*, ed. Horst Pfefferl, Vol. 7 (Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2008), XVII.

228 Valentin Weigel, *Van de Betrachtingh des Levens Christi: En, Hoe Christus tot onsen nut, moet gekent worden; Vervat in vijf Cappittelen; Noch is hier by ghevoeght de Korte Invleydinghe Tot de Duytsche Theologie*, (Amsterdam: Pieter la Burgh, 1647). Actually, one of the three small works, “Die Frau von 21 Jahren,” is not considered one of the Eckhartlegenden per se, even though Kurt Ruh classifies it as being associated with that group of texts. For simplicity’s sake, I refer here to all three texts as Eckhartlegenden.

229 Weigel, *Van de Betrachtingh*, 107-108. I am citing the Dutch version of this legend from the volume containing Weigel’s work.


231 Ibid, 109-110. Whether intentionally or not, the spatial structure suggested by the narrative is compelling, as it mimicks the path of procession (ûzgang) and return that Eckhart describes many times in his writings.
These role-reversal dialogues were common property of the German and Dutch Sprachgebiet and circulated as early as the fourteenth century.\footnote{Kurt Ruh, "Das Frauchen von 22 (21) Jahren," in Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters Verfasserlexikon, ed. Kurt Ruh, Vol. 2, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 858; Kurt Ruh, “Eckhartlegenden,” in Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters Verfasserlexikon, ed. Kurt Ruh, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 350. See also Sara S. Poor, “Women Teaching Men in the Medieval Devotional Imagination,” in Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany 1100-1500, eds. Fiona Griffiths and Julie Hotchin (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming November, 2013).} It is not possible to say for certain how the editor of the volume came across the legends in the first place, as there is no single (extant) volume that includes all three texts, even though, separately, they are preserved in many manuscripts and printed books. “Meister Eckharts Tochter” was not printed in the early modern period, but does survive in two Dutch manuscripts, one from the 1451 and the other from 1592. The situation is the same for the “Frau von 21 Jahren,” where there is no early printed edition but three Dutch manuscripts, all from the fifteenth century.\footnote{Johannes Tauler, Des erleuchten D. Johannis Tauleri, von eym waren Evangelischen leben, Göttliche Predig, Leren, Epistolen, Cantilenen, Prophetien (Köl: Jaspur von Gennep, 1543), cccxxxvii ra-va.} The final Eckhartlegende, known as “Meister Eckhart und der arme Mensche,” appears in this text in a modified form, combining two separate but similar Legenden.\footnote{The Handschriftencensus lists Königliche Bibl. Cod. 133 F22 in Den Haag as containing both the Eckhart Spruch (66) and Das Frauchen von 22 (21) Jahren. http://www.handschriftencensus.de/, accessed June, 2012.} This form of the story is apparently found in two other Dutch manuscripts, as well as in another Tauler edition from 1543 (the so-called Köln Taulerdruck),\footnote{Fully documenting Weigel’s transmission into the Netherlands is obviously a much larger project than can be accomplished here, and would require a new round of archival research.} so it is not possible to pinpoint the precise source for these texts in the 1648 Dutch Weigel edition. In any case, this is not to claim that the 1648 editor used specifically any of these manuscripts or printed books, but rather that the circulation of the stories in the Netherlands was widely attested at the time the book was published.\footnote{Fully documenting Weigel’s transmission into the Netherlands is obviously a much larger project than can be accomplished here, and would require a new round of archival research.} Further, Beyerland’s decision to publish Eckhart-related materials in the same volume as
Weigel’s work constitutes further evidence for my argument that Eckhart’s ideas were a key element in Weigel’s thought, as well as my argument that Eckhart was neither forgotten nor anathemized amongst learned Protestants.

A work published in German fifty years after Beyerland’s Dutch edition suggests that not only were Eckhart and Weigel linked in the minds of seventeenth century readers, but that it was specifically the concept of Gelassenheit that connected the two theologians (the use that Weigel makes of Gelassenheit is the subject of Chapter 2). The publication that links Weigel with Gelassenheit is a 1523 treatise by the Protestant theologian Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486-1541), republished in 1693 and misattributed to Weigel. Karlstadt initially published his treatise with the title Was gesagt ist: Sich gelassen. Unnd was das wort gelassenhait bedeüit, und wa es in hayliger schriyfft begryffen, but the very same work was later published twice under a different title and with Weigel listed as the author. It is first printed as Principal und Haupt Tractat Von der Gelassenheit, was dieselbige sey, und worzu sie nutze, Auß wahren gerechten Apostolischen Grunde und den Cristallinen Brünlein Israelis geschöpffet in 1618 by Johann Knuber (actually a pseudonym for Joachim Krusicke, who was the first to print Weigel’s actual works between 1609 and 1618). Nearly a century later (1693), the same work is reprinted as the Gründlicher Tractat Von der wahren Gelassenheit: Was dieselbe sey und worzu: Was dieselbe sey und worzu sie nütze, Allen Kindern Zu Stärckung und Wachsthum am Innern Menschen, this time in Frankfurt a.M. by Heinrich Wilhelmi.

237 Though Karlstadt had been one of Luther’s early companions-in-arms, Luther quickly dissociated himself from Karlstadt on account of his increasing radicalism. Ulrich Bubenheimer, “Karlstadt,” Vol. 17, in Theologische Realenzyklopädie (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 651-653.

As this chapter has shown, Eckhart was not completely forgotten in the centuries after being proclaimed a heretic in the fourteenth century, nor did this heresy charge prevent early modern readers from approaching his work out of fear. However, it is true that this interest in Eckhart’s works in the sixteenth century does not match the degree of fame and respect currently accorded to Meister Eckhart, who is now considered a “classic” writer and thinker, one of the “greats” of the German canon. The story of Eckhart’s survival through the centuries remains part of the story that is told about him—including in prefaces, introductions and encyclopedia entries in a way that both affirms and relativizes his status as a classic.\(^{239}\) This chapter concludes by looking briefly at how Eckhart’s canonicity and timelessness is constructed in modern scholarship, helping modern readers remain aware that their image of Eckhart differs greatly from the image of Eckhart in Weigel’s time.

The Catholic philosopher, Franz von Baader, inaugurated the hyperbolically positive reception of Eckhart’s works, announcing that “Eckhart wird mit Recht der Meister genannt...Er übertrifft alle Mystiker.”\(^{240}\) Baader claims to have introduced Eckhart to Hegel, in an anecdote that is repeated in numerous prefaces and introductions to Eckhart’s works: “Ich war mit Hegel in Berlin sehr häufig zusammen. Einstens las ich ihm nun auch aus Meister Eckhart vor, den er nur dem Namen nach kannte...Er war so begeistert, dass er am folgenden Tag eine ganze Vorlesung über Eckhart vor mir hielt und am Ende noch sagte: da haben wir es ja, was wir wollen.”\(^{241}\) These Eckhart commentators,

\(^{239}\) Aside from numerous translations and a critical edition nearly a century in the works, Eckhart’s writings are included in the series of \textit{Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker}, \textit{Classics of Western Spirituality} and \textit{Penguin Classics}.  

\(^{240}\) Degenhardt, 112.  

and others, were frequently at pains to emphasize Eckhart’s profundity, his originality, as well as his role as founder of German philosophy (with alternating emphasis on his ideas and his Germanness).\textsuperscript{242} While many scholars have made more measured assessments of Eckhart, the temptation to hyperbolic praise has certainly not disappeared.\textsuperscript{243} For Oliver Davies, the editor and translator of the English \textit{Penguin Classics} edition (published in 1994), Eckhart not only “stands out as one of the most exciting and radical thinkers of his own, or indeed of any age” and is “the father of a distinguished German philosophical and theological tradition which extends to the present day,” but also inspired...

\textsuperscript{242} To cite only a few: Blakney, in the introduction to his 1941 translation of Eckhart’s writings, writes: “It was in his doctrines of God that he went beyond the tolerance of his time and perhaps beyond the capacity of ours….Certainly he lifted Christianity above any parochial conception and revealed its inner relation to the great, universal spiritual movements which have found expression in many forms. He lived on that high level, on the same highlands of the spirit that were disclosed in the Upanishads and Sufi classics. To go where Eckhart went is to come close to Lao Tzu and Buddha, and certainly to Jesus Christ” (Blakney, xiv). Franz Pfeiffer calls Eckhart “eines der tiefsten denker aller zeiten” Franz Pfeiffer, ed., \textit{Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts} (Leipzig: G.J. Göschen, 1857), vii. Kurt Ruh’s assessment of Eckhart in his thorough and authoritative \textit{Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik} acknowledges that modern scholarship grows and changes in its assessment of Eckhart, but emphasizes Eckhart’s persistent relevance and timeliness: “seit ihn neuzeitliche Wissenschaft zurückgewonnen und den Lesern bereitgestellt hat, von ununterbrochener, wenn auch immer wieder anders ausgerichteter Aktualität”. Kurt Ruh, \textit{Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik}, Band 3 (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1990), 220. Recently, see also Lisa Cerami, “Ineffable Histories: German Mysticism at the Jahrhundertwende,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2010.

\textsuperscript{243} Heinrich Denifle emphasized that Eckhart did not create his ideas \textit{ex nihilo} but rather was firmly a part of the tradition of Scholasticism (\textit{Kindlers, “Meister Eckhart”). Otto Karrer agrees, writing that Meister Eckhart was a great thinker (“a true king”) but that he was also “the typical child of his time”: “In reality there is literally nothing in his philosophy of theology which he could call his own; everything is rooted in the tradition of the old teachers. In this respect he is the true scholastic.” Otto Karrer, “Introduction,” in Meister Eckhart, \textit{Meister Eckehart Speaks: a collection of the teachings of the famous German mystic}, trans. Elizabeth Strakosch, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 9. See also Meister Eckhart, \textit{Deutsche Predigten und Traktate}, ed., trans. Josef Quint, (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1955). More recent scholarship has emphasized the continuity of Eckhart’s “scholastic theology” and his “popular piety,” arguing that distinguishing between so-called high and low religion does not actually reflect the reality of religious life in the Middle Ages. Amy Hollywood, for instance, has argued that Eckhart should not be seen as the one who corrected and theologized (so to speak) the ideas of female mystics. Instead, Hollywood “attempt[s] to show how Eckhart situated himself in relation to his two predecessors [Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete], how his thought was significantly shaped by the mystical concerns and theologies of the women’s movement, and how he might have come to his distinctive resolution of their tensions.” Amy Hollywood, \textit{The Soul As Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart} (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2001). Bernard McGinn has likewise been interested in showing not what Eckhart “may have learned from the Beguine authors” but rather “what Eckhart \textit{shared} with them,” investigating “the community of discourse and joint concerns in which his thought and theirs developed and enriched each other.” Bernard McGinn, \textit{The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany} (1300-1500), Vol. IV (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2005), 4.
philosophers from Hegel and Schopenhauer through to Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida—an impressive feat for a single thinker. Eckhart’s supposed immediacy and timelessness has also made him a prominent locus for ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues, extending his sphere of influence even beyond the entire modern philosophical tradition to eastern religions (Buddhism and Hinduism) as well as Islam.

Perhaps the persistent interest in affirming Eckhart’s importance has to do precisely with his perceived absence in the centuries following his death, which makes his modern resurgence seem more spectacular. Bernard McGinn, for instance, writes in the preface to his monograph on Eckhart (The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing) that “Eckhart has a way of getting through to readers, despite the difficulty and frequent obscurity of both his original Latin and Middle High German texts, and the translations that sometimes betray him.” Presumably unlike other medieval writings that are not classics, McGinn imagines that Eckhart communicates without any medium at all, or rather in spite of an opaque medium.

Eckhart’s puzzling disappearance in the early modern period, in other words, is overcome by the immediacy of Eckhart’s voice, such that Eckhart can take on his foundational role

245 For a comparative study with Islamic thinkers, see Michael A. Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). For comparative studies with Buddhism, see for instance Ha Poong Kim, To See God, to See the Buddha: An Exploration of Seeing Spirituality with Meister Eckhart, Nagarjuna and Huang Bo, (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 2010); Alois M. Haas, “Das Ereignis des Wortes: Sprachliche Verfahren bei Meister Eckhart und im Zen-Buddhismus,” Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 58, no. 4 (December 1984): 527-569. Denys Turner dismisses these comparative studies as fundamentally misguided, since they tear Eckhart out of his (proper) medieval context, and amount to nothing more than a modern misunderstanding. He asks: “What is the contemporary reader going to make of Eckhart’s radical doctrines of detachment...if they are ripped up from their roots in Neoplatonic apophasicism, except some ‘mere’ metaphors, no doubt satisfyingly redolent of Buddhism?” Turner’s study could be considered, in this context, the most concerted attempt to deny Eckhart the very modernity that, for instance, Bernard McGinn attributes to Eckhart, and to win him back, so to speak, as distinctively medieval. Denys Turner, The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 266.
for modern philosophy, theology and literature that McGinn ascribes to him: “Perhaps no mystic in the history of Christianity has been more influential and more controversial than the Dominican Meister Eckhart. Few, if any, mystics have been as challenging to modern readers and as resistant to agreed-upon interpretation.” McGinn suggests that although Eckhart was forgotten for a few centuries this does not call into question his status as a great, and might even, on the contrary, prove and affirm it.

Theologians in Weigel’s immediate context had an *Eckhartbild* that is rather distant from this modern image of Eckhart. Far from Eckhart being a dreaded heretic or heroic *Einzelgänger*, these sixteenth century Lutheran readers were cautiously appreciative of Eckhart. With this in mind, the following chapter turns to Weigel’s writings themselves, in which Weigel enthusiastically takes up Eckhart’s concept of *Gelassenheit* and uses it to criticize his own Lutheran church for being too willing to serve the interests of secular power and too willing to ignore its pastoral duties in favour of engaging in endless petty theological disputation. In the end, Weigel takes his critique of the Lutheran church so far that he abandons the notion of a church altogether.

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The transition of the Lutheran church from persecuted minority to established majority was a rocky one, as I described in the Introduction, the end-point of which was the publication of a state-sponsored document entitled the *Formula Concordiae* in 1577. In Weigel’s Saxony, for instance, all Church ministers were bound, by signing it, to uphold and adhere to the content of this document, or risk losing their posts or even being exiled. Though many were in favour of the unity and calm that this *Formula* aspired to create, and though many agreed with the theology it promulgated, Weigel disagreed with a number of significant doctrinal points, and thought that the *Formula* chiefly had the effect of producing a *false* concord, where divergent opinions were not voiced only out of fear. *True* concord, as Weigel envisages it, is vastly more difficult to attain, and it was to this end that Weigel took up Eckhart’s notion of spiritual poverty. Weigel reimagines spiritual poverty as a means of generating agreement *without* resorting to force amongst a group hopelessly divided by dispute and debate, despite ostensibly belonging to the same denomination—not to mention the same religion. In this chapter I begin by discussing Eckhart’s perspective on *Gelassenheit*, before examining how Weigel transforms this Eckhartian *Gelassenheit*, which serves as the key element of his principled non-
That I give a prominent place to Eckhart in Weigel’s work marks a departure from modern scholarship on Weigel. The earliest scholarship on the links between Eckhart and Weigel was done by Winfried Zeller in the 1930s who was one of Weigel’s early champions, and co-edited the first edition of Weigel’s works. Although Zeller’s early article on Eckhart and Weigel is invaluable for starting to identify Eckhart citations in Weigel’s substantial body of writings, Zeller incorrectly claims that Weigel’s interest in Eckhart is limited to his early writings. However, although mentions of Eckhart’s name and long quotations from Eckhart’s sermons are not found in Weigel’s later works, the concept of *Gelassenheit*, which Weigel initially took from Eckhart, continues to occupy a prominent place in Weigel’s writings. Furthermore, Zeller argues that Weigel uses the Eckhartian concept *Gelassenheit* only in the context of the debate surrounding the Lutheran doctrine of justification. As this study shows, however, Weigel’s use of Eckhart has much broader implications than the more modest ones for which Zeller argues and that Weigel’s interest in Eckhart is best read as a response to the process of confessionalization that Weigel observed in Saxony society, religion and politics.

In the eighty-odd years since Zeller’s article appeared, the topic of Eckhart and Weigel has aroused little scholarly interest. Freya Odermatt’s 2008 publication examined

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the relationship between Tauler and Weigel, but left Eckhart aside entirely.250 Alexandre Koyré’s essay listed Eckhart alongside Tauler, Dionysius and other “mystics,” discussing the influence on “mystical ideas” on Weigel in general but without examining how exactly Weigel might have come in contact with these ideas.251 Lastly, Andrew Weeks’s monograph on Weigel, as discussed in the introduction, mentions Eckhart as one of Weigel’s influences without going into much detail.252 The only claim Weeks makes about Weigel’s use of Eckhart is that Eckhart and the Theologia are strictly “binary” (“concerned with the alternatives of self or God, nothingness or being”), whereas Weigel’s more modern sources, Paracelsus in particular, are more dynamic, or at least triadic.253 In Weeks’ account, medieval writings are binary, a binarism which is overcome by early modern thinkers. Weeks’ characterization of Weigel’s medieval influence is both cursory and inaccurate, as it is precisely the fact that Eckhart rejects binaries that Weigel finds attractive. Weigel’s interest in the idea of a confession-transcending indifference was piqued by Eckhart’s discussion of Gelassenheit, Weigel’s shorthand for Eckhart’s admonishment to move beyond the binaries of self and God or God and world. So interested was Weigel in this idea that he copied an entire Eckhart sermon on the subject almost verbatim.

The pages that follow will show that Weigel’s borrowing from Eckhart is substantial (i.e. he borrows an idea that was central to Eckhart’s thought rather than a peripheral one, or that was merely a linguistic borrowing), significant (i.e. Gelassenheit

250 Freia Odermatt, Der Himmel in Uns: Das Selbstverständnis des Seelsorers Valentin Weigel (1533-1588) (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).
253 Ibid.
sits at the heart of Weigel’s own network of ideas) and productive (i.e. the after-effects of his intellectual engagement with Eckhart are to be observed throughout Weigel’s entire oeuvre). I will examine the dynamics of binarism in Eckhart and Weigel, and show how both writers deconstruct various dichotomies, particularly between self and God. Weigel’s treatment of Eckhartian Gelassenheit occurs, broadly speaking, in three phases: the first in which Weigel familiarizes himself with Eckhart’s writings, the second in which he transforms Eckhart’s ideas to serve as the crucial argument in his own theological projects and the third in which Weigel deploys Gelassenheit in a practical, pastoral context as a model for how Christians should behave in turbulent times.254

This first phase, Weigel’s initial contact with Eckhart, is documented in a short treatise from 1570 entitled Zwene nützliche Tractat, der erste von der Bekehrung des Menschen, der ander von Armut des Geistes oder waarer Gelassenheit, a text that essentially consists of Weigel’s reading notes on sermons by Eckhart and Tauler, through which he becomes thoroughly acquainted with his medieval source material. Here, Weigel zeroes in on the concept of spiritual poverty, including his nearly word-for-word transcription of Eckhart’s sermon on that same subject, and the treatise demonstrates that Weigel was well-acquainted with the idea of Gelassenheit from the very beginning of his career as a writer. Eckhart is Weigel’s temporal as well as intellectual point of origin.

As for the second phase, the key productive transformation of Eckhart’s idea of spiritual poverty appears in his treatise on epistemology, Der güldene Griff. Eckhart’s treatment of spiritual poverty pushes the process of detachment beyond giving up possessions, knowledge, and desires to the point of abandoning one’s very self, his goal being to return the soul to the unity it enjoyed with God before creation: the soul should

be “as it was when it was not.” For Weigel, this ultimate spiritual poverty has important epistemological ramifications. Abandoning the self entails abandoning the self’s cognitive faculties, allowing God’s own cognition to take over instead, leaving God to peacefully contemplate God’s own self without interference. In such a scenario, there cannot be, by definition, any disagreement or disunity, as the various selves abandon themselves and resolve into a single viewer (God) contemplating a single object (which is also God) through a medium that is identical with both viewer and object (in God’s own self).

In the third and final phase, Eckhartian spiritual poverty appears in Weigel’s oeuvre as guidance for Christians living in discordant times. As is fitting for giving practical advice, Weigel takes up a pastoral form—the sermon. The sermon in question belongs to his most controversial work, the *Kirchen- und Hauspostille*, and treats the flight of the Holy Family from Herod’s violent revenge upon all the male children in Bethlehem. Weigel asks why Christ did not intervene to prevent this terrible injustice: surely the King of Kings incarnate need not fear a mere earthly king, and be reduced to sneaking away at night? Weigel reads the flight into Egypt as a defence of non-intervention in political affairs: it is better to refuse to be tempted into violence altogether by fleeing and hiding, which is therefore not cowardice, but rather imitation of Christ Himself. Just as Christ chose not to return Herod’s violence with violence, a Christian should avoid intervening in earthly affairs because any intervention (even on God’s side) can only fuel conflict—never extinguish it. Moreover, Weigel draws parallels between Herod’s Judaea and the Saxony of his own time, where corrupt priests, blinded by self-interest, cooperate with an earthly ruler to persecute the innocent and the faithful.
Crucially, Weigel writes that the Holy Family knew that flight was the right choice because they had attained spiritual poverty (Gelassenheit). Weigel, then, borrows from Eckhart again, in the hopes of restoring peace and harmony to Lutheran lands: if the perfect concord that Weigel envisaged in Der güldene Griff is not to be attained, then at least Christians should imitate Christ by pursuing Gelassenheit, and thus avoiding escalating the conflict by joining the fray.

**Eckhart on Gelassenheit**

Eckhart taught that his spiritual charges should aspire to exist in a state of spiritual poverty (Gelassenheit), in which the soul can thank God for whatever may befall it. Since all things come from God equally, the truly devoted soul neither seeks a reward from God (salvation, for example) in exchange for its suffering, nor does it complain when suffering afflicts either body or soul, nor even does it crave the joys of spiritual consolations (visions, raptures, feeling close to God etc.). Moreover, Weigel and

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255 Eckhart repeats this sentiment throughout his work. Sermon 12 provides one example: ‘Daz hœhste und daz næhste, daz der mensche gelâzen mac, daz ist, daz er got durch got láze. Nû liez sant Paulus got durch got; er liez allez, daz er von gote nemen mohte und liez allez, daz im got geben mohte, und allez, daz er von gote enpfâhen mohte. Dô er daz liez, dô liez er got durch got, und dô bleip im got, dâ got istic ist sîn selbes, niht nâch einer enpfâhunge sîn selbes noch nâch einer gewinnunge sîn selbes, mêr: denne in einer isticheit, daz got in im selber ist.’ Eckhart, *Werke*, Vol. 1, 146:3-10. (“The noblest and the ultimate thing that a person can forsake is that he forsakes God for God’s sake. Now St. Paul forsook God for God’s sake; he left everything that God was able to give him and everything that he was able to receive from God. When he had left all this, he left God for God’s sake, and there remained for him God as God exists in himself, not as one might receive something of him or as one might attain something of him; rather, as in the isness that he is in himself.” [Eckhart, *Teacher and Preacher*, 268]) Eckhart is referring to the Apostle Paul’s declaration that he would willingly be separated from God if that were God’s will (the so-called resignatio ad infernum), which Eckhart interprets as abandoning all desire, even desire for spiritual goods such as salvation. In this state, pain is pleasure and multiplicity is unity: “Daz mensche, der nû alsô stät in dem willen gotes, der enwil niht anders, dan daz got ist und daz gotes wille ist. Wære er siech, er enwölte niht gesunt sîn. Alliu pine ist im ein vröude, alliu manivicalticheit ist im ein blôzheit und ein einicheit, stät er rehte in dem willen gotes.” Eckhart, *Werke*, Vol. 1, 148:20-24. (“A person who is so established in the will of God wants nothing else but what is God and what is God’s will. If he were sick, he would not want to be healthy. All pain is a joy to him, all multiplicity is simplicity and unity, if he is really steadfast in the will of God.” Eckhart, *Teacher and Preacher*, 269.) For this dissertation I am using the two-volume
Eckhart agree that spiritual poverty must be taken so far that the truly *gelassene* soul does not even think about what it has abandoned in order to become *gelassen*. As Eckhart writes, “der mensche, der gelâzen hât und gelâzen ist und der niemermê gesihet einen ougenblick ûf daz, daz er gelâzen hât, und blîbet staete, unbeweget in im selber und unwandellîche, der mensche ist aleine gelâzen.”

In cultivating an indifference to both God’s favour and displeasure, the soul achieves a union that mirrors God’s own perfect unity, a rather surprising approach that grows out of Eckhart’s particularly robust definition of God’s unity. Eckhart distinguishes between the being of creatures and the being of God, where the former is

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256 This is quoted from the same sermon, Sermon 12. Eckhart, *Werke*, Vol. 1, 150:21-24. “The person who has forsaken all and remains in this state and never for an instant casts a glance toward what he has forsaken and remains constant and unmoved in himself and unchanging, only such a person is detached.” Eckhart, *Teacher and Preacher*, 270.

257 A caveat on the phrase “the soul achieves”: it is difficult to describe Eckhart’s conception of union in language that does not make his teaching on *Gelassenheit* sound active (i.e. to be attained by concerted effort or in exchange for pious works), even though it grew precisely out of his attempt to restore the proper attitude towards works through an innovative interpretation of the relationship between the contemplative and active lives. Eckhart was suggesting neither engaging in ascetic athletics nor accumulating good works, nor even fleeing the world to lose oneself in contemplation. Rather, in its detachment, the soul remains quietly united with God at the same time as it moves about the world actively. For Eckhart (in Sermon 86), for instance, it is Martha who is the model of spiritual perfection and not Mary (who, because Christ said that she had “chosen the best part,” was the model who validated a life of withdrawn contemplation). Mary is recast as a beginner, who will eventually progress so that she will, like her sister, become “so grounded in being that her activity [does] hinder her.” (Eckhart, *Teacher and Preacher*, 343) Martha “stands in the midst of things, but not in things.” (Ibid, 340) Moreover, the soul’s breaking through to God in detachment is complemented by God’s own breaking through to the soul. That is, the true “work” in this *Durchbruch* is in fact God’s work, even though, speaking dialectically, Eckhart can also refer to it as the soul’s work insofar as it arises from the fused ground of God and soul. That saving grace appears external to creatures is only an effect of their separation from God, as is the transformative (active) power of grace, which is static and produces no works in union. As Eckhart often reminds his audience, God became man so that man might become God in Christ by grace of adoption. Though the idea would have scandalized Luther or Calvin, even grace is to be overcome and left behind when the soul is truly united with God (though of course it is necessary to attain to that point). Since grace is something created and only arose after creation or in the act of creation (it is the first act of grace), it will fall away when the soul breaks through to God in the eternal (pre-creation) *nû*. Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)*, Vol. IV (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2005), 161-162.
Esse distinctum and the latter is esse indistinctum. Esse distinctum means, as Eckhart puts it, being a “this and that” (hoc et hoc), a thing that can be counted with numbers. It is called distinctum because each created thing is bounded off from other created things—this chair is a chair because it is not a table, or this chair is this chair because it is not that chair, his body is not her body, and so on. Crucially, esse distinctum is only “being” in a partial sense of the word (it is “limited being”), because for Eckhart, things do not have being from themselves, they have it because God has given it to them. God, on the other hand, is esse indistinctum because God is not, in fact, any kind of thing at all, but rather the cause of being in the first place. Thus, only God, as esse indistinctum, can be said to truly exist; as Eckhart says, “ist got aleine in der wârheit.”


259 As Turner explains it: “We cannot distinguish between God and the soul as kinds of things, for though our soul is a thing of a kind, God is not. Nor can we distinguish between God and the soul as individuals; for though my soul is one and distinct numerically from yours (your soul plus my soul equals two souls) God is not ‘one’ in the sense that my soul plus God equals two of anything at all, even individuals. For, not being a kind of thing, God is not and cannot be an additional anything. God is absolutely unique. There is not any collectivity to which God could be added as a further item.” Turner, Darkness, 161.

260 Sermon 46: “sol der mensche got bekennen, in dem sîn éwigi sællichkeit beståt, sô muoz er ein einiger sun sîn mit Kristô des vaters; und dar umbe: wellet ir sælic sîn, sô múezet ir éin sun sîn, niht vil süne, mér: éin sun. Ir sult vol unterscheiden sîn nách lîplîch geburt, aber in der éwigen geburt sult ir ein sîn, wan in gote enist niht wan éin naturlîcher ursprunc.” Eckhart, Werke, Vol. I, 490:10-16. (“And thus if a person is to know God (in whom his eternal happiness consists), he must be an only Son of the Father with Christ. Therefore, if you want to be happy, you must be one Son, not many sons; rather, one Son. You should, of course, be different according to your corporeal birth, but in the eternal birth you should be one because in God there is only one natural fountainhead.” Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher, 304.) Being a Son versus this particular son follows from the fact that God did not become a particular human as Christ (“dïsen menschen noch dén menschen”), but rather took human nature upon himself, becoming a Son in general. ‘Daz merket! Daz éwige wort ennam niht an sich dïsen menschen noch dïsen menschen, sunder ez nam an sich eine vrije, ungeteilté menschlîche natûre, diu dâ bloz was sunder bilde [Largier translates bilde as Individualzüge]; wan diu einvaltige forme der menscheit diu ist sunder bilde.” Eckhart, Werke, Vol. I, 490:21-25. (“Follow carefully! The eternal Word did no assume this human being or that human being. Rather, he assumed a free, undivided human nature which was bare, or without a [formed] image, for the simple form humanity does not have a [formed] image.” Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher, 304.)

261 This passage is from Sermon 77: “wan alle crêatûre n sint ein snœde dinc und ein blôz niht gegen gote. Dar umbe: waz sie sint in der wârheit, daz sint sie in gote, und dar umbe ist got aleine in der wârheit...Daz ander: ez meinet, daz got ungescheiden ist von allen dingen, wan got ist in allen dingen, wan er ist in inniger, dan sie in selben sint. Alsô ist got ungescheiden von allen dingen.” Werke, Vol. 2, 140:28-142:6. (“All creatures are worthless and a mere nothing compared with God. Therefore, what they are in truth they
one-of-a-kind thing, or the best kind of thing. For Eckhart, this indistinctness is how God is absolutely One; to put it another way, ‘God’s esse is to be ‘neither this nor that,’” or yet another way, God is “nothing in particular.” Over and over, Eckhart admonishes his listeners and readers to do away with distinctions. Names, images, concepts, identity, time, and ultimately even the distinction between distinction and similarity—all of these must be rejected as the soul returns to God. Indeed, as we will see later in this chapter, the abandoning of distinctions is the subject of the Eckhart sermon (Sermon 52) to which Weigel devoted a careful and close reading.

The flip side of Eckhart’s surprising definition of God’s unity (God is One because God is indistinct) is an equally surprising understanding of the union of God and soul, which is the overwhelming emphasis of Eckhart’s work. The basis of this union is Eckhart’s definition of intellect. Just as the existence of created objects was determined by their distinctness from each other, so too is the intellect’s knowledge of them. When the intellect considers, for instance, a square object, it perceives its squareness only by contrast with non-square things. Moreover, Eckhart (following Aristotle) argues that to know an object is to become it, and so in order for the intellect to continue perceiving a

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are in God, and thus God alone is in truth...God is unseparated from all things, for God is in all things and is more inwardly in them than they are in themselves. That is how God is unseparated from all things.” This English translation is from Meister Eckhart, The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart, ed. Maurice O’C. Walshe and Bernard McGinn [New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009].) We know that this is the case from Eckhart’s theory of analogy. In things related by analogy, what is in one of the analogates is not formally in the other, which in plain(er) English means that “if something is affirmed about God, it must be denied of creatures” and vice versa. McGinn, Harvest, 137. Or, as Eckhart writes in Sermon 9: “Ein jeglich dinc würket in wesene, kein dinc enmac würken über sîn wesene. Daz viur enmac niht würken dan in dem holze. Got würket über wesene in der wîte, dâ er sich geregen mac, er würket in unwesene; ê denne wesene wäre, dô worhte got; er worhte wesene, dô niht wesene enwas.” (“Everything works in being; nothing works above its being. Fire cannot work except in wood. God works above being in vastness, where he can roam. He works in nonbeing. Before being was, God worked. He worked being when there was no being.” Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher, 256.) Werke, Vol. 1, 106:15-20.

262 Turner, Darkness, 165.
263 Eckhart imagines an eye looking at a piece of wood: “Geschihet aber daz, daz mîn ouge ein und einvaltic ist in im selben und üfgetan wirt und üf daz holz geworfen wirt mit einer angesiht, só blibet ein
variety of things, the intellect cannot be materially transformed by any thing it perceives—otherwise, if the intellect became square materially when it perceived a square thing, it would no longer be able to perceive a square thing (and all perception is by contrasts), because it would have to be both square and non-square, which is impossible. See Turner, 158.

As outlined above, the only other instance of being that is nothing at all was the esse indistinctum, and in this sense, the intellect is God—which leads Eckhart to the bold conclusion that the soul, insofar as it is intellect, is God. This does not mean that the intellect does not function in more mundane ways, as it does when it is oriented towards multiplicity—that is, when it is ungelassen. However, when oriented toward the One in stripping away all distinction, the intellect is God. On the subject of intellect (vernünfticheit), Eckhart writes: “In dem, daz disiu kraft nihte glich enist, sô ist si gote glich,” and conversely “Rechte, als got nihte glich enist, als enist ouch disiu kraft nihte glich.” Of course, Eckhart alludes to the intellect by a plethora of other metaphors as well, chief amongst which are the spark of the soul (Seelenfunke, vünkelîn), a little castle (burgelîn), a desert (wüeste), a silence (einieglichez, daz ez ist, und werdent doch in der würklicheit der angesiht als ein, daz man mac gesprechen in der wârheit: ougeholz, und daz holz is mîn ouge. Waere aber daz holz âne materie und ez zemâle geistlich waere als diu gesiht mines ougen, sô möhte man sprechen in der wârheit, daz in der würklicheit der gesiht daz holz und mîn ouge bestüenden in einem wesene.” Eckhart, Werke, Vol. 1, 506:5-14.

264 Otherwise, if the intellect became square materially when it perceived a square thing, it would no longer be able to perceive a square thing (and all perception is by contrasts), because it would have to be both square and non-square, which is impossible. See Turner, 158.

265 This explanation of Eckhart’s definition of intellect relies on Turner’s presentation of the subject. Turner, Darkness, 156-159.

266 Eckhart, Werke, Vol. 2, 673. Though the intellect can function in these two modes, there are nevertheless not two intellects, but only one that can be gelassen or ungelassen. As Eckahrt writes: “Dâvon, als man die krefte [of the soul, including the five sense] nimet in dem wesene, sô sint sie alle ein und gliche edel; aber dâ man die krefte nimet in irn werken, sô ist einiu [das ungeschaffene Licht] vil edeler und vil hoerher dan diu ander.” Eckhart, Werke, Vol. 1, 508:2-5. (“If we consider the powers of the soul in their being, they are all one and equally noble: but if we take them in their functions, one is much higher and nobler than the other.” Eckhart, Complete Mystical Works, 310.) On the unity of the soul, or rather the unity of the entire man (body and soul), see also Turner, Darkness, 152-156.

267 The passages here are from Sermon 69. Eckhart, Werke, Vol. 2, 46:31 and 48:20-21. (“The very fact that this power is like nothing makes it like God. Just as God is like nothing, so this power is like nothing.” Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher, 313.Though Eckhart addresses the intellect throughout his work, Sermons 5b, 9, 69 and 71, taken together, address in more detail what I have given here in my paraphrase.
einvaltig stille), an uncreated light (lieht, daz ist in der sêle, daz ist ungeschaffen), and the ground (grunt) or ground of the soul (seelengrunt), or even more simply as an einez.

Behind Eckhart’s concept of Gelassenheit, then, stands a daring (or scandalous, as the fact that he was charged with heresy suggests) metaphysics, anthropology, and epistemology. When the gelassene soul does not distinguish between pleasure and pain, self and world, between self and other people, its indifference mirrors God’s own “indifference,” that is, God’s indistinctness or unity. Gelassenheit is the affective or anthropological correlate of both indistinctness and union, and a shortcut to the core of Eckhart’s theology.

Eckhart in Weigel I: Zwene nützliche Tractat (Or, Eckhart teaches how not to love God)

Weigel enthusiastically embraced Eckhart’s treatment of spiritual poverty in his first extant work, Zwene nützliche Tractat, der erste von der Bekehrung des Menschen, der ander von Armut des Geistes oder waarer Gelassenheit. In the second of the two tracts, Weigel copies almost the entire text of Eckhart’s well-known sermon Beati pauperes spiritu, in which Eckhart formulates a demanding definition of spiritual

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268 These terms occur throughout Eckhart’s work, but see the following as examples: Wüeste and stille are at Werke, Vol. 1, 508:20-21; Grund at Werke, Vol. 1, 70:12; burgelin, vünkelin, huote and lieht at Werke, Vol. 1, 32:26-30.

269 Valentin Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractate, edited by Will-Erich Peuckert and Winfried Zeller, Volume 3, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1966); Weeks, Religious Dissenter, 65. To clarify a point of terminology, Eckhart usually referred to spiritual poverty as abgescheidenheit, though he sometimes also used the words gelassen and Gelassenheit. Weigel chooses the latter as his preferred term for spiritual poverty, as the title of the tracts indicates, Armut des Geistes oder waarer Gelassenheit, and this dissertation will follow Weigel in using Gelassenheit as a synonym for spiritual poverty.)
poverty.\textsuperscript{270} Eckhart begins by setting aside what he calls outer poverty (“ein ûzwendigu armuot”\textsuperscript{271}), the giving up of earthly possessions. Though he does concede that it is praiseworthy to live as Jesus lived on Earth, Eckhart is more interested in an inner poverty (“ein inwendigiu armuot”), the spiritual poverty that Christ praises in the Sermon on the Mount, and, crucially, the spiritual poverty that constitutes their claim to the kingdom of Heaven. Eckhart’s definition of spiritual poverty proves to be far more complex than the simple formula by which he introduces it: spiritual poverty is wanting nothing, knowing nothing, and having nothing (“Waare Armut des Geistes ist, do der Mensch nichts will, nichts weiß und nichts hat”).\textsuperscript{272}

In the first of these three things—willing nothing—Eckhart demanded a greater sacrifice than other theologians might. It is not enough simply to desire only what God desires (to align one’s own will with God’s will), since this still implies the presence of will—the will to do God’s will is still a will.\textsuperscript{273} Nor is it enough to cease desiring frivolous earthly things and begin desiring lofty things such as eternity or even God himself (“etwas Begehrung hat der Ewigkeit und Gottes”),\textsuperscript{274} Eckhart calls for the soul to

\textsuperscript{270} The pericope for the sermon is the opening to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3): “Selig sind, die da geistlich arm sind, Denn das Himelreich ist ir.” Discussing this work in this chapter is in danger of becoming unwieldy because of the many different versions of Eckhart’s work in play: the Baseler Taulerdruck version (Weigel’s source), Weigel’s relatively faithful transcription of the Baseler Taulerdruck, as well as the modern critical edition of Eckhart’s work. Although the rest of this dissertation uses the critical edition of Eckhart’s works, in my discussion of Weigel’s text in this section, I will quote directly from Weigel’s own text, noting any significant divergences from the Baseler Taulerdruck if they are relevant or if Weigel does not copy that particular phrase, and will provide a reference to the modern critical edition.

\textsuperscript{271} BT, CCCVIvb. V1, 550:11.

\textsuperscript{272} Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 62; BT, CCCVIvb.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid; BT, CCCVIIra. “Dann also lang der Mensch das hat, das inn seinen Willen ist und das sein Wille ist, das er will erfullen den liebsten Willen Gottes, dieser Mensch hat nicht Armut, von welchen wir ahier reden, denn dieser Mensch hat einen Willen, mit welchen er genüge will sein den Willen Gottes, und das ist nicht recht.”

\textsuperscript{274} Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 63; BT, CCCVIIra.
be as free of willing and desiring as it was “when it was not,” as Eckhart puts it (“so mus
er seines geschaffenen Willens also ledig sein, als er wahr, da er noch nichts wahr”).

Breaking through to an uncreated or pre-created state is important to Eckhart
because he conceives of creation as a separation from God—a separation that somehow
diminishes both God and creature. Echoing Yahweh speaking to Moses from the burning
bush, Eckhart says that before creation flowed out from Him, God was simply what God
was (“er was das er was”), but God is now God-in-creatures (“sunder in den creaturen
was er got”).276 After creation, God is no longer the perfectly fulfilling end of creation
(“nun das mag mich nicht seelig machen, denn hie erkenn ich mich Creatur”) no matter
how great the God-in-creatures may still be.277 God-in-creatures contains one distinction
(God vs. God’s creation) that the soul must strive to break through into union, because, as
described above, for Eckhart, God is perfectly and entirely One, and thus cannot have any
distinction within him that would mar this unity.278

The second element of spiritual poverty—knowing nothing (“zum andern ist der
arm, der nichts weiß”)—calls for the creature to return to the state of spiritual ignorance it

275 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 62; BT, CCCVIIra. Kurt Flasch points out that Eckhart is playing with
time designations here (“spielt...mit den Zeitbestimmungen”), since, strictly speaking, time is created as
well, and thus there is no time before creation. Giving up ideas of before and after, past and future also
belongs to spiritual poverty. Kurt Flasch, “Preidgt Nr. 52,” in Lectura Eckhardi: Predigten Meister
Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1998), 188.
276 BT, CCCVII. Michael Sells points out that modern editions of this sermon explain away some of the
sermon’s radical charge by making some kind of editorial intervention to distinguish God from God-in-
creatures (by adding quotation marks around one “God”, for example) Those listening to Eckhart deliver
the the sermon (or reading a pre-modern edition or manuscript) would have been left to sort out the
difference between got and “got” on their own. What this means is that the sermon, as it was heard rather
than read, would have sounded far more radical, but at the same time would have better captured Eckhart’s
dialectical thinking. Michael A. Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying. (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 1994), 1. Weigel does not quote these two particular lines here, but he does cite similar ones that are
repeated at the end of the sermon (Weigel, Zwene Tractat, 67-68); for clarity’s sake, I discuss them here as
they occur in Eckhart’s line of reasoning, rather than in Weigel’s text.
277 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 67-68.
278 Flasch, 186; Turner, Darkness, 162-167.
enjoyed before creation. A person who is spiritually poor should be so bereft of all knowing that he does not even know that God is in him. Eckhart begins by explaining that God is neither a being, nor a supremely rational being that knows all things ("Gott ist weder Wesen noch Vernunft noch erkennen nichts, diß noch das"). Rather, God is both free from all things but is also, by definition, all things ("Hierumb ist Gott ledig aller Ding und hierumb ist er alle Ding"). But knowledge, as discussed above, deals in particulars and distinctions (diß and das). In order to know what a thing is, one must contrast it with other things that are not that thing (a candle is not a lamp, a square is not round and so on). But if there is no distinction in God, Eckhart concludes that the soul cannot know God and therefore, returning to the sermon under consideration, if the creature wishes to return to the way it knew before it was created, it must renounce all claim to know God or to know anything about God ("Hierumb so ist es nicht, das der Mensch begehrende sey, das er möge wissen noch erkennen den Weg Gottes"). The soul could not take God as its object in order to know God, because God is not an “other”

279 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 63; BT, CCCVIIrb.
280 Ibid, 64; BT, CCCVIIva.
281 Ibid; BT, CCCVIIva.
282 Ibid, 64-65. Unfortunately, this particular paragraph is full of small errors in the Basel Tauler edition that are then taken over in Weigel’s transcription. Large’s text reads “sô ist ez nôt” and “diu werk gotes”, whereas the BT reads “so ist es nit” and “den Weg Gottes,” obviously either errors of a scribe in the manuscript lineage that the BT was based upon, or a typesetting error in preparing the printed text. Likewise, the BT has “der muß arm sein alles seines eigenen Wesens” where Quint has “der muoz arm sîn alles sînes eigenen wizzennes”—“wizzen” and “wesen,” differing only by a minim or two, are easily confused if the scribe’s hand were bad or the paper damaged. Valerie Pektas attributes this kind of error to Weigel, seeming not to have looked at the Basel edition that Weigel would have used. However, every one of these divergences from Quint’s text originates in the Basel edition, and most of them, so far as I can tell, are what one might call “innocent” errors—misreadings of two very similar-looking words with different meanings—rather than a deliberate attempt to either change or play down any heterodox element in Eckhart’s sermons, since the changes are not applied consistently throughout a sermon. The sentence that confuses “wizzen” and “wesen,” for instance, transcribes “wizzen” correctly in the second clause of the very same sentence. Virginie Pektas, Mystique et Philosophie: Grunt, abgrunt et Ungrund chez Maître Eckhart et Jacob Böhme (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 2006). My opinion is that these errors make the Basel edition confusing in places, but that the repetitive form of the sermon allows most of what is omitted or distorted in one place to be clearly transmitted in another, such that not only Eckhart’s ideas but also his characteristic language are conveyed when the text is taken as a whole.
nestling inside the soul, but rather is the soul itself (“do der mensch stuond in der ewigen art gottes, do lebte in im nicht ein anders, was da lebte, daz was er selb”). This ignorance of God is not a defect (a failure to be in possession of information about God, so to speak), but rather, possessing information about God is by definition an impossibility.

In describing the third element of spiritual poverty—having nothing—Eckhart continues to develop this tension between distinction and unity. Although he had once taught that the soul should free itself from all things and all works so that it might hollow out an empty place (“also das er mag sein eine eigene Stadt Gottes”) in which God might work (“do Gott innen wircket”), Eckhart proclaims that he has not taken spiritual poverty far enough: a person pursuing spiritual poverty must relinquish even a self in which God can work. Instead, the truly poor spirit allows God Himself to be the place in which God works (“wolle Gott wircken inn der Seele, das er selber je die Stadt sey, darinn er wircken will”). God, concludes Eckhart, must be active in God’s own self rather than in a person’s individual self, “ein Wircker inn ihm selber,” because to preserve a separation between self and God is to hold on to distinctions (“da der Mensch Stadt behalttet, da beheldt er Unterscheidt”), which are entirely alien to God’s unity and perfection. As I described above, Eckhart argues that the intellect is the anthropological basis for the possibility of such an intimate union with God, and here is simply called a “something in the soul” (“ein Ding ist inn der Seele, von welchen fleußt

284 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 65-66.
285 Ibid, 66; BT, CCCVIIvb.
Erkentnus und Liebe”). This “something” is what allows the union of the soul with God, rather than either knowing God or loving God (“an Erkentnus und Liebe”) as other theologians have taught. Although the BT and Weigel call it “ein Ding,” what follows makes it clear that Eckhart is not talking about any ordinary kind of thing, since he immediately denies it any of the attributes of a thing: “das erkennet selber nichts noch hat nichts lieb...diß hat weder vor noch nach und es wartet keines zukunftigen Dinges, denn diß mag weder gewinnen noch verliehren.” This “something” is a relic of the soul’s existence before creation and thus shares certain divine attributes, namely that it is eternal and perfect.

Later in this same tract, Weigel makes an interesting editorial interpolation that demonstrates he has understood the logic of Eckhartian Gelassenheit. Here, Weigel quotes from another Eckhart sermon, making the now familiar argument that the soul must detach itself from all created things. Weigel then inserts a clause into this sentence that is not found either in the critical edition of the Eckhart sermon or the Basel Tauler edition before resuming the Eckhart quotation (I have put the words that Weigel added in Italics): “Der Mensch, der sich allzumal liese einen Augenblick inn gelassener

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287 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 64; BT, CCCVIIva. Unfortunately, the BT gives this lines as “ein Ding” rather than as “einez,” because of course Eckhart took pains earlier in the sermon to emphasize that God is no thing, neither this nor that. Although the sentences that follow immediately contradict the conclusion that God is a thing, calling it an einz is perhaps the best way of talking about this thing-that-is-no-thing. Elsewhere Eckhart uses the indefinite pronoun ‘ein’ to refer to something that is indistinct rather than a particular something. This becomes particularly important in Eckhart’s Christology, where the distinction between ein Sohn and der Sohn expresses the idea that Christ took human nature upon himself (see note 12, above). Actually, since Eckhart is referring to the no-thing that is God and the intellect, perhaps a better translation for einz would be, not “something” but rather an “any” or a “one” in the soul, even though this is not grammatically correct in English. As an indefinite pronoun, einz belongs to a small group of grammatical categories that Eckhart deems particularly suitable to theological discourse. For example, adverbs belong to this group, because they are wholly dependent on the verb for their meaning, and, like the Bild in relation to its Urbild, or the image in relation to the mirror, cannot exist without it. V1, 112:24-114:7.

288 Weigel, Zwene Tractat, 63. BT, CCCVIrb.

289 Ibid, 64; BT, CCCVIrb
Gelassenheit, das ist, das er nicht wuste, das er sich gelassen hette, dem wurden alle Ding gegeben.”

The person who receives the greatest reward is one who abandons himself in “gelassener Gelassenheit,” clarifying that this doubling of Eckhart’s term designates the height of Gelassenheit, when a person does not even know that he has attained Gelassenheit.

That this second-order Gelassenheit becomes the title of this small work is an indication of how important Eckhart’s conception of spiritual poverty is to Weigel. Nevertheless in this early work, Weigel does not spell out why he is so interested in Gelassenheit, or why Gelassenheit is so relevant to the problems he detects in his milieu at the time he was writing. In the following section, I discuss a slightly later work by Weigel in which Gelassenheit plays a prominent role, this time as a response to the conflicts plaguing Saxony that Weigel greatly laments: Weigel observed that the religious and secular government of Saxony had grown closer and closer together, and that theological disputes were increasingly being resolved by political means (dissenting ministers and theologians were being arrested and exiled, for instance). Nevertheless, Weigel does not believe that the answer is to debate these theological issues ever more fiercely, drawing upon the force of secular government to prevail if necessary. Instead, Weigel identifies the cause of confessional conflict as individuals asserting their own interpretations of the Bible, and therefore believes himself able to offer the appropriate (if unexpected) pacifying solution: cut out the interpreting individual altogether.

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290 Weigel, Zwene nützliche Tractat, 75.
291 Simpson, writing about 16th century England, has investigated the negative consequences (paranoia and persecution) of the Protestant Reformation’s affirming the primacy of the individual reader (what Simpson terms fundamentalism) above a communal tradition-bound reading practice anchored in the Catholic church. This fundamentalist reading, even as it affirms the individual, is faced with a thorny problem should individuals readers disagree, with no means of adjudicating between two interpretations, other than resorting to the idea of ‘inspired reading’ (where one reader claims that the Holy Spirit has guided his
end, Weigel returns to Eckhart’s ideal soul in a state of *Gelassenheit*; perfectly passive, entirely one with God, beyond ideas and words, beyond wilful selfhood and devoid of knowledge and concepts, such a soul does not simply add yet another interpretation into a disputatious discourse, but rather moves beyond interpretations and opinions altogether.

**Eckhart in Weigel II: *Der güldene Griff* (Or, the real *Formula Concordiae*)**

In order to understand how Weigel deploys *Gelassenheit* so as to diffuse confessional conflict and restore harmony within the Christian community, we must begin with a discussion of his epistemological theories, which he set down in a treatise from 1578 called *Der güldene Griff*, composed only one year after the signatures were collected for the *Formula Concordiae*. The work’s full title is actually *Der guldene griff Alle dinge ohne Irthumb zuerkennen, allen hohen schulen unbekant, und doch allen menschhen notwendig zuwissen*, which gives a clue as to what this “golden grasp” might be: it is a method for knowing all things correctly. Briefly, Weigel’s method is built on two assertions: that knowledge comes from the knower rather than the object known, and that knowledge is possible because God is fully present within each person in the ground of the soul. Knowledge, by this account, is only possible because of this divine indwelling, but allowing God’s superior knowledge to stand in for each person’s reading but not his opponent’s). This fantasy of the perfect reader who reads without interpreting is, to a certain extent, not a dissimilar impulse to Weigel’s, except that Weigel then goes on to argue that without interpretation there is no basis for action, and therefore fundamentalism cannot turn to persecution. James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
(necessarily inferior) knowledge provides an altogether more accurate epistemological foundation—albeit, as we will see, at the cost of the individual knower.

Like the Bible, Weigel begins at the beginning, by retelling the story of creation. For Weigel, as for Eckhart, creation is both separation and emanation.\(^{292}\) As created things came forth from God into being, their coming forth is simultaneously how created things are separated from God: “durch die scheidung all dinge seint herfur kommen an das Licht; gott besitzet alle Dinge in ihm selber.”\(^{293}\) This coming forth is also a transition from what is hidden to what is apparent (“aus dem Verborgenen ins Wesen”), from the invisible to the visible (“aus dem unsichtbaren in das sichtbare”), from the spiritual to the physical (“aus dem geistlichen in das leibliche”).\(^{294}\) Weigel situates the hidden, invisible and spiritual on one side of the dichotomy and the apparent, visible and physical on the other. In fact, it is less appropriate to speak of a dichotomy, since Weigel describes the emanations as remaining nestled within each other like Russian dolls (“bleibt eins in dem

\(^{292}\) Describing creation with metaphors of emanation/separation (such as rays of light, fountains, boiling pots), rather than metaphors of making (sculpting, building, or shaping), is a persistent feature of theologies with a neo-Platonist cast to their thinking. It is also one that has proven rather problematic for Christian neo-Platonists, because God is meant to have created \textit{ex nihilo}, to have created each thing directly (as described in Genesis, God created light, land, water, fish, animals, and finally humans himself), and to have created because he so willed it (the original \textit{fiat}). On the other hand, an emanationist creation myth has God creating \textit{ex se}, through intermediaries (God creates only the first emanations, which then go on to create the emanation below it and so on) and out of necessity (God is so overabundant that he \textit{must} overflow into creation). The classic formulation of this debate is Lovejoy’s \textit{Great Chain of Being}, which ascribes apparent contradictions in the work of Christian theologians to their recurring attempts to Christianize an emanationist view of creation. Arthur O. Lovejoy, \textit{The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942). See also Endre v. Ivánka, \textit{Plato Christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter} (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964), 70ff.

Both Eckhart and Dionysius seek to reconcile these two views. As discussed above, for Eckhart the emanations are not hierarchical, but all exist at one remove from God, so to speak, rather than mediated through higher emanations. Dionysius’ response to this issue is discussed in Chapter 4, but briefly Dionysius likewise denies that there are any creative intermediaries between God and creature. When Dionysius speaks of hierarchies he means the degree to which each creature is an expression of God; creatures that only have Being express God more generally than creatures that have Being and Mind, but each creature is a direct expression of God’s very self. See for instance Alexander Golitzin, ”The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?,” (Mystics Quarterly) 19, no. 3 (September 1993): 98-114.


\(^{294}\) Ibid, 10.
andern”). Or rather, to use Weigel’s metaphor, a visible-physical tree (“der sichtbare leibliche baum”) remains “inside” the invisible-spiritual tree (“in den unsichtbaren geistlichen baume”). 295

This is the case for all created things, but Weigel is particularly interested in explaining the workings of the human creature, to whom Weigel refers throughout as Adam. Adam’s physical being is his outwardmost divine emanation, but carries within it all the other, higher emanations that stretch back to God himself, who is present in the soul from Adam’s creation. Weigel argues that every person is naturally in possession of the entirety of both earthly and divine wisdom, because God’s spirit was implanted in all people at creation. In the traditional Genesis narrative, God turns clay into living flesh by breathing a “living breath” into Adam, 296 but Weigel supposes that God has been more generous, implanting not only life but the divine spirit as well (“sampt dem gottlichen geiste”), thus bequeathing Adam God’s eternal, heavenly wisdom (“der halben liget auch die ewige himlische weisheit in ihme”). 297

Weigel repeatedly affirms, throughout his work, the presence of God in man, referring to it, as Eckhart did, by many names: it is a seed, a treasure, a tree, an inner garden, a light, a book, a spiraculum, and an inner inheritance. 298 Most pertinent in this

295 Weigel, Griff. 11. This image is a reference to a passage in one of Weigel’s earliest works, a small tract that he wrote as an introduction to the Theologia Deutsch (1571). Rather than thinking of creation as a potter and a vase, or a sculptor and a statue, Weigel likens the relationship between creature and Creator to that between an acorn and a fully grown oak tree. Although the acorn does not visually resemble the oak tree it produces, nonetheless the oak tree is “in” the acorn as an idea because the acorn will one day produce the tree. And more importantly, though the oak tree no longer resembles the acorn, nevertheless the tree preserves the acorn “inside” it because the tree was produced by it. Valentin Weigel, Kurtzer Bericht und Anleitung zur Teutschen Theology, in Sämtliche Schriften, ed. Winfried Zeller, vol. 3, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag-Günther Holzboog, 1966), 118.
296 Genesis 2:7.
297 Weigel, Griff. 11.
298 “Die ander geburt geschicht aus dem samen, nemlich aus dem Weib samen, Welchs ist das spiraculum, der geist gottes, das Wort gottes oder Christus in uns durch den glauben wonhafftig...[es] ligt der gantz
context is that he picks up on Eckhart’s characteristic language, calling it the “ground of the soul” or “inner ground.” Moreover, Weigel makes it clear that Adam is not simply the first person to be created, but rather stands in for all people, and that God repeats the creation of Adam for each human being who is conceived. Each person has a double conception (“es hat ein Jeder Christe eine zwifache empfengnis oder geburt”), a visible-material creation of the mortal body, and a second spiritual-heavenly one. Weigel uses Luther’s language when he says that Christ is in every person durch den glauben, but never adds the qualification that Christ is lost to man because of sin and must be re-implanted in man by faith. Quite the opposite: Weigel writes that Christ is not offenbar, but that does not mean Christ has been driven away by sin, but rather must be awakened, remembered or uncovered, which is an entirely different proposition. Weigel does not deny that humans are sinful, but reminds the reader they are only sinful accidentaliter and not substantialiter: as he writes, “die seele bleibet seele.”

Weigel’s idiosyncratic reading of Genesis leads to a rather counterintuitive account (at least to a modern reader) about how knowledge is acquired, concluding that true knowledge of all things (“all erkentnis aller dingen”) is to be found within each person already. Mirroring the operation of the universe emanating from interior to exterior, the fundamental principle of Weigel’s epistemology is that knowledge comes from the knower and not the object known, and he repeats this formula often throughout

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299 For example: “Aber die ubernaturliche erkentnis, die mag wol heissen die Innere gottliche erkentnis, dan sie kommet nicht von aussen hinein, sondem eben das objectum ist schon darinne, im Inwendigen grunde der seelen, Nemlich gottes Wort, Wille, gesetz, geist etc.” Weigel, Griff, 53.

300 Ibid, 61.

301 “Es [das reich gottes] muß erwartet, erkennet, gefunden, gefület, geschmeckt werden im Innern grunde der seelen.” Weigel, Griff, 62 and 72.

302 Ibid, 12.
the text: “alle dinge kommen von Innen heraus und nicht von aussen hinein.” As
evidence for his theory of knowledge, Weigel offers the indisputable fact that people
disagree about almost everything. Weigel asks his reader to imagine a dispute among a
group of observers about whether the wall they are looking at is painted green, green-blue
or blue. The wall remains identical, of course, but is perceived differently; what causes
these different perceptions is that everybody’s eyes are constituted differently. Being
colour blind or not will decide if the observer’s perception and knowledge will be
correspondingly accurate or inaccurate: “dann nach art und eigenschaft der augen wird
volbracht das sehen oder erkennen.” If the object were the source of knowledge, it
would simply “impress” itself on the human mind and senses and there would be no
choice but to see the object for what it is. Weigel then gives voice to his opponents in this
debate, who object that perception must then constitute an interaction between object and
eye, rather than come solely from the eye: if there were no objects to see in the first place,
they argue, there could not be any seeing. Weigel concedes that external objects do play a
role in our understanding but only as reminders of what we already know, or, more
accurately, have always known.

However, Weigel is less worried about disagreements about what colour a wall is
and more concerned about disagreements that prove more divisive. If people cannot even
come to a consensus about simple, concrete objects, what hope have they to agree about
complicated or abstract matters, like the definition of justice, or how to govern a nation?
Weigel’s purpose in arguing for an interior source of knowledge becomes clearer when

303 Weigel, Griff, 13.
304 Ibid, 38.
305 Weigel concedes that external objects do play a role in our understanding but only as reminders of what
we already know. Outer things only exist to jog our memories, books only exist to testify to and refer us
inwards to the true Text—the wisdom God implanted in Adam. Weigel, Griff, 39.
he begins to steer the discussion away from objects in general to one particular kind of object—books. Returning to the wisdom implanted in Adam at creation, Weigel does not explicitly say how fully formed it is. He does not simply mean that every person is naturally born with the capacity to acquire these things through a formal education, but rather that the actual details of all these accomplishments are locked away in a person’s brain at birth and must only be remembered with the aid of books. Weigel repeats the trope that learned ignorance—what the wise fool knows—is to be valued above the book learning of clerics and university doctors. What a scholar cannot even master in thirty years by reading books, a person who cultivates self-knowledge can learn more accurately in three years (“Was in ander in XXX Jahren nicht lernen kan, das mag ein solcher in III Jahren Lernen ohne allen Irthumb”). For Weigel, learning by reading books at university is not only time-consuming, but can only lead to error. Rather, knowledge of the world is gained by coming to know oneself more fully, by turning inwards to access the vast stores of knowledge implanted by God in Adam and all his descendants at the moment of creation. In line with his general theory of knowledge, the

306 Although it does seem blatantly counterfactual that a person is born knowing, for instance, Hebrew grammar and the rules of rhetoric, nevertheless Weigel already provides here some ammunition for his oft-repeated attack on the schools and universities. As the product of a state-sponsored primary and university education, it was perhaps not unreasonable that Weigel considered the schools and universities as hopelessly corrupted by worldly ambitions and the site of political intervention. If a complete school and university education is innate to every person, Weigel can dismiss educational institutions while still retaining the practical knowledge they provided students.

307 Readers of medieval mystical texts will be familiar with this trope and the debate about clerical authority it refers to. Mechthild of Magdeburg, for instance, chose to write in the vernacular (and thematized her choice) rather than in the Latin of the educated clergy as part of her call to reform. Moreover, she disavows direct authorship of her book (God himself claims to have written it), turning her supposed ignorance (as a woman writing in the vernacular) into a claim to authority. As Mechthild writes: “das ist mir vor inen ein gros ere und sterket die heiligen cristanheit an in vil sere, das der ungeleerte munt die gelerte zungen von minem heiligen geiste leret” (“It is a great honor for me and it very much strengthens Holy Christianity that the unlearned mouth, aided by my Holy Spirit, teaches the learned tongue.”) Moreover, the passage just quoted is placed in the mouth of God himself, whom Mechthild claims to be quoting here, conversing with her. Mechthild of Magdeburg, Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit (Book II, ch. 26: 29-33) cited in Sara S. Poor, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 38.

308 Weigel, Griff, 12.
information found in books is not absorbed by the knowing subject; instead, pre-existing knowledge implanted by God “flows out” into books, which stand not as the source of human knowledge but rather as externalized monuments (excretions, almost) of this pre-existing knowledge.³⁰⁹ Weigel’s discussion circles back to books and reading many times in the course of this treatise, though admittedly focusing on the shortcomings of the written word. In fact, it might be more accurate to describe Der güldene Griff not as a treatise on epistemology but rather a treatise on hermeneutics and exegesis, given that every step of Weigel’s discussion of perception leads into an assessment of the implications it has for one’s reading practice.

As for Weigel’s epistemological reflections proper, Weigel distinguishes between natural cognition and supernatural cognition. Natural cognition, he writes, relies on a distinction between the knowing subject and the object known—between the Auge and the Gegenwurff. Beginning with the object known (the Gegenwurff), natural knowledge can only seek to know what Weigel calls finite objects. This category includes all created things, even abstract ideas or non-physical entities. The example that Weigel chooses here to illustrate his point—the Bible—is not idly chosen. The Bible, Weigel writes, is an instance of a finite object, both because it is a book that the reader can touch and see, but also because it is an idea and a message created by God, and the idea of it can be grasped and comprehended (enclosed) in the reader’s mind. Moreover, Weigel knows that it is a finite object because precisely people disagree about its meaning, which, in turn, is

³⁰⁹ “Der halben liget auch die ewige himlische weisheit in ihme, daraus geschlossen wirdt, das alle erkentnis aller dingen, nicht aus den buchern genommen werde, sondern aus dem Menschen selbest her fliesset in den buchstaben” Ibid, 12. That Weigel demotes the written word from the source of all knowledge set him at odds with many Protestants who, following Luther, placed the utmost importance on scripture (sola scriptura), as the Introduction discussed.
further proof for Weigel’s theory that knowledge comes from the subject and not the object.\footnote{Weigel, \textit{Griff}, 85.}

As for the knower, Weigel subdivides natural cognition into three types of perception, the \textit{oculus Carnis} (which, despite being called an eye, actually includes all five senses), the \textit{oculus rationis} and the \textit{oculus mentis}.\footnote{Ibid, 25.} The \textit{oculus Carnis} is even further subdivided into sense perception\footnote{And, of course, sense perception is yet again subdivided into the five senses, which are arranged hierarchically: touch, taste, smell, hearing and vision.} and imagination, which is simply sense perception when the object in question is absent. The three eyes of natural cognition are hierarchically arranged, such that the \textit{oculus rationis} is above the \textit{oculus Carnis}, because it can perceive the inner being of things rather than limiting itself to exteriors, and above the eye of reason is the \textit{oculus mentis seu intellectus}.\footnote{What the powers of the various eyes are is less important than their arrangement, (proceeding from a weak and crude eye that perceives only exteriors or concrete details all the way up to the most subtle and attuned eye that perceives invisible things, the innermost being of things, and abstract ideas) which follows the same pattern as all creation in containing the lower within the higher. The imagination “encloses and includes” the five senses, reason encloses imagination and the five senses and so on, which for Weigel means that the higher power can perform its perceptive tasks without the help of the lower one. In fact, the lower powers only interfere with the workings of the higher one, and should be “quietened” if one is to perceive more accurately with these higher eyes. Ibid, 31-33.}

Weigel identifies the “eye” as the seat of a person’s identity (here Weigel does not mean the physical/outer eye but rather the inner eye) rather than the body, presumably because Weigel uses the word to refer to the higher cognitive faculties. To take Weigel’s example, a blacksmith is who he is because of his knowledge of metalworking, not because his hands are capable of working metal.\footnote{Weigel, \textit{Griff}, 45. More precisely, a smith is a smith because of his \textit{inborn} knowledge of metalworking. Though Weigel does not discuss this explicitly in the \textit{Griff}, presumably the fact that talents and abilities vary from one person to the other (despite having the same epistemological heritage by virtue of having the same indwelling God) is due to which parts of it have been ‘reawakened’ by training or studying.} If the seat of identity is the (inner) eye, the body becomes incidental, and thus, because identity has no anchor in the physical
body, both eye and body are fungible; the self can be changed completely if the eye is replaced by another eye.

Finally, natural cognition is characterized by the way the object and the eye interact, where the knowing subject actively pursues knowledge, reaching out to the object it wants to know: it operates “durch eigene kreffte undt schwindigkeit, do sich der mensche wircklich helt, mitt speculiren, phantasiren, betrachten, erforschen etc.”

Perhaps not accidentally does Weigel refer to this active knowledge as wircklich (meaning “active” rather than “actual” as it does in modern German), picking up the Lutheran polemic against righteousness by works in favour of the creature as the passive (leidtlich) recipient of God’s saving grace.

Ultimately, Weigel is less interested in developing a theory of natural cognition than of what he calls supernatural cognition. Whereas the object of natural cognition was finite, supernatural cognition only occurs in relation to an “infinite” or “incomprehensible” object (the phrase “infinite object” should already alert us to the fact that Weigel’s argument is about to take an unconventional turn). There is only one object in this class, and that is God. Weigel specifies that even an infinite object can still be viewed as an object (though the rest of the treatise is dedicated to ways of viewing God not as an object, as Eckhart admonished). He compares the incomprehensible object “God” to the ocean. The ocean is far bigger than the eye can take in at a single glance, but one part of it can still be looked at, and it is thus seen as an object but not “comprehended.”

Likewise, it is possible for the human mind to consider God as an object, so long as it is

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315 Weigel, Griff, 23.
316 Aquinas also distinguishes between two meanings of comprehend (“Comprehension is twofold.”), either to “completely surround” or rather to “attain, touch”. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Part 1, Question 12, Article 7.
understood that the mind cannot possibly acquire complete knowledge of God this way, nor can it ever “comprehend” the infinite object (comprehend in the sense “surround completely”).

And whereas natural cognition was active, supernatural cognition is passive (leidtlich, as he calls it), and the subject does not reach out for any object at all. In the union of infinite God with finite creature, it is not God who changes, but rather the human, who becomes totally passive, as all cognitive activities cease completely. In this “Sabbath,” all human intellectual effort ceases completely and the person waits in quiet Gelassenheit (“in stiller Gelassenheit”317), giving himself completely to God in obedient faith.318 As the soul achieves, through grace, a state of passive stillness, the multiplicity and fragmentariness of all creation resolves into the harmony of God’s unity. In this sense, it is imperative that the cognitive faculties, in particular, cease their work of Urteyl (judgment)—where the emphasis is on teyl, of reasoning which can know only through distinctions and differences.

This overcoming of distinctions is taken so far as to collapse the components necessary for knowledge in supernatural cognition into each other. Eye and object are identical—and they are both God. Like Eckhart, Weigel insists that God is always present in the inner ground of the soul, which is how inner knowledge is only possible of God,

317 Weigel, Griff, 30.
318 The passive state the soul must come to is not necessarily a pleasant or joyous one, but rather is “nothing less than dying,” as Weigel writes (“nicht weniger als in den todt gehen und sterben”). It is as if one is cast into Hell or even seized with unbelief (“gantz im unglau bene begriffen sein.” Ibid, 55. Being faithful even to the point of welcoming torment in Hell is a familiar trope. Biblical precedents include Paul, who declared himself willing to suffer damnation if it would cause the Jews to be saved, Moses volunteered to be erased from the Book of Life in exchange for God’s pardon for his idol-worshipping charges. Eckhart, likewise, argues that a person should be so deeply embedded in God’s will that anything that happens, good or evil, is a blessing, even Hellfire (see above, n. 9). Or, to attempt to bridge the gap between Eckhart’s vocabulary and Weigel’s, the nature of a thing is determined by the state of being of the subject that perceives or experiences it, or as Weigel would put it, knowledge stems from the knower and not the object.

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because of his presence in the inner ground of the soul: 319 “eben das *objectum* ist schon darinne, im Inwendigen grunde der seelen, Nemlich gottes Wort, Wille, gesetz, geist etc.” 320 When God causes man’s cognitive capacities to cease by an influx of grace and pours his own eye into the void left behind by their cessation, eye and object become identical. Man is no longer the eye that perceives, but rather God is himself the eye, which perceives God’s self through God’s self: “Droben ist bewisen worden, daß in der natürlichen erkentnis der mensche das auge selber sey, Aber allhier in der ubebernaturlichen erkentnis ist der mensche nicht selber die erkentnis noch das auge, sondern gott ist selber das auge im menschen, unnd durch den menschen.” 321 Weigel works dialectically, as Eckhart had done, in that he sets up distinctions only to later overcome them. For instance, in this text, Weigel began by speaking of the divine spirit being implanted in man at creation. However, although Weigel initially speaks of God being “in” man—which would seem to locate the divine presence in a definite “place” in the soul—Weigel later entirely collapses the distinction between subject and object, that is to say, the distinction between God and self, or between Creator and creation. Weigel has a name for this ecstatic state: *Gelassenheit*. 322 The faithful, when they are reborn and

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319 Weigel, *Griff*, 53. Here Weigel quotes Luke 17:21, one of his favourite proof texts: “Das reich gottes ist Inwendig in euch,” the Kingdom of God is within you, adding that it is Christ himself who testifies to this inner presence of God (“wie Christus bezeuget *Lucae* 17”).
320 Ibid, 53. As this list suggests, Weigel is at pains to emphasize that God is fully present in the ground of the soul, both as Law and Gospel, whereas orthodox Lutheran theology admitted that while God’s Law might be written even on the hearts of unbelieves, these unbelievers certainly did not also possess God’s Word or Spirit. For Weigel, separating off one part of God from another was impossible if God’s unity was to be preserved—an argument that will be discussed further in the next chapter.
321 Moreover, because God is an infinite object, and the human mind is finite, it would be impossible for any mind to comprehend God except for God’s own infinite mind. Ibid, 55.
322 Ibid, 87. Weigel identifies this ecstatic state in which God displaces the human eye to contemplate God’s own self in man as being “gotte gelassen,” and calls it a faith that God produces “in dem gelassenen Menschen.”
wait *in stiller Gelassenheit*, receive an immovable foundation for their knowledge: “wer den glauben hatt, des grundt is unbeweglich.”

It is important to remember that, although this treatise seems highly philosophical, it posits not simply an interest in discerning true doctrine for its own sake, but rather a way of disengaging from the logic of confessionalization altogether. Weigel means something specific by this immovable ground, namely that a true *gelassen* Christian becomes a reliable judge of right doctrine. A person who is *gelassen* has the capacity to judge all sects to discern where God’s spirit truly is: “er [der glaube] ist das Urteyl, dardurch alle seckten erkennet und geurteylet werden, er ist das auge, dardurch alle geister geprufen und gesehen werden.”

Weigel positions the faith that makes the soul *gelassen* as “die meßschnure, das Winckelmaß, die richtschnure, der meßstabe, damit man das himlische Jerusalem abmisset, mitt ihren einwonern.” By comparison, the *Formula Concordiae* describes itself in strikingly similar language, as a “summarischen Begriff, Regel und Richtschnur, nach welcher alle Lehre geurtheilet und die eingefallene Irrungen christlich entschieden und erklärt werden sollen.”

Weigel, then, intends his *Gelassenheit* to serve as the true plumb line (“richtschnure”) by which truth in general—and doctrine in particular—is to be judged. Weigel tellingly calls this consensus amongst the truly faithful a *concordantz*, probably an ironic reference to the false consensus created by the *Formula Concordiae*: “Doher findet sich in allen gleubigen eine Concordantz, ein glaube, ein Christus, ein gott, ein geist, ein Hertz, eine tauffe.”

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323 Weigel, *Griff*, 87.
324 Ibid.
325 Ibid.
326 *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 767.
Of course, Weigel does not turn to Eckhart because he thinks that, in a state of Gelassenheit, Christians might thereby receive any more accurate doctrinal information with which to win any doctrinal argument. Indeed, the conception of Gelassenheit that Weigel absorbed from Eckhart could not properly serve as a plumb line or a yardstick to judge true doctrine. As I described earlier, Gelassenheit leads beyond language, beyond distinction and beyond knowledge—hardly a firm foundation for a confessional document, since there would be nothing to write about and no words with which to write it. Moreover, if God is without distinction, it would be impossible to describe God in a series of articles of faith, since language necessarily introduces distinctions that would mar God’s perfect unity. That is, Weigel is not trying to get hold of a bigger stick with which to beat his enemies, so to speak, but rather he is seeking to disengage from the battle entirely. Weigel makes it clear that this is the only way for people to achieve concord and agreement, by the ultimate cessation of their minds and eyes—not by some kind of consensus reached by open discussion or by a better knowledge of facts, least of all by a document to be signed under duress.327

Weigel repositions Eckhart’s idea of the spiritually poor person surrendering his individuality in a confessional context, so that it becomes a way of circumventing a Lutheran ecclesiastical institution that, in his eyes, had become as corrupt as the Catholic one it was meant to replace. Furthermore, because illumination from God occurs by replacing the self with God, not by the self receiving anything, all believers receive the same illumination and therefore all believers believe the same thing—and furthermore, no one person is especially qualified to testify to the truth, since all believers are equally illuminated. In practical terms, a simple layperson has as much claim to preaching the

327 Weigel, Griff, 50.
truth as an educated theologian or an ordained minister. Collapsing the duality between subject and object, and between self and God (in the spirit of Eckhartian \textit{Gelassenheit}), eliminates any disagreement about doctrine or Scriptural interpretation by definition, because there are no individuals to disagree, and nothing about which to disagree—there is only God’s serene concord with Himself.

Confessional documents were not the only written words that were relegated as insignificant by Weigel’s understanding of the \textit{Gelassenheit} attained in supernatural cognition; Scripture is the next document Weigel targets. Scripture (so precious to Luther) is demoted to mere paper, and worse, Weigel writes that the Bible is symptomatic of sin and would not have existed had Adam not taken the apple from Eve.\footnote{After all, the Angels in \textit{Heaven} do not need to read the Bible, or go to Church. Weigel repeats this argument often throughout his work, but see also for instance Valentin Weigel, \textit{Von Betrachtung des Lebens Christi, in Sämtliche Schriften}, ed. Horst Pfefferl, Vol. 2 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1997), 25.} Weigel’s professed skepticism about the role of written books in theological matters leaves him in rather sparse company, given both the importance of the written word in the centuries-long Christian tradition as a whole, as well as the emphasis in the Reformation movement on the return to Scripture in its many guises (translating and editing the text, private Bible reading, Bible reading in Church services, and preaching) that placed the spoken and written word at the very centre of Christian life, both individual and communal.

The foundation of Weigel’s theory about biblical interpretation is to be found in his epistemological dictum “die erkenntnis fließet nicht aus dem gegenwurff sondern aus dem auge,” which in turn depends on his speculations about man’s two-fold conception and God’s continued presence in the ground of the soul. As a consequence, books are no longer the cause of knowledge but rather demoted to being the external manifestation of
inner knowledge—and the Bible is no exception. If one hundred readers were brought
together, each would interpret the Bible differently, each according to his own “eye.”
Were books truly the source of knowledge, they would impress their content on their readers and there could be neither interpretation nor disagreement. As it is, Weigel concludes ruefully, “Quot homines, tot sensus, so viel menschen, so viel kopfe.”
Nevertheless, the dependence of the outer book on the inner book also guarantees, in a way, the existence of the inner book, for if the outer book exists, then the inner one must too.

In this respect, the Bible has a special status apart from other books, and it is to the proper understanding of what the Bible is, and in particular what the Bible has become in the confessional Church, that Weigel dedicates the rest of the tract. Weigel relates a vision he had many years before he wrote the Guldene Griff, claiming here that his religious beliefs originate in his vision, and are authorized by it. He begins by reaching back to a time prior to his coming to true faith (“ehe ich zum anfange des waren glaubens kam”). The false faith that Weigel claims to have had was based on the opinions of other theologians. However, Weigel’s conversion experience is not described as being a transition to affirming his own ideas or theologies, but rather as coming to agree with God’s own theology. Before he believed “mitt den andern,” whereas now he believes “mit gotte.” Weigel characterizes his youthful error as putting his trust in the written word: he turns to the written books of many writers, and emphasizes that they were textual, written by scribenten. Alas, these books neither console him nor enlighten him, since the more he reads, the less certain he becomes (“mein Hertz war Immer

329 Weigel, Griff, 85.
330 Ibid, 89.
331 Ibid, 88.
ungewisser”) and finds that his footing becomes less and less certain: “ich konte weder grundt noch warheitt finden.” Having used the word grundt throughout this text as referring primarily to God’s presence in the soul, Weigel’s use of the word grundt here expresses more than mere intellectual certainty, it expresses his profound separation from God, what we might even call his un-Gelassenheit.

In addition to feeling destabilized and uncertain, Weigel is not enlightened by these books, and in fact the only insight he gained was that he began to contemplate his own lack of insight: “ich sahe an und bedachte unsere klegliche erbermliche finsternis,” which he compares to swordfighting in the dark (“in der finsternis zu fechten”). Finally, he describes his experience of reading books as unsatisfying (“mir geschahe keine genuge”). This word genuge or Genüge has often been used in a theological context, either to describe the true plenitude of God, the fulfilment the Christian will experience through faith in God, or ironically to contrast with the false fulfilment of worldly pleasures. But whereas genug in modern German means “to be sufficient,” the older meaning of the term describes not only an adequate quantity of something but rather an abundance of something (the Grimm dictionary glosses Genüge with the Latin abundantia). The New Testament describes itself as food or drink, but in contrast to the true nourishment of biblical wisdom, Weigel receives no satisfaction, no genuge, from the other books he reads.

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333 For instance, Christ tells the Samaritan woman he meets at a well that he is the living water that extinguishes all thirst (John 4:10); Christ says that his flesh is real food (John 6:55); Paul describes the message he preaches as milk (1 Corinthians 3:2) and the Gentiles as branches grafted on to a tree receiving “nourishing sap” from Christ (Romans 11:17).
Weigel is critical of what he finds in these theology books he picks up, seeing nothing but petty quarrelling. He discusses one of these disputes, over the role of faith versus works, listing the whole variety of positions on the issue. He begins: “so man vom glauben redete, so wolte der ander werck haben, so man von fruchten redete, so wolte Jener alleine einen ertichten glauben” and continues “der dritte sagte, die Sacramenta weren nottwendig zum glauben oder zur seligkeit.” He lists several more theories in a similar fashion, such that no position is elevated above another, none of them are designated as true or false, and all are introduced not by a name but rather only by a number. The effect of a list like this is to sap the polemical force these arguments might have in the context of a disputation by not pitting one position against the other, and by reducing these positions to such a long list, to suggest that Weigel finds the whole debate tedious and petty. One position is just as worthless as another (“der dritte...der vierte...der fünfte”).

At least by the standards of Augustine’s rule of charity (discussed in the Introduction), these university theological debates are failed interpretations of the Bible, encouraging not charity but rather enmity. One theologian turns against another, reporting his colleague as a heretic to the secular authorities (“wie einer den andern fur weltlicher obrigkeitt angabe”), who then receives a worldly punishment for a spiritual error: “Incarcerirte, verJagte etc. von wegen der erbsunde, des freien willens, der person Christi etc.” The problem, concludes Weigel, is that these theologians lack illumination, a light by which to properly see, and thus must strike out blindly in their disputations. If blind people were pitted against one another in a sword fight in the dark (“als habe man

334 Weigel, Griff, 89.
335 Ibid, 90.
die Blinden an ein ander gehetzett, in der finsternis zu fechten”), they could not distinguish between friend and enemy, and would strike out at whatever their weapon fell upon.  

Weigel deplores this way of discerning truth about theological matters and becomes increasingly agitated as he reads more and more books. He is “harte bekummert” and turns to God with an inward sigh of despair (“mitt einem Innigen seuftzen”), begging that God illuminate his message for Weigel (“Las mir leuchten dein Wort”). As he prays, he is struck by God’s grace (“wiederfthur mir gnade von oben herab”) and is shown a special book, which he calls the book of life (“das buch des lebens”). This vision both comforts him (“mich erfrewete”) and enlightens his heart (“mein Hertz erleuchtete”), because Weigel is now able to see, judge and understand all things (“alle dinge sehen urteilen und erkennen konte”) more clearly by this special book than if all the teachers in the entire world had taught him everything written in their books (“das mich alle lerer mitt ihren buchern in der gantzen Welt mochten geleren”).  

One part of this gracious revelation is to be able to understand and judge things by it, but equally important is receiving the knowledge that this book of life exists in the first place. Many weltgelerten (Weigel’s word for university theologians) deny its existence (“verneinen und verleugnen”), insisting that written books are the only source of knowledge; they cling to the dead written letter, as Weigel puts it (“kleben...am todten buchstaben”). Weigel’s vision allows him to know better—that this book not only exists, but exists in the hearts of all people, young and old, learned and unlearned (“dis

336 Weigel, Griff, 90.
337 Ibid.
338 Ibid.
339 Ibid.
buch ist In mir und auch In allen menschen, In grossen und kleinen, In Jungen und alten, In gelerten und ungelerten”).\textsuperscript{340} And moreover, Weigel’s vision tells him that the interior book of life is the \textit{source} of all the books that were ever written: “doraus waren alle bucher geschrieben, von anfang der Welt.”\textsuperscript{341} Having affirmed the universal presence of this book on the one hand, Weigel concedes that only a few people are able to read this book because they are so confused and blinded by sin. Those who \textit{can} read it are granted the sum total of all the wisdom and knowledge there is to be had, and, more importantly, the ability to confidently read Scripture, sure of being able to discern its true meaning (“dardurch ich sicher lesen kan die heilige schrift”).\textsuperscript{342}

Weigel then pushes the implications of this inner book’s existence even further, arguing that the book must be God himself. Weigel heaps up names for this book—it is God’s word, God’s wisdom, his image, spirit, seed, and kingdom, it is Christ and it is God’s law.\textsuperscript{343} And yet, all of these things are not separate from God, since God’s properties are part of God’s very being. Weigel makes a familiar distinction between a thing’s essence and its accidents; its accidents are qualities that can be changed without changing the nature of the thing. All birds, for instance, have wings, and having wings is part of the essence of a bird, but not all birds have blue feathers, and “blueness” is an accident for birds: a bird with red feathers is still a bird. The situation is different for God, who is perfectly \textit{one}, and therefore cannot have any distinction between essence and accidents, such that God \textit{is} all of God’s properties. As Weigel writes, “alles was von gott

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{340} Weigel, \textit{Griff}, 90.
\item \textsuperscript{341} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{342} Ibid, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{343} Ibid, 92.
\end{itemize}
This also means that not only are all of these properties in fact part of God’s very being, but also that these properties are essentially homonyms; Weigel says they are all “ein ding.” God’s word is just another way of saying God’s law, God’s image is another way of saying Christ and so on. To say that God’s word is in every person actually means that God himself, with all of God’s properties, is in every person.

This wholesale rejection of a worldly Church apparatus in favour of an indwelling Christ—and especially the verbal (including liturgies of the word like baptism and communion) and textual aspects of church life is a significant departure from what the Lutheran church teaches. Weigel directs his point against those Lutherans who concede that God’s law is in all men (including unbelievers), but certainly not God’s kingdom. In fact, the Formula Concordiae stipulates that, even though God is indwelling by faith “in den Auserwählten, so durch Christum gerecht worden und mit Gott versöhnet sind,” this indwelling does not count as their justification (“so ist doch solche Einwohnung Gottes nicht die Gerechtigkeit des Glaubens...umb welcher willen wir für Gott gerecht gesprochen werden”) but rather is a consequence only of the process of renewal that follows justification. That is, there is no circumstance where God’s indwelling is salvific, not in believers and certainly not in unbelievers, whereas for Weigel, it is

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344 Weigel, Griff, 93.
345 Romans 1:20 and Romans 2:14-15: “Denn so die heyden, die das gesetz nicht haben, und doch von natur thun, des gesetzes ynhalt, dur sich yns die gesetz nicht haben, sind sie yhn selbs ein gesetz, damit, das sie beweyesen, des gesetz werck sey beschrieben ynn yhrem hertzen.” In the Formula of Concord, the Lutheran position is the following: “D. Luther den Unterschied mit besonderem Fleiß schier in allen seinen Schriften getrieben und eigentlich angezeigt, daß viel eine andere Erkenntnis Gottes sei, die aus dem Evangelio kommt, denn die aus dem Gesetz gelehrt und gelernt wird; weil auch die Heiden aus dem natürlichen Gesetz etlichermaßen eine Erkenntnis Gottes gehabt, gleichwohl ihn aber weder recht erkannt noch recht geehrt haben, Röm. 1.” Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 960.
346 Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 933.
impossible that God’s law be present in man without Christ also being there, since God cannot be split up into his various attributes.\footnote{347}{This unity of God’s attributes plays a significant role in Weigel’s theology, and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.} Either one has God or one does not, full stop.

As such, Weigel came to understand the Church as a purely spiritual community of true believers, rejecting entirely the idea that salvation is dependent on Church membership because the activities that are normally performed in the Christian religious community (listening to sermons, reading the Bible, performing the liturgy) cannot of themselves bring about salvation. Unbaptized children, Muslims, and heathens are all potentially saved, provided they accessed the salvation they carried around with them by their very nature, in the ground of their souls. They do not need to listen to sermons, to receive baptism or communion, or even to read the Bible.\footnote{348}{Valentin Weigel, \textit{Zwene nützliche Tractate}, 31.} If grace, for Luther, is \textit{extra nos}, Weigel objects that Christ will remain external unless He is already inside, or, more precisely, unless Christ had never been absent from the soul at all.

Weigel’s use of \textit{Gelassenheit} and his concomitant ambivalence about the Church was seized upon by Weigel’s critics.\footnote{349}{Weeks, 180.} These more orthodox critics wrote as clergy charged with pastoral care and the running of day-to-day church life, for whom theology was certainly no abstract matter. When they imagined a Church built on the basis of God’s word indwelling in man, they feared chaos and anarchy. For instance, Andreas Merck’s \textit{Trewhertzige Warnung fürm Weigelianismo} groups Weigel with the false prophets that have threatened the Church from its very beginning by substituting
Gelassenheit for the Bible, which is the source and foundation of true religion. In other words, Weigel not only causes the disease, but destroys the medicine that might cure it.

Not only does Weigel deviate from the literal sense with all manner of allegories and spiritual interpretations (‘qualescunque allegoriae und so etwa geistliche Deutungen der Sprüche’) but wants to transcend the physical-material world entirely, relying solely on Gelassenheit to communicate with God. The process by which a person comes to know true religion is not reading Scripture, hearing it preached in church by an ordained minister, or studying it at a university, but is (scandalously) chiefly Gelassenheit.

Another anti-Weigelian polemic, this one by Nicolaus Hunnius, critiques Weigel’s dangerous use of Gelassenheit, ironically attempting to apply the very logic of confessionalization Weigel had used Gelassenheit to critique. Hunnius concedes that

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350 “Unter allen Trübsalen, damit die Christliche Kirch auff Erden, von anbeginn bißher geängstiget worden, ist die fürnembste, so ihr von Ketzern und falschen Propheten zustöst.” and “Was das Wesen der wahren Religion, oder die Lehr für sich betriff, so ist der Quell und Grund derselben die H. Schrifft oder das von GOTT dem HErrn...geredete..eusserliche Wort Gottes.” Andreas Merckius, Trewhertzige Warnung fürm Weigelianismo, Darinn angezeigt Grund und Ursach / Worbey und warumb man den Weigelianischen Schwarmgeist, für irrig und verdampt erkennen und halten (Halle: Peter Schmidt, 1620), 25.

351 Here, of course, Merck runs into trouble since he must resort to Scripture to prove that Scripture is reliable: “Von der Schrifft selbst lehret er [Weigel] Sie sey in beyde Feuste...man könn aus ihr kein gewiß Urtheil nehmen. Und das wieder die klare Schrifft 2. Pet. 1. wir haben ein festes Prophetisch Wort.” Merck, 28f. The passage he points to (2 Peter 1: 16-21) is from an epistle that compares true prophets to false ones. What distinguishes true prophets from false ones is that true prophets do not invent what they say, nor do they interpret anything (“keyn weyssagung ynn der s chrifft geschicht aus eygener außlegung”). False prophets, on the other hand, speak empty words that have nothing behind them (“sie lautten von schwulstigen wortten, da nichts hynder ist,” 2 Peter 2: 18)—they are like a spring without water (“brunnen on wasser,” 2 Peter 2: 17). Nevertheless, Peter goes on to reassure his audience that the prophecies about Christ are trustworthy, even if they require some interpretation to be understood: even though the promised Second Coming has not happened, they must remember that this happens in God’s time, where a day does not mean 24 hours, and thus the imminent apocalypse might actually be centuries away.

352 Merck, 59.

353 “Das fürnembste [Proceß zur erkenntnis der wahren Religion] ist die Gelassenheit, der stille Sabbath etc...nemlich, daß einer, der die göttliche Warheit erlangen wolle, auff einen stillen Winckel kriechen, sich von allen dingen abwenden, an nichts gedencken, sich selbst hassen, in eine Vergessenheit sein selbst und aller dinge kommen, unnd so gleichsam wie in einem Traum unnd entzückung auff Gottes Einsprechen warten solle und müß.” Merck, 94-95.

354 Hunnius (1585-1643) was a theology professor at Wittenberg and then Superintendent of the city of Lübeck. During his time in that office, he had to deal with followers of Weigel and other suspected mystics and spiritualists—the group he calls, in the title of the work cited here, the “new Prophets.” It is in arguing against their beliefs that he deals with Weigel’s work, which he believes to be a source for these disruptive
the Lutheran Church can accept an anodyne version of *Gelassenheit*, which he takes to mean nothing more than frowning upon worldly desires and possessions, and willingly converting rather than stubbornly resisting God’s grace like the stubborn Jews. Alas, he writes, Weigel taught a heterodox version of *Gelassenheit*, calling for people to give their minds, bodies and senses to God completely, so that he can use them as he pleases. Even worse is Weigel’s claim that it is only in a state of *Gelassenheit* that man can receive divine teaching (“göttliche Lehre empfangen”). Hunnius is clear about why he shudders at this kind of *Gelassenheit*: it denies the efficacy of the spoken word, spoken by an ordained minister, duly occupying an office which Christ Himself instituted, and which is a kind of order established by God for instructing humankind towards its salvation. Such a malignant species of *Gelassenheit*, Hunnius concludes, can only be the work of Satan. Hunnius’ arguments against *Gelassenheit* are interesting not only because of their content, but also because of the way they are expressed. Hunnius writes

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356 “Sie erfordern eine solche Gelassenheit, da wir alle unsere Sinne GOTT ergeben, daß er sie gebrauche, wie er will, und alle unsere Gliedmassen.” Hunnius, 146.

357 The original text, in full, reads: “Durch die Gelassenheit wird die Ordnung zerrüttet und auffgehoben, welche GOTT uns zur Lehre fürgeschrieben, und deren sich die Christenheit allezeit gebrauchet hat: Das ist die mündliche Predigt, die Christus angeordnet.” And: “Nun hat ein jeder leicht zu ermessen: Wer sich in die Gelassenheit begeben, das ist, in ein Vergessen sein selbst und aller Sinne, den mag man durchs mündliche Wort lehren, solang man will, er wird doch so wenig davon lernen, als ein Todter und ein Klotz: Soll nun niemand eine andere Lehre annehmen, denn in solcher Gelassenheit, so ist unsers HErns GOttes Lehr-Ordnung gänzlich zerrüttet, auffgehoben und zu nichte gemacht: welches Werck einig und allein vom leidigen Satan seinen Ursprung haben muß.” Hunnius, 150.
that the kind of *Gelassenheit* Weigel advocates does not belong to the true (Lutheran) faith, so Hunnius ascribes it to his opponents instead, claiming that both Catholics and Anabaptists rely on Weigelian *Gelassenheit* to support extra-biblical practices (Catholics) or encourage insurgency (Anabaptists). Hunnius wages a war on two fronts, against outside enemies (Catholics) on the one hand, and against enemies within (Anabaptists and new Prophets, both of whom were offshoots of Protestantism) on the other.

The arguments that both Merck and Hunnius use against *Gelassenheit* resonate strongly with the charges of heterodoxy levelled against Eckhart three centuries earlier. While some theologians did admit that the soul could be swept up into God in rapture, most were reluctant to argue that the soul is *identical* to God in union as Eckhart did, insisting that union cannot overcome a necessary distinction between creature and Creator. Indeed, Eckhart’s teaching on the union of man and God is one of the doctrines that the Inquisition questioned Eckhart on. From both a theological and an institutional perspective, such a belief in the identity of God and soul is worrisome. The presence of a “something in the soul” that is the source of salvation is difficult to square with a belief in the corruption caused by original sin, since it implies that blessedness is somehow permanently in a person’s possession, and therefore does not have to be granted

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358 Hunnius, 151.
360 McGinn, *Harvest*, 150. In the papal bull “In agro dominico,” for instance, the relevant articles are 10 through 13 and the first of the additional objections. Article 13, for instance, reads: “Whatever is proper to the divine nature, all that is proper to the just and divine man. Because of that, this man performs whatever God performs, and he created Heaven and Earth together with God, and he is the begetter of the Eternal Word, and God would not know how to do anything without such a man.” (78). The additional objection is: “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and not capable of creation; if the whole soul were such, it would be uncreated and not capable of creation, and this is the intellect.” (80) Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981). See also Bernard McGinn, “‘Evil-Sounding, Rash, and Suspect of Heresy’: Tensions Between Mysticism and Magisterium in the History of the Church,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 90.2 (2004): 193-212.
specially by God via Christ’s crucifixion. Furthermore, Eckhart makes very little mention of the Church as dispensing blessedness, even though Eckhart did not deny the necessity of the sacraments and felt himself gravely misunderstood on this point. Not surprisingly, the idea that the soul should not desire anything at all, even holiness or salvation, was condemned—if the soul desires nothing at all, then there is no need for the Church to even facilitate the attainment of blessedness.

Weigel transposes Gelassenheit into a confessional context, imagining it to be a way of producing true concord amongst his quarrelling co-religionists (and perhaps even ecumenical harmony amongst all denominations and all faiths) by transforming the way they think about writing and reading. For Weigel, sola scriptura, when referring to a way of reading a physical book, can only produce irreconcilable readings, and therefore must be understood to refer to reading an interior Book. This interior Book is not to a physical book as the Spirit is to the Letter, but rather the interior Book turns out to be God himself, who, when the gelassene soul returns to God, “reads” himself in himself harmoniously and univocally. Here, Gelassenheit serves to ground an attitude of productive

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362 McGinn, Harvest, 164.
363 “In agro dominico”, articles 7 through 9. Article 8 states: “Those who are not desiring possessions, or honors, or gain, or internal devotion, or holiness, or reward or the kingdom of heaven, but who have renounced all this, even what is theirs, these people pay honor to God.” These 14th century objections resurfaced in the 16th and 17th centuries, not only in passages that directly address the meaning of union, but also in the context of discussions about original sin (i.e. about how much Adam lost in the Fall). Those who feared that overemphasizing God’s presence in the ground of the soul or the identity of the soul with God would elevate the imperfect, sinful creature to divine status also ran the risk of going too far and denying that God’s creation—as necessarily befits a perfect creator—is as good as God himself declares it to be: that is, good (Exodus 1:10), or very good (Exodus 1:31). Created things can be quite evil indeed, but they cannot be completely evil. Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 78. For a summary of this debate amongst Lutherans, see Irene Dingel, “The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548-1580),” in Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550-1675, 15-64 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 48ff.
indifference that allows Weigel to avoid taking sides in a conflict he thought was not befitting of true Christians, but rather to dismiss the dispute entirely. In the end, *Gelassenheit* serves to ground a new notion of the Church that is not confessional or sectarian. The next section investigates what kind of behaviour *Gelassenheit* generates in this-worldly (*diesweltlich*) Church life.

**Eckhart in Weigel III: *Kirchen- oder Hauspostille* (Or, why Christ is not a coward)**

Envisaging even the potential for perfect harmony amongst all Christians might have been a comfort to Weigel, though it does not immediately suggest how a Christian ought to participate in either secular society and in the Church as a result—especially to those who find themselves at odds with either of those two institutions. Weigel develops a more concrete idea of how a person who is *gelassen* would (or should) behave throughout his work, but particularly when he was writing in didactic or pastoral genres. The Introduction already discussed one such didactic dialogue, and I turn in the first part of this section to another dialogue, this time between a free-thinking layman and his father confessor (the full title of the work is *Ein Gespreche, wie ein Leyhe seinen Beuchtvatter uberzeuget, das der Priester an Gottes Stadt nicht Sunde vorgebe*) in which Weigel proposes a surprising alternative to the disputatious religious culture he observed in his own Church, in which the true Christian abandons the example of the saints and martyrs by concealing his or her true beliefs: the testimony of the individual is suppressed in favour of peaceful coexistence. I conclude this section by examining a sermon by...
Weigel that links his belief that that the testimony of the individual should be suppressed in favour of peaceful coexistence with the notion of Gelassenheit.

In the *Gespreche*, a layman with unorthodox opinions openly confesses his beliefs to his priest, lamenting that, though he has often gone to confession, his heart receives no peace and consolation and he believes therefore that confessing to a priest is not effective.³⁶⁴ The priest responds by asserting the authority vested in him as a pastor (*Seelsorger*), who has been charged by God himself with the task of forgiving sins. The two trade arguments about whether the layman should even be sitting in the confessional at all (the priest *pro* and the layman *contra*) until the layman flat-out rejects the priest’s authority.³⁶⁵ He plainly states that he does not believe the priest is authorized to act in Christ’s place because it is nothing other than usurping the honour due to God, making his confession and absolution a horrible lie (“eine greuliche Lugen”).

Up until this point, the dialogue might have been patterned after a didactic dialogue such as the *Schwester Katrei* treatise, in which a wise-foolish “daughter” (a Beguine) surpasses her father confessor in wisdom until eventually he seeks *her* out as a

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³⁶⁵ The exchange, including the Biblical proof texts, can be summarized thus: One should confess not to a priest but rather to the one against whom one sinned. The layman has violated the two NT commandments, and has not loved God nor his neighbour, and those two parties should, by rights, hear his confession. The priest rejoins that the neighbour has no power to forgive sins, the layman responds that he does, citing proof texts such as James 5:16 (“Bekenne einer dem andern seine suende, und betet fur einander, das jr gesund werdet. Des gerechten gebet vermag viel, wenn es ernstlich ist.”) and others. These refer not to the forgiveness of sins but only to the mutua reconciliatione (says the priest), without which one cannot receive God’s pardon—which is precisely the layman’s point. However, the priest responds that one only comes to God through a medium (“durch ein Mittel”), making the priest literally a vicar, who sits “ann Gottes Stadt.” It is not sacrilege (says the priest), because Scripture says that Christ put Peter in charge of the keys. This is only the literal, Old Testament way of interpreting the verse (responds the layman), rather than the spiritual New Testament way: Christ did not give the key to Peter alone, because the key in question is actually the Holy Spirit, which is dispensed to all believers equally.
teacher. However, the turning point in Weigel’s dialogue that reveals the previous conversation as ironic comes when the priest offers a *Bekenntnis* of his own. *Ich muß bekennen*, he begins, that God’s grace has long taught him that his absolution has no power to forgive the sins of one who has not repented and sought forgiveness himself from God and neighbour, just as the layman had argued. The layman is taken aback at this turn of events, and rightly so, wondering why the priest did not simply say so sooner. The priest responds that he was not sure that his *Beuchtkind* was not still ignorant of the truth like the other members of his flock (‘sondern stundest noch in der Unwissenheit wie die andern’).367

Their real beliefs now out in the open, they reassure each other that they do indeed belong to the circle of true believers, who came to true knowledge through God’s grace and who now understand that Christ empowers no regent to govern his Church in his stead: “Gott setzet keinen Menschen ann seine Stadt. Christus setzet keinen Stadthaltter, er regieret selber die Kirche.”368 They furthermore agree that their consciences are clear (“ohne Vorletzung meines Gewissens”), that God will judge their

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366 The Sister Katherine treatise is printed in an abridged version in Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Ladies, Whores, and Holy Women* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), 54-91. I will return to this text in greater detail in Chapter 4.
367 Weigel, *Gespreche*, 89.
368 Ibid, 97. The contrast between Weigel’s two dialogues highlights his growing pessimism following the publication of the Formula of Concord. (The editor of the critical edition estimates that the *Gespreche* dates from just before the *Dialogus*, which references the former. The *Dialogus* was discussed briefly in the introduction and will be examined further in Chapter 4.) In this *Gesprech*, he imagines an isolated but dedicated community of priests and laypeople, who might reach out to each other. In the later *Dialogus*, Weigel paints a less positive picture. There is no sympathetic mutual consolation between priest and layperson as in the *Gesprech*, only open hostility between the Concionator and the Zuhörer, and their antagonistic debate ends only with their deaths. Moreover, even though Weigel has Christ appear to strengthen the authority of the Auditor, Christ does not step onto the stage as the risen glorified Christ but rather as *Mors*. Death’s relationship to Christ is ambiguous, for strange as it might seem, Death is not only sent by him, but rather “is one with him.” Just as Christ is the door to life, so too is death: “Kentestu Christum deinen Erlöser, so würdestu mich auch kennen und nicht fur mich erschrecken dürfen. Denn er hat mich gesandt, ich bin mit ihm eins...Ich bin die Thür zum Leben so wol als Christus mein Herre, der mich gesandt hat.”

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hearts and not their actions, and that their faith has remained steadfast all along ("Es ging meinen Glauben nichts dran ab").\textsuperscript{369} The priest is only a priest with his physical body, just as the layman only goes to confession with his physical body—but in reality, with respect to their inner selves, they are followers of Christ. In their duplicity, they have not been shirking their duties before God, but have proven that they understand the New Testament way of behaving by exercising their freedom of spirit ("bestanden in der Freyheit des Geistes nach dem neuen Testament").\textsuperscript{370} It is enough to practice true religion in their gelassene hearts, secure in the knowledge that no exterior circumstance could diminish their faith, disrupt their intimate relation with God or compromise their salvation.

Of course, duplicity and cowardice were both terms that Weigel would most strenuously have rejected: rather than cowardice, Weigel saw turning the other cheek, and rather than duplicity, Weigel saw a pious desire to keep sacred wisdom safe from a hostile world. Weigel links this private/duplicitous religion with \textit{Gelassenheit} in a sermon from his \textit{Kirchen- oder Hauspostille}, composed around the same time as the \textit{Güldener Griff}, patterned on the story of the Holy Family’s flight from Egypt and Herod’s slaughter of the innocents (Matthew: 2).\textsuperscript{371} In this early episode in Christ’s life, Joseph is informed by an angel that Herod has evil intentions towards the newborn Jesus, and secretly flees with his family from Bethlehem; Herod retaliates by having all the male infants in Bethlehem killed.

\textsuperscript{369} Weigel, \textit{Gespreche}, 90.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid.
Weigel gives the passage an unexpected meaning by supplementing the set text with two scriptural snippets of his own, namely Christ’s words of self-defence to Pilate (“Mein Reich ist nicht von dieser Welt”), and Christ’s rebuke to his disciples for cutting off the ear of the soldier who tried to arrest him at Gethsemane (“Meynestu nicht, daß ich meinen himlischen Vater bitten kändte, daß er mir zuschicken kändte mehr dann 12 Legion Engel”). These two passages are the key, writes Weigel, to understanding why Mary and Joseph avoided persecution by fleeing to Egypt, rather than remaining in Bethlehem and calling on God to defeat Herod’s soldiers. It was not cowardice to flee under cover of darkness: the flight to Egypt makes it clear for Weigel that Christ chooses not to intervene in worldly affairs—even if it is to protect the innocent from persecution, and even if Jesus, as the omnipotent God made flesh, is perfectly capable of doing so.

Weigel is unusual in being preoccupied by the issue of whether Christ displayed cowardice in allowing the innocents to be slaughtered. In a lengthy sermon on this same pericope, for instance, Luther never raises the possibility of Christ’s cowardice. At most, he dismisses the suggestion that the Magi ought to have reported back to Herod rather than going home by another way as tempting God (because God could, of course, have protected the baby Christ with a miracle if he willed it). People ought to exhaust natural means before demanding divine intervention. Moreover, in Luther’s sermon, Herod is not depicted as a secular ruler, but rather as a figure for the Pope—any potential collusion between priests and tyrant (Weigel’s focus) is thereby neutralized. Lastly,

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372 Weigel misattributes the two passages. The first is actually from John: 18, the second from Matthew: 26, not the other way around as he writes.
Luther writes that Herod deceived the priests, who are therefore not complicit in his plot to kill Christ, but rather are themselves victims of Herod’s wickedness.

Christ chooses not to intervene, according to Weigel, because he is neither an Old Testament religious leader like Moses (“Priester nach Art deß Alten Testaments”), nor a political leader like Herod (“nicht ein Welt König, nicht ein Herr der zeitlichen Güter”). Rather, the flight from Egypt is a paradigmatic example of the New Testament model for Christian behaviour (“die Art deß Newen Testaments”). The family is wholly reliant on angelic guidance (Matthew 2: 13) in deciding on a course of action. Moreover, the newborn Jesus cannot even walk, and is utterly dependent on others for his safety, and thus illustrates the complete quiescence of the will that should characterize a true Christian. Weigel turns the story of Jesus’ escape from the murderous non-Christian king into a lesson about how Christ’s followers must not use violence against fellow Christians.

For Weigel, this episode demonstrates that the Holy Family is not only materially poor, but also lacks what he calls “Eigenthumb deß willens.” Evasion, slipping away quietly at night, is the right thing for a Christian to do, and exemplifies the posture of the true believer, which Weigel again calls Gelassenheit. He describes the flight as an “Eigenschafft deß Glaubens Christi oder seines Evangeli”, which is to be “ihme selber entnommen...und Gotte gelassen” (to be left to God or given over to God). Joseph and Mary have faith, and obey God’s instructions to flee without grumbling (“ohne

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374 Valentin Weigel, Postille, 73.
375 Ibid.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid, 75.
Murren”)—and they do this “in Gelassenheit deß willens und der Güter.”

Moreover, Weigel explicitly condemns those who take violent action in the name of their faith (“die jenigen sich Christi oder deß Glaubens rühmen, welche umb Land und Leute kriegen und Feldschlachten thun”) as they behave “gantz wider den Glauben;” it is a misreading of both Scripture and Christ’s behaviour.

Rather than focus on Herod’s inability or unwillingness to recognize that Christ is the messiah, Weigel is more interested in the relationship between Herod and his religious advisors, interpreting their behaviour in light of the close cooperation of secular and religious orders in confessionalized states. Weigel emphasizes the extent to which Herod relies on the opinion of the “Schriftgelehrten” who surround him in court (i.e. rather than the Magi, or his own judgement), and, conversely, the extent to which these Schriftgelehrten meddle in political affairs. This might be less objectionable to Weigel if the priests in Herod’s court were truly pious and able to recognize that the Messiah had appeared in their midst. They are as blind as Herod, however, and do not try to stop him when he resorts to violence—a sure sign for Weigel that they are corrupt and ungodly.

Herod, furthermore, tries to struggle against God’s providential ordering of worldly events by murdering the male children in Bethlehem. This amounts to an exercise of self-will, and an insistence on keeping hold of his “Eigenthumb deß Willens” Like all faithless people, he remains “ihnen selbst gelassen,” living only for himself (“lebete ihm selber”) and not for God. And in contrast to Mary and Joseph, who leave their home for an impoverished life in exile, Herod clings to his royal wealth, remaining in his “Eigenthumb der Güter.” Taken together—the collusion of religious and secular

378 Weigel, Postille, 76.
379 Ibid.
380 Ibid.
authorities, the blindness of the supposedly pious priests, Herod’s insistence on having his own way rather than God’s— the un-Gelassenheit of Herod’s court and the priests represents (as Weigel states in no uncertain terms) the source of all conflict, the “Brunn aller Kriegen.”

Whereas Herod’s Ungelassenheit leads him to take violent action, Weigel commends the Gelassenheit of those who take no action and do not intervene in worldly affairs. Weigel’s Eckhartian concept of Gelassenheit helps him to reach the conclusion that reform does not mean modifying earthly institutions, because this kind of change can only perpetuate suffering by causing wars: the only true reform is the reformation of the soul, its becoming gelassen. Despite the fact that Weigel hoped to imitate Christ by a peaceful and quiet evasion (in not publically leaving the Church in protest), his definition of reformation had practical implications for both Church and State that made him non grata: Gelassenheit means that neither church nor state are ultimately necessary. Unlike others who fought for the reform of the church, Weigel thought that a “Christian church” was a contradiction in terms. That is, it is the very idea of an institutional church that is the problem, rather than any particular incarnation of the Church. Through his reading of Eckhart’s mystical texts, Weigel realized that a Christian’s participation or non-participation in them is an indifferent matter, and can neither harm nor save a truly faithful Christian. In a marked departure from the celebrated confessors and martyrs of the early Church—and from Martin Luther’s defiantly public statements of belief—Weigel allowed that neither priests nor parishioners need speak out in public against practices that were contrary to their beliefs, if doing so would endanger their safety.

Dismissing the call to martyrdom in this way, however, left Weigel spiritually homeless,

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381 Weigel, Postille, 78.
and all the more so since he saw little point in attempting to build a new church that would be more congenial to his beliefs, having concluded that not only is his particular church spiritually corrupt, but that the very idea of an earthly church is unchristian. What, then, would be the point in trying to found a new church? Reformation, in other words, is just as hopeless as maintaining the imperfect status quo.

Not testifying in public did not, of course, exclude testifying in private (i.e. before other laypeople, or, as Weigel calls them, \textit{idiota}^{382}), in the company of kindred spirits—though again, whether testifying in private still counts as testifying is by no means clear. Tertullian and the martyrs of the \textit{Golden Legend} would likely not have allowed it.\footnote{In his final work, the \textit{Dialogus de Christianismo}, Weigel depicts the Layman in his death throes ("Ach Gott, wie bange ist mir, ich kan nicht weytter...")}, his brothers Johannes and Paulus appear, urging him to give up his heretical beliefs. Fearing for the safety of their brother’s soul, they suggest he let a priest give him absolution and administer last rites, but the Layman insists that the sacraments are useless, that Christ is within him, and that he therefore has a priest and the sacraments to hand already. In desperation, Johannes uses the following argument: "Ist dein Glaube gerecht, wie du immer in deiner Meynung verharret bist, so tröste dich deines gutten Gewissens. Ist er aber falsch gewesen und hast falsche Leere geliebet, so thu nur Busse und bekenne es fur den Priester."\footnote{\textit{De fuga persecutione}, Tertullian writes: "Can you boast that you have shown yourself a brave and constant witness to Christ?...Oh yes, perhaps you have admitted you are a Christian to some individual, but, in refusing to do so before many, you have denied Him." Tertullian, \textit{Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works}, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly and Edwin A. Quain (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959), 300-301.} Weigel does not have Johannes gambling on the existence of God here, but rather on the means of salvation. If it is possible for the inner man to remain \textit{gelassen}, unmoved and unaffected...
by worldly events, then the sacraments are useless rather than harmful, meaning the Layman does not lose anything by receiving them. But if the inner man can be affected by what goes on outside it, then the sacraments are beneficial and even necessary, meaning that the Layman must receive them to secure his salvation. The odds here are 50/50, and the Layman has everything to lose, so Johannes’s point is not unreasonable: why would one not receive the sacrament? The Layman ultimately bets on his own convictions and dies unshriven, but his brother’s question is not so easy to shake off, since it could be regarded as a reformulation of Weigel’s reflections on Gelassenheit. If one might or might not face persecution for refusing what the church requires, and if furthermore what the church requires neither helps nor harms the gelassene soul, then martyrdom is no longer the necessary outcome of the Christian’s decision-making algorithm “testify or be damned.” And if an earthly institution is a matter of indifference, then the responsibility to reform the church can be refused with a clean conscience in favour of generating harmony amongst Christians. As Weigel writes, “es ist dir nicht bevohlen, zu reformieren.”

In the following chapters, I continue to explore the role that Weigel envisions for the individual Christian in the context of the institution of the Christian church of his time. I focus in particular on how Weigel demonstrates that language can be used to generate true concord within the church through what I am calling “indifferent signification.” This way of using language serves to resolve the divisions amongst Christians that Weigel believes are created by the process of codifying doctrine undertaken by the Lutheran ecclesiastical body in the late 16th. Moreover, I discuss how this indifferent signification is based on Weigel’s reading of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. In emphasizing

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385 Weigel, Vergebung, 62.
the strength of the intellectual relationship between Weigel and Dionysius, I am arguing that there was not a radical break between medieval and modern theology as many historians argue.
PART II

VALENTIN WEIGEL AND DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITES
A central concern for readers of Dionysius is what he has to say about the role of the earthly church, specifically whether some members ought to have more power than others when it comes to administering salvation—that is, whether the church ought to be organized hierarchically. Dionysius’ work deals extensively with the idea of hierarchy (two of his works are entitled *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Celestial Hierarchy*) and, as we will see in this chapter (and in more detail in Chapter 4) he makes some statements that seem strongly to favour the idea that access to salvation is only via ordained clerics, and that the church is organized in a rigid hierarchy within which absolute obedience is necessary. Indeed, as the first part of this chapter shows, many people read Dionysius as a proponent of hierarchy, from the Middle Ages onward, using his authority to protect ecclesiastical authority, to limit the power of the laity, and to make membership in a hierarchical church the condition of salvation. On the other hand, Dionysius’ work is dialectical, and many of these statements in favour of hierarchy are relativized by his strong statements about God’s unity, which is absolute, and which therefore requires that hierarchies exist in a dynamic process of unfolding and enfolding. The tension between

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Dionysius as a pro- and anti-Church thinker remains unresolved, and Dionysius’ readers are divided about whether he guards the castle gates or storms them. Weigel, for one, takes this this latter reading of Dionysius, and conceives of hierarchy as a dialectical counterpart to God’s unity, and as such, the hierarchical “processions” from the One are simultaneously enfolded back up into the One—procession cannot be conceived of without return. In order to assert God’s unity strongly, there cannot be anything that is not God, and therefore everything, in a sense, stands in an immediate relationship to the One whilst simultaneously forming part of the multiplicity of creation. As such, Weigel concluded that, precisely because the universe was hierarchically constituted, there was no need for a separate earthly ecclesiastical hierarchy. As we will see in Chapter 4, Weigel uses Dionysius to argue that there can be no such thing as a truly Christian church, to challenge the idea that clerics have power over the laity and to reject the notion that salvation is dependent upon church membership.

In this chapter, I ask what led Weigel to read Dionysius in the first place. Following the same structure as Chapter 1 on Meister Eckhart’s writings, I search out what readers contemporary to Weigel wrote about Dionysius and retracing the material history of Dionysius’ writings (who printed his works and with what aim) in order to determine why Weigel might have become interested in Dionysius. Similarly to Eckhart’s modern reception, most modern accounts of Dionysius’ textual afterlife skip straight from 1500 to 1900, with little attention paid to the four intervening centuries.\(^{387}\) However, as I...
demonstrated for Eckhart, I will demonstrate that Dionysius was indeed still productively read in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the case of Dionysius, his authority suffered somewhat in the early modern era, when it was suggested that Dionysius was not in fact the student of the Apostle Paul, as his writings claimed—the point at which Dionysius the Areopagite was demoted to Pseudo-Dionysius. Luther, for instance, referred to him as “Dionysius, whoever he was,” and Melanchthon declared him to be a “new and counterfeit author”—and with these dismissals from high-profile theologians, it might seem that Dionysius had ceased to matter for early modern Protestants.  

Looking beyond prominent figures such as Luther and Melanchthon, however, reveals that Dionysius was indeed read in Weigel’s time, by Protestants as well as Catholics. In this chapter, I focus on two groups of readers and show how these readers are also divided about whether Dionysius is pro- or anti-church.  

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superficial (a mere verbal continuity) not because his authenticity was disputed but rather because there was a “radical break between the mediaeval traditions and today’s” around that time, due to the abandoning of “the hierarchical ontology Neoplatonism.” Denys Turner, *Darkness*, 266-267. There are two articles that begin to write the history of Dionysius after 1500, and this dissertation makes a contribution to their efforts: Karlfried Froehlich, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987); Adolf Martin Ritter, “Dionysius Areopagita im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Auctoritas Patrum: Zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, 143-158 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1993).  

For Luther, see WA5, 503: 9-10. The Melanchthon reference is from his “De potestate et primatu papae tractatus,” (1537) which was subscribed in 1537 at a meeting of Protestant Princes and theologians in Schmalkalden. The work was included in the *Book of Concord* and as such, Melanchthon’s treatise containing this dismissal of Dionysius would have been widely circulated alongside confessional documents, even though Melanchthon’s name was no longer attached to the Treatise.  

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The beginning of this chapter should be the place for a clarification of what is meant by the terms “radical” and “conservative,” but fixing a definition of these two key terms is not possible because of the wide range of contexts in which Dionysius’ varied commentators have put the terms to work, as the introduction to this chapter will demonstrate. Briefly, however, for some, the conservative/radical pair is meant to comment on social and political arrangements, as a defence or critique of this-worldly ecclesiastical arrangements. Should laymen and laywomen share in spiritual authority, or should they be excluded, leaving priests, bishops and popes alone to wield ecclesiastical power? For others, the terms are addressed to internal debates in Christian theology, where the radical/conservative distinction is mapped onto heterodox/orthodox—a usage rendered ever more complicated by the fact that one denomination’s orthodoxy is another’s heterodoxy. Is Dionysius even a real Christian or is he actually a (pagan) neo-Platonist? Does he really believe in the Trinity and does he speak often enough of Jesus Christ, or does he secretly deny Christ’s humanity? Different again is the equation of radical/conservative with
readers were polemicists who sought to defend the Roman Church against the attacks of the Lutheran reform movement. They dismissed the scholarly work claiming that Dionysius is a pseudonym in order to have Dionysius serve as an authoritative voice from the earliest days of the Church, proclaiming that the Roman Church was the only divinely sanctioned one. The second group of early modern Dionysius readers were alchemists and Hermeticists, who placed Dionysius in a tradition of arcane wisdom that reaches back beyond the birth of Christ to classical times, or beyond that even to the Egyptians. This tradition is not opposed to Christianity, but does relativize the claim of the Christian church to be the sole source of wisdom by positing the existence of ancient antecedents. Finally, I discuss early modern printed editions of Dionysius’ work, and highlight the fact that he was widely printed and disseminated by people both loyal to the church and highly critical of it. Both groups of printers give Dionysius a place in the *Gelehrtenrepublik*, as a classical writer alongside Homer, Cicero and Ovid, to be studied by humanists and scholars interested in classical languages and the ancient world.

However, before discussing Dionysius’ reception in the early modern era, I begin by investigating the modern reception of Dionysius as a way of helping modern readers see past the current image of Dionysius as an anticlerical radical. In the last four decades, there has been a great deal of scholarly interest in Dionysius and, at the moment, the reading of Dionysius as a radical has become ubiquitous, such that it would be easy for modern readers to forget that Dionysius once served as the ultimate argument in favour of a hierarchical church, and of papal power in particular. It is in the guise of the creative deconstructionist/ontotheological, where a reading of Dionysius is injected into a debate in contemporary philosophy. Does Dionysius’ God-beyond-being and God-beyond-language really do away with ontotheology?
destroyer that Dionysius is most often taken up in the 20th and 21st centuries. 390 Most recently, for instance, an entire issue of the journal Modern Theology has been dedicated to addressing what the editors call a “remarkable recent upsurge of interest” in Dionysius, “an undeniable by-product of the post-modern ‘apophatic rage.’” The editors also acknowledge that a renewal of interest in Dionysius is perhaps no surprise since, from the beginning, Dionysius’ readers have both “found [his] meaning obscure, and yet his mysterious message irresistible.” 391 This post-modern apophatic rage has been dated back some forty years, to a lecture given by Jacques Derrida on “la différance.” The moment is sometimes recounted as an anecdote, in which an audience member wondered whether “[Différance]...is the God of negative theology.” 392 Whether the comment is read as an accusation (that Derrida has inadvertently endorsed a theist position), or as a plea (to grant one brand of theology amnesty from the attacks of secular philosophy), Derrida took the comment seriously, and his subsequent responses circulated Dionysius’ name outside religious studies and classics departments to which he had hitherto mostly been confined. 393 Other scholars look back further than the 1960s, categorizing Dionysius as


the founder of the entire tradition of negative theology, and as such, Dionysius becomes relevant as part of a more general modern interest in negation that can be traced back to Nietzsche, or even beyond that to Kant.\textsuperscript{394} It is this \textit{tradition} (rather than Dionysius alone) that “resonates positively” with the “spirit of the times,” and therefore explains modern interest in Dionysius.

Whether the starting point for interest in Dionysius is located in the \textit{nineteenth} century or the \textit{twentieth}, negative theology (of which Dionysius is one proponent) frequently serves as the interface for the dialogue between (secular/atheist) postmodernism and what is often called postmodern theology.\textsuperscript{395} To greatly simplify this dialogue into a three-star constellation, negative theology has in some way appealed to postmodernism, and as such becomes useful and interesting to Christian apologetic theology.\textsuperscript{396} One of the best-known postmodern theologians, John D. Caputo, states the apologetic response to postmodernism very clearly: “In my view, a deconstruction is good news, because it delivers the shock of the other to the forces of the same, the shock of the good (the ‘ought’) to the forces of being (‘what is’), which is also why I think it


\textsuperscript{395} Wolosky reads Derrida’s “Denials” essay as a response to “an ongoing and aggressive effort on the part of contemporary theologians to save theology not from but, rather, for deconstruction,” thus “attempt[ing] to recuperate Derrida as a valuable contributor to theological doctrine” (262). This attempt, however, is unsuccessful: “Such a negative attitude toward language [in Derrida] becomes the ground for those who would claim a convergence between Derridean deconstruction and negative theology. But this antilingual stance is the very reverse of Derridean deconstruction, which remains a grammatology, a ‘thinking of différance or the writing of writing.’...Far from supporting the notion of a position to be achieved beyond the faulty medium of language, it investigates the impossibility of such a position.” (266) Shira Wolosky, “An "Other" Negative Theology: On Derrida's "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials"," \textit{Poetics Today} 19, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 261-280.

\textsuperscript{396} Postmodern theology adopts an \textit{apologetic} stance rather than a \textit{defensive} one: “if Christians are to continue to communicate and incarnate the gospel in a world with postmodern assumptions, then they must seek to understand their culture and seek relevancy.” Ronald T. Michener, \textit{Engaging Deconstructive Theology} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 7. Turner and Davies express similar hopes that returning to negative theology might facilitate a ‘dialogue with much in contemporary secular intellectual culture.” Davies and Turner, 1-2 and 4.
bears good news to the church.” Elsewhere, Caputo closes the circle, calling negative theology “a salient example of this recognition that language is caught up in a self-defeating enterprise.” In short, if Eckhart spoke of a God who could delight Hegel (as recounted in Chapter 1), then perhaps Dionysius speaks of a God whom even Derrida could respect. If religion and postmodernism could perhaps speak to each other through negative theology, then “getting negative theology right” is what allows the apology to be successful. The account of negative theology that might serve as such an interface with secular postmodernism emphasizes the negation of self (as a religious companion-in-arms in postmodern philosophy’s attack on the unified Cartesian subject), it emphasizes negative theology’s apophaticism (likewise a response to the positive revaluation of the *aporia* and the critique of logocentrism) and, finally, it emphasizes negative theology’s rigorous denial of all names and attributes of God, including Being (a correlate to the critique of ontotheology). As Caputo writes, for instance, the *via*

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397 Caputo’s work is explicitly directed against a socially and politically conservative Christianity where the question ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ (hence the title of Caputo’s book) is used by the ‘Christian Right’ as “a hammer to beat their enemies.” The book as a whole is explicitly intended as a defence of “Christian socialism,” but here I am citing John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernity for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 26-27 and 30-31.  
399 On Hegel’s response to first hearing about Eckhart, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.  
400 A clear example of this stress on getting negative theology right is the work of Ian Almond. For instance, he responds to Derrida’s lecture “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” point by point, correcting Derrida’s reading of Eckhart and Dionysius. Almond, 329-344.  
401 On negative theology and the Cartesian subject, Perl writes: “In Dionysius’ metaphysics, then, there is no such thing as an individual, a being conceived as a closed, self-contained unit which extrinsically enters into relations with other beings” and later “Dionysius opens a major area of dialogue between Dionysius and recent phenomenological thought, overcoming the characteristically modern duality between subject and object.” Perl, 80, 112-113) Perl is enthusiastic about what Dionysius can offer postmodern philosophy: “His thought can thus also contribute to contemporary reflection on technology and the related area of ‘environmental philosophy.’ The Dionysian, Neoplatonic understanding of all things...may be set against the objectifying and reductionist view of nature which has led to its exploitation and destruction.” Perl, 113. On negative theology and ontotheology, see for instance Amy Hollywood, "Preaching as Social Practice in
negativa is getting at the same point as the step/not beyond,\textsuperscript{402} both of which are impossible journeys undertaken without known goals, similar to Derrida’s destinnerant and contre-allée: “And what is the via negativa if not the way or path marked by the not, the passage to a shore we will never reach, a step/not beyond? Why can I not stop speaking of God, of whom I cannot say a thing?\textsuperscript{403} The via negativa is explicitly made a figure of the “postmodern condition,” which, for Caputo, is far from being new but rather “also very ancient,” as his reference to apophaticism (“why can I not stop speaking of God?”) suggests.\textsuperscript{404} The question is then whether Christianity as a whole is “rescued” for post-modernity, or whether Dionysius is “rescued” for Christianity.

But while Caputo proclaims the good news of deconstruction to practitioners of negative theology, one might wonder whether deconstructionists are equally pleased to hear this news. Derrida, though he deliberately gave negative theology a fair hearing, ultimately remains skeptical about whether différance and negative theology are indeed walking along the same trackless path, suspecting that negative theology “seems to reserve, beyond all positive predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being.”\textsuperscript{405} More concretely, he also draws attention to the ease with which an ecclesiastical or celestial hierarchy can slip into a political hierarchy. Dionysius’ Mystical Theology, for instance, begins by imagining Moses ascending Mount Moriah to meet God in the cloud—an ascent that begins, as Dionysius

\textsuperscript{402} This is the awkward translation of the \textit{pas-au dela}, where \textit{pas} is a homonym in French, meaning both \textit{step} and \textit{not}. Caputo takes the term from Maurice Blanchot. Caputo, \textit{What Would Jesus Deconstruct?}, 42ff.

\textsuperscript{403} Ibid, 54.

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid, 56.

points out, with a purification, a separation from the impure. This separation is necessary because Moses (and thus also Dionysius, and his disciple Timothy to whom the treatise is addressed) must keep his special un-knowledge a secret from the uninitiated.

Derrida describes this ascent as “withdraw[ing] with an elite,” commenting that “from the start this topolitology of the secret obeys an order” (the order to purify and keep a secret), and that the “allegorical veil becomes a political shield, the solid barrier of a social division.”

Most recently, it has been argued that Dionysius seems radical today because his ideas are inherently radical; his appropriation for conservative purposes is the result of misreading, or even deliberate tempering of Dionysius’ original text. As such, those subsequent Dionysius readers who claim him for heterodoxy would, in this case, be perceiving the echoes of radicalness Dionysius emits even in his attenuated form.

406 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Paul Rorem, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987). All further English references to Dionysius in this chapter are from Luibheid’s translation, and will be referred to by the initials of the treatise. *The Mystical Theology* [*MT*], 1000C-1001A.

407 Dionysius emphasizes in all four treatises of the *CD* that the knowledge he offers must be kept secret from the impure and the uninitiated. From the *Mystical Theology*: “But see to it that none of this comes to the hearing of the uninitiated.” [*MT*, 1000A]. From the *Divine Names*: “This is the kind of divine enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture.” [*The Divine Names*, [*DN*], 592B] (Dionysius’s meaning is not entirely unambiguous here, and he is perhaps suggesting that Scripture as a whole belongs to the esoteric rather than the exoteric tradition.) “As the divine tradition so commands us, let the holy be there only for the holy, and let such things be kept away from the mockery and the laughter of the uninitiated.” Dionysius then follows this sentence with an admonishment to help those uninitiated, who seem to stay away from what is holy by inclination and not by nature (i.e. they could be initiated at any moment if they wanted to); “Or, rather, let us try to rescue such men and turn them from their hostility to God.” [*DN*, 597C]. In the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius confirms that Scripture resorts to “dissimilar names” (calling God a bear or an ointment) so that it remains esoteric, i.e. “the wise men of God, exponents of hidden inspiration, separate the ‘Holy of Holies’ from defilement by anything in the realm of the imperfect or the profane.” [*The Celestial Hierarchy* [*CH*], 145A]. And finally in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: “See to it that you [Timothy the Fellow-Elder] do not betray the holy of holies...Keep these things of God unshared and undefiled by the uninitiated.” [*The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [*EH*], 372A]

408 Derrida, “Denials,” 23-24. Rubinstein highlights the political critique of Dionysius that Derrida makes: “If the via negativa knows where it is going and how to get there, is its unknown God truly unknown? By now, it should be clear that Derrida’s critique of teleology stems neither from intellectual snobbery nor from a ‘postmodern’ commitment to ‘play’. Rather, it is attuned to the violent and exclusionary politics of certainty. The moment I know who the Messiah is and when he is coming, I know who is in the kingdom and who is out—and will behave accordingly.” Rubinstein, 737.

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Dionysius’ very first Greek reader, John of Scythopolis, is said to have introduced “significant changes” that cleansed Dionysius’ writings from the taint of Origenism (considered a fearsome heresy in the early Church). An alternate branch of the *Corpus* textual transmission (in Syrian rather than in Greek), by contrast, has not been tampered with, and so can serve as a point of access to a “more faithful, if indirect, witness to that original text” that is “replete with Origenistic influences.” Moreover, it has been suggested that Dionysius might even have welcomed the veils that his earliest readers drew across his work, proposing that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was never intended for a general audience, “but rather [was] produced for a select, esoteric audience of Origenists.” On this account, John of Scythopolis did not misinterpret Dionysius so much as transform an esoteric text into an exoteric one. Perhaps this new theory about the ambiguity that presides over Dionysius’ very early reception history can serve as a model for his subsequent reception, which also oscillates between radical and conservative.

So far the discussion has focused on those for whom Dionysius is radical and heterodox. Against this strand of scholarship that claims Dionysius for heterodoxy are those who think that there is something inherently conservative about Dionysius’ thought. Steven Ozment, for instance, writes that “Dionysian mysticism, with its strong sense of established hierarchy, could be enlisted to promote a very conservative ‘descending’ view of political authority.” Setting aside the question of whether an idea can be inherently conservative or radical regardless of context or deployment, Dionysius’ texts have indeed

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410 Ibid, 557-558.
411 Ibid, 565.
served as cornerstones in defences of ecclesiastical hierarchy and justifications of ecclesiastical power.\textsuperscript{413} One salient example in favour of this view of Dionysius might be the papal bull \textit{Unam Sanctam} (1302), a document proclaiming that only the Roman Church can offer salvation, and that the Pope presides supremely over this church with a power greater than all secular powers. Dionysius’s name appears to authorize the Bull’s underlying assumption that hierarchy is the natural order of things: “For, according to the Blessed Dionysius, it is a law of the divinity that the lowest things reach the highest place by intermediaries. Then, according to the order of the universe, all things are not led back to order equally and immediately, but the lowest by the intermediary, and the inferior by the superior.”\textsuperscript{414} By denying the possibility of any immediate contact between highest and lowest (which is always mediated by hierarchy), Dionysius seems to be exempting the Pope from all judgement by any inferior powers, serving here as the chief advocate for ecclesiastical—specifically papal—authority (Dionysius is the only authority cited in the Bull other than Scripture).

\textbf{Dionysius Becomes Pseudo-Dionysius}

Indeed, it was not only the Pope in Rome who pressed Dionysius’ fondness for (celestial) hierarchies into service in authorizing his (ecclesiastical) power, but also the

\textsuperscript{413} Bewes expresses this idea succinctly when he reverses Walter Benjamin’s dictum on the philosophy of history: “If every document of civilization is also a document of barbarism, as Benjamin claims, the conclusion is inescapable that every document of barbarism is also a document of civilization.” Timothy Bewes, "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism," \textit{differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies} 21, no. 3 (2010): 18.

\textsuperscript{414} “Nam secundum beatum Dionysium, lex divinitatis est, infima per media in suprema reduci. Non ergo secundum ordinem universi omnia aequae ac immediate, sed infima per media, et inferiora per superiora ad ordinem reducantur.” The reference to the Bull was first found in Yves Congar, \textit{L’Église de saint Augustin à l’époque moderne} (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 272.
royal family in France, whose encouragement of the cult of Dionysius (Denis, as he is called in French) served to endorse a particular vision of order. St. Denis became the patron saint of France around the **seventh** century, where his cult centred around the Basilica of St. Denis, located in the eponymous town just north of Paris (now a suburb of the city). The basilica and the abbey enjoyed the generous patronage of the French kings for more than a thousand years: beginning with Dagobert in 639, most of the French kings are buried in the crypt, and the *oriflamme*, the sacred standard the French army carried into battle, was given to the monastery for safe-keeping.

How a town near Paris came to be the shrine of a saint said to have come from Athens (or, indeed, the shrine of a man who had not existed at all) is the result of intensive myth-building by those in charge of his cult. At the beginning stands a triple case of mistaken identity, where the writings of the sixth century Greek/Syrian monk (for whom Dionysius was only a pseudonym) were attributed to another Dionysius (a missionary to Gaul martyred in Paris, who, for clarity’s sake, will be called Denis in this chapter), both of whom were then identified with the Dionysius mentioned in the Bible

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416 "A forked-tongue scarlet banner embroidered with golden flames, the Oriflamme was believed to have originated as Charlemagne's standard; it represented a flaming lance with which he could save the Holy Land from the Muslims. Hugh Capet later deposited it at the monastery of Saint-Denis, where it remained largely unheralded until Louis VI used it as his royal standard in battle in 1124 against Henry I of England. A century later, Louis IX received the Oriflamme from the abbot of Saint-Denis before going on his crusades. Although traditionally to be unfurled only in the face of enemies of Christianity, by the 14th and 15th centuries the Oriflamme had become the military standard of the French kings...After 1418, the use of the Oriflamme diminished, and it was returned to the monastery of Saint-Denis.” Kelly De Vries, "Oriflamme," in Medieval France: An Encyclopedia, 1291 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995). Alternately, the *oriflamme* was actually the abbey’s flag, which Louis VI “took from the altar and announced that the saint was the special protector of the realm,” and that the royal flag was identified with the abbey’s standard. Thomas Waldman, "Denis," in Medieval France: An Encyclopedia, 556-559 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 558. At any rate, the abbey of St. Denis was seen as the guardian of France’s continued military success.
(Acts 17: 15-34), one of the skeptical philosophers converted by Paul during a proselytizing visit to Athens.  

The second of the three, Saint Denis, is supposed to have been sent to Gaul as a missionary in the third century, where he was martyred in Paris at Montmartre, probably around 250. In some versions of the story, a pious woman rescued the saint’s body and buried it at what is now the site of the cathedral of St. Denis.  

In another version, Denis is beheaded at Montmartre, which, as the legend has it, is inconveniently located several miles from the site of St. Denis.  

So, Denis miraculously picked up his severed head and walked to his chosen burial place (being the most famous of the cephalophorus saints), singing hymns of praise as he went. Protected and promoted by noble and royal patrons, Denis’ shrine quickly became a basilica that drew many pilgrims.

As for the other Dionysius (the pseudonymous one), his writings made their way to the West as early as 649, but the copy of his works that resulted in his wide renown arrived in 827, when a volume of his works was gifted to King Louis the Pious by a

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418 The context of the passage is a visit by the Apostle Paul to Athens. He initially tries to convert Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who then bring him to speak at the Areopagus. Paul’s speech to the Areopagites is perhaps the reason the author of the CD picked Dionysius as his pseudonym. That is, Paul opens by referring to the altar “to an unknown god” he spotted on his way (the altar existing to ensure that no god was left unworshipped, even gods as yet unknown), and uses it to accuse the Athenians of worshipping in ignorance, which he has come to dispell: “in the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” (30) Some Athenians convert, “among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.” Perhaps it is from Paul’s accusation that the Athenians are “ignorant of the very thing [they] worship” that the author was inspired to write about the via negativa under the name of one who converted upon hearing those words. See also Charles M. Stang, ”Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym,” Modern Theology 24, no. 4 (October 2008): 541-555.

419 Waldman, 557.

420 Ibid.

421 The first of whom is Paris’ other patron saint, Genevieve, member of a “grand lignage noble germanique” and of “dignitaires gallo-romains importants,” who began building a place of worship on the site of Denis’ grave in the middle of the 5th century (the exact date is disputed). Geneviève was said to be passionately devoted to Denis, and was a forceful champion of her building project, which she finances by commanding the priests of Paris to come up with the requisite funding amongst themselves. The basilica later functioned as the focus of her campaign to rally the Christians of Paris against paganism. Roger and Pierre de Peretti Bourderon, Histoire de Saint-Denis (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1988), 62-63.

422 Luscombe, 134.
delegate of Emperor Michael the Stammerer. Louis then gave the manuscript to the Abbey bearing the author’s name, commissioning a translation from Hilduin, then the Abbot of St. Denis. However, Hilduin did more than simply translate Dionysius’ works; realizing that the relics his church already possessed might be rendered even more valuable by a connection to the Apostles themselves, he also created several other works to strengthen the historical record linking Dionysius and Denis. In this new composite narrative, Dionysius converted to Christianity in Athens, where, as Bishop, he composed his theological treatises, then travelled to Gaul as Denis the missionary, where he was martyred.

Before Dionysius’ texts arrived at the Abbey, Denis’ grave was already an important place of worship, and already enjoyed the support, financial and otherwise, of many high-ranking patrons (beginning with Hilduin and Geneviève). The discovery that Denis was also a great theologian greatly enhanced his reputation, but did not create it.

What the attribution of the Corpus Dionysiacum to the patron saint of France did do was

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423 It is still unclear who made the first leap in identifying the two Dionysius’. Luscombe suggests that the link was suggested (but not explicitly made) in 825 by Frankish bishops when discussing idolatry at a council in Paris. In their written dispatches from the event, according to Luscombe, the bishops are not careful about distinguishing between Dionysius of Athens and Denis of Paris. One of these dispatches was sent to Constantinople, where the Greek church had opted for iconoclasm at that time. According to Luscombe, this is perhaps the seed that prompted the idea of sending a codex of Dionysius’ writing (in Greek) to France as a gift in the first place. Luscombe, 136.


425 Luscombe has Hilduin resorting to a bit of forgery for the “enhancement of his own position among the prelates of France and in respect of France’s links with Rome and with Constantinople.” Luscombe, 140.

426 Hilduin would already have had the letters composed by the Frankish bishops that begin to make the link, as well as a version of Denis’ passion composed shortly thereafter that retells the story in light of this suggestion. He did, however, fabricate a ‘History by an imagined Aristarchus’, as well as a hymn to the saint, and finally a work entitled the ‘Revelation of Stephen’. The Stephen of the last piece is Pope Stephen (3rd century), who in Hilduin’s fiction leaves a pallium and keys (symbols of ‘apostolic dignity’) on the altar of St. Denis. Ibid, 139.

427 Dionysius arrived in the west already with impeccable references, so to speak. Two reputable and orthodox Byzantine theologians, John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor had added glosses and scholia to Dionysius’ writings, which “claimed the Areopagite’s corpus for orthodoxy.” Paul Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.
to make the interpretation of these works a high-stakes activity, and effectively to discourage much subsequent questioning about whether there were three Dionysius’ or one.\textsuperscript{428} Might a man in Athens really have seen the miraculous eclipse that is supposed to have occurred in Jerusalem during Christ’s crucifixion (as Dionysius claims in one of his letters)? Why did Jerome and the other early church fathers never mention the name of such a great authority? Could the liturgy Dionysius describes really have been so elaborate already in the first century?\textsuperscript{429} Thanks to Hilduin’s literary efforts, Dionysius’ writings came to enjoy ecclesiastical (as one of the earliest witnesses to proclaim the power of the Church) and political (as the patron saint of France) protection against critics\textsuperscript{430}—and also brought the Dionysian writings into wide circulation. In the centuries

\textsuperscript{428} Massaut notes that French scholars resisted the philological arguments against Dionysius’ authenticity the longest for that reason—even into the 19\textsuperscript{th} century when the techniques of modern historians had definitively identified them as belonging to a later era. Jean-Pierre Massaut, \textit{Critique et tradition à la veille de la Réforme en France} (Paris: J. Vrin, 1974), 187.

\textsuperscript{429} These are all key questions addressed by various commentators in the many centuries that followed Hilduin’s historical sleight of hand. The question about the eclipse (noted in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and related again in Dionysius’ seventh letter, to give authenticating period detail) was posed by the Italian Humanist Valla in his notes on the New Testament, written in 1457 (his \textit{Adnotationes}). This work was not published during Valla’s lifetime, but Erasmus found the manuscript and published it in 1505. Laurentius Valla, \textit{Laurentii Vallensis viri tam graecae quam latinae linguae peritissimi in Latinam Novi testamenti interpretationem ex collatione Graecorum exemplarium Adnotationes apprime utiles}, in Vol. 1, \textit{Opera Omnia} (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1962), 852. Erasmus was convinced by Valla’s criticisms, and incorporated them into his own \textit{Annotations} on the New Testament (first published in 1516 but later revised). Erasmus adds the last two objections, noting that it corresponded more closely to the liturgy practiced several centuries after Apostolic times, and also that Jerome and Origen never cite Dionysius. Desiderius Erasmus, \textit{Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians} (New York, Leiden: Brill, 1989).

\textsuperscript{430} One of the few to voice doubts about this rather dubious story during the Middle Ages was Peter Abelard, who was at St. Denis recovering from his \textit{calamitutes}. However, Abelard was only skeptical about the identification of Dionysius and Denis, not about whether Dionysius was actually the figure named in the Bible. This second “unmasking” did not take place until the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, with Valla and Erasmus. Paul Rorem, \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 16. Rorem’s reading of John Scotus Eriugena’s commentary on the \textit{Celestial Hierarchy} (mid 9\textsuperscript{th} century) adds another opinion to this group of Dionysius skeptics. Rorem suggests that Eriugena would have had to pick his words carefully to avoid disappointing the royal dedicatee of his work (King Charles, who was particularly dedicated to the patron saint of his kingdom). The poem that prefaces the commentary depicts Dionysius following in his teacher Paul’s footsteps not to Paris but rapt up to the third heaven where he gathered his insights on the ranks of the angels. By making Dionysius’ rapture the entry to the commentary, rather than Denis’ journey to France, Eriugena could thereby avoid having to weigh in on whether or not Dionysius went to Paris after he was released from his rapture. It was the “eloquence of silence in the face of royal expectations.” (14) Paul Rorem, \textit{Eriugena's}
that followed, three translators improved upon Hilduin’s rudimentary one, numerous commentaries were produced throughout the Middle Ages, and hundreds of manuscripts survive from the Middle Ages.\footnote{431} John Scotus Eriugena (ninth century),\footnote{432} Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century)\footnote{433} and Albert the Great (thirteenth century)\footnote{434} all commented extensively on Dionysius.

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Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005).
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\footnote{431}{John Scottus Eriugena was given the task of retranslating the works by Charles the Bald (then Holy Roman Emperor) in 860. Knowledge of Greek in the Latin west was limited but not entirely absent, as Jeaneau describes in his article on the tools that might have been available in Carolingian times for learning Greek, such as glossaries and bilingual psalters. Édouard Jeaneau, "Jean Scot Érigène et le Grec," Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi (Bulletin du Cange) XLI (1979), 26-40. As for the surviving manuscripts, for German-speaking regions at least, a search of the online catalogue www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de for “Dionysius Areopagita” returns 110 hits, for manuscripts containing both parts of the CD as well as the whole corpus. Iter Italicum (http://cf.itergateway.org/italicum/), a database for uncatalogued Renaissance manuscripts, returns 317 results for “Dionysi*”. This is a crude measure of Dionysius’ popularity, but it is sufficient to show that Dionysius was widely read and copied in Europe throughout the Middle Ages.}


\footnote{433}{Moulin and Burrell attempt to deconstruct the classification of Albert and Aquinas as “Western” and Dionysius as “Eastern,” but nevertheless acknowledge that the ideas of Albert and Aquinas emerged from a productive encounter with Greek, Islamic and Jewish thinkers. (635) Burrell’s portion of the article on Aquinas gives a helpful introduction to Aquinas’ reading of Dionysius. It was long thought that Aquinas was purely Aristotelian (as opposed to Platonist/Neoplatonist) but this opinion has been challenged, particularly, as Burrell and Moulin point out, in the way that Aquinas puts forward a not-strictly-dualist philosophy (i.e. God is completely transcendent and yet not entirely Other from it). (645) David Burrell C.S.C. and Isabelle Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius." Modern Theology 24, no. 4 (October 2008): 633-649. Chenu comments that in fact Aquinas was attempting to reconcile two strands of Neoplatonism, that of Augustine and that of Dionysius (ultimately incompatible, in his opinion). M.-D. Chenu O.P. in Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, 49-98 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968). On the afterlife of Platonism and Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages in general, see Chapter VIII of Endre v. Ivánka, Plato Christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964).}

\footnote{434}{A good introduction to Albert’s commentary on Dionysius is Simon Tugwell’s introduction to the Paulist Press edition of Albert’s work (the relevant pages are 39ff). The intellectual environment for Albert’s reading of Dionysius is the reaction against what Tugwell calls “Eastern influences” in the university, by which is meant the recently translated works of Greek, Islamic and Jewish theologians (John Damascene, John Chrysostom, Avicenna, and Al-Ghazali, for instance). The point of contention was an epistemological matter: whether full and direct “enjoyment and vision of God” is possible, either in this life or in heaven. The negative bent of these newly available philosophers suggested that this was not possible,
Outside the universities, Dionysius’s impact was no less significant. Kurt Ruh calls him the “father of medieval mysticism,” beginning his four-volume *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik* not with Jerome or Augustine but rather with Dionysius, because although the former wrote a century before the latter, Dionysius is “der erste und entscheidende Ausgangspunkt für die mittelalterliche Mystik.”

Likewise for Evelyn Underhill, Dionysius is the archetypal contemplative, the “great master” whose words are “writ large on the annals of Christian ecstasy.”

Hugh of Saint Victor (twelfth century), Meister Eckhart (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Nicholas of Cusa or at least only possible in a limited sense (we will see God through a likeness, but not directly, or we will see God’s attributes more clearly but not his essence and so on). The impossibility of full knowledge of God in heaven by the blessed was one of the propositions condemned in 1241 by the Bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne and the Masters of the University. When Albert arrived in Paris sometime around 1242, it was therefore not a straightforward task to write a commentary on Dionysius and his union of unknowing. Albert argued that knowledge of God is possible through the intellect, which “receives a certain divine light, which is above [our mind’s] own nature and raises them above all their natural ways of seeing things, and this is how our minds come to see God, though only in a blurred and undefined knowledge ‘that’ he is” which is why “it is said that God is seen by not-seeing: he is seen by the absence of natural seeing.” The passage just cited is from Albert’s *Commentary on Dionysius’ Mystical Theology*. Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, ed. Simon Tugwell, trans. Simon Tugwell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 172. See also Francis J. Catania, “‘Knowable’ and ‘Namable’ in Albert the Great'S Commentary on the Divine Names,” in *Albert the Great: Commemorative Essays*, 97-128 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).


Coolman places Hugh (1096-1141) at the beginning of the “medieval ‘affective’ interpretation of the *CD*,” which “depart[s] from Dionysius [because it] champions love (*amor, dilectio, affectio*) over knowledge in the pursuit of union with God.” (615) This affective reading of Dionysius, to be brief, means that, at the point when the intellect self-transcends in the negation-of-the-negation, there is a second power, Love, that takes over. While the affective interpretation is likely a distortion of Dionysius’ authorial intention, Coolman puts this affective reading in a broader context, seeing it an attempt to resolve the contradiction between “the (Augustinian) assumption that God is fully known and loved in a beatific *visio Dei*, which is the goal of human existence and the (Dionysian) insistence that God is radically and transcendently unknowable” (615) The most important proponents of this affective tradition are the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (14th century) and Thomas Gallus (d. 1246, Gallus, like Hugh, was a member of the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris). As seen above (note 51), Albert the Great opposed this affective tradition, insisting that it was through the intellect alone that any knowledge is to be had. Boyd Taylor Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (October 2008): 615-632; *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grossetests on De Mystica Theologia* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003); Ivánka.
all explicitly cite Dionysius, and whether or not they agreed with him (though often they did), Dionysian ideas were seriously to be reckoned with.⁴⁴⁰

These readers of Dionysius, however, were not inconsequential people, but rather powerful churchmen with significant influence (Cusa was a cardinal and later vicar-general of the papal states, Eckhart was twice magister at the university in Paris and vicar to the master general of the Dominican order⁴⁴¹). And as we saw earlier in this chapter, popes, kings and emperors were the first to champion Dionysius’ writings. As Dionysius’ appearance in the Unam Sanctam bull discussed earlier suggests, perhaps it is no surprise that popes and bishops might be attracted to the works that could be interpreted (rightly or wrongly) as inscribing ecclesiastical authority into the very structure of the universe and the Divine Work itself: after all, Dionysius was the one who coined the term hierarchy.⁴⁴² Moreover, certain passages in Dionysius lend themselves quite easily to such a reading. In one of his letters, for instance, Dionysius reprimands a monk for impertinently chastising a priest (higher-ranking than a monk) who had supposedly

⁴³⁸ Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses Eckhart’s theories of language and creation, which are deeply indebted to the apophatic tradition. See also Kurt Ruh, "Dionysius Areopagita im deutschen Predigtwerk Meister Eckharts," Perspektiven der Philosophie 13 (1987): 207-223; Denys Turner, Darkness, especially chapters 6 and 7 on Eckhart; Denys Turner, "Dionysius and some Late Medieval Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe," Modern Theology 24, no. 4 (October 2008): 651-665.
defiled the “sacred things” by inviting an impure penitent into the inner sanctuary. The monk’s insurgency was unjustified, writes Dionysius, because those ranking lower in the hierarchy have no authority over those above: “Even if disorder and confusion should undermine the most divine ordinances and regulations, that still gives no right, even on God’s behalf, to overturn the order which God himself has established.” This sentiment is the reverse of Luther’s claim that he has the authority to rebuke the Pope himself on God’s behalf, regardless of the consequences. The purpose here is not to adjudicate between these divergent interpretations, but rather to describe how Dionysius could be interpreted (and was interpreted) in a “conservative” fashion, in addition to the “radical” position that is also ascribed to him.

From serving as the heavy artillery in a papal bull or in the Summa, however, Dionysius had much to lose should his pseudonymity be discovered—after all, it was his presumed proximity to the Apostles that made him an authoritative source, rather than the content of his works alone. Dionysius’ first successful debunkers were the humanists Lorenzo Valla and Desiderius Erasmus, whose commitment to philology inclined them not to take Dionysius’ claims about his identity at face value. Valla pointed out that the Areopagites were not philosophers at all, rather judges. Moreover, he queried some of the details that Dionysius had presumably added to his text to reinforce his

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443 Dionysius, Letter 8, 1088C.
445 Valla’s most famous feat of debunking was proving that the so-called Donation of Constantine was a fraud (1440). The Donation was said to be a document in which the Emperor Constantine, who first established Christianity as a tolerated religion in the Roman Empire, turned the control of the Church over to the Roman pope Sylvester I (4th century). Valla established that it was in fact not written until the 9th century. Such a document was extremely useful to those who defended the authority of the Roman Church, and Valla was even brought before the Inquisition in 1444 for his scandalous claim, rescued only by the intervention of his patron. "Valla, Lorenzo," in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1689; Laurentius Valla, Laurentii Vallensis, Patritii Romani, de Falso credita & ementita Constantini donatione Declamatio, in Vol. 1, Opera Omnia (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1962), 781-795.
pseudonymous identity, claiming, for instance, to have witnessed the eclipse that is supposed to have occurred when Christ was crucified.\footnote{Laurentius Valla, “Laurentii Vallensis viri tam graecae quam latinae linguae peritissimi in Latinam Noui testamenti interpretationem ex collatione Graecorum exemplarium Adnotationes apprime utiles,” in Opera Omnia (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmo, 1962), XXXV verso.} Valla’s comments did not circulate widely at all, and it was not until Erasmus discovered a manuscript copy and published it in 1505 that his critique began to provoke a response. Erasmus accepted Valla’s conclusions, and added some further criticisms of his own. If Dionysius was really such a famous authority from the first century, why did Jerome and Origen not cite him?\footnote{Erasmus, Annotations. “Deinde mirum si tam priscus autor fuit, & tam multa scripsit, à nomine uterum, seu Graecorum seu Latinorum fuisse citatum: non ab Origene, non à Chrysostomo, ne ab Hieronymo quidem, qui nihil intentatum reliquit.” Desiderius Erasmus, Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians (New York, Leiden: Brill, 1989), 312.} Erasmus also finds it impossible that the elaborate liturgy Dionysius describes could have already existed at such an early date.\footnote{Erasmus, Annotations. “Mihi non uidetur priscisillis temporibus tantum fuisse Christianis ceremoniarum, quantum ille describit.” Desiderius Erasmus, Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians (New York, Leiden: Brill, 1989), 312.} Perhaps not everybody was convinced by Erasmus’ philological detective work, but by the time Luther referred to Dionysius in 1519, Dionysius the Areopagite had become “Dionysius, whoever he was,” advising his readers to avoid the frivolities (nugae) in Dionysius like the plague.\footnote{Referring to Erasmus in his commentary on the Psalms on the subject of the darkness of God (Operationes in Psalmos, 1519-1521), Luther wrote “Multi multa de ista caligine commenti sunt, præsertim Dionysius ille, quiquis fuerit.” WA5, 503: 9-10. For the comment on avoiding Dionysius like the plague, see WA39.1, 389: 18-390:5.} Dionysius’ theology is worse than frivolous, in fact, and Luther sarcastically comments that Dionysian negative theology is not union by unknowing, it is simply sheer ignorance. True negation is suffering and fear of hell, because to enter into God’s darkness is to understand that God is truly found on the Cross.\footnote{WA5, 176: 28-33. See also Bernard McGinn, “Vere tu es Deus absconditus: the hidden God in Luther and some mystics,” in Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation, edited by Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Knut Alfsvåg, “Deification as creatio ex nihilo: On Luther's appreciation of Dionysian spirituality in Operationes in Psalmos,” in Hermeneutica
other leaders of the Protestant Reform, likewise dismissed Dionysius as a mere fiction whose arguments had no hold over their thinking.\textsuperscript{451} And if Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin and Zwingli can be taken together as representing the \textit{mainstream} of Protestant theology, then Dionysius’ legacy can indeed be said to end with Erasmus’ and Valla’s unmasking of Dionysius’ pseudonymity.

As was the case for Eckhart’s reception, Dionysius was no longer a prominent figure in the theological mainstream of the \textit{sixteenth} century, but, again as for Eckhart, Dionysius continued to be read in other circles all the same. Indeed, it was not until the end of the \textit{nineteenth} century that it was conclusively proven that Dionysius wrote in the fourth or fifth centuries and not the first.\textsuperscript{452} However, once it began to become known that Dionysius was likely not an apostolic authority, his importance was evaluated no longer on his status but rather on the content of his books: one can disagree with or reject the ideas of non-canonical authors, but one has to work around the ideas of canonical ones, finding ways to reconcile their ideas to one’s own. Perhaps, then, calling Dionysius \textit{pseudo} is to be seen less as stripping him of authority and more as setting his ideas free to be borrowed, critiqued and re-worked—but also to be fragmented and dispersed in the process. In the mainstream of Christian theology from the \textit{ninth} to the \textit{sixteenth} century, Dionysius’ texts and ideas remained anchored to his (admittedly fictive) name, consolidated and held together by the pseudonym’s authority. Having become unmoored, the ideas and their author began to fragment and wash up on distant shores (to strain the metaphor slightly), as Dionysius found his way into new and unexpected contexts, such

\textsuperscript{451} Froehlich, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{452} O’Daly, \textit{Theologische Realenzyklopädie}, 778.
as a Hermeticists and Alchemists like Oswaldus Crollius, or a disaffected Lutheran like Weigel. This chapter now investigates two networks of Dionysius readers, focusing first on Catholic apologists polemicizing against Luther, turning then to Reform-minded humanists (both Catholic and Protestant) with a side line in the esoteric (Hermeticism, astrology and alchemy). The chapter concludes with an overview of Dionysius’ various printers and publishers. Despite the claims of modern scholars that Dionysius was not read in the early modern era, there were in fact a large number of editions of Dionysius (more than a hundred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries alone). Examining the history of printed Dionysius editions reveals that the Areopagite’s writings were printed by both Catholics and Protestants, by those who supported a robust ecclesiastical authority and those who would like to see church power devolved to laypeople.

Dionysius Readers I: Anti-Lutheran Polemicists and the Early Church

Jesus Christ never went to Rome, but if he had gone, he would have founded a church very much like the one that existed in 1515. This was the proposition that our first set of Dionysius readers set out to defend, arguing that the Protestant reformers were wrong to want to restrict the authority of the Pope: the Church was fine as it was, or perhaps needed only a few cosmetic reforms to correct isolated abuses. The two authors in this section (Josse Clichtove and Johannes Cochlaeus) focus particularly on Dionysius’

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453 Much more work could be done in this area, building on the incredible philological undertaking of Philippe Chevallier, the Dionysiaca. The primary task of the Dionysiaca is a critical edition of eight Latin translations, plus two Greek editions, rather than a detailed discussion of the manuscript and printed versions that are the basis for his edition. However, he does provide a helpful list of every printed Dionysius edition up to the 20th century, which could serve as the basis for future historical work. Dionysius the Areopagite, Dionysiaca: recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'Areopage, and Ed. Philippe Chevallier, 2 vols. (Paris, Bruges: Desclée, de Brouwer & Cie, 1937).
valorization of hierarchy *per se* in order to defend, by implication, the hierarchical Church headed by the Roman Pope.

Briefly, Dionysius’ conception of hierarchy proved particularly useful for anti-Lutheran polemic because it is based on his belief that the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies are continuous: the chain of offices stretches from the laity up through the deacons, priests and bishops, all the way up to the three orders of angels. Moreover both hierarchies ultimately derive their sacred force from a single source, God himself.454 God’s light emanates outward illuminating an orderly progression of angels (the celestial hierarchy), which light then flows downward through the ordained clergy (the ecclesiastical hierarchy) and only then down to the laity. In such a scheme, the clergy are far more than ecclesiastical *Beamter* performing a useful service by ministering to their fellow Christians.455 Instead, the clergy are divinely illuminated mediators between God and laypeople. Simply by virtue of having been ordained, the clergy stand closer to the Source than those to whom they minister. This way of reading Dionysius means that the clergy are not only important but necessary, for without them divine illumination could not reach the bottom of the hierarchy—and to do away with the ecclesiastical hierarchy would not only be a breach of *worldly* order but also of *divine* order.

In the case of the humanist and Catholic polemicist Josse Clichtove’s *AntiLutherus* (1524), the clue is in the title.456 Clichtove (1472-1543) did not begin his career as a polemicist, but rather as a reform-minded humanist, editing and studying the

454 A more detailed discussion of Dionysius’ understanding of hierarchy is undertaken in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
455 The image of the layperson underwent significant changes in the 16th century, particularly in Lutheran ecclesiology. Chapter 4 discusses Weigel’s understanding of the layperson in much greater detail, in the context of the changing role of the layperson provoked by the Protestant reformation.
456 Josse Clichtove, *AntiLutherus Judoci Clichtouei Neoportuensis* (Köln: Petrus Quentell, 1525). It was originally published in 1524, but it is almost identical to the 1525 edition that I had consulted first.
works of the Church fathers and classical philosophers.\textsuperscript{457} After studying theology at the university in Paris, Clichtove carried out this work under the patronage of several powerful clerics convinced of the necessity of ecclesiastical and monastic reform.\textsuperscript{458} Because he openly advocated ecclesiastical reform, Clichtove was censured by the faculty of theology in Paris, and, once Luther’s own reform movement gained speed after 1515, he had to defend himself against charges of Lutheranism in his earlier writings.\textsuperscript{459} Although he did continue to believe that the Church needed to be improved, Clichtove ultimately moved away from his reforming colleagues and instead turned his efforts to the defence of the Roman Church against Luther after about 1520; his \textit{AntiLutherus} is only one of the polemical texts he produced between 1520 and his death some twenty years later.\textsuperscript{460}

Clichtove had been a reader of Dionysius from the beginning of his career. His mentor Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples edited one of the earliest printed editions of Dionysius in 1498; Clichtove furnished Lefèvre d’Étaples’ edition with a preface when it was reissued in 1515, and so was presumably very familiar with the entire Dionysian corpus,


\textsuperscript{458} These patrons include Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, whom we will meet again later in this chapter as a fellow Dionysius reader, and several powerful families with members well-placed in the Church, the d’Amboises and the Briçonnetts. In addition, Clichtove also cultivated close relations with the faculty of theology at the university of Paris, a body that saw itself as gate-keeper of orthodoxy in France, even though it had no means of enforcing its judgements and condemnations. Farge describes the faculty of theology as the “\textit{bête-noire} of humanists,” declaring that theology had “no need for pretty words.” James K. Farge, \textit{Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500-1543} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985).

\textsuperscript{459} Fabisch, 84.

as well as the with the arguments used to discredit Dionysius, but his faith in Dionysius’ authenticity remained unshaken.\(^{461}\)

In the *AntiLutherus* a decade later, he is on the offensive against Valla and Erasmus.\(^{462}\) Curiously, Clichtove devotes some twenty pages (four chapters) to defending Dionysius’ authority in a work designed to discredit Luther. What is the connection between his offence and his defence? As we will see, Clichtove argues that Luther’s theology is wrong because it disrupts the proper order of the world, which, for Clichtove, is hierarchical. Dionysius, then, serves as a testimony to the fact that the Church has always been hierarchical, and therefore ought to remain so. Consequently, Clichtove must prove that Dionysius was indeed writing in the first century for Dionysius’ testimony to be authoritative.

Motivating Clichtove’s turn from moderate reform to polemical defence was his professed fear of disorder—\(^{463}\) and it was disorder that he chiefly expected Luther’s ideas

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\(^{461}\) Even in his preface to the 1515 edition of Dionysius’ work (i.e. after Valla’s critiques were published in 1505, but before Erasmus’ in 1516) he presents Dionysius as a true disciple of Paul: “At vero inter eos qui post sanctorum eloquiorum scriptores caelestia nobis mysteria litterarum adminiculo tradiderunt, divinus pater Dionysius Areopagita cum primis annumerandus est, a beatissimo quidem Paulo verae fidei sacramenta edoctus.” Eugene Rice, *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples and Related Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 350.

\(^{462}\) Clichtove’s attack on Erasmus was part of a larger conflict between Erasmus and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris and even more broadly between Erasmus and his Catholic critics (as Rummel argues in her book of the same title). The theologians in Paris were notoriously ill-disposed towards humanism, especially insofar as its philological program was perceived as an attack on the authority of the Vulgate. More importantly, Rummel writes that Erasmus drew the ire of his Catholic critics by initially “refus[ing] to take a clear stand” on Luther’s ideas, “pleading scholarly detachment”: “his unwillingness to commit himself formally to one of the warring parties destroyed his credibility.” (Even when he did make a public statement against Luther in his *De libero arbitrio* in 1524, he did not manage to rescue his reputation, as “he was labelled a heretic by Catholics and a hypocrite by Lutherans.”) Luther calls Erasmus “ubique lubricus et flexiloquus,” and likens him to Proteus during their debate about free will (*De servo arbitrio*, from 1525). WA18 601:34-35 and 602:1. Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics*, 2 vols. (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1989). 1. Rummel treats the conflict with Clichtove in Volume 2, 73-79; and the conflict with the Sorbonne as a whole in Volume 2, 29-79. James K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500-1543* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985).

\(^{463}\) Modern scholarship has observed that this fear of disorder permeates his entire oeuvre. See for instance Massaut, “Thèmes ecclésiologiques.” An exchange between Kraus and Zemon Davis draws attention to Clichtove’s unshakeable respect for hierarchy, as perceived through his relationship to his various patrons,
would produce, because they were based on the antinomian twin principles of liberty and equality. The *AntiLutherus* casts Luther’s theology as destabilizing and anarchic because it tempts Christians away from the pious discipline of the Church, suggesting that they abandon fasting, celebrating feast days, clerical celibacy, monastic vows, going to confession and so on. What Luther calls Christian freedom is nothing but unbridled and lax living, and sheer license (“laxiorem vivendi, sine constitutionum ecclesiasticarum observatione: licentiam...effrenatam vitae conditionem”), which ought rather to be called a Babylonian Captivity (“vero nomine captivitas Babylonica debe apellari”). Those who hate the precepts of the Church do so because they wander according to the ways of the flesh—the implication being that, to those who follow the path of the spirit, these precepts are like freedom. Indeed, Clichtove flatly states that what God likes best is not whom he exempted from his otherwise vigorous criticism. Kraus suggests that Clichtove maintained a respect for order out of financial motivations, being afraid to bite the hand that fed him. Zemon Davis, on the other hand, argues that Clichtove truly believed that a hierarchically ordered society was best. The hierarchy that particularly commanded Clichtove’s respect, according to Zemon Davis, was the one that set clerics above laypeople: “Clichtove had entered this elite male world of university students and professors, monks and prelates as a young teenager, and throughout his life never wavered in his belief in the absolute spiritual and intellectual superiority of the clerical estate over the lay.” And this belief in the absolute separation between laypeople and clergy implied by the hierarchical church became, Zemon Davis further remarks, increasingly remote from reality as the laity changed over the course of the 14th and 15th centuries—this new laity was more powerful, more independent and better educated. Given his perception of the laity as a “passive mass” to be ministered to, Zemon Davis asks whether, even had Clichtove not avoided criticizing his patrons out of fear of losing his income, his critique would “really have sounded very bold” at all. (72-73). Michael J. Kraus, "Patronage and Reform in France of the préreforme: The Case of Clichtove," *Canadian Journal of History* 6, no. 1 (March 1971): 45-68. Natalie Zemon Davis, "New Monarchs and Prudent Priests," *Canadian Journal of History* 6, no. 1 (March 1971): 69-73.

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464 Whether or not Luther’s theology is indeed based on liberty and equality, or in what sense these two words are to be understood is another question. Massaut bases this assertion on Clichtove’s perception of Luther’s theology, as he expresses it in the *AntiLutherus*. Massaut, "Thèmes ecclésiologiques," 333.

465 Josse Clichtove, *AntiLutherus Judoci Clichtouei Neoportuensis* (Köln: Petrus Quentell, 1525), 5r.

466 Ibid, 4r and 4v. The dig is directed against Luther’s aggressively anti-Roman tract *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae* (1520).

freedom, but rather obedience. As one historian puts it, Clichtove’s theology is a “theology of order,” and, consequently, his defence of the Church against Luther amounts to a defence of order as well.

But how to convince Christians that the sacrifices the Church required of them were, counterintuitively, the truest expression of freedom? Here is where Dionysius enters into Clichtove’s argument, in the section where he responds to Erasmus’ objection that the ceremonies Dionysius describes were too elaborate for the first century, and that it took several centuries for such complex rites to build up. Implicit in Erasmus’ objection is the assumption that religious rituals are extraneous or additional, and thus could be added to Christianity at a later date, whereas for Clichtove they are necessary and essential—part of Christ’s original legacy to those he was sent to redeem. Far from seeing the complexity of rite in Dionysius as proof that he was writing later, Clichtove argues that this proves the Church has always been hierarchically organized and ceremonially complex. As he (re-)imagines the history of the Church, it was established by an “abundant infusion” (“exuberanti infusione”) of grace from the Holy

mendacii afflatus Lutherus: quaecunque in ecclesiasticis constitutionibus gravia videntur ac dura, quæque secundum carmen ambulantes abhorrent.” Ibid, 4v.
468 “Plurimum ad iustitiam prodesse iis qui pie et religiosae ea perficiunt, quoniam eo ipso acceptissimam Deo praestant obedientiam.” Clichtove, 46 r–v.
470 Clichtove’s arguments are often circular, chiefly because they refuse to allow the kind of philological reasoning that Erasmus and Valla use, even though Clichtove must have been familiar with that kind of argumentation from his involvement with humanist circles earlier in his life. For instance, he disputes the suggestion that Dionysius could only have been writing in the fourth or fifth century because Jerome and Origen did not cite him by noting that, in fact, plenty of people had cited Dionysius, starting with John of Damascus—who was not born until approximately 645. Whether intentionally or out of ignorance is hard to say, Clichtove writes in these chapters as if he has completely missed the point of Erasmus’ objection.
Spirit, which inspired the Apostles (“bases et columnae ecclesiae”) to institute and organize the Church “in its hierarchy and in its ecclesiastical offices” (“instituta fuit & ordinata in suis gradibus & officijs ecclesia”).\textsuperscript{471} The Christianity that the Apostles preached was, in fact, identical to the Christianity that was practiced in the Roman Church of the sixteenth century because, before dispersing to undertake their proselytizing mission, the Apostles set the ceremonies and sacred rites according to which the sacraments of the Church would be administered and the ministers consecrated.\textsuperscript{472} As Clichtove argues, Dionysius’ writings prove that the Roman Church is timeless, unchanging and divinely instituted. On this account, there is no need for reform, since the Church has not changed in fifteen centuries—in fact, to change anything would be to act against God’s will, according to which the hierarchical church was established.

Less well known than Clichtove’s polemic but equally interesting is the inclusion of an excerpt of Dionysius’ writing in a small compilation entitled the\textit{ Epitome Apostolicorum Constitutionum} from 1546, addressed to Pope Paul III, edited by the Catholic and humanist theologian Johannes Cochlaeus together with the Venetian humanist (and ambassador) Carlo Capello.\textsuperscript{473} Though it comprises a mere 23 folios, the compilation, through its prefaces and the arrangement of the works it contains, positions Dionysius alongside other “Apostolic” writers as evidence of the authority of the Church and of its divine origins, and explicitly polemicizes against the “new sects.”

\textsuperscript{471} Clichtove, 18v-19r.
\textsuperscript{472} “...caeremoniaeque & ritus sacri ab iisdem definiti quibus ecclesiastica administrarentur sacramenta & ministerorum sacrorum fieret consecratio antequam dispergerentur in uniuersum orbem, aut per martyrium de mundo tollerentur.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{473} Johannes Cochlaeus, \textit{Epitome Apostolicarum Constitutionum, In Creta Insula, per Carolum Capellium Venetum repertarum, & e Greco in Latinum translatum} (Ingolstadt: Alexander Weissenhorn, 1546).
The primary piece in the compilation is an excerpt (Epitome) of the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, which stages itself as a collaboration between Clément I of Rome (said to have been ordained by Saint Peter himself) and the Twelve Apostles.\(^\text{474}\)

However, the *Constitutions* were likely not produced until the fourth century,\(^\text{475}\) so while it documents the theological milieu of the *early Church*, it was not, as the title claims, the work of the Apostles themselves. Content-wise, the *Constitutions* are a compendium of the practices, doctrine and liturgy of the Church—giving instructions, for instance, on how baptisms and ordinations are to be conducted, listing prayers suitable for various occasions, prescribing the proper roles for the laity and for the ministers, as well as promulgating correct doctrine on various points (against idol worship, for instance). The work as a whole offers a vision of a Christian community that is, above all, orderly and hierarchical, but the passages that Cochlaeus includes in his *Epitome* are particularly pointed statements on the subject of hierarchy.\(^\text{476}\) These passages first of all affirm a clear separation between priesthood and laity, where only priests’ actions are pleasing to God.

\(^{474}\) The work is attributed to Clément, but also evokes the authorship of the Apostles (‘nous, les Douze’), where Clément is given the part of their secretary (“c’èt lui qui était chargé de recueillir leurs directives, de les compiler et de les diffuser”). Metzger concludes that this complicated authorial fiction serves as an authorizing strategy: “Or il ne s’agit pas d’un pseudonyme, mais on a voulu accréditer l’ouvrage en l’attribuant faussement à ce personnage bien connu, saint Clément, un des premiers successeurs de saint Pierre, à la tête de l’Église de Rome.” Marcel Metzger, *Le constitutions apostoliques*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985), 36.

\(^{475}\) There is much debate about which century the Apostolic Constitutions date from, ranging from the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) century to the 4\(^{\text{th}}\), but relevant here is that they were not, in fact, written by the Apostles, only attributed to them. The history of the *Constitutions* is actually rather complicated, as it seems to be a collection of older texts that were stitched together (with various interpolations, additions and reworking) by a compiler (posing as Clément and the Apostles) to create the *Constitutions*, which then circulates independently of those older texts. Nevertheless, most of the text that is integrated into the *Constitutions* is believed to have been written in Syria in the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) and 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) centuries. So the *Constitutions*, like the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, is a pseudonymous work stemming from a Syrian Christian writer. A good summary of this complicated history, and for the critical edition (with a translation into French) is Marcel Metzger, *Le constitutions apostoliques*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985), 18-23. For the *Constitutions* in English translation see Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

\(^{476}\) Included in the compilation is Section 5 from Book 8, as well as Sections 27-34 from Book 2. In Cochlaeus’ edition, they are found on pages 1-11.
“tout laïc qui accomplit quelque chose sans le prêtre agit en vain”\textsuperscript{477}, and threatening dire consequences for any layperson who transgresses that separation: “tout comme le roi Ozias, qui sans être prêtre avait accompli ce qui revient aux prêtres, fut atteint de la lèpre à cause de sa transgression, de même ne restera-t-il pas impuni le laïc qui aurait méprisé Dieu, outragé ses prêtres et se sera attribué cette dignité.”\textsuperscript{478} In addition to the priest/layperson separation, the passages also affirm a hierarchy within the class of ordained ministers, subordinating deacons to bishops (“qu’il [le diacre] ne fasse absolument rien sans l’évêque”\textsuperscript{479}). Like the Unam Sanctam bull many centuries years later, the Constitutions position the bishops as irreprouachable and supremely powerful. Deacons, for instance, should not even do good deeds for those in need without their bishop’s consent, because this might be construed as reproaching the bishop with callousness or cold-heartedness for not having performed the good deed himself. Moreover, in doing so, the deacon would be sinning not only against his superior, but against the Lord Himself (“Quiconque dénigre l’évêque en paroles ou en actes offense Dieu”\textsuperscript{480}), and since God is necessarily beyond reproach, then the deacon ought never to criticize his superiors for fear of offending God. The Constitutions ascribe so much dignity to the bishop that he ranks above even kings and princes (the latter only cares for their bodies, the former for their more valuable souls), and should receive greater material tribute than the latter.\textsuperscript{481}

\textsuperscript{477} Constitutions, Metzger, Book 2.27: 3.
\textsuperscript{478} Constitutions, Book 2.27: 4, 241-243. The story of Uzziah/Osiah is found at 2 Chronicles 26: 16-21.
\textsuperscript{479} Constitutions, Book 2.31: 1, 251.
\textsuperscript{480} Ibid: 3, 251.
\textsuperscript{481} For instance: “Que l’évêque reçoive plus que le roi de jadis : celui-ci ne conduisait que les affaires militaires, proclamant la guerre et la paix pour la sauvegarde des corps; tandis que l’évêque est chargé du sacerdoce de Dieu et repousse les dangers du corps et de l’âme. Donc autant l’âme l’emporte-t-elle sur le corps, autant le sacerdoce l’emporte-t-il sur la royauté, car il lie ou délie ceux qui méritent châtiment ou pardon.” Book 2.34: 4.
It is hardly surprising that Cochlaeus thought that any Pope might be pleased to hear of such an authoritative source that exalted the bishops above all others—laypeople, priests and kings alike. But the dedicatee, Pope Paul III, might have been particularly pleased by Cochlaeus’ philological offering, presiding as he did over the embattled Roman Church from 1534 to 1549, as the break with the Evangelical movement became permanent. In convening the Council of Trent to reform the Church on his own terms, Paul III was a clergyman struggling to take charge of a church full of both unruly priests and unruly laity, and seeking to affirm the universal Church’s “natural” unity against those who called this unity and universality into question.482 In his preface, Cochlaeus alludes to the fractured religious community (“nostrae religionis confusionem”), and attributes the troubles to an insufficient reverence for hierarchy (“id euenisse ob neglectam obseruantiam cuius que fere muneres, ordinis, gradus, dignitatis, amplitudinis, & praesertim diuinae Ecclesiasticae maiestate”). Order and hierarchy are to be respected everywhere, including in the Church, because they are part of the order of things (“rerum ordinem & conuenientiam”) as God created it (“mundi opifex & effector”).485 The Constitutions, with their praise of good order, are a salutary antidote to

482 Paul III was Pope from 1534 to 1549. “Many consider Paul III the first pope committed to efficacious reform of the Catholic church in the sixteenth century.” “He commissioned from [his cardinals] the reform document Consilium de emendanda ecclesia (1537)...revived the Roman Inquisition in 1542, and after long, frustrating delays and despite fear of conciliarist tendencies among prelates, he convened the Council of Trent (1545-1563)”. Paul III also struggled to “formulat[e] policies that would simultaneously satisfy the archrivals Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor, 1519-1556) and Francis I (king of France, 1515-1547) while maintainin his own neutrality.” In light of this situation, he might have appreciated being granted the upper hand over quarrelling kings and princes as well as over his cardinals and bishops. William V. Hudon, “Paul III,” The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation, ed. Ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, 1996, http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t172.e1067 (accessed June 20, 2012).
483 Cochlaeus, 3r.
484 Ibid.
485 Ibid.
this spirit of unwelcome insubordination and a suitable offering to the head of the Roman Church (“Donum Papa dignum”

Whereas Cochlaeus believed the Constitutions to be a genuine work (or at least gave no indication in his prefatory dedication to Pope Paul that there were any doubts to be had), Cochlaeus acknowledges that his schismatic opponents claim the document is a forgery (“confictam”), but attempts a form of damage control in putting together the compilation. Cochlaeus declares that the doubters are wrong, but he hopes to strengthen his case for the authenticity of the Constitutions by showing its continuity with other Apostolic writings (“adiungere ei quaedam ex antiquīßimis Apostolorum discipulis testimonia, his Apostolorum constitutionibus conformia”) by appending excerpts from Dionysius and two other Apostolic authors, Polycarp and Ignatius. The grouping of those three figures is not an unusual one, since many printed editions of Dionysius included the letters of Polycarp and Ignatius. Unfortunately, in an irony that Valla, Erasmus and Luther might all have relished, Cochlaeus’ text in fact offers up three inauthentic documents to the Pope himself under the cover of a text that claimed to adduce venerable apostolic writings meant to strengthen the Pope’s natural and necessary authority: both the Constitutions and the Dionysian writings were produced by later authors posing as Apostolic ones, and the letter of Ignatius that Cochlaeus picked happens to be inauthentic as well.

Nevertheless, Cochlaeus considers his compilation to be timely—appearing as

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486 Cochlaeus, 4v.
487 Ignatius did write letters, but not all of them are genuine, on the basis that they were not cited by others until 6th century. It is not known who wrote the spurious letters, or when. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985). When the first Greek edition was published in 1557, doubts were raised about the authenticity of the letters, but it was only the publication of the 1623 edition of the letters that definitely declared some of the letters to be spurious (105). For the letter excerpted by Cochlaeus, “there is an enumeration of various Church officers, who were
it does during the Council of Trent (“in qua praecipue & de salutari ac necessaria
Reformation & de uariorum haeresum extirpacione tractandum est”) and believes that the
work could show the right path (“omnia bona uiam ostendere”).

The Dionysius passages that Cochlaeus chooses are, indeed, in tune with the
Constitutions. In one passage taken from the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, Dionysius praises
order and hierarchy itself, which “entirely reject[s] and exclude[s] the disordered, the
unregulated, and the confused; and, at the same time, choose[s] and manifest[s] the
regulated and ordered, and well-established.” In Cochlaeus’ compilation, this particular
sentence is highlighted by a marginal note (“sacerdotium omne inordinatum et confusum
arcet a se”). Cochlaeus also includes most of the letter to the monk Demophilus
discussed earlier in this chapter, in which Dionysius reprimands the monk for insulting
his superior and acting above his station. And as in the Constitutions, Dionysius
threatens the disobedient with dire consequences, referring again to the priest Uzziah
(called Ozias here), who was stricken with leprosy for daring to offer a sacrifice without
using a priest as intermediary.

To prove that schismatics such as the Lutherans are punished not only with
leprosy but even with death, Cochlaeus appends to the compilation two contemporary
examples on the subject of how Protestantism leads straight to disorder and chaos. The
final text in the compilation is from his own biography of Martin Luther detailing

certainly unknown at the period when Ignatius lived” (106). The letter itself is on pages 110-112.
Polycarp’s letter is believed to be genuine. Ibid, 31.
488 Cochlaeus, 2r.
490 The passage is in Letter 8, and the reference to Uzziah is found at 1089B-1089C of that letter.
491 Cochlaeus, 13v.
492 Recorded contemporaneously over the first twenty-five years of the Reformation by Luther’s lifelong
antagonist Johannes Cochlaeus, the Comentaria de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lutheri was published in Latin
Luther’s conflict with Andreas Karlstadt, and the destruction and misery of the Peasant’s War led by Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525). Luther’s teaching, according to Cochlaeus, must be false because it results only in discord, disagreement, and violence. Karlstadt and Müntzer both met bad ends because they attempted to “turn Luther’s words into deeds”—although Cochlaeus notes with satisfaction that Müntzer recanted before his execution.493 For Cochlaeus, the Apostles lived in harmony and unity, whereas Luther and his followers war amongst each other and against their neighbours. The wretched deeds (“infoelicia gesta”) of the deformed priests Karlstadt and Müntzer (“sacerdotum difformia”) stand in stark contrast to the lives of the Apostles—the reader can see only too clearly (“certius clariusque intelligat”) which is to be preferred.494 This passage paints a picture of Protestants as a violent, ungodly and warmongering group, and contrasts them with the supposed harmonious community presided over by the Roman pope in the other passages assembled in Cochlaeus’ compilation, the peaceful Apostles (as in the Constitutions) or the well-disciplined and God-fearing hierarchy from Dionysius’ Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.

The two figures discussed in this section, Clichtove and Cochlaeus, share a common horror of disorder, and considered a powerful ecclesiastical institution to be an effective bulwark against it. Furthermore, both authors turn to Dionysius when they argue

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493 One of Müntzer’s associates (the curiously named Fistulator) was captured and executed “without confession or contrition, as though he were a beast” because he refused to recant. “However, Müntzer ended his life in a far better fashion than did Fistulator...But Müntzer is said to have been led into great penitence, and with the highest devotion both to have recanted his errors and to have accepted the venerable sacrament under one form, after having made his confession according to the Catholic rite, before he fell by the blow of the sword.” Vandiver, 161.

494 Cochlaeus, 2v.
for a hierarchical church, seizing upon his praise for hierarchy and obedience in their
defence of the Roman Church. But whereas Clichtove and Cochlaeus wished to restrict
truth and salvation to within the bounds of the Roman Church, the writers discussed in
the next section read Dionysius part of a broader program to expand wisdom and truth
beyond the Christian era, expressing a belief in a single source of illumination that had
been expressed in pagan writings as well as Christian ones.

**Dionysius Readers II: Alchemists, Hermeticists, and the Search for Ancient Wisdom**

Clichtove and Cochlaeus both valued Dionysius because they supposed him to be ancient, a student of the Apostle Paul and therefore almost as old as the Church itself.

Another set of Dionysius readers—humanists in France, Germany, and Italy—valued Dionysius’ ancientness as well, but inserted him into a much grander narrative, one that enfolded the story of the early Christian church into a tradition of secret wisdom that stretched back through the classical Greek philosophers (from Plato all the way back to Pythagoras) through the history of Old Testament Israel (it was Moses who taught the Greeks their wisdom) back even as far as ancient Egypt, where it was believed the god Hermes (or Thoth, to the Egyptians) revealed arcane and mystical knowledge to his inspired disciples. Alas, these so-called Hermetic writings (the *Corpus Hermeticum*) are in fact yet another pseudonymous composition to add to the growing list of forgeries and fakes this chapter has discussed: far from dating to Egyptian times, they were compiled
after the birth of Christ in Greek (probably sometime between the first and third centuries), mostly likely by Greek-speaking writers like Dionysius.\textsuperscript{495}

An intense interest in the occult has long been considered integral to Renaissance humanism, as well as a marked tendency to syncretize. Given the difficulties involved in justifying the desire to read the ancient heathen philosophers—Plato in particular—one solution (proposed by, for instance, Marsilio Ficino) was simply to declare that Plato was in fact a witness to Christ, but that he did so in secret, under the cover of paganism.\textsuperscript{496}

The various pagan integuments (Jewish, Greek, Roman and even Egyptian\textsuperscript{497}) served to conceal one single truth, which, conveniently, was the Gospel of the coming of Christ into the world.\textsuperscript{498} Marsilius Ficino, a passionate reader of both Dionysius and the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}, wrote in a letter (entitled “Divine Providence has decreed the restoration of

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{495} The transmission history of the Hermetic writings is extremely complex, and is still disputed. Modern scholarship has suggested that there was, in fact, an Egyptian context for the \textit{Corpus}, but one that dates back to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} centuries BCE rather than back to the Old Kingdom (3000 BCE). At this time, Egypt was occupied by Greeks and Romans successively, and so it might be more accurate to say that the Hermetic writings have a Greco-Egyptian heritage. Whatever the case, though, the important point is that the authorship of the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum} was not what Ficino and other 15\textsuperscript{th} century writers believed it to be. For an overview of the transmission history debate see for instance Brian P. Copenhaver, \textit{Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius} (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xlv-lix; Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang, “Hermetica”, Vol. 18, in \textit{Theologische Realenzyklopädie} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 749-752.
\textsuperscript{496} Ficino wrote that “…the ancient tradition of the theologians was to shroud the divine mysteries in the numbers and forms of mathematics as well as in the images of poetry” (22). This is from a letter entitled “Concordia Mosis et Platonis”, where according to Ficino, all of the Academic philosophers, from Zeno to Plato (Dionysius included) preach essentially the same message—a message that is entirely consonant with Christianity. The following letter, entitled “Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica” makes essentially the same point, that “Socrates was, so to speak, a forerunner of Christ, the author of salvation” (12). Marsilio Ficino, \textit{The Letters of Marsilio Ficino}, trans. Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, Vol. 7 (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2003). Hannaway describes Ficino’s project as an attempt to “construct a genealogy of...Gentile gnosis.” Owen Hannaway, \textit{The Chemists and the Word: The Didactic Origins of Chemistry} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 13.
\textsuperscript{497} Although, of course, the Egyptian writings were actually neo-Platonically influenced Greek writings, and so, with the exception of the Jewish writings (both the Old Testament and the kabbalistic writings), the real interest is in Platonism and neo-Platonism as it influenced Greek and Roman writers.
\textsuperscript{498} See for instance: Michael J. B. Allen and James Hankins, \textit{Introduction}, Vol. 1, in \textit{Platonic Theology}, trans. Michael J. B. Allen and James Hankins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), viii-ix. The \textit{Platonic Theology} was Ficino’s “mature attempt to sketch out a unitary theological tradition, and particularly a theological metaphysics. This he fervently believed stretched back to Orpheus and beyond, to Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster, even as it had culminated in the Christian revelation most luminously articulated for him by the Areopagite, Augustin, and Aquinas.”}
the ancient teaching”) that “because divine Providence wills to recall all people to herself in a wonderful way according to their individual natures, it happened that a certain holy philosophy was born in times past both among the Persians under Zoroaster and among the Egyptians under Hermes, her sound true to herself in both peoples.” From Persia and Egypt, this “holy philosophy” was “subsequently nurtured among the Thracians, under Orpheus and Aglaophemus, and soon grew to maturity, under Pythagoras, among the peoples of Greece and Italy.” From this maturity, however, “it was by the divine Plato in Athens that she was finally brought to perfection.” Where Luther, for instance, objected that there was too much Plato and not enough Christ in Dionysius, no such distinction would be possible for Ficino, there being an essential continuity between Platonism and Christianity. And so, according to Ficino, because Hermes taught Plato (whose disciple Dionysius was), it is hardly surprising that Ficino detected similarities between the Dionysian and Hermetic writings. In Ficino’s commentary on the Divine Names, for instance, he observes that “these mysterious sayings of Dionysius are

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499 Ficino, 22. See also his comments on the subject from the preface to his translation of the Pimander: “At the time when Moses was born flourished Atlas the astrologer...whose grandson was Mercurius Trismegistus...he was the first to discuss with great wisdom the majesty of God, the order of demons and the transformations of souls. Thus he was called the first author of theology, and Orpheus followed him...In this way, from a wondrous line of six theologians emerged a single system of ancient theology, harmonious in every part, which traced its origins to Mercurius and reached absolute perfection with the divine Plato...He [Mercurius] foresaw the ruin of the old religion, the rise of the new faith, the coming of Christ, the judgement to come, the resurrection of the race, the glory of the blessed and the torments of the damned.” Ficino later revised this chronology to accomodate the dual originators Hermes and Zoroaster (as quoted in the main text, above). Quoted in Copenhaver, Hermetica, xlviii.

500 Ficino, 22.

501 Ibid.

502 See for instance his “On the life of Plato”, Ficino, 45.

confirmed by Hermes Termaximus [i.e. Trismegistus] who says that God is nothing, and yet that God is all."504

Ficino’s interest in Dionysius and Hermes is mirrored in the work of Jacques Lefèvre d’Étapes, who produced one of the first printed Dionysius edition in 1498, as well as an edition of Ficino’s translation of part of the Corpus Hermeticum in 1594, followed by the entire translation into Latin in 1505.505 Lefevre d’Étapes travelled to Italy several times and met many of the Italian humanists, including Pico della Mirandola. Although Lefèvre d’Étapes ultimately disavowed his earlier enthusiasm for (and defence of) white magic, others in his circle took away from Étapes an interest in the Hermetic writings, as well as other less theologically suspect esoteric disciplines like numerology.506

But while Lefèvre d’Étapes was interested enough in Ficino’s ideas to publish one of his works, he nevertheless only walked a few tentative steps down Ficino’s syncretistic path, as we can see from the introduction to his edition of the Corpus

504 Cited in Yates, 125. The Dionysius passage is from the first chapter of the Divine Names.
505 The 1494 volume contained only the so-called Pimander, as translated and edited by Ficino. The 1505 version contained the entire body of works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the Pimander and the so-called Asclepius. Both works had been printed separately before, but Étapes was the first to bring them together in a single volume (in the 1505 edition). In this volume he also included a hermetic dialogue called the Crater Hermetis by the poet laureate Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500), a work composed in the spirit of the Corpus Hermeticum that Étapes must have considered similar enough in spirit to be published alongside the more ancient Hermetic works (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn call it “one of the purest and most explicit examples of hermetic-Christian syncretism”, 57). Lazzarelli also translated the last part of the Corpus Hermeticum that was missing from the manuscript Ficino used for his own translation; this second part of the Corpus was published by Symphorien Champier (1470-1540) in 1507. On Lazzarelli, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Ruud M. Bouthoorn, Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents, 2005. On Symphorien Champier, see Brian P. Copenhaver, Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition in Renaissance France (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978).
506 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 22-24. He did, however, retain his interest in mystical numbers, at least enough to communicate this interest to several students; both Charles de Bovelles (De perfectis numeris ad Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem philosophum claisium, 1510) and Clichtove (De mystica numero significatione, 1513) published books on numerology. Brian P. Copenhaver, "Étapes d'Étapes, Symphorien Champier, and the Secret Names of God," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 40 (1977): 189-211.
Dionysiacum. For Lefèvre d’Étaples, Dionysius illuminated hidden knowledge, knowledge that was not exactly extra-biblical (that would be a heretical idea), but that did, at any rate, reveal to the theologian secrets not given to ordinary Christians. In the preface to this work, Lefèvre d’Étaples begins by praising Dionysius for his proximity to the source of sacred knowledge ("unumquodque quanto magis suae propinquat origini, tanto quoque puriorem suam retinet naturam atque servat"). The sacred Scriptures (the New and Old Testaments) flowed out from God himself and so are most authoritative and venerable ("ut quae a Deo proxime manaverint in dispositos animos transfusa"); the writings of the Apostles and the Old Testament prophets rank next in dignity and authority. At only one further remove, however, are the hagiographa and sacred writings produced by those who heard the Apostles speak directly ("quae apostolorum auditores"), and it is with these hagiographa sancta scripta that Dionysius’ writings rank, according to Lefèvre d’Étaples. These most sacred works ("sacratissima opera") are left as a legacy for the future community of the faithful ("ad fidelis ecclesiae instituendam futuram sobolem reliquere"). In short, Dionysius is a light that is brilliant because it is close to the sun: “lumen quanto soli vicinius est, tanto splendet illustrius vimque mortalium superat oculorum.” However much Dionysius is a brilliant light, and however foundational his works might be for the Church, Lefèvre d’Étaples still points out that Scripture is like an ark in which treasures of wisdom are locked up, shrouded in an impenetrable darkness. Dionysius unlocks this ark by the light of the mystical wisdom he offers: “et eloquia persimilia sunt arcae in qua sapientiae thesauri latentius oculi spinis.

508 Ibid, 61.
509 Ibid.
occultique manent, nunquam oculis pervi, nisi sit qui reseret sacrumque inferat lumen." One modern historian, in citing this passage, translates arcae simply as “chest,” but while this is of course the literal translation of the Latin word, it would perhaps be better rendered as “ark” in order to call to mind the Ark of the Covenant, a particularly important allusion, given the importance of Moses to those interested in esoteric or Hermetic traditions. Ficino, as discussed above, saw an essential continuity between Moses and Plato, and ultimately traced Plato’s roots back to Hermes. Moses, moreover, figures prominently in Dionysius’ work as well, where his journey up Mount Moriah is offered as the model for mystical ascent. In other words, Lefèvre d’Étaples begins the preface with a sentiment that Clichtove or Cochlaeus would have found unobjectionable (i.e. Dionysius is an authoritative source because he was taught by an Apostle), but his language in the passage just cited suggests that the supramundanus theologus (as Lefèvre d’Étaples calls Dionysius) offers access to esoteric or hidden wisdom. In fact, Lefèvre is clear that Dionysius is not a Platonist (or an Aristotelian, Stoic or Epicurean, or adherent of any pagan philosophy) but rather a “divine-sounding trumpet of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit” (“Iesu Christi et sancti spiritus...diviniloquam tubam”), but then goes on to assert that Dionysius “knew what Plato and Aristotle knew.” Lefèvre manages to have his cake and eat it by means of a counterfactual scenario: if history allowed it, Plato and

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510 Rice, 62
511 Hughes, 7.
512 MT, 1000C-1001A.
513 Rice, 62.
514 Ibid, 63.
515 Ibid.
Aristotle would have been glad to have been his disciples ("immo vero uterque (si tempora dedissent) se etiam beatum putasset eius nominari discipulum").\footnote{Rice, 63.}

While Lefèvre d’Étaples was not so bold as to fully merge Christian and pre-Christian wisdom as Ficino had done, another of Dionysius’ readers, Oswaldus Crollius (1560-1608), had no such anxiety about his syncretistic views, stitching Christianity, Hermeticism, neo-Platonism, Paracelsianism, Kabbalah, alchemy and chemistry into an eclectic and expansive philosophical quilt.\footnote{The most accessible work on Crollius is Owen Hannaway, \textit{The Chemists and the Word: The Didactic Origins of Chemistry} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975). See also Oswaldus Crollius, \textit{De signaturis internis rerum: Die lateinische Editio princeps (1609) und die deutsche Erstübersetzung (1623)}, ed. Wilhelm Kühlmann and Joachim Telle (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996); Oswaldus Crollius, \textit{Alchemomedizinische Briefe 1585-1597}, ed. Wilhelm Kühlmann and Joachim Telle (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998).} Most importantly for this study, however, is the fact that Crollius was also a reader of Weigel, whom he cites alongside Dionysius in the preface to his major work, the \textit{Basilica Chymica} (1609).\footnote{Croll’s knowledge of Weigel provides an interesting glimpse into the circulation of Weigel’s manuscripts before they were printed. The first text of Weigel’s was only printed in 1609, the same year that Croll’s \textit{Basilica Chymica} went to press, meaning that Croll could only have known about Weigel via manuscripts. Hannaway, 10-11.}

By contrast to Weigel who, as far as is known, never travelled more than a hundred miles from his birthplace, Crollius travelled widely through Europe, first as a student in Marburg, Heidelberg, Strasbourg and Geneva, then as a private tutor, finally setting off on his own through Moravia and Bohemia before settling in Prague for the rest of his life.\footnote{By the end of the 16th century, the Emperor Rudolf II had gathered at his court a “distinguished circle of ‘occult’ physicians and philosophers” (2), of which Croll was on the fringes. He did not, in fact, work for the (Catholic) Emperor but served as the personal physician to the (Calvinist) Prince Christian I of Anhalt-Bernburg (the dedicatee of the \textit{Basilica}) who used him for “delicate diplomatic negotiations in and around the imperial city in furtherance of his project for an Evangelical Union of Protestant Princes” (2). Hannaway, 2; Crollius, 7.} Born in Lutheran Hessen, he embraced Calvinism in the course of his travels, but, like Weigel, was an eclectic thinker whose wide-ranging reading interests...
were mobilized to support a non-confessional, irenic project. More interested in integrating his sources rather than distinguishing them, the common thread in all his influences is a belief in the “essentially inner spiritual nature of Christian experience” that finds no expression in one church only, but rather draws on a single pool of wisdom. In his quest to trace all wisdom back to a single source, Crollius is prepared not only to link Christian theology and pagan philosophy as Ficino did, but is even willing to view Christianity as a kind of magic, whose spells are conducted with the magic Word (Christ) rather than a magic word. As Crollius writes, “es ligt und besteht alles in der Erkanntnuß, als der gantzen Welt Schatz, sintenal ohne dieselbige niemand zum ewigen Leben kommen kan.” Most of what heathens wrote is false, but some pagans, including Hermes, lived with pure hearts before Christ’s time and were enlightened by the Holy Spirit in the “secret shrine of their hearts” and deserve to be called “lovers of God” more even than people who call themselves Christians. These Christians-before-Christ are possible because there is only one true wisdom that

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520 Crollius, 3.
521 “Crolls ‘wahre’ Philosophie greift zurück auf die Zeit, bevor das Wort ‘Fleisch’ geworden ist, und versteht sich dennoch nicht als heidnisch, sondern also christlich.” Crollius, 4.
522 Hannaway writes that “by focusing the Cabalistic magic on the name of Christ himself, Croll could claim that this magic was nothing other than the fulfilment of St. Paul’s injunction: ‘And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him’...Croll envisages both magics, natural and Cabalistic, as devolving from one source, the Word” (21). Interestingly, Dillon has found similar views on the subject of magic expressed in Origen: “the name of Jesus has power independent of the virtue of the person using it” and it therefore “has...a truly magical power” because “the efficacy of a magical incantation is now dependent on the moral state of the person using it, but solely on the correct performance of the associated ritual” (206). John Dillon, The Magical Power of Names in Origen and Later Platonism (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateno, 1985), reprinted in John Dillon, The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990).
523 Oswaldus Crollius, Basilica Chymica oder Alchymistische Königlich Klynod (Frankfurt: Gottfried Tampach, 1623), 27.
enlightens all great thinkers in every era rather than a single point at which wisdom was finally revealed in Christ and the Church he founded.

Knowledge in all its forms is what Crollius is after, and for him knowledge of Self, of God and of Nature are all identical, or at least have the same source. Like Weigel, Crollius believes that “alle natürliche un[d] ubernatürliche Güter zuvor in uns: Gleich wie aber derselbige Göttliche Character durch die Sünde in uns verfinstert wirdet, also scheinet und leuchtet er hernach, nach dem die Sünde außgetilget..die Erkanntnuß aller Dinge ist mit uns zugleich erschaffen, und ligt alles gleichsamb in dem Marck unsers Geistes verborgen, und wirdt demnach nichts mehr erfordert, als daß wir uns von dem Schlaff auffmuntern, darinn wir durch die Sünde gerathen, die uns von GOTT verliehene Gaben nicht achten, und also weder sehen, empfinden oder glauben, daß solche Gaben unnd Güter albereit in uns zugegen.”

Far from created things obscuring knowledge of God, the diligent study of Nature will reveal God—a thought that Crollius attributes to Dionysius: “Dionysius aber sagt, wir können Gott nicht auß seiner Natur sondern auß aller Creaturen ordentlichen Disposition, in deren er sie erschaffen, und welche die Bildnussen unnd Gleichheiten seiner Göttlichen Exemplar vorstellen, am allerbesten erkennen.” From Dionysius’ understanding of the double-edged value of God’s names Crollius takes away the idea that Dionysius teaches how to read the book of nature via an analysis of the book of grace.

Both teach, as Crollius writes, that “unser Gemüth zu Gott, unnd unsere Augen zu der Warheit würden erhoben, wie gleichfalls auch zu der

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525 Crollius, Basilica, 26.
526 Ibid.
527 “To the Paracelsian enthusiast, with his innate distrust for the written texts of men, the Book of Nature was not a book like an other: it was the book, the companion to the only other book which mattered, the Book of Scriptures. In addition, neither of these two books was an open text of words to be read and cursorylly analyzed; they were books of signs whose hidden meanings were to be interpreted...its text was not a discourse of words...but a codex of secret signs whose interpretation must be guided by the light from within and without.” Hannaway, 61.
Widergeburt unnd Begierde der künfftigen und ewigen Seeligkeit,” noting that “wer das Liecht der Natur recht hat erkennet, dem wird auch Gott der Gnaden bekannt,” suggesting the reader consult Dionysius on this point. Dionysius is not the only philosopher and theologian to have united Nature and Grace—Weigel, too, belongs to the group of “viel fromme unnd gelährte Männer, als Paulus Braun von Nürnberg. Valentinus Weygelius und Petrus Winzius...welche eben in solchem richtigen Wege einher ganger, nicht allein in der Sensualischen Schul der Anfänger, noch auch in der rationali, deren so zugenommen, sondern in der dritten Mentalischen unnd Intellectualischen der vollkommen Pfingst Schüler unterwiesen, in welcher Schul auch die Propheten, Apostel und alle gelährte Männer, so in ihrem Leben den Fußstapffen Christi nachgefolgt, ohne Mühe und Verdruss haben studiert.” Dionysius then takes his place in Crollius’ new alchemical pantheon, presided over by Hermes Trismegistus and populated by Weigel.

Ficino and Crollius, as discussed in this section, were eclectic readers who sought to gather together the wide range of texts they found particularly meaningful, integrating them into a single grand tradition of wisdom. Crollius even gallantly extended the possibility of salvation to pre-Christian philosophers, who might have been specially illuminated in secret by the Holy Spirit. This is in contrast to the anti-Lutheran polemicists discussed in the previous section, who were instead motivated to draw boundaries around truth and therefore salvation, fencing it in safely as the unique preserve of the Roman church. The figures discussed in the next section—those who printed the CD in the early modern period—have more in common with the former than the latter: while some did find themselves ensnared in confessional conflicts, their work

528 Crollius, Basilia, 71, n. d.
529 Ibid, 71-72.
offered Dionysius to the *Gelehrtenrepublik*, publishing his work for classicists and humanists as part of yet another an eclectic publishing program.

**Dionysius Printers: Dionysius in the *Gelehrtenrepublik***

While the use that Clichtove and Cochlaeus make of Dionysius in their anti-Lutheran polemic might suggest that Dionysius was claimed for the Catholic side, as should be clear by now, other Dionysius readers came from a Protestant milieu: Weigel, for one, was a Lutheran minister, Lefèvre d’Étaples found himself at odds with the Theology faculty in Paris on charges of Lutheranism, and Crollius was a Lutheran who turned Calvinist (outwardly at least). Moreover, the ultimate evidence contradicting the notion that Dionysius was not read at all beyond the Middle Ages is that there were in fact 127 complete or partial printed editions between 1480 and 1700, and the history of these printers and publishers of Dionysius in the sixteenth century suggest a similarly broad cross-confessional readership. What follows is a survey of the lives, works and contexts of some of Dionysius’ printers, some of whom were Catholic, others Protestant, some religious activists and others seemingly indifferent to the religious conflicts of their time. This survey will necessarily be brief, given the large number of editions of Dionysius (more than a hundred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries alone).

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530 Dionysius, *Dionysiaca*, XXII ff.
531 Much more work could be done in this area, building on the incredible philological undertaking of Philippe Chevallier, the *Dionysiaca*. The primary task of the *Dionysiaca* is a critical edition of eight Latin translations, plus two Greek editions, rather than a detailed discussion of the manuscript and printed versions that are the basis for his edition. However, he does provide a helpful list of every printed Dionysius edition up to the 20th century, which could serve as the basis for future historical work. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Dionysiaca: recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'Areopage*, and Ed. Philippe Chevallier, 2 vols. (Paris, Bruges: Desclée, de Brouwer & Cie, 1937).
Although we cannot say exactly which edition of Dionysius that Weigel used, I have narrowed down the many early modern Dionysius editions to a much smaller set, and focus only the subset of editions that Weigel might have read. The first criterion by which some Dionysius editions can be eliminated is the translation that Weigel used. By 1550, there existed four complete Latin translations of Dionysius—by Hilduin and Eriugena (both ninth century), John Saracennus (twelfth century) and the most recent translation by Ambrogio Traversari Calmadulensis (early fifteenth century)—as well as a partial translation by Marsilio Ficino (late fifteenth century) of the Mystical Theology and the Divine Names, and finally the so-called Extractio Vercellensis (paraphrase) by Thomas Gallus (thirteenth century).\footnote{Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 159-161.} Weigel, it seems, was using Traversari’s translation: even allowing for changes Weigel would have made in paraphrasing, Traversarius translation is a very close fit with what Weigel has copied. In addition to the overall syntax and structure, there are a few individual words that are found only in Traversarius’ version, making it clear that his was the translation Weigel was using. I am assuming that Weigel worked with a printed copy of Dionysius’ works rather than with a manuscript.\footnote{This assumption could perhaps be challenged with much more archival work on the Dionysius manuscripts circulating in Germany in the 16th century. However, for the purposes of this study, there is no reason not to think that Weigel was using a printed book. There is, to my knowledge, no work on the post-medieval Dionysius manuscripts, and this understudied area could, I suspect, produce interesting findings in future work. On the manuscript transmission of Dionysius’ work, see for the Byzantine (pre-medieval and non-Western) tradition see Dionysius Areopagite, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Beat Regina Suchla, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990). For the early medieval era see David Luscombe, *Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite in the Middle Ages from Hilduin to Lorenzo Valla*, Vol. 1, in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.-19. September 1986* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1988). For the Middle Ages see H. F. Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’Université de Paris au Xlle siècle* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1953). However, this study is limited to Paris and to the 13th century. See also *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grossetests on De Mystica Theologia* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).} Moreover, Dionysius first appears in Weigel’s work in 1570, which leaves
nine distinct editions of Dionysius (complete, Traversarius translation, published before 1570) that Weigel could have used. Of these, six (more than half) were from France (all from Paris), two from Italy (both from Venice) and one from Spain (Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid).

France

Given the central importance of Saint Denis to the history of the French monarchy, it is perhaps no surprise that the bulk of the Dionysius editions under consideration here are from Paris. We have already encountered in some detail the editors of two of the Parisian Dionysius editions, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (the 1498 edition) and Josse Clichtove (the 1515 edition). It is worth noting, however, that Weigel likely had had access to both editions, since books published by both editors were available as far away as Saxony. Luther himself read and thoroughly annotated Lefèvre d’Étaples’ translation of the Psalms (the Quincuplex Psalterum of 1509), and a catalogue of the Wittenberg university library from 1536 lists several works by Clichtove and numerous works by Lefèvre d’Étaples, most pertinently his 1498 edition of Dionysius. Indeed, as we will see in the following pages, the Lefèvre d’Étaples edition is reprinted throughout Europe by other printers, meaning that it seems to be the definitive edition of Dionysius’ work in the early modern period, and therefore most likely the one that Weigel consulted.

535 Hughes, 60-61. See also n. 15 on p. 61 of this chapter.
Of the remaining four Parisian editions, little is known about the 1554 edition (published by Jerôme and Denise de Marnef) and the 1569 edition (published by Michel Julien). The Marnef family were established printers in Paris in the sixteenth century, specializing in theological works and liturgical books; the Jerome and Denise who published the Dionysius edition were brother and sister, but little more is known that might give an indication of their beliefs and attitudes.

The final Parisian candidate for the Dionysius edition Weigel might have used is the one published in 1555 by André Wechel. The Wechel family presses were founded in 1526 by Chrétien Wechel (1495-1554), born Christian van Wechele in Herentals (now in Belgium) as the illegitimate son of a priest. After his father’s death, he moved to Paris and chose printing as his profession, becoming a French citizen in 1528. In 1526 he took over the business of a Swabian book dealer, to which he later added a printing press, from which in turn he produced and distributed successful and highly regarded editions of scholarly works until his death in 1554. Under his successful Pegasus imprint, he published works by Catholics and Lutherans alike, on subjects ranging from history to

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537 Chevalier in the Dionysiaca lists one more Dionysius edition that meets my criteria: Beati DIONYSII opera, Ambrosio monacho interprete....Joannis Damasceni theologiae libri quatuor published in Paris by Henri Estienne in 1519. However, I was not able to visit a library that held this edition. Moreover, the library catalogues in which an edition of John Damascene published by Estienne in 1519 is listed make no mention of Dionysius’ works in the same volume. Until I can establish which book Chevalier is referring to, it seems most likely that Estienne re-issued the Étapes edition of Dionysius appended to the Damascene books. Dionysius, Dionysiaca, XXVII.

538 La Bibliothèque nationale, Imprimeurs & Libraires Parisiens du XVIe siècle: Fascicule Cavellat, Marnef & Cavellat, Vol. 3 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1986). This book, sadly, covers only the period where Jérôme de Marnef collaborated with Guillaume Cavellat between 1563 and 1576, so after the date the Dionysius edition was published. However, the volume does note that “avant 1563, la spécialité de Jérôme de Marnef [était] les livres religieux et les petits livres de classe” (168).

editions of Greek and Latin classical texts to books on military strategy and by a wide array of European authors.\textsuperscript{540}

The remarkable feature of Wechel’s success was that he openly held Protestant beliefs in France, and did not repudiate them even as confessional tensions grew. While, surprisingly, Chrétien Wechel seems not to have suffered at all for his choice of confession, his son André was not so lucky: he was forced to flee to Germany twice, briefly in 1569 and then permanently after the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572.\textsuperscript{541} The Wechel family had many connections in Germany, which proved invaluable in helping rebuild the business in Frankfurt. These connections with Germany were extensive: Chrétien started his business by buying out a Swabian book seller named Conrad Resch, André cultivated contacts at the Frankfurt book fairs and often hosted German travellers, to the extent that he even became known as a host “der die Teutschen lieb hatte.”\textsuperscript{542} In addition to his connections with these scholars and students, André’s more influential contacts included Hubert Languet, a French convert to Lutheranism who settled in Germany at the court of Augustus, Elector of Saxony, often serving as his representative to the French court. Languet’s huge and varied network of contacts throughout Europe provided Wechel with material to publish in the years immediately following his immigration to Frankfurt and therefore the means to survive the precarious

\textsuperscript{540} Evans comments that “the house of Wechel always asserted its identity and its claims as a quality undertaking”, noting that “almost all its volumes involved considerable preparation; many were very bulky and expensive...with...close-printed pages and heavy Latin” that “called for a devoted audience.” Evans, 6.


\textsuperscript{542} Ibid, 3.
first years after immigration. As for André Wechel, throughout his confessional persecution, he neither renounced his faith nor made it the basis of his publishing program, and he cautiously describes himself as a member of a Republic of Letters rather than as a Protestant (he was a Huguenot). He published neither religious polemics, nor much vernacular writing, focusing his efforts (certainly after settling in Frankfurt) on medical literature, historical chronicles, and pedagogical books, producing only the occasional work of Calvinist theology. Although Wechel’s edition of Dionysius’ works antedates his move to Germany and the beginnings of serious Huguenot persecution, Weigel might have found Wechel the most congenial Dionysius editor—a Protestant who, at least in public, took care to avoid the worst of the polemic and religious controversy of his time. Moreover, given the direct link to Saxony via Languet, or at least to German scholars in general, Wechel’s books might have found their way to Wittenberg. While there is no textual evidence to prove that Weigel used Wechel’s edition of Dionysius, nor is there anything in Wechel’s Dionysius edition to mark it either as pro- or anti-Roman, Wechel’s prudent Protestantism makes him a counter-type for anti-Lutheran Dionysius readers such as Clichtove or Cochlaeus.

Italy

There are two Italian Dionysius editions published up until 1570, both from Venice, which is no surprise since by 1520, Venice was the largest publishing center in Europe. The first edition was published in 1502 by Joannes Tacuinus de Tridino

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(Turin), and is a reprint of Lefèvre d’Étaples’ edition (complete with his preface), but there is little information on Tacuinus himself, other than a note that he printed mainly classical works (Homer, Ovid, Vergil) and flourished between 1492 and 1536.\footnote{Dionysius Areopagita, \textit{Operum Beatissimi Dionysii \& Undecim Epistolarum divini Ignatii Antiochensis ecclesiae Episcopi \& unius beati Polycarpi Smyrneorum antistitis, discipulorum sanctorum Apostolorum \& martyrnum Iesu salvatoris mundi foelicissimorum}, (Venice: Joannes Tacuinum de Tridino, 1502).}

Dionysius, in the context of his printing program, would have likely been classed amongst of the classical Greek and Roman authors. The works he printed might well have reached Saxony, as several of them are found in the Wittenberg library catalogue of 1536.\footnote{Kusukawa, 254.} Moreover, Wittenberg librarians were active in seeking out books not readily available, travelling, for instance, to Venice to purchase Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.\footnote{Ibid, xvii-xviii.}

The second Italian Dionysius edition dates from 1546 (reprinted in 1556), from the presses whose colophon reads \textit{Ad signum Spei}—the editors who printed at the Sign of Hope were Antonio Brucioli (1487-1566) and Giovanni Centani.\footnote{Brian Richardson, \textit{Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32. The New Testament alone was printed in 1530, the Old and New together in 1532.} Brucioli at least had good reason to conceal his identity as a printer, following his 1532 translation of the Bible into Italian (later placed on the Index in 1559). Born in Florence and initially associated with Florence’s distinguished humanists, Brucioli was exiled from Florence, taking refuge first in Venice (1522) and then in Lyon (1523).\footnote{Anthony M. Cummings, "Musical References in Brucioli’s Dialogi and Their Classical and Medieval Antecedents," \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas}, April 2010: 169-170.} Both Lyon and Venice were cities in which Protestantism flourished outside Germany,\footnote{Luther’s books made their way to Venice early on (note 163, above), and Lyon was one of the hubs for French Protestants. Philip T. Hoffman, "Lyon," \textit{The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation}, ed. Hans J. 197} and while in exile

Brucioli must have come in contact with Lutheran ideas, returning to Florence in 1527, only to be exiled again for his beliefs, this time to Venice, where he published a translation of the Bible as well as works on Protestant theology. He was tried by the Inquisition twice, in 1548 and 1555, first for publishing banned works then for heresy.\footnote{Chris Coppens and Angela Nuovo, “The Illustrations of the Unpublished Giolito Bible,” in \textit{Lay Bibles in Europe 1450-1800}, 119-142 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), n. 29, 134. See also John Jeffries Martin, \textit{Venice's Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).}

Unfortunately, it is not possible to guess from the Brucioli edition of Dionysius itself what Brucioli himself thought of the work, why he decided to publish the work, or whether his decision to publish an edition of Dionysius had anything to do with his Protestant beliefs: it is a reprint of Lefèvre d’Étaples’ edition, prefaced with Étaples’s own introduction—but with no comment at all by Brucioli. Perhaps historians of Venice’s printers will locate documents from the press \textit{Ad signum Spei} that might answer this question. In the mean time, I mention Brucioli’s Dionysius edition chiefly as an example of another Protestant Dionysius reader, alongside André Wechel, Oswaldus Crollius and Weigel himself.

Spain

By contrast, the Alcalá edition from Spain emerged from a Catholic and humanist milieu, published in 1541 on the presses of Juan Brocar, and dedicated to the Archbishop of Toledo, Juan Pardo de Tavera. The Alcalá edition of Dionysius is interesting for having been produced by a press both in the service of Catholic reform and dedicated to perhaps the most powerful man in Spain after the King himself. The printer, Juan Brocar’s was the son of Arnao Guillén de Brocar, founder of one of the first printing
presses in Spain (his first publication dates to 1490), producing chiefly liturgical books and devotional works, but also Latin grammars and other pedagogical works. In 1511, he was recruited by the powerful and influential Cardinal Francisco Ximénes de Cisneros (1436-1517, impassioned reformer of the clergy, persecutor of Jews and confessor to Queen Isabella) to work at the University he had founded in Alcalá. Brocar’s task was to help produce the so-called Complutensian Polyglot Bible (Complutum being the Latin name for Alcalá), a multilingual edition of the Bible with the Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean and Latin texts arranged in parallel. Cardinal Ximenes gathered a team of distinguished linguists and theologians in hopes that “the hitherto dormant study of Holy Scripture may now at last begin to revive,” as he put it in the preface to the work. It was the first polyglot edition to be printed (1513-1517), but Erasmus’ own Greek/Latin edition (1516) beat the Cardinal’s to the market (which was not distributed until 1522). However, Ximenes was careful not to modify the text of the Vulgate itself, limiting his editors to choosing amongst variants in the Vulgate manuscripts, whereas Erasmus made numerous changes to the Latin text, thus impiously suggesting that the Vulgate was incorrect. Erasmus’ critics thought he was undermining the authority of the Church by his

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philological activities, whereas the Cardinal was able to dedicate his edition to the Pope without any suggestion of subversive thinking.\textsuperscript{555}

Some fifteen years after Arnao Brocar finished printing the Complutensian Polyglot for Cardinal Ximenes, his son Juan Brocar dedicated his edition of Dionysius to Ximenes’ successor Juan Pardo de Tavera—who had expanded the reach of his authority even further, having added the responsibility of both Viceroy and Inquisitor to his role as Archbishop of Toledo. The preface to Brocar’s edition is not calculated to displease so powerful a man as Tavera, whom he addresses as “Illustriissimo ac Reuerendissimo Cardinali.” Brocar’s preface refers only indirectly to the debate about whether Dionysius’ writings might not be Apostolic, asking whether anybody with a sound mind (\textit{sanae mentis}) could doubt that Dionysius was indeed a disciple of Paul. It is not known whether Brocar’s edition might have travelled to Germany, such that Weigel might have picked up a copy, but it does seem unlikely that Weigel would have had access to this edition of Dionysius.

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This chapter has discussed a wide range of thinkers connected with Dionysius in the early modern era, showing that Dionysius was indeed read in the \textit{sixteenth} and \textit{seventeenth} centuries, and that the main issue at stake for these readers is whether a hierarchical church is necessary or not. Though influential theologians such as Erasmus and Luther rejected Dionysius as a counterfeit, others such as Clichtove, Cochlaeus, Ficino, Lefèvre d’Étaples and Crollius were enthusiastic readers of Dionysius, despite the

growing body of evidence suggesting that Dionysius did not have the apostolic authority initially ascribed to him.

One fiction attracts another, it seems, as the circle of Dionysius readers discussed in this chapter includes a rather large subpopulation of pseudonymous authors, ghostwriters, mythical authors, and outright forgers. And although pseudonymous authorship is by no means an uncommon practice, either ancient or modern, Dionysius is unusual for having disappeared into his assumed identity as Paul’s disciple so completely that his “real” name remains discoverable.556 Whoever Dionysius was, he (she?) did not choose to link his writings (or at least the portion of them that make up the Corpus Dionysiaca) with his public identity—and neither did Weigel. Like Dionysius, Weigel in turn attracted secretive readers:557 at least one of his publishers used a pseudonym, and after his death there appeared a large body of pseudo-Weigeliana.558 While Weigel, by writing under his real name, enforced a much less strict separation than Dionysius did

556 Many candidates for the real Dionysius have been proposed and rejected, but, for now at least, there is no definitive answer. Valla proposed Apollinarius (2nd century), Stiglmayr suggested the Monophysite Severus of Antioch (6th century), Rosemary Arthur proposed Sergius of Reshaina (6th century), herefore known only as a translator of Dionysius into Syrian. Rosemary A. Arthur, Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 187; Kurt Ruh, Die mystische Gotteslehre des Dionysius Areopagita (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 7-9.

557 Weigel’s secret readers and Winckelprediger (perhaps best rendered as underground or backroom preachers) are the subject of much discussion of Weigel’s critics, who feared above all secret preaching and hidden cults away from the supervision of more orthodox clergy. For instance, Groß’ anti-Weigel tract takes openness and public speech to be the mark of Christian expression: “Ist die Sache Gottes, vertheidiget er von Gott erweckte WunderMänner, sucht er der Christenheit bestes, warumb schewet er sich seinen Nahmen zubekennen?” Secrecy, on the other hand, is a mark of Satan, “das sie im finstern mausen, ihren Nahmen verschweigen, und alle ihr Ding heimlich treiben” (here, Groß is quoting John 3:28), who crawl into dark corners (“zu Winckel kröche”), so that their teaching cannot be properly judged. Christian Groß, Nothwendige, gebührliche Ehrenrettung des Evangelischen Predigampts, Wider die Neve Prophetische Hohnsprecherey (Alten Stettin: Georg Götzken, 1644), 9. Whether this is simply a paranoid fantasy or not is difficult to ascertain, since counting the number of secret believers is, by definition, an inexact science. Also, some of Weigel’s works were published by a printer using a pseudonym in a fictive location. See Winfried Zeller, “Der frühe Weigelianismus—Zur Literaturkritik der Pseudoweigeliana,” in Theologie Und Frömmigkeit: Gesammelte Aufsätze (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag Marburg, 1971), Siegfried Wollgast, Philosophie in Deutschland 1550-1650 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 511-519.

558 The editor of the critical edition has worked to separate out the authentic Weigel works from the epigraphic ones; however, these rejected works are still enormously interesting and are in need of further examination.
between his work as a parish minister and his work as a theologian, he neither preached
the beliefs he expressed in writing from the pulpit, nor did he choose to bring his works
into wide circulation by having them published.\textsuperscript{559} Indeed, in his later years, he
elaborated a theology that explicitly allowed Christians (not only laypeople but ministers
as well) to abstain from expressing heterodox opinions if doing so would endanger their
safety, as I will discuss in the following chapter. Weigel’s disinclination to bring his true
inner beliefs into line with his outwardly professed ones is symptomatic of his larger
disregard for the institution of the Church as a whole, such a complete disregard that he
does not even think the Church worth abolishing, never mind reforming.

The key authority to which Weigel turns in support of his dismissive attitude
towards ecclesiastical institutions turns out to be Dionysius—a curious choice given that
others at a not-too-distant intellectual remove from Weigel had used Dionysius’
statements in favour of hierarchy to defend the existence of the (Roman) church. In the
following chapter, I will argue that, in Weigel’s account of Dionysius, hierarchy is not a
one-way street, and the downward procession of divine illumination cannot be conceived
of separately from the upwards “gathering-up” back into Divine unity. Thinking of
hierarchy solely as downwards procession, Dionysius goes so far as to say, blasphemes
against God’s unity.\textsuperscript{560} If God is truly One (as Dionysius strenuously and repeatedly
asserts), then God must paradoxically be beyond both unity and multiplicity—a view that
considerably relativizes the importance of hierarchy. That is, whereas for Clichtove and
Cochlaeus (the anti-Lutheran polemicists discussed above), a hierarchically structured
universe seemed to imply the need for a correspondingly hierarchical (earthly) church,

\textsuperscript{559} See Introduction, p. 1-5.
\textsuperscript{560} DN, 636C.
Weigel concludes that, precisely because the universe is hierarchical, there is no need for an earthly church to administer the saving sacraments, since the means for creation to return to the Divine are built into the universe itself.
Weigel was a keen observer of the threat that fragmentation posed to the Christian church in Europe in the sixteenth century: Luther’s reform movement had led to a schism within the church, but that initial schism was then followed by further breaking up of the church body as various groups once affiliated with Luther separated to form their own ecclesiastical bodies. Writing at the end of the sixteenth century, Weigel feared that the Lutheran church might be further splintered by the many bitter doctrinal disputes he observed amongst his coreligionists, and concluded that attempts to reform the Church by purifying doctrine only led to further fragmentation. For Weigel, any attempt to formulate a confessional document containing the one and only true doctrine would not succeed because texts, including the Bible, are subject to interpretation; in turn, this interpretation would never be singular because human minds are hopelessly subjective.

Believing that true concord cannot be achieved by confessional documents, Weigel turned instead to Eckhartian Gelassenheit to argue that best way to achieve both concord and truth is for individuals to cease any attempt to articulate doctrine: true doctrine is only found when individual minds achieve Gelassenheit and simply avoid interfering in God’s own serene self-interpretation (see above, Chapter 2). Since Weigel argued that taking action to reform the church would not improve it but only break it
apart, he suggested that true Christians should avoid voicing divergent views and should instead cultivate an attitude of *Gelassenheit*, an indifference that mirrors God’s own unity.

In this chapter, I show how Weigel explores an interpretation of indifference drawn from the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, arguing not only that the Church is not worth reforming, but also that it need not exist at all. As such, Weigel considered the effort expended by the confessional church to purify doctrine and then to discipline both clerics and parishioners by means of secular power to be entirely in vain. Instead, Weigel proposed an alternative theology, where theology is meant literally as a different way of speaking about God—a theology that might be termed an *irenic*. The noun *irenic* has not survived into modern usage alongside its antonym, *polemic*. The *Duden* does have an entry for *Irenik* (defined as “das Bemühen um eine friedliche interkonfessionelle Auseinandersetzung mit dem Ziel der Aussöhnung”), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists two adjectival forms, *irenic* (meaning “pacific, non-polemic”) and *irenical* (meaning “peaceful; pacific; tending to promote peace, esp. in relation to theological or ecclesiastical differences”).  

However, these non-technical usages do not capture the idea of irenic as a rhetorical strategy or a way of communicating. So if polemic means

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562 This is how Müller uses the term *Irenik* in discussing the attempts to end confessional conflict in the late 16th to mid-17th centuries, after Weigel’s time. Far more than simply referring to the good intentions (or at least battle-weariness) of the various parties who came together to conduct this *Irenik*, for Müller, it constitutes an attempt at “Kommunikationsreform.” His study looks at the ways that scholars (theologians) communicated, and how this affected religion in the public sphere. The attempt to find consensus, however, often only led to more conflict. He is not trying to point out the oft-noticed hopeless partisanship of confessionized religion, but rather to examine the rules and practices that governed learned disputation. Disputations were a socially determined way of defending and defining the truth that seemed completely obvious to the theologians of the time. *Irenik* placed this method of “Wahrheitsverwaltung” under scrutiny and therefore was itself vulnerable to attack. (Müller, *Kommunikationsreform*, 15) Moreover, in order to have their ideas validated and thus have an impact, the Irenicists had to counter orthodox criticism in the format that was normal at the time—in disputation. (Müller, 21.) Because *Irenik* seemed to undermine the
“a strong verbal or written attack on a person, opinion, doctrine, etc.” or “aggressive debate or controversy; the practice of engaging in such debate,” irenic might be better defined as the practice of engaging in conversation about theology in a way that brings about peace or promoting non-aggressive behaviour. For Weigel, making his theology serve as an irenic means above all avoiding speaking about God in a way that fractures God’s unity by introducing the distinctions, doctrines and definitions that characterize, for example, the *Formula Concordiae* and other confessional documents. Weigel takes inspiration from Dionysius the Areopagite’s reflections on how to talk about God: God, because he is supremely One, is necessarily both nameless and omninameable, and therefore the most responsible theologian must acknowledge that his discourse about God will ultimately break down, either lapsing into silence (to use Dionysius’ metaphor) or turning into nonsensical babbling (to use Weigel’s metaphor). This deliberate failure of language is known as *apophasis*.

Dionysius’ theory of language rests on the insight that, in order for God to be truly perfect, God must be truly One. God’s unity, in turn, means that nothing could not be God, and so the multiplicity of the created universe must proceed hierarchically outward from God, and also, crucially, return to God in order to rest in God’s perfect unity. The anti-Lutheran polemicists discussed in the previous chapter (Cochlaeus and Clichtove) used Dionysius’ writings about hierarchy to defend the sole legitimacy of the Roman Church. However, they neglected the dialectical nature of Dionysius’ thinking.
and so did not dwell on the fact that hierarchy and unity for Dionysius are complementary rather than opposed concepts. Weigel, on the other hand, concluded that, precisely because the universe was hierarchically constituted, there was no need for a separate earthly ecclesiastical hierarchy.

In what follows, I will first lay out some of the key principles of Dionysius’ thinking in more detail, focusing in particular on the relationship between his theory of language and his ecclesiology, in order to then make clear how Weigel absorbs and transforms these ideas in his writings. I will then trace the three phases of Weigel’s reception of Dionysius’s writings. The first is Weigel’s initial contact with Dionysius’s ideas, documented in one of Weigel’s earliest pieces of writing, *De vita beata* from 1570. Here, Weigel argues that, because the universe is hierarchically structured, then all things must participate in God. The means of salvation are therefore always at hand, and can be approached by turning inward, away from the multiplicity of the created world to the One.

The second phase occurs in a slightly later work, *Ein Schön Gebett Büechlein, Welches die Einfelttigen berichtett* (from 1575), where Weigel uses a Dionysian understanding of hierarchy to demonstrate how this inward turn can be accomplished, namely via prayer, by which Weigel actually means practicing a form apophasis. In doing so, Weigel makes the main functions of the Church irrelevant—administering the sacraments, preaching sermons, interpreting the Bible, and doing theology—envisaging a world where laypeople are perfectly able to serve God and achieve salvation on their own, without the assistance of ordained clerics.

In the final phase, Weigel pushes this Dionysian apophasis even further in his most explicitly anti-confessional work. In the *Dialogus de Christianismo* from 1584 (his
final work), Weigel strongly criticizes what Luther had defined as the task of the theologian: correctly distinguishing God’s Law from God’s Gospel, a practice termed orthotomia (Greek for “correctly cutting” language about God). Instead, Weigel offers a passionate defence of a theology that is respectful of God’s unity by practicing apophasis—an indifferent signification that does not divide God’s unity into attributes and properties. This indifferent signification sets laypeople free from the confessional church, leaving the attainment of salvation as a matter for God and devout soul alone. That is, guided by Dionysius’ theory of apophasis, Weigel imagines a church in which the ultimate spiritual power rests with laypeople rather than with a professional clergy.

In this respect, the positive valuations of indifference that Weigel absorbs from his pre-modern influences—Dionysius’ apophasis and Meister Eckhart’s Gelassenheit—both serve to bring about harmony amongst Christians by suppressing human capabilities. As discussed above, good Christians should strive to attain a state of Gelassenheit in order to suppress their unruly epistemological activity, which only separates them from God rather than uniting them. Likewise, Christians should cultivate the spiritual practice of apophasis in order to bring about a failure of ordinary signification, particularly the way that language is used to write doctrine (and confessional documents in particular), which only introduces unnecessary distinctions into God’s supreme unity.

**Dionysius on God’s Unity**

Examining Dionysius’ writings more closely, we find that he does not embrace hierarchy for its own sake. Rather, Dionysius’ hierarchically structured universe follows, paradoxically, from the most important assertion in his theology: God is One. The Divine
Names, as the title suggests, is based on Dionysius’ insight that God can be called by all names; Dionysius sets out to praise all of God’s so-called conceptual names (the names drawn from abstract ideas rather than from objects) starting from God’s lowest name (Good) and ending with the highest name (One), which he calls “the most enduring [name] of them all.”\textsuperscript{564} This section explores how Dionysius treats the apparent contradiction of praising God’s perfect unity and simultaneously asserting that all things in the hierarchy participate in God.

Dionysius’ definition of unity implies a very delicately balanced relationship between immanence and transcendence—or, using Dionysius’ preferred terms, between simplicity and complexity. The first part of his definition of God’s unity emphasizes God’s complete transcendence: “Theology, attributing every quality to the cause of everything, calls him ‘Perfect’ and ‘One.’ He is perfect not only insofar as he is absolute perfection, defining perfection in himself and from his singular existence and total perfection, but also because he is far beyond being so. He sets a boundary to the boundless and in his total unity he rises above all limitation. He is neither contained nor comprehended by anything. He reaches out to everything and beyond everything and does so with unfailing generosity and unstinted activity.”\textsuperscript{565} However, Dionysius then goes on to say in this same passage that God’s unity means \textit{simultaneously} asserting God’s complete immanence: “To speak of perfection is to proclaim that it cannot be increased or diminished, for it is eternally perfect, that it contains all things beforehand in itself, that it overflows in one unceasing, identical overflowing, and undiminished supply.

\textsuperscript{565} DN, 977B.
thereby perfecting the perfect and filling all things with its own perfection...Nothing in the world lacks its share of the One.”566 The One is the “underlying element of all things,” and all things exist simultaneously in their state of created multiplicity, as well as in their state of pre-created unity.567 All beings can therefore be said to be in God. And yet, it must also be said that while God is in all beings, he is not himself a being—because “to be” means “to be some thing in particular.”568 Rather, God is the limit of Being itself, its condition of possibility. In order to truly assert God’s Oneness, one must assert that God is also beyond oneness, that God is, oxymoronically, a multiple unity.569 Or, as Dionysius puts it, “the One cause of all things is not one of the many things in the world but actually precedes oneness and multiplicity and indeed defines oneness and multiplicity.”570 Dionysius uses a number of metaphors to describe his view of creation—as unfolding, as overflowing or boiling over, as emanating, as radiating—but the general idea is that creation proceeds outwards from God. God, says Dionysius, is a “being-making procession.”

But simply because God is all things does not mean that God is all things equally. This outward procession means that, for Dionysius, the entire created universe is structured hierarchically, starting with the three ranks of Angels, down through man and

566 DN, 977B.
567 DN, 1980B.
568 As Perl puts it, “All things are not God, but God is not therefore something else besides all things.” And so, by interposing God’s status as a non-being between Creature and Creator, Dionysius, arguably, avoids the charge of pantheism. Eric D. Perl, *Theophay: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 33.
569 To quote again from Perl: “The center of the circle, the undifferentiated containment of all things, is not ‘first’ a simple monad which ‘then’ in addition to being itself also produces or undergoes differentiation. Rather, the containment is itself the unfolding, the overflow, multiplication or differentiation, by which beings are distinct and so are beings.” Perl, 32.
570 DN, 977D.
571 DN, 816B.
animals, through plants and non-living beings all the way to mere matter. Each rank in the hierarchy is receptive in a different way to divine illumination, and four of God’s names correspond to the modes by which God relates to each rank. The first name, Good, names “all the processions of the universal Cause; it extends to beings and non-beings and that Cause is superior to being and non-beings.” The second, Being, “extends to all beings which are, and...is beyond them” (including inanimate beings like rocks); Life extends to all living things (plants) and wisdom to all “higher” beings (animals, humans, angels). Importantly, each rank possesses not only its own procession, but all those below it as well: if something has Being it also possesses Goodness, Life possesses Being and Goodness, and finally Wisdom possesses the other three. Proceeding down the scale of being, each rank does not possess God less, but rather possesses God more specifically (i.e. it possesses fewer processions).

Dionysius is not suggesting that the beings that participate less fully in God do not participate sufficiently in God. Rather, each is illuminated according to its capacity, unequally but not inadequately: “the title ‘Righteousness’ is given to God because he assigns what is appropriate to all things; he distributes their due proportion, beauty, rank, arrangement, their proper and fitting place and order, according to a most just and righteous determination.”

572 “Although he applies his neologism hierarchy only to the angelic and ecclesiastical ranks, the concept of hierarchy is at work throughout his understanding of reality, and all the related terminology, such as order, rank, higher/coordinated/lower, superior/inferior, superordinate/subordinate, is found in the Divine Names with regard to the structure of reality as a whole.” Perl, 65.
573 DN 816B.
574 Ibid.
575 That the processions remain “inside” each other is an extremely important concept for Weigel, as we will see later in this chapter. The lower and higher ranks, by virtue of their participation in the One, remain continuous, and so one part can express (if imperfectly) the whole. As Weigel transforms this idea, the rank of man becomes the microcosm that contains and expresses the macrocosm.
576 DN, 894A-B.
God, because he is God, is necessarily perfectly righteous, and therefore must have assigned each thing to its proper place perfectly rightly. “It is the righteousness of God which orders everything, setting boundaries, keeping things distinct and unconfused, giving each thing what it inherently deserved.” To modern, egalitarian sensibilities, this is a problematic situation when it comes to describing the earthly church, not to mention Lutheran and Weigelian sensibilities, where Luther’s dissenting movement aimed to remove hierarchical barriers preventing access to God, arguing that all Christians are (or could be) priests, all Christians are equally equipped to read the Bible for themselves. However, Dionysius’ views on hierarchy should be understood in the context of his views on God, and specifically on God’s unity. That is, God is not to be thought of as the “first and highest being” from which all other beings proceed, because this would mean that “only the highest beings would be in immediate communion with God.” However, “since God is not any being but ‘all things in all things and nothing in any,’ he does not stand at the top of the universal hierarchy but transcends and permeates the whole” and thus, “the entire hierarchy of reality,...from the highest seraph to the least speck of dust, is the immediate presence and manifestation of God, of unity and goodness, according to the different modes and degrees that constitute the different levels

577 DN, 894A-B.
578 Perl, 73. This, however, does not say anything about the relationship between beings within the hierarchy, only about each rank’s relationship to God. So while, say, a geranium (a living but non-intellectual being) might have the same immediate relationship to God as an Angel (a living, intellectual being), the geranium would still, presumably be subject to the Angel. But although one might not worry so much about the rights of a geranium, the situation gets more difficult when Dionysius introduces the Ecclesiastical hierarchy, which sets bishops above priests, and priests above laypeople. While each might in fact also relate immediately to God, each is still subject to its superior—laypeople to the authority of priests, and priests to the authority of bishops. On this account, it is not difficult to see why Dionysius’s writings might have been seen as invaluable allies in a defence of the hierarchical Roman Church against Luther’s attacks.
579 Perl, 73. The Dionysius citation is DN, 872A.
As we will see later in this chapter, Weigel embraces the idea of a hierarchically ordered universe. Whereas Dionysius concludes that a hierarchically ordered universe necessitates a corresponding hierarchical Church, Weigel concludes that the former hierarchy alone is sufficient to connect humans to God.

Just as God is both transcendent and immanent, God’s pro-cessions are paired with a re-cession to God. As Dionysius describes the unfolding and enfolding of the One into multiplicity and back into unity: “Inspired by the father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in the power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in.”

Using the Divine name Light to discuss return is fitting, because of the (false) etymology Dionysius uses, in which helios derives from “to gather up,” where paradoxically the “spreading rays” of the sun “gather together the scattered.” In short, for Dionysius, procession and return always occur together. While the ranks do indeed recede from the Source as they proceed outwards, they are simultaneously gathered back up and enfolded within God’s unity—with God, of course, remaining all the while

580 Perl, 73. See also Dionysius, CH, 165A: “The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all understanding and action. It is forever looking directly at the comeliness of God. A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God’s will to beings further down the scale.” The key thing to note is that each rank both receives the divine splendour directly and passes this splendour down the scale, meaning that each rank is connected both to the ones below it and to the ones above it. See also Turner, Darkness, 30-31.

581 Dionysius is careful to Christianize the pattern of procession and return taken from Neoplatonic philosophy by sandwiching that last statement between two Bible passages. Scripture speaks of procession when it says that “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coing down from the Father of lights.” (James 1:17), and of return when it says “from him and to him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

582 DN, 700B. The editors note that Dionysius takes this etymology from Plato’s Cratylus: “If we use the Doric form of the name, I think matters will become clearer, for the Dori ans call the sun ‘halios.’ So ‘halios’ might accord with the fact that the sun collects (halizein) people together when it rises, or with the fact that it is always rolling (aei heilein ion) in its course around the earth.” Plato, “Cratylus,” in Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 409a.
undiminished and unmoved in God’s self. Indeed, this pattern of procession, remaining and return is reflected in the structure of Dionysius’ writings themselves. The *Divine Names*, for instance, begins with God’s lowest name, *Good*, which stands at the bottom because Goodness, as discussed above, is the mode by which *all* things (beings and nonbeing) participate in God. He then proceeds through *Being*, *Life* and *Wisdom* before ending, as noted above, with God’s highest name, *One*.  

The One’s complex simplicity has important consequences for Dionysius’ theory of language, such that Dionysius dedicates two of his four treatises to a discussion of God’s names (the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*). By now the structure of Dionysius’ way of thinking should be familiar when applied to God’s names: God is both totally nameless and omninameable, and is also neither of these but rather an unspeakable word. On the one hand, “we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being” but on the other, God is the cause of all things, and so “has the names of everything that is.” Perhaps it is better to phrase the title of the treatise paradoxically—as a treatise not on divine names, but on “the beneficent and divine names of the unutterable and unnameable Deity.”

Dionysius writes about two kinds of statements about God, affirmations and negations. Affirmations can assert a lofty attribute (“God is light”) or a humble one

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583 *Lowest* and *highest* are not necessarily helpful terms here, since procession and return are so intimately linked. As the editors note here, Dionysius correspondingly praises *One* as the “most enduring” name, and *Good* as the “most revered.” See DN, n. 261, 127. Also, the *Divine Names* only treats what Dionysius calls God’s conceptual names (love, goodness, being and so on), as opposed to the myriad other symbolic names (God’s feet/face/hands, names likening God to a crown/stone/breeze and so on). These symbolic names, Dionysius writes, were to be discussed in his *Symbolic Theology*, a treatise which is either (yet again) fictional, or which has been lost.

584 As Turner puts it, there is an “ontological foundation” for the theory of language implicit in apophatic theology. Turner, *Darkness*, 23.

585 DN, 588A and DN, 596C.

586 DN, 636C.
(“God is a rock”) or even a negative one (“God is dark”). Negations assert that any of the affirmations just made are not true (“God is not light,” “God is not a rock,” “God is not dark”). Both affirmations and negations together belong to what is called cataphatic discourse about God, or positive theology. Negations belong to cataphatic theology because to make a negative statement about God (“God is a desert”) or to negate a statement about God (“God is not just”) is still to make a statement about God.

If cataphasis means making any kind of statement about God, apophatic theology, by contrast, is failing to speak about God altogether. Dionysius describes apophasis as a state that must be obtained through language, rather than by never having spoken of God at all. While there is not only one way to attain an apophatic state, Dionysius’ characteristic method is pairing affirmations and negations—for instance, God is life and God is lifeless. Dionysius is insistent that God can, and indeed must, be named by every name. Furthermore, to refuse to attribute every name to God would be blasphemy, since to do so is “profanely daring to sunder absolute unity.” Every name refers “indivisibly, absolutely, unreservedly, and totally to God in his entirety,” because it could not possibly refer to anything that is not God (and could not do so without resorting to created language, and there is no kind of uncreated language).

For Dionysius, it does make sense to affirm that God is life, in the sense that God gives life to all living things, or that God is the life that lives in all living things. And yet,

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587 Confusingly, cataphatic theology is sometimes called positive theology. As Turner writes, “it is of the greatest consequence to see that negative language about God is no more apophatic in itself than is affirmative language. The apophasic is the linguistic strategy of somehow showing by means of language that which lies beyond language. It is not done, and it cannot be done, by means of negative utterances alone which are no less bits of ordinarily intelligible human discourse than are affirmations. Our negations, therefore, fail of God as much as do our affirmations.” Turner, Darkness, 34-35.

588 Turner describes it as lapsing into an “embarrassed silence” after having said too much. Turner, Darkness, 22-23.

589 DN, 636C.
this affirmation falls well short of the mark, and we could just as easily say that God is lifeless because life is a property of beings, and God is not a being, but rather the source of being. And since both statements are true, and are also the opposite of one another—and so cannot both be true without violating the rule of non-contradiction—then we are forced to say something nonsensical: God is lifeless life, or, just as infelicitously, God is lively lifelessness. In the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius lets this exercise in apophatic speech run riot, affirming and negating a whole litany of Divine names, starting with the lowest names (God is not material, God is nonexistence, God is not life and so on) all the way up to the highest names: God is not knowledge, not truth, and not understanding. Scandalously, this even applies to the incarnation: “Jesus is hidden even after this revelation...hidden even amid the revelation...he was neither human nor nonhuman”. Calling Jesus the God-Man is a perfect example of negating a negation.

Indeed, one might see the structure of the *Divine Names* as leading to apophasis just as the *Mystical Theology* does, even though it does so by virtue of its effusive naming of God in a way that reverses the structure of creation. The *Divine Names* begins with the name *Good* (the name for the “outermost” procession), and ends by giving God the name of One (in which the processions are gathered back up and enfolded into unity, which only God truly has). Dionysius concludes by stating that “no unity or trinity, no number or oneness, no fruitfulness, indeed nothing that is or is known can proclaim that hiddenness beyond every mind and reason of the transcendent Godhead which transcends every being.” The final step in the *Divine Names* is to say that God is beyond both assertion and denial.
This is admittedly a nonsensical assertion within the bounds of everyday language, but a necessary conclusion in Dionysius’ logic: God is beyond assertion and denial because denying something requires us to know what we are denying, and knowledge of God of any kind is not possible.\textsuperscript{590} To be able to mean anything when I deny that the sun is shining, I need to know what I mean when I say that the sun \textit{is} shining. When I say that, for instance, God is not good, this denial is not, properly speaking, a denial, because I cannot by definition know precisely what is meant by the proposition “God is good.” Denying that either my assertion or my denial truly signifies anything amounts to a double negation.\textsuperscript{591} And so, having affirmed and negated every possible name for God, and having negated that negation, what else is there left to do but fall silent? Dionysius falls silent at this point as well, as the \textit{Mystical Theology} ends with this double negation.

With this grounding in the basic concepts of Dionysius’ philosophy—that God is one, that God’s unity implies the participation of all things in God through a process of emanation and return, that therefore God can be named by every name and yet is nameless, and that, finally, the most responsible way to talk about God is to fall silent—I now turn to Weigel’s works, exploring how Weigel puts these ideas to work in his critique of the confessional church. The next section shows how Weigel, in an early work that constitutes the first proof of his having read Dionysius, he uses the Dionysian dialectical hierarchy to imagine a universe where man not only issues forth from God in the act of creation, and so remains irrevocably connected to his creator. The implication

\textsuperscript{590} My understanding and explanation of this point relies on Denys Turner’s clear exposition of the subject. Turner, \textit{Darkness}, 39.

\textsuperscript{591} As Turner puts it, we don’t even know how far short of the mark our language about God falls: “For whereas in non-theological cases, for example scientific, we are normally able to state in what respect a metaphor falls short of what it metaphorises, in the case of God the only language we have for describing the inadequacy itself falls short, as deficient in the description of the difference. We can only say that every utterance about God falls short of God ‘infinitely’. But to say that is to say that we have no conception at all of the degree of shortfall, and therefore no language at all in which to describe it. Turner, \textit{ Darkness}, 39.
being that he can do so without the assistant of a priest or cleric, and so Weigel’s reading of Dionysius is part of the anticonfessionalization that runs through all of Weigel’s works.

Dionysius in Weigel I: *De vita beata* (Or, Dionysius teaches how to be happy)

The first piece of Weigel’s writing to be published (albeit posthumously) is the one that documents Weigel’s engagement with Dionysius’ writing on hierarchy and apophasis. The work’s full title is *De vita beata, non in Particularibus ab extra quaerenda sed in Summo Bono intra nos ipsos possidenda*, which appeared in Halle in 1609 on the press of Joachim Krusicke.\(^{592}\) *De vita beata* consists essentially of Weigel’s reading notes on Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophia* and Dionysius’ *Divine Names*: as Weigel describes the work in the dedicatory preface, it is a small book collected together chiefly from Boethius’s words, by which he hopes to help defend against man’s folly.\(^{593}\) While not published until 1609, the work is one of Weigel’s earliest

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\(^{592}\) Joachim Krusicke later published Weigel’s *Büchlein vom Gebet* (1612), *Vom Ort der Welt* (1613), *Dialogus de Christianismo* (1614), and *Der güldene Griff* (1613). The other works from Krusicke’s press cannot be considered particularly revolutionary or heterodox. For instance, only a few years after publishing Weigel’s own extract/summary from Boethius, Krusicke published *Loci Communes Sententiosorum Versuum ex Elegiis Tibulli, Propetri & Ovidii* (1613), equipped with an index to help schoolboys with reading (“in gratiam puerorum”). His press also published books on science (a book on plants, for instance), grammar primers, a number of works by the thoroughly orthodox Lutheran pastor and preacher Paul Röber and the equally orthodox Simon Musäus, sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux, Melanchthon’s biography of Luther, an ordinance for the city of Halle, liturgical books and a few alchemical books. Krusicke’s shop also published a sermon by Andreas Merck, who, as discussed in Chapter 1, went on to write a *Streitschrift* against Weigel (with a different publisher) entitled *Notwendige, gebührliche Ehrenrettung des Evangelischen Predigtaums, Wider die neue Prophetische Hohnsprecherey*. Wollgast follows Zeller in suspecting that Krusicke also printed under the pseudonym Johannes Knuber in the equally fictitious Newstadt. Knuber, whomever he was, printed almost exclusively Weigel texts, all between 1615 and 1618. A future project might be to search out whether there is any more archival material available on both Krusicke and Knuber.

compositions, most likely dating to 1570.\textsuperscript{594} \textit{De vita beata} was written around the same period that Weigel produced his reading notes on Eckhart and Tauler, the Zwene nützliche Tractat, der erste von der Bekehrung des Menschen, der ander von Armut des Geistes oder waarer Gelassenheit (see above, Chapter 2). The years around 1570, then, are a period in which Weigel’s ideas begin to take shape through his intensive contact with his sources, and the two works from 1570 document Weigel’s initial engagement with the ideas of previous generations. Just as the Zwene nützliche Tractat attested to Weigel’s initial contact with Eckhartian Gelassenheit, this section traces a key Weigelian idea—the idea that God’s unity implies a hierarchical universe, which in turn means that the soul always has access to God—from its initial emergence in his reading notes through its transformations in his later works.

\textit{De vita beata} is actually part of a complex of works, including a short treatise entitled \textit{De luce et caligine divina}, published alongside \textit{De vita beata} in 1609 and \textit{Vom seligen Leben}, a rather free translation of \textit{De vita beata}.\textsuperscript{595} \textit{Vom seligen Leben} was never published, and is currently known from a single manuscript dating to 1590 and most likely is the work of Weigel’s deacon, Benedikt Biedermann, rather than Weigel himself. \textit{De luce et caligine}, by contrast, was only known in printed form until recently, when an independent manuscript transmission of the work was discovered; \textit{De luce} was also written around the same time as \textit{De vita beata}, either in 1570 or early 1571. \textit{De vita beata} and \textit{Vom seligen Leben} match up closely for the most part, even though it is not a word-for-word translation, and I occasionally cite the German paraphrase in the notes of this section, though only secondarily to Weigel’s earlier Latin version. The most significant

\textsuperscript{594} Weigel, \textit{De vita beata}, XXVIII-XXIX.
\textsuperscript{595} On the entire print and manuscript transmission, see Pfefferl’s introduction in Weigel, \textit{De vita Beata}, XIII to XXXVI.
difference between the two texts is that the two Dionysius chapters (Chapters 14 and 26) are missing in the German version. However, I do not believe this is because Weigel was trying to conceal his sources or suppress a radical idea, since he inserts a summary of the content of those two chapters at the beginning of the next chapter (i.e. Chapters 13 and 25 in *Vom seligen Leben*). In one of these cases (Chapter 25), Weigel still names Dionysius as the source of this idea ("Es saget der Dionysius in seinem buch..."), meaning that he cannot have been trying to conceal the fact that he was reading Dionysius from a lay (German-speaking) audience.\(^5\)

Nowhere in his works does Weigel suggest that some ideas are appropriate only for a learned (i.e. restricted, elite) audience to read in Latin, whereas other would be too dangerous for an uneducated (i.e. popular, lay) audience to read in German.

The Boethius and Dionysius quotations that make up the hundred and twenty pages of *De vita beata* are gathered together around the theme of how to attain true happiness—the *summum bonum*. All natural things, declares Weigel in the preface, both good and bad, desire peace and rest, which is to be found by turning away from false, fleeting external goods (what Weigel calls *particular* goods), looking inwards to find God, whom every person possesses within himself ("possident intra seipsos").\(^6\)

It is not immediately clear what connection Weigel saw between Boethius’ meditations on how to protect oneself against the fickleness of *Fortuna* and Dionysius’ reflections on how to speak about God and God’s names. Briefly, however, Weigel considers the two chief attributes of the *summum bonum* to be its unity and its goodness. Concerning the first of these, the unity of the *summum bonum*, Weigel draws on

\(^5\) Weigel, *De vita beata*, 191.
\(^6\) Ibid, 4.
Dionysius to show that, just as God can properly be named with every name precisely because God is perfectly One, so too is the *summum bonum* simple and perfect and does not consist of particular goods, and is therefore the only possible goal and good for all creatures: the highest possible good and the greatest possible pleasure is to return to that from which one came. As for the goodness of the *summum bonum*, both Boethius and Weigel must explain how God as the *summum bonum* is, in fact, good, given the existence of evil in the world. Asserting God’s goodness, for Dionysius, becomes problematic as a result of a belief in God’s Oneness: God is supremely One, which means that nothing that exists can not come from God, so Dionysius offers the familiar conclusion that therefore evil cannot have any being in itself. Any evil in the world exists only “accidentally” or derivatively. Since this understanding of goodness is derived from the idea of unity, then, Divine unity is the concept that Weigel takes from Dionysius.

In the following close analysis of *De vita beata*, I will show how Weigel uses Dionysius’ concept of divine unity to demonstrate that all of creation participates in God’s substance, proceeding hierarchically from the One and returning to the One. For Weigel, this mutual enfolding of all levels of creation is a crucial insight because means...

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598 The existence of evil is a rather sticky problem for Dionysius (and indeed for Weigel as well), and the chapter in the *Divine Names* on whether it is appropriate to call God Good is disproportionately long. Arthur points out that this is a consequence of such a robust definition of God’s unity: “Dionysius’ monistic system may have been employed to combat the Gnostic type of dualism which is a denial of the unity of God. There cannot be more than one God, since the source of every duality is a monad. Nothing lacks its share of the One because everything in the world has arisen by means of procession and return to the One. He now has to explain the existence of evil. Opponents who believe in the existence of evil as a distinct entity have tried to trap him with a dilemma: either evil comes from God or from another, independent, divine principle....The avoidance (in general) of the associated topics of hell, Satan, the Cross and Atonement is necessitated by his argument that evil is an accidental deficiency of good and that nothing is evil by nature.” Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 156. This last point, in fact, was one of Luther’s key objections to Dionysius, that he speculates idly on the orders of the angels instead of confronting the suffering Christ on the Cross. Christ crucified is the true *via negativa*, *Gottesferne* is the true divine darkness. For a discussion of Luther’s comments on Dionysius, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation, p. 166.
that the soul, though an outward procession from the divine, remains connected to its creator, a connection that is not severed by sin, merely obscured. This necessary and unbreakable connection between God and soul means that Christians are not dependent on the church for salvation, robbing the confessional church of its main function.

Weigel begins *De vita beata* with Boethius in his prison cell, wondering how to defend his happiness against cruel and fickle Fortune, where Lady Philosophy advises him to avoid pursuing worldly goods. Money, beauty, strength, valour, glory and physical pleasure are nothing but false goods and cannot provide lasting benefit to the person who pursues them: “Frustra ergo mortales omnes Summum bonum in particularibus ab extra invenire conantur.” To yoke one’s happiness to the caprices of fortune is, for Weigel, selling oneself into slavery (“homines...in turpem servitutem sese dedant”), and needlessly so, since man possesses true happiness within him (“beatitudinem intus possidere”). Moreover, man has no right to complain when Fortune turns against him and takes all of her gifts away; she has not acted unjustly since those things belong to her, and she is free to give and take her own possessions as she pleases.

Weigel makes one characteristic addition to this list of vain pursuits: the pursuit of knowledge and education (“vel industria et hominum studio ab extra importata ut Ingenij bona, ut Artes, Scientiae rerum peritia Linguae”). The *Linguae* in question

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599 Weigel, *De vita beata*, 13.
600 Ibid, 14. The language of slavery and servitude does not seem to be in Boethius’ text, but is incorporated into it in Weigel’s paraphrase. For instance, Boethius’ text reads: “Quid tu, homo, ream me cotidianis agis querelis?” Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (München, Leipzig: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2000), 31. Weigel’s reads: “Quid me o mea mancipia et servi subjecti [my italics] reum agitis quotidians querelis?” (Weigel, *De vita beata*, 22) Perhaps Weigel has in mind Paul’s use of slavery metaphors to describe sin, as he does, for instance, in Romans 6:17: “Gott sey aber gedancket, das jr Knechte der Suende gewesen seid, Aber nu gehorsam worden von hertzen, dem Furbilde der lere, welchm jr ergeben seid.”
601 Weigel, *De vita beata*, 22-23.
602 Ibid, 11.
refer to Greek and Hebrew, the biblical languages so important to Protestant biblical philology, and a core component of the theological curriculum at Wittenberg. As discussed in chapter 2, Weigel argued that Lutheran theologians substituted one false method for reading the Bible (the Scholastic one) with another (the philological one), losing the true meaning of the Bible in technical discussions about the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew originals.  

Nevertheless, all created things naturally seek out happiness, even if they fail to recognize that the goods they pursue to attain happiness are not the summa bonum that will fulfill them completely, but only partial goods. These partial goods are not unrelated to the summa bonum, however. The greedy do not desire wealth for its own sake, but rather desire wealth because they want to fulfill all their needs and so imitate God’s perfect quiescence. Of course, wealth is only a partial good and not the summa bonum, and so cannot be completely fulfilling; those who pursue it as if it were the summa bonum do not find themselves more at peace the wealthier they are, because wealth can only make it easier to fulfill the need, it does not do away with need itself. The partial goods are not bad per se, but rather are perverted forms of Divine goods (material wealth versus God’s infinite richness; worldly power versus God’s omnipotence and so on).

But this is not the biggest problem with pursuing particular goods, because the summa bonum is not just the sum of all particular goods (‘ex congregatione diversarum

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603 See p. 117f (Chapter 2) for further discussion of Weigel’s attitude towards universities.
604 The German paraphrase represents this idea more vividly: “Sie [erlangen] volle gnüge, und den mangel aller dingen durch Reichtumb von sich zu Jagen, auf daß sie möchten in ruwe leben wie God.” Vom Seligen Leben, in Weigel, De vita beata, 137.
605 Weigel, De vita beata, 30-31. Moreover, a man who becomes wealthy is beset with a new problem, namely the fear of losing his money.
rerum”), but rather brings the particular goods together in a higher kind of unity because they are actually identical (“unum simplicitate substantiae”).\footnote{Weigel, De vita beata, 45.} That is, if the \textit{sumnum bonum} is perfectly powerful, then it needs no other thing to assist it, and if it is thus perfectly sufficient then it is lacking nothing and so needs no money or possessions to satisfy those needs; if it is therefore perfectly sufficient and powerful, then it is necessarily perfectly dignified and noble and therefore most worthy of respect and so on. Boethius links all of the particular goods in this way, and, as Weigel notes, the difference between them is a trick of language: “sunt unum simplicitate substantiae, licet nomina sint inter se diversa, ut sufficientiae et potentiae una eademque natura est.”\footnote{Ibid, 45-46.} However imperfect the happiness the particular goods can bring is, Lady Philosophy assures Boethius that the very existence of imperfect happiness implies the existence of perfect happiness: “in quocunque enim genere est reperire imperfectum, in eodem etiam est reperire perfectum.”\footnote{Ibid, 51.} Imperfect happiness implies perfect happiness, and anything perfect must be identical with God himself, since there can be no perfection that is \textit{not} God, who would then be incomplete and thus imperfect: therefore all of the imperfect goods must be identical with God’s very substance.\footnote{The universe, of course, could not have an imperfect source, because something can be judged imperfect only with respect to perfection (“imperfectum non est principium rerum, quia perfectum est prius ipso imperfecto”), and so perfection must come prior to anything imperfect. Ibid, 51.}

While Boethius is keen to demonstrate that all \textit{good} things participate in God’s substance (and that God, because he is perfectly self-sufficient therefore must rule the entire universe sovereignly and providentially), he is not particularly focused on demonstrating that \textit{all} things participate in God’s substance. That is, while Boethius
argues that there cannot be more than one highest good in which the other goods participate, he does not say anything about how creation as a whole participates in God. This is the point at which Boethius’ ideas intersect with Dionysius’ in Weigel’s paraphrase, where the unity of the *summum bonum* in Boethius leads Weigel to investigate God’s unity in Dionysius. Whereas for Boethius, God was happiness itself, power itself and beauty itself and so on, for Dionysius, God is not lacking *anything*: “nec beatitudo, nec bonitas, nec pulchritudo, nec lux, nec vita, nec perfectio, nec justitia est distincta a DEO etc.”610 This first list of names for God is followed by several sets of even longer lists that are nowhere to be found in Weigel’s source: “DEUS est sufficientia, potentia, dignitas, gloria, laetiti, bonitas, beatitudo, lux, intellectus, voluntas, amor, mens, verbum, Spiritus omnis veritatis, fons, essentia, Unum etc. et hae omnia sunt unum in DEO, unitate simplicissima, sine omnia mutua penetration.”611 These flourishes of cataphasic excess, which would have been at home in Dionysius’ *Divine Names*, give God scores of names from every register of language, from the more humble names taken from the material world (*fons* and *lux*) to the lofty and immaterial names (*essentia* and *Unum*).

Having made all these assertions about God, Weigel demonstrates that he has learned from Dionysius the *via negativa*, pairing assertions with negations and negating the negations: “DEUS est omnia ablata omni imperfectione, nec tamen est hoc aut illud, non enim sic esset omnia, et super omnia, nec est hic et ibi, non enim esset ubique, nec est hodie aut cras, non enim esset aeternus.”612 As Dionysius himself might have written,

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610 Weigel, *De vita beata*, 52-53. This list is not in the Boethius passage, where Boethius is only discussing whether happiness is identical with God.
611 Ibid, 55-56.
612 Ibid, 56.
God is neither here nor there ("nec est hic et ibi"), nor is he everywhere ("non enim esset ubique"); he is neither today nor tomorrow ("nec est hodie aut cras"), nor is he eternity ("non enim esset aeternus"). Weigel, in fact, explicitly acknowledges at this point that he had read Dionysius and, in particular, had taken his teaching on negating the negations to heart: “Coincidunt et vere affirmatnur de DEO, DEUS lux est. DEUS est tenebrae. Et Affirmationes et Negationes, in divinis non contrariuntur sibi invicem. Sed de his consule Dionysius Areopagitam, De Mystica Theologia.” Referring his reader to Dionysius’ Mystical Theology Weigel comments that affirmations and negations do not contradict each other when referring to God.  

Moreover, whereas Boethius strives to refer the imperfect shadow of particular goods upwards to their perfect exemplar, Weigel (via Dionysius) is keen to emphasize the reverse, namely that the perfect exemplar is nevertheless in all particular things, even if imperfectly. We have encountered this passage before, in which Dionysius argues that God is both perfectly transcendent (“in his total unity he rises above all limitation”) and perfectly immanent (“nothing in the world lacks its share of the One”). God, as Weigel paraphrases Dionysius, “est unum, non collectione ex pluribus, sed unitissima et fontali unitate unum est, et ipsum est ante omne unum, et ante omnem multitudinem.” Taking up Dionysius’ analogy, Weigel writes that all numbers, no matter how big or how small, are all based on the number one: “nihil existentium est expers unius, ut numerus omnis unitatis est particeps, et binarius dicitur...unus et denarius, et dimidia, cujusvis rei pars

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613 Dionysius closes the MT with the idea in question: “[The Cause of all] is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial.” MT, 1048B.

614 DN, 977B and 977C.

615 Weigel, De vita beata, 58.
The stress that Weigel lays on the participation of all things in the One, as is the case in Dionysius, is in service of a belief in the real and unbreakable bond between creature and Creator. As he notes, not even a gnat or a fly could exist outside of God. The basis for this participation is Weigel’s creation narrative, which, like Dionysius’ narrative, imagines a series of processions flowing outward from the One and simultaneously leading back to it. The universe that God created, according to Weigel, is three-fold (“ita tres sunt Coeli seu Mundi”, “TRes numerantur Mundi”). The highest world (“Supremus”) is the incomprehensible God, followed by the middle world (variously called Heaven, Medius or intellectualia) which is the domain of the angels, and finally the lowest one, the material and sensible world (Machina visibilis or sensibilibus). However, the various processions (or worlds, as Weigel calls them) remain inextricably bound together, tied to each other both above and below, as well as to their creator: the Angels, for instance, contain the material world enfolded within them (“totam mundi machinam in se complicat”) and God in turn contains the angels and the created world enfolded in his abyss (“omnia in suo abysso complicet”). The mutual enfolding of all levels of creation means that man at least can both ascend and descend the processions down to the lowest reaches of the material world and up to the angels in the intellectual world—and even beyond matter, mind and anything created, to union with God himself in the highest world.

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616 Weigel, De vita beata. The relevant passage in Dionysius is DN, 977C.
617 Weigel, De luce et caligine divina, 115. “Deinde dicitur Lux, quod omnia ex tenebris, seu ex nihilo in lucem vocet, et omnia Entia de non esse, ad esse producat, hinc vocatur in literis pater luminum, quod omnia Entia dependeant a DEO, et extra DEUM, nec culex aut musca degere possit.”
618 Weigel, De vita beata, 61.
619 Ibid.
620 Ibid.
Weigel and Dionysius use metaphors of both ascent and enfolding with equal ease, but access to the divine seems to be chiefly a matter of turning inward rather than upward. As discussed in Chapter 2, Weigel speaks often of a treasure buried inside every person to describe the indwelling of God in man, a gift implanted in Adam in the form of God’s spirit at the moment of creation. In *De vita beata* as well, Weigel contrasts the external goods that are the gifts of Fortuna (who can take them away again at will) with this *internal* good that is man’s inalienable possession. The real existence of God in man implies, for Weigel, that the means of salvation are always at hand, and can be approached by turning inwards away from the multiplicity of the created world into the One: “Omnia procedunt ab isto primo Uno, et reguntur ab Uno, et consistunt in Uno, nam omnia lumina ab uno patre luminum descendunt, et quo quid magis ad hoc Unum appropinquare potest eo foelicius, perfectius, augustius et beatius esse potest.”

Thus far in *De vita beata*, Weigel has insisted that salvation is to be attained by turning inwards towards the One, but has not discussed in any detail how one might achieve this inward turn. The next section shows how, for Weigel, the types of communal religious devotion commonly practiced in the Lutheran church—reading the Bible, listening to sermons, receiving the sacraments—are not the way to do so. These are all ineffective in and of themselves, because, as Weigel argues, these practices only derive their effectiveness from the inner reality of faith, just as a shadow is dependent on the object casting it. The next section discusses the alternative devotional practice that

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621 “O mortales caeci extra quaeeritis beatitudinem et foelicitatem anxie cum intro vos ipsos eam possideatis abundanter.” Weigel, *De vita beata*, 23.
622 Ibid, 9.
Weigel suggests will allow the soul to turn inwards to the One, namely prayer. Moreover, as we will see, the form of prayer Weigel advocates turns out to be a practice very similar to Dionysian apophasis.

**Dionysius in Weigel II: No Unity without Hierarchy (Or, why does God need a Church anyway?)**

In this section, I show how Weigel deprives his church of its two most important functions (preaching the Word and administering the sacraments) by embedding God himself and the entire universe inside each person, such that there is hardly anything left for the Church to do that every layperson could not do herself. Christians can still participate in normal church life (be baptized, receive communion and so on) if they wish, but Weigel specifies that the sacraments can only function as valid salvific currency, so to speak, because they are linked to the spiritual gold standard of the internal treasure. As Weigel puts it, external ceremonies only derive their effectiveness from the inner reality of faith, as a shadow from the object casting it. Likewise, Scripture can only convey the Gospel message because it is an expression of the inner Word. For Weigel, what is most real and most meaningful is God within. Any external manifestations thereof remain connected to their source but ultimately fall far short of it—and, since God himself is indwelling in every person, why would anybody settle for scraps of paper or

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(Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 2008), 25. The idea that Scripture and the Sacraments are only effective on account of an inner faith is omnipresent in Weigel’s work, but see for instance Weigel, *Seligmachende Erkenntnis*, 80; *Vom Leben Christi*, 112-116; *Der güldene Griff*, 66-67.

624 Weigel, *Vom Gesetz*, 25. The idea that Scripture and the Sacraments are only effective on account of an inner faith is omnipresent in Weigel’s work, but see for instance Weigel, *Seligmachende Erkenntnis Gottes*, 112-116; Weigel, *Der güldene Griff*, 66-67.


626 For a discussion of God’s indwelling in Weigel’s work, see p. 131ff (Chapter 2), above.
morsels of bread? In this section, I first argue that Dionysius’ dialectical way of thinking leaves an ambiguous attitude towards the earthly church. On the one hand, it is the earthly correlate of the celestial hierarchy, but Weigel also seems to suggest that this church is transcended in the ascent towards union with the Godhead. Weigel picks up on the latter aspect of Dionysius’ thought, and I will show that Weigel suggests that truly devout Christians should pray in order to reconnect with God within, but the form of prayer he suggests turns out to closely resemble Dionysian apophasis.

Dionysius’ attitude towards the earthly church is ambiguous. On the one hand, Dionysius concluded that the existence of a hierarchical universe entails the existence of an ecclesiastical one; to each procession belongs a hierarchy to lead its members back up to God, and God has arranged for each hierarchy to be adapted to the ability of its members to receive the divine.627 The human hierarchy, for instance, caters to our nature as sensible material beings by using material sacraments: “the heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God” whereas “for us...it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted.”628 For Dionysius, in other words, the sacraments, as “perceptible symbols,” have an anagogic function, “lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization.”629 The sacrament has power to transform the soul because God has “established for us those

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627 “It is the same one whom all one-like beings desire, but they do not participate in the same way in this one and the same being. Rather the share of the divine is apportioned to each in accordance with merit.” EH 373B.
628 EH, 373B.
629 EH, 373A. As Wear and Dillon point out, the hierarch performing the liturgy “mimics the divine activity of differentiation and unity, and full reversion,” as does the effect of the sacrament itself. All three have a “cosmic relationship.” Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 103. Of the eucharist, for instance, Dionysius writes: “the divine rite of the synaxis [i.e. the eucharist], although holding on to its unique, simple and indivisible cause, still becomes pluralized in a sacred multitude of symbols because of love for man, and it travels to the whole range of hierarchic images, but it draws back together all these images unitedly into its own unity and it makes united with those being led sacredly towards it.” The Dionysius passage they refer to is EH, 429AB.
saving sacraments by means of which the participants are divinized,” which establishment is not an arbitrary act, but rather is part of God’s order-bestowing nature: “God himself...gives substance and arrangement to everything that exists, including the legal hierarchy and society.”

On the other hand, the union obtained via the sacramental and liturgical life of a real earthly church (described in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, hereafter EH) is radically relativized by the apophatic union described in the Mystical Theology (hereafter MT). Whereas the EH says that the “perceptible symbols” are the means of divinization, the MT says the One “is neither perceived nor is it perceptible.”

And again, the EH has the hierarch alone receiving illumination and passing it on. But the MT explicitly describes Moses “standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priests.” He then “breaks free from them” and plunges into the “mysterious darkness of unknowing” without priests or liturgy. Dionysius does not resolve the tension between these two kinds of union (ecclesiastical and extra-ecclesiastical, or perhaps cataphatic and apophatic).

Weigel is most receptive to the non-ecclesiastical understanding of union, concluding that, precisely because God has disposed the universe in a hierarchical fashion, there is no need for a separate ecclesiastical hierarchy to exist. Since all the lower emanations “remain” in human beings, there is, in a sense, little need for the sacraments to be expressed in material form. As discussed above, Weigel calls for Christians to recognize that they have both the sacraments and a priest to administer them, even though both priest and sacrament reside in a different church altogether—within the believer’s own self.

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630 EH, 429C.
631 EH, 505A-B.
632 MT, 1001A.
633 Nor does the secondary literature on Dionysius, which focuses almost exclusively on the conception of union presented in the Mystical Theology.
In arguing that the Bible and the sacraments, the mainstays of Lutheran religious devotion, are ineffective on their own without faith, Weigel is not simply making the basic Lutheran point that it is faith alone that saves, rather than works or masses. The Lutheran conception of the sacrament still teaches that the sacraments, when they are used “according to God’s word” (i.e. as they are explicitly described in Scripture), are the means by which God “draws [sinners] to himself, and convert, regenerate and sanctify them.” Although God, being omnipotent, could in theory reach out to sinners directly to redeem them, God has chosen to restrict his salvific activity to certain channels: God will only work through the preached word and through the sacraments. In fact,

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634 Lutherans argue that an action is a sacrament only if it is explicitly designated by Christ as a promise. Christ, for instance, instructs his followers on how to perform baptism and administer the Eucharist, but does not explicitly tell them to administer extreme unction, or marriage, or the consecration of priests, which are therefore not sacraments. To put it differently, when Christ says “do this in memory of me,” it is the imperative verb (“do this”) spoken by Christ himself that makes breaking bread a sacrament and not a symbol. As Luther writes in his Large Catechism, “Das Wort (sage ich) ist das, das dies Sakrament machet und unterscheidet...Das Wort muß das Element zum Sakrament machen.” Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 709. As for baptism, Luther’s Small Catechism teaches that “Taufe ist nicht allein schlecht Wasser, sondern sie ist das Wasser, in Gottes Gebot gefasset und mit Gottes Wort verbunden.” Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 515. God’s command, in this case, is Christ’s injunction (from Matthew 28:19) to the apostles to go forth and baptize all people (“Gehet hin in alle Welt, lehret alle Heiden und täufet sie im Namen des Vaters und des Sohns und des heiligen Geists”), which Luther cites in the catechism article on baptism. See also Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, “Luther II,” Vol. 21, in Theologische Realenzyklopädie (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 552-555.

635 The Formula concordiae marks out believing the sacraments to be ineffective and relying instead on God’s immediate intervention as an error of both Enthusiasts (Schwärmer) and Epicureans (antinomians) (Solida Declaratio, Article II, Vom Freien Willen): “Die weil aber diese Lehre vom Unvormugen und Bosheit unsers natürlichen freien Willens und von unser Bekehrung und Wiedergeburt, daß sie allein Gottes und nicht von unser Bekehrung und Wiedergeburt, daß sie allein Gottes und nicht unserer Kräften Werk sei, beides von Enthusiasten und Epikerun unchristlich mißbraucht wird, und viel Leute durch solche Reden wüste und wilde und zu allen christlichen Übungen im Beten, Lesen und christlicher Betrachtung faul und träge werden, indem sie sagen: weil sie aus ihren eignen natürlichen Kräften sich nicht vermügen zu Gott bekehren, wollen sie Gott immerzu gänzlich widerstreben oder warten, bis sie Gott mit Gewalt wider ihren Willen bekehre, oder weil sie in diesen geistlichen Sachen nichts tun können, sondern alles allein des Heiligen Geistes Wirkung sei: so wollen sie weder Wort noch Sakrament achten, hören oder lesen, sondern warten, bis ihnen Gott vom Himmel ohne Mittel seine Gaben eingieße, daß sie eigentlich bei sich selbst fühlen und merken können, daß sie Gott bekehret habe.” Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 890.

636 This position is summed up in the Konkordienformel (Epitome, Article III, Von der Gerechtigkeit des Glaubens): “Iem, daß D. Luther geschrieben, daß des Menschen Wille in seiner Bekehrung sich halte pure passive, das ist, daß er ganz und gar nichts tue, daß solches zu vorstehen sei respectu divinae gratiae in accendendis novis motibus, das ist, wann cder Geist Gottes durch das gehörte Wort oder durch den Brauch
Melanchthon’s *Defence of the Augsburg confession* explicitly links the effect of the sacraments to those of Scripture—Scripture produces faith in the heart by striking the ear, whereas the sacraments produce faith in the heart by striking the eye.  

Nor, however, does Weigel believe that the sacraments are mere symbols. Rather, the sacraments are best described as the material expressions or externalizations of an interior immaterial faith, and are produced in the same way that the rest of the material world was created—by procession or outflowing from the One. And, like the rest of creation, the sacraments need not exist since the faith they proceed from already “contains” them in a higher manner, even though, as it happens, they do exist. To use an anachronistic analogy, the sacraments are like a digital photograph displayed on a
computer screen, which image is an expression of the information contained on the hard drive. This information (a string of 1s and 0s) does not look like its expression, but nonetheless one might say that the data on a hard drive contains the photograph in an invisible or illegible form. Likewise, the display on the screen requires the presence of the data on the hard drive, but the data on the hard drive can exist perfectly well without a manifestation that is meaningful to the human eye.

The same logic of existence and expression governs Weigel’s conception of Scripture. The Word flowed outwards into a fleshly form (Jesus Christ), as well as a paper form (the pages of the Bible) to serve as a reminder, a comfort and a witness for those who are already converted: “Also soltte nicht alleine das wortt fleisch werden, sondern solches innere wortt soltte auch eußerlich zum Memorial, lehre, warnung, tröst und zeugnis in die buchstaben gebildet werden.” However, neither Christ’s person nor Scripture count as revelation for Weigel because, in fact, they serve only to conceal God: “Also verbirget sich das wortt ins fleisch, undt verdecket sich darunter, niemands bekant als deme der von got gelehrt wird...also verbirget und verdecket sichs auch in die buchstaben, niemandts bekandt undt offenbahr.” This is a definite departure from Luther’s understanding of Scripture, for whom Scripture was a revelation, i.e. it is perfectly clear and thus could (mostly) be read literally.

Weigel devotes one of his more practically minded treatises, *Ein Schön Gebett Büechlein, Welches die Einfelttigen berichttett* (1575), to discussing this proposed

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640 Weigel, *Seligmachende Erkenntnis*, 75.
641 Ibid.
642 On Luther’s understanding of Scripture’s clarity see Introduction, p. 37un.
alternative—namely prayer.\textsuperscript{643} Weigel’s \textit{Gebetbuch} is in fact modelled on Luther’s own pastoral work, \textit{Wie man beten sol, fur Meister Peter Balbirer} (Weigel quotes Luther’s work in the preface to his own treatise).\textsuperscript{644} Weigel wrote other works that were intended explicitly as “mirror-image works” (e.g. his \textit{Postille} is an ironic reprisal of Luther’s own \textit{Postille}, his \textit{Vom Leben Christi} is an ironic reprisal of the Lutheran confessional document the \textit{Formula Concordiae}), and while the \textit{Gebetbuch} is less vicious in its criticism of the Lutheran church, it still follows the pattern of filling a Lutheran form with content that arrives at a distinctly un-Lutheran conclusion. For Luther, prayer is meant to supplement regular Church attendance, whereas for Weigel, prayer supplants it altogether. Moreover, Luther’s reflections on prayer are intended for people who are already Christians, whereas Weigel’s \textit{Gebetbuch} seeks to help the reader attain Christ in the first place. For Weigel, this occurs by uncovering the treasure of the indwelling Christ (reminding oneself of the “gegenwertigen Schatzes”), and prayer can assist in this process by allowing a person to enter into a silent Sabbath.\textsuperscript{645} As for sins (the dirt that covers up the hidden treasure), they still need a priest to wipe them away, but Weigel assures the penitent that this priest is inside her. Just as ordained priests do not exercise power by their own nature, but rather by wielding power in God’s name, so too does God’s indwelling grant each person the power to absolve his own sins through prayer: “Wer diser Bitt [“forgive us our sins,” from the Lord’s Prayer] Rechten Verstandt weis und sie wohl brauchen kan, der findet die Absolution und den Priester In Ihme selber er...

\textsuperscript{643} Weigel, \textit{Gebetbuch}, XL. The editor argues that the treatise was written in 1575, but notes that there is some uncertainty about the date of composition of this text, which could potentially have been written as early as 1572.

\textsuperscript{644} WA38, 364:13-22.

\textsuperscript{645} Weigel, \textit{Gebetbuch}, 100 and 120.
sej wo er welle.”

And if every person walks around with a priest inside her, then surely forgiveness of sins cannot be limited to baptized Christians: a person who believes is “in” God’s kingdom even if she is at the bottom of the ocean, where she could hear no sermon and receive no sacraments. This also means that a person who does not have faith could be outside God’s kingdom entirely, even if he did nothing but listen to sermons all day.

Weigel does not simply mean repeating the *Pater noster* again and again, but rather has a particular kind of prayer in mind—what he calls holding a silent Sabbath.

We have encountered this form of prayer before, in chapter 2, where it is the state that is achieved by the *gelassene Seele*, so I will now take another look at silent prayer in the context of Weigel’s reading of Dionysius’ hierarchy. Setting aside Weigel briefly and returning to Dionysius’ description of the union with the Godhead, Dionysius does not denigrate creation as “mere” creation, but rather sees a use for the processions that make up creation, as one part of his apophatic meditations. As he instructs his disciple Timothy in the *Mystical Theology*, he is to give God every name from creation, climbing down from the highest name to the lowest name, then climbing back up by negating every one of God’s names, before denying that God is named by the affirmations and denials together.

Imagining Moses climbing up Mount Moriah to receive the tablets of the Law,

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646 Weigel, *Gebetbuch*, 111.
647 “Also kan ein Mensch drinnen sein in dem Reich Gottes Ob er schon in der Tieffe des Möhrs [Meeres] wer, keine Predigt hörte oder Sacrament brauchte...sondern so er nur glaubete. Dagegen kan einer draussen sein dieweill er Gottloß Ist, Im Unglauben bleibet, Ob er schon mitten In der kirchen wer, Predig höret die sacramenta all Tag brauchete.” Ibid, 54.
648 In the *Gebetbuch*, Weigel writes that it is important to master the proper practice of prayer “auf daß er endlichen komme in ain stille oder Sabbath und höre In Ihme selber was Gott rede, lerne befinden das Lebendige Wortt Gottes im Herzen: Dann durchs wartten, feyren und Sabbath halten, wirdt offenbahr Christus, Psalm 42. 84.” Ibid, 5. The importance of being a *listener* rather than a speaker proves very important for Weigel, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.
649 “In the earlier books my argument traveled downward from the most exalted to the humbles categories, taking in on this downard path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of the descent. But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the
Dionysius writes that the summit of this ascent is not illumination but rather union with the “completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge” in which Moses “knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”

However, to simply summarize Dionysius’ argument like this as a series of steps (assert, negate, negate the negation) is already to miss Dionysius’ point. Dionysius’ is a performative insight: one can only understand what he means by doing what he says, or more specifically, by saying what he says. Beginning with an invitation to follow along (“So this is what we say”) the last two short chapters of the Mystical Theology contain long lists of repetitive sentences as Dionysius moves up the chain of denials. He begins: “The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistence, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity or weight.” Sentences with a similar cadence continue for several more paragraphs, concluding with the final negation of all negations: “It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its pre-eminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial.” The repetition, however, is precisely the point, as the names in the list are not simply an excess of examples that all prove the same argument. One example will not suffice, that is, and as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, apophatic theology means reading the whole list until one has run out of things to say, as Dionysius instructs:

more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascend, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.” MT, 1033C.

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650 MT, 1001A.
651 MT, 1040D.
652 Ibid.
653 Ibid, 1048B
“the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent it will turn silent completely.”\textsuperscript{654} The point of apophasis is not to begin with silence, to never say anything about God at all, but rather to achieve or provoke silence after an effusion of speech.

The same holds for Weigel, and we must look not just at what Weigel says but also how he says it. The modern editor’s notes on the Dionysian chapters in Weigel’s \textit{De vita beata}, for instance, deprecate them as repetitive, but in the context of this discussion of Dionysius’ chains of affirmations and denials they take on an entirely different cast, functioning more as a devotional practice than as a set of arguments.\textsuperscript{655} In the remainder of this section, I discuss a Weigel text that exemplifies this apophatic repetition, namely his \textit{Von der Seligmachenten Erkentnuß Gottes nach der Heiligen drey Einigkeit} (1574), which is a meditation on the basic insight that God can be viewed from two perspectives: “für sich selbst \textit{absolute}” (in God’s Oneness) and “respectu creaturarum...\textit{respective}” (in God’s Multiplicity).\textsuperscript{656} In asserting the necessity of these twin perspectives, Weigel assembles in the first chapter of this work a series of short pairs of affirmations and negations (“Alß \textit{absolute}...Aber \textit{respective}”).\textsuperscript{657} In the second chapter, as one might by now expect, Weigel introduces the apophatic double negation, producing a series of affirmation/negations/double-negations: “ob gleich Gott, als dem \textit{ingenito} gebüret, alle \textit{genita} ist...so ist er doch der \textit{genitorum} Keines...Item ob Gott gleich alle orter ist, wie denn dem \textit{infinito} gebüret, so ist er doch der Orter Keines, weder Hie noch da, alßo

\textsuperscript{654} MT, 1033C.
\textsuperscript{655} Weigel, \textit{De vita beata}, 57, n. 2.
\textsuperscript{656} To map Eckhart’s language onto Weigel’s, the absolute perspective would be the pre-creation Godhead and the creaturely one would be the God of creation. See chapter 2 of this dissertation on Eckhart’s distinction of God and ‘God’.
\textsuperscript{657} Weigel, \textit{Seligmachende Erkenntnis}, 3.
Weigel sums up this understanding of how theological language works as “beydes wahr unnd erlogen, darnach man es Verstehet.” Or, as he puts it elsewhere, God lets his creatures call him by every name not so that they can truly name him, but rather “auf daß er mit Uns Kindern lalle.” Though Dionysius does not speak of apophatic theology as babbling as Weigel does, it is an apt metaphor for the apophatic breakdown of speech.

Weigel then begins to put this Dionysian insight to work for his own purposes, relativizing and minimizing the importance of the earthly church to attain salvation. A foolish theologian (“den einfeltigen Theologum”), he writes, might wonder why the nameless God allows all manner of names to be attributed to him, and why the One God would reveal himself under three names as Father, Son and Spirit. A true Christian, however, finds none of this puzzling, because he sees very well that God’s omninameability is directed towards the salvation of sinners (“hiemit meine unsere rechtfertigung, unsere seeligkeit oder newgeburt”). First, the idea that God is “all names and nameless” is the corollary of Dionysius’ idea that God is One, such that creation, while it is nothing in itself, cannot also be anything other than God. For Weigel, this means not only that God is his names (as discussed above), but also that these names are actually more properly predicated of God than of creatures, since it is from God that

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658 Weigel, Seligmachende Erkenntnis, 6.
659 Ibid, 12.
660 Ibid, 19.
661 As discussed in Chapter 2, a soul that has achieved, by God’s influx of grace, a state of gelassenheit, falls into a deep silence beyond all words, what Weigel often refers to as a “silent Sabbath.” See also, amongst others, Der güldenee Griff, 30; Vom Leben Christi, 120-121 and 122-123; Gebetbuch, 120-121.
662 Weigel, Seligmachende Erkenntnis, 47. “Es möchte den einfeltigen Theologum verwundern, warumb ihme Gott, der doch nhmloß unnd glißloß ist laße zuschreiben mancherley nahmen und glißmaßen, so da nur in menschen seyndt, und warumb der einige Unwanndelbahrre Gott, sich offenbahre, alß ein Vatter, alß ein Sohn, und Heiliger Geist. Aber der da Verstehet, was Christus ist, und kennet Christum nach dem worte, kraft oder geist der wundert sich gar nichts.”
663 Ibid, 47.
all the named things derive their being to begin with. If God is all things such that he can be given all names, concludes Weigel, then creation must be nothing. By understanding that God can be given all names, a creature is led to recognize its own nothingness and, Weigel concludes, will understand that salvation comes from God alone and not from anything created.

In rejecting anything created as the means of salvation, Weigel does away with almost everything that the earthly church has to offer, including interpreting the Bible, preaching sermons and administering sacraments such as baptism and the Eucharist, all of which are the created images of their divine exemplar. Nevertheless, Weigel does not imagine that laypeople will be left spiritually bereft as a result. As the next section discusses, Weigel envisages a laity that will be spiritually sufficient outside of an ecclesiastical institution, able to achieve salvation without doctrine, sermons or sacraments.

Dionysius in Weigel III: Orthotomia and Indifferent Signification (Or, God is One and so are we all)

Weigel tries to imagine what a truly Christian Church might look like in his last extant work, the Dialogus de Christianismo from 1584, which pits a layman against a clergyman in a debate about the role and function of the Church, mediated by the figure of Death. The Dialogus marks an important shift in Weigel’s writing, since, until this last

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As such, God must be identical with his names—he must be whatever he is called—otherwise ascribing a name would introduce division into God’s unity. Weigel, Seligmachende Erkenntnis, 44-4. However, God’s names only become a problem since God insists on being named—by producing Scripture, or by sending his Son the Word, or by letting the Spirit descend on the Apostles with a preaching mission; the names attributed to a completely ineffable and transcendent divinity would be straightforwardly equivocal.
work, Weigel had written explicitly or implicitly in the voice of a minister of the church, but in the *Dialogus* he inhabits, for the first time, the position of the layperson. This shift in perspective mirrors Weigel’s changing views on the importance of the earthly Church, and his corresponding positive valuation of the layperson’s spiritual independence.

Ultimately, the *Dialogus* stages a battle between clerics and the laity, a battle in which the laity triumphs and gains spiritual independence. Indeed, the *Dialogus* ends with the promise of eternal happiness for those who follow their own religious path, and the threat of eternal suffering for those who coerce others to obey them in matters of religion. In the *Dialogus*, the Layman signals this independence by means of a peculiar way of using language that can only be described as what I call *indifferent signification*. And although Weigel nowhere in the *Dialogus* mentions Dionysius’ name, this indifferent signification bears many of the traits of the apophatic speech described in the *Mystical Theology*, as the Layman strings together nouns and adjectives in a way that the Preacher finds objectionable. To give one example here, he says that “die Wiedergeburth in uns ist Christus inhabitans et regnans und ist der Glaube und die Liebe, die Gerechtigkeit, Friede und Seiligkeit.”

The Preacher tells him that he speaks strangely and confusedly (“Du bringest seltzame, frembde Reden fur und mengest eins in das ander”), admonishing him to practice what he calls *orthotomia*, which translates from the Greek as “correctly cutting” his words. Separating off the Law from the Gospel, sin from salvation, man from God, and preachers from laypeople constitutes sound theology, in the Preacher’s opinion. The Layman on the other hand, believes that this parsing of nouns

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665 Weigel, *Dialogus*, 17.
666 Ibid.
667 Ibid, 18.
introduces unnecessary distinctions that serve only to spoil God’s perfect unity. How could a person have God’s Law without also simultaneously having God’s Gospel as well?

In the *Dialogus*, Weigel (speaking through the Layman) shows how this novel way of communicating allows the Layman to slip outside the conflicts generated by the confessional Church to attain true peace (or *concordia*, one might say). Conversely, the Layman’s way with words highlights how the Preacher’s practice of *orthothomia* only serves to perpetuate the confessional church’s antagonistic practices and maintain the division between the clergy and those to whom they minister. This last section, then, looks at how Weigel thinks apophatic speech will generate a harmonious church, not by reforming or even by abolishing it, but simply by cultivating an indifferent attitude towards it.

That the Layman plays the starring role in his own religious life in Weigel’s *Dialogus* fits with the larger trend beginning in the 14th and 15th centuries in which laypeople took on a more and more prominent role in religious life, becoming better educated in particular.668 The Protestant Reformation put additional pressure on the idea of the layperson, reconfiguring religious authority by advocating the so-called “priesthood of all believers.” This new priesthood meant that, although Luther did not intend to abolish the clergy altogether, he did intend to desacramentalize it.669 While


669 Additionally, articles V and XIV of the *Augsburgische Konfession*, taken together, express the Lutheran church’s public opinion about ministers: “Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das Predigamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakrament geben, dadurch er als durch Mittel den heiligen Geist gibt, welcher den Glauben, wo und wenn er will, in denen, so das Evangelium hören” (58). “Vom Kirchenregiment wird gelehrt, daß niemand in der Kirchen öffentlich lehren oder predigen oder Sakrament reichen soll ohn ordentlichen Beruf.” (69) The *Apologie der Konfession* (Article XIII, Von den Sakramenten) denies that priests have a special status, and describes their position as an *Amt*: “Durch das Sakrament des Ordens oder
Luther did not ever use the exact phrase the “Priesthood of all believers,” he did expand the role that laypeople were allowed to play in religious life. That said, Luther found that his “universal priesthood” was frequently misunderstood: he did not mean that everybody should be a priest, just that everybody who was baptized could potentially serve as a priest because, for Luther, the priesthood is an office, not a status. Similarly, any American-born citizen could be President, but this does not mean that every American-born citizen can actually exercise executive powers. By being elected and then sworn in, a citizen becomes the President, and after he has served his term, becomes a regular citizen again because there was no change to his essence. He holds an office, and it is in the office that power is vested rather than his person. Likewise, every baptized Christian can be called to be a preacher, but he must be approved by his congregation and “sworn in” (i.e. consecrated by a bishop or by a more senior member of the clergy); should he resign from his position, he will be a baptized Christian as he was before, no more and no less. Luther emphasized each side of this equation differently throughout his career, depending on what circumstances called for, but the two elements are always present: every Christian can be a priest, but no Christian is a priest until he is called upon by his fellow Christians. By contrast, consecration of a priest was, in the Roman Catholic Church, a sacrament like baptism, and conferred a permanent change of status and nature on the person who received it.

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Priesterschaft verstehen die Widersacher nicht das Predigamt und das Amt die Sakrament zu reichen und auszuteilen, sondern verstehen von Priestern, die zu opfern geordent sein.” Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 293.

670 Wengert, 1. The clearest discussion of Luther’s views on the laity is Timothy Wengert, "The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths," in Institute of Liturgical Studies Conference Proceedings (Valparaiso, IN: http://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/2, 2005).
Regardless of Luther’s intentions in the first half of the sixteenth century, the ecclesiastical apparatus of the Lutheran church became progressively more entrenched in the latter half of the century, with priests given a new formal training at the universities and slotted into the growing bureaucracy of the Lutheran states. This new Lutheran clergy was not without its critics—Weigel included, as we have seen. Within the priesthood of all believers, Weigel defines the layperson negatively, through two different exclusions: laymen are excluded from learning and education, and are excluded from ecclesiastical power. Weigel thus gives his layperson three names in the *Dialogus*; he is a *Laie*, an *idiota* and a *Zuhörer*, corresponding to these exclusions. I will return to the idea of the layperson as listener (*Zuhörer*) momentarily, but first examine the first two names for Weigel’s layperson.

The first term, *idiota*, refers to the Layman’s unlearnedness (suggested by the modern English word *idiot*). Etymologically, the Greek word *idiota/idios* refers to a person who represents his own interests rather than official or public interests—a citizen

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671 Weigel is not the first to use the form of the debate to address anxieties about learnedness and authority. In the so-called Sister Katherine treatise (14th century), the *idiota* is an unlearned woman, and the narrative tension results from power struggle between her and her father confessor. Her “unlearned learnedness” or “wise foolishness” proves superior to both the book learning and institutional legitimation of the Beichtvater. He initially accuses her of disobedience (“Du wilt übel...das du nitt raites wilt folgen. Wissest, das gehorsami ein tuget ist!”), but she replies, much as Weigel does, that she is obedient to her true master: “Ich wil gehorsam sin bis an minen tott...Christo und dem himelschen vatter, dem Iohannes gehorsam was in der wüste, und Maria Magdalena und Maria von Egipton und Maria Salome.” (60) She in turn accuses him of hindering her salvation, rather than showing her the way (“ir hand mich gehindrett meiner ewigen sälikeit”) and regrets having followed human advice at the expense of the Holy Spirit’s (“Mir ist von herzen leide das ich menschen rait ie als lang gevolget und dem ratte des heilgen geistes widerstanden han”). The dialogue concludes with the confessor asking for both her blessing and her instruction (“Glopt si gott, das er dich ie gemachet zuo einem menschen, wan du hest mich gewiset zuo miner ewigen sälikeit” [90]). Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Ladies, Whores, and Holy Women* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010). A second such dialogue is the *Idiota de Sapientia* by Nicholas of Cusa (1450), featuring a poor but wise layman and wealthy orator (we discover later that the layman lives in an underground dwelling making his living carving spoons). The layman criticises the orator for relying too heavily on books, which are not the best source of wisdom. The debate in Cusa’s dialogue is not over ecclesiastical authority, but rather over the value of secular learning, philosophy and rhetoric in particular. Nicholas of Cusa, “Idiota de sapientia,” in *Complete Philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: A. J. Banning Press, 2001).
as opposed to an office-holder, an individual as opposed to the state, or an amateur as opposed to an expert (which is the source of the word’s modern English meaning). The New Testament uses the word to designate a certain kind of linguistic ability, namely those who attend the gatherings of Christians but who cannot understand those who speak in tongues. They are neither unbelieving and uncomprehending outsiders, nor have they been fully welcomed as believing or comprehending insiders. These people are *idiotes* in the eyes of the Christians, but sometimes the tables are turned, and it is the Apostles who are *idiotes* in the eyes of those they seek to convert: their audience is amazed at how well Peter and Paul speak because they are only “ungelehrte Leute und Laien,” meaning that they are not skilled rhetoricians. The unlearnedness of a true Christian became a common refrain throughout the Middle Ages, as many wondered about the true value of secular learning and philosophy for attaining salvation: how much did a Christian need to know in order to be saved, and were the tools of ( secular) philosophy needed to understand the Gospels? Furthermore, Christians in the Middle Ages began to question whether Latin was indeed superior to the vernacular languages, and whether those who could not read or write in Latin as well as university-trained theologians really had no insight to offer other devout readers.

References:


673 1 Corinthians 14:16.

674 “Sie sahen aber an die freydickeyt Petri vnnd Johannis, vnd verwunderten sich, denn sie waren gewis, das es ungelerte leutt unnd leyen waren, unnd kandten sie auch woll, das sie mitt Jhesu gewesen waren” Acts 4:13. Luther translates “ungelerte leutt und leyen” from the Latin “homines sine litteris et idiotae.”

675 Grundmann locates the stirring of an attitude shift against learnedness in the Franciscan movement (13th century), who revived the apostolic ideal of the simple unlearned man preaching before the learned Pharisees or the Athenian jurists. Herbert Grundmann, "Litteratus - illiteratus: Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 1958: 56.

676 Grundmann situates the origin of the layman in the 11th with Gregory VII’s ecclesiastical reform. This particular reform “completed the structure or *ordo* of the hierarchical Church, which rested on the idea of apostolic succession, reserving the execution of Christian salvation to those who had been ordained to it either directly or indirectly by the successors of Peter and the apostles. Yet as soon as the hierarchical *ordo*
More familiar than the word *idiota* (the root of both the English *layman*) is the second term Weigel uses to refer to his layperson, a *Laie*, from the Greek word *laos*. In classical Greek, *laos* simply refers to a crowd of people. However, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the so-called Septuagint) uses *laos* to designate a tribe or a nation, specifically the nation of Israel (other groups are called *ethnos*). Perhaps for this very reason, the Greek New Testament ignores this distinction, using *laos* to mean the entire Christian community, presumably designating them as God’s new chosen people—the new Israel. Subsequently, in early Christian writings, *laos* came to mean a congregation assembled in worship, but as the Church became administratively more complex in the third and fourth centuries, various offices were instituted dividing the congregation off from the person leading it—those who do not wield ecclesiastical power are the *laos*, the laity.

Why this Layman and *idiota* should be called a *Zuhörer* as well is less straightforward, but I argue that this is the key term for understanding this text, and marks the final stage in the evolution of Dionysius’ apophatic theology in Weigel’s...
writing. By calling his Layman *der Zuhörer*, the one who listens, Weigel emphasizes
(here and throughout his writing) the impotence of speech, particularly its rhetorical
weakness—its inability to persuade, convert, convince or otherwise bring about action. In
the *Dialogus*, Weigel has his Layman defend his belief that salvation is not granted
through the Church, refusing to receive the sacraments from a priest even as he is dying.
Following the deaths of both Layman and Preacher, *Mors* allows the Preacher to appear
from beyond the grave to testify that the Layman was right in refusing to receive the
sacraments from a priest, and that the Layman is in Heaven whereas the Preacher is in
Hell. However, Weigel does not allow the Layman to speak for himself, nor does Weigel
imagine the Layman triumphing while still alive, convincing the Preacher of his belief
that true beatitude is found outside the earthly church during their debate.

Death intervenes on the side of the Layman,678 helping to prove that the
Concionator’s theology is gravely misguided because it rejects the inner word or inner
illumination. The Layman opens the dialogue with an exclamation, praising God who is
united with man for all eternity: “Ach, welche eine Liebe hat uns Gott der Vater bezeugt,
das wir Menschen sollen mit ime *somatikos*, das ist leibhafftig vereiniget sein durch
seinen Sohn Jesum Christum, er in uns und wir in ihme, in alle Ewigkeit.”679 The
Preacher immediately corrects him, saying that it is indeed a great act of love, but that
God is not indwelling and united with man, certainly not *leiblich*, though perhaps he
might be indwelling in a more limited sense “durch den Glauben.”

678 In Weigel’s text, the Preacher debates the Layman, and Death intervenes on the side of the Layman. Death is not the layman’s opponent as in the *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*, to which Weigel’s dialogue has erroneously been compared. Johannes von Tepl, *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*, ed. Gerhard Hahn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984).
After several more exchanges, they get to the crux of the problem, namely the source of religious teaching: “Das [deine Lehre] gebn dir keine Lehrer zu, auch hastu solches von mir auf der Cantzel nie gehöret noch jemals in den Schriften unserer praecptoren gelesen.” The Layman has to concede that he has not learned his theology from any of these sources: “ich habe es weder von E ur Würde noch bei den Auslegern der Schriftt gefunden, allein in der Biblia finde ich sovil.” Whereas the Layman claims to adhere to Scripture alone, the Preacher appeals to a set of written documents that supplement the Bible: the “Schriften Domini Philippi oder andern Auslegern der alten und newen Scribenten,” “die Schrifften Luteri,” the “Hohe Schulen” (universities), the Augustana Confessione, the Locis Philippi, oder Corpore Doctrinae, Formula Concordiae.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^0\) It is these last group of titles that indicates that the Preacher and the Layman are not simply continuing old debates about the sources of religious authority, but rather are debating about the value of confessional documents.

The Preacher asserts again and again that the Layman cannot be right because he has not read it in any book and he was not taught it at school. The Layman likewise stubbornly argues his case, until the Preacher is driven to declare that he cannot change his mind because he has sworn an oath to uphold the teaching expressed in confessional books and theological treatises, and does not want to be “vorketzert und zum Lande ausgetrieben” for breaking his oath.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^1\) As discussed in the Introduction, the Layman reveals that he had also sworn that same oath, even though he held heretical beliefs. He dismisses this “Verschreiben” on the grounds that the oath he made did not pledge loyalty to “Menschenbücher” but rather to the writings of the Prophets and Apostles alone.

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\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^0\) Weigel, *Dialogus*, 7.

\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^1\) Ibid, 58.
Others are loyal to mere men (the Pope, Luther, Melanchthon, or Mohammed), but he is only loyal to Christ: “An Jesum Christum hange ich mich, bei den Schrifften der Aposteln und Propheten bleibe ich bis in den Tod.” What separates the Layman from the Preacher is not their learning or even their ecclesiastical status (both are ordained ministers after all) but rather a refusal to adhere to an oath promising to uphold what is written in a confessional document.

But if he did not intend to be bound by his oath, why did the Layman bother signing the Formula Concordiae? To answer to this question, Weigel mobilizes the fact that his Layman is not only a Privatmensch and an idiota, but also a Zuhörer and an Auditor. The Layman thinks there will be no return on the risk taken by his “unzeitiges Bekennen,” because nobody can be persuaded by verbal testimony at all, by a preacher’s sermon from the pulpit, or even by Christ’s preaching itself: the synagogues were not converted when they heard the Lord himself speak, so why should he expect anybody to be converted by his own human preaching? That is, he does not believe that his office as preacher will either help or hinder his fellow Christians in their spiritual development, and so it is not worth him suffering for the sake of reforming his church. For the Layman, words (both spoken and written) are of little use in matters of faith, and so for him, it is better to be a listener than a speaker, a reader rather than a writer. What does the Layman-Auditor listen to, then, if not sermons or the Bible read aloud? Like the soul that has achieved Gelassenheit and has ceased all mental activity to allow God’s perfect and harmonious self-interpretation, the Layman listens primarily to the Word that is indwelling, and only secondly to the echo of this Word in the words he reads in the Bible.

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682 Weigel, Dialogus, 59.
683 Ibid, 61.
and the sermons he hears preached in church: “Ich halte mich...vleissig zu Gottes Gesetze oder zu Gottes Worte, welches in uns gepflanzet ist, welches mit dem Finger Gottes in unser Hertze geschrieben ist.”

One phrase here—“Gottes Gesetze oder Gottes Worte”—alerts us to the most important aspect of the Layman’s use of language, and that is what I am terming his practice of speaking indistinctly. It is not that he speaks inarticulately, but rather that he fails to observe the distinctions that form the basis of the work of learned Christians (preachers and theologians). To modern ears, this may seem a strange way to define the work of a theologian, but as I will show below, Luther went so far as to define the theologian as one who distinguishes things correctly. In the phrase just cited, for instance, the Preacher protests, asking how Christ, who is God’s Word, can possibly be the same thing as God’s Law. And although the Bible concedes that even heathens know the Law, surely it is the Word that they are lacking, which therefore cannot be implanted within them? The Layman frequently uses chains of nouns such as these throughout the text, such as: “[die] Wiedergeburth in uns ist Christus inhabitans und ist der Glaube und die Liebe, die Gerechthigkeit, Friede und Seeligkeit.” As mentioned briefly above, the Preacher finds this way of speaking objectionable: “Einseltzam Theology machestu, solches hab ich von meinen praeeptoribus nie gehört...Es wehre nicht orthotomein recte secare verbum, das ist Gottes Wortt recht scheiden, wenn man also alle Ding vormengen soltte.” This curious word orthotomein—which in Greek means “to cut straight”—is used only once in the New Testament (2 Timothy 2:15): “Beuleissige dich Gotte

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684 Weigel, Dialogus, 38.
685 Ibid.
zuerzeigen einen rechtschaffen vnd vnstrefflichen Erbeiter, der da recht teile [give greek here] das Wort der warheit.”

The term has not survived its sixteenth century origins, but its role in the history of Lutheran theology begins with the philological work of Erasmus and Luther. A brief detour into the way that these earlier theologians use the term will help understand Weigel’s critical stance towards orthotomein. Although the Greek passage used the word orthotomein, the literal sense of the word was not carried over to the Vulgate, which read “recte tractare” (to treat or handle correctly). Erasmus, basing himself on the Greek text of his New Testament edition 1516, amended the Latin text to recte secante.

Luther took Erasmus’ correction into his German translation (cited above), adding a gloss in the margin to explain what the metaphor of cutting a text meant to him: “Das er nicht das Gesetz vnd Euangelium in einander menge, sondern treibe das Gesetz, wider die rohen, harten, boesen, vnd werff sie vnter das weltliche Recht oder in ban. Aber die bloeden, betruebten, fromen, troeste er mit dem Euangelio.” (Perhaps it is this marginal note that the Preacher is echoing when he tells the Layman to practice orthotomia rather than mixing things together, vormengen.)

Separating the Law from the Gospel, as Luther notes in his gloss, is a fundamental principle of Lutheran theology, serving not only as a guide to interpreting the Bible, but also as the mark of the true theologian and the sign of a real Christian.

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686 In an earlier version of his Bible translation (from 1522), the text reads “schneytyen” rather than “teilen”: “Befleyß dich Gotte zuertzeygen eynen bewerten vnd vnuertaddelichen erbeytter, der da recht schneytte das wort der warheyt.”
688 Ibid.
689 From Luther’s commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1531): “Is locus de discrimine legis et Evangelii scitu maxime necessarius est, quia continet summam totius Christianaee doctrinae. Ideo quisque diligenter discat discernere legem ab Evangelio, non tantum verbis, sed etiam ipso affectu et experientia,
distinguishing between Law and Gospel is the most important task of a preacher, which he explains by a spatial metaphor, imagining the Gospel in Heaven and the Law on Earth (“ut Evangelium ponas in coelo, legem in terra”). Indeed, Heaven and Earth are not far enough apart to express the radical difference between the two, and it would be better if we could put even more distance between the two (“atque utinam adhuc longius eas discernere possemus”). This distinguishing is not a static operation of the mind, however, and the rather dry words conceal the two-act drama of the sinner undergoing justification. First, the sinner is accused by the Law of failing to fulfill it—and no matter how pious that person might be, she still falls infinitely short of being able to satisfy God’s demands, since sin has corrupted every part and faculty of human nature, body, reason and soul. The Law has done its work when the sinner reaches the point of total despair, recognizing that he has no moral resources to draw upon whatsoever and so must continue to fail and fail again to do God’s will. And yet, the Law is divine and so must be fulfilled, which means that somebody else will have to do the work instead. When things can get no blacker, the sun and the great light of the Gospel and of grace shine in the day: Christ, who is perfect, can satisfy the demands of the Law. Truly believing this (that Christ will do everything and that we will do nothing) is what allows the despairing sinner to ascend, leaving the donkey with his burdens on Earth. The Pope, writes Luther, has failed to properly distinguish the two by turning the Gospel into mere laws,
and ceremonial ones at that. That is, instead of allowing the Gospel to be a relief from the strictures of the Law, the Gospel becomes a new set of laws (acts of penance, pilgrimages, relics, fasts, set prayers, obligatory confession, monastic vows etc.) that are as burdensome as the old ones (dietary restrictions, keeping the Sabbath, strictures on dress etc.).

Failing to practice *orthotomia*, then, means failing to distinguish between Law and Gospel, and that is precisely what the Layman intended to do. Weigel concluded from reading Dionysius that the nameless God can and must be called by all names: God is One, and as such God’s Law must be the same as God’s Gospel. Moreover, Weigel’s Neoplatonic concept of creation means that man *must* have God within him if he is to exist at all. Therefore, blessedness consists not in receiving something extraneous (God’s grace flooding in like sunlight, as in Luther’s words above) but in achieving the right orientation towards what one already has. Or more precisely, since Weigel does still speak of receiving God’s grace, if God were not already within man, then the grace man received would be ineffective, having nothing to act upon.

We are now in a better position to understand why Weigel described his Layman as a *Zuhörer*. What distinguishes the Preacher from the Layman is not holding a particular office or not, it is whether one believes that speaking rather than listening will bring about salvation. When the Preacher practices *orthotomia* by preaching the distinction between Law and Gospel, Weigel argues (through the Layman) that it is not his words that will make the difference in calling the sinner back to God.

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694 “Papa autem non solum miscuit legem cum Evangelio, sed meras leges et eas tantum ceremoniales ex Evangelio fecit.” WA 40.1.II, 209:12-14.
695 Though of course, as discussed in Chapter 2, Weigel does not rule out the possibility that one might be moved to faith by a sermon or by the sacraments, he departs significantly from Luther in asserting that they
course Weigel does not rule out the possibility that one might be moved to faith by a
sermon or by the sacraments, he departs significantly from Luther in asserting that they
are only one amongst many ways that God calls sinners back to himself. Instead, Weigel
concludes that it is far better to fall silent and listen to God’s Word speaking within,
meaning that there is no need for church ministers whose job it is to preach, such that
each and every person is a layman and a listener.

Of course, the Zuhörer does speak, but he has taken on a way of using language
that blunts the knife the Preacher uses to recte secare. Putting back together what the
preacher had cut apart, the Zuhörer pieces God’s attributes back into union. The
Preacher’s way with words could be described either as a disputation (from the Latin “to
think asunder”) or as a polemic (“to make war by speaking”), both of which Weigel
explicitly rejects. The Zuhörer’s unitive way of speaking reverses the distinctions that are
introduced into God’s unity, making his speech an Irenik (to make peace by speaking),
concluding the Dionysian dynamic of procession, remaining and returning. The Zuhörer’s
undifferentiated speech—his apophatic theology—simply has no place in, and no need
for the confessional church. This laypeople’s church that Weigel describes so positively
in the Dialogus sadly did not come about in reality: the Dialogus concludes in the realm
of fantasy with the figure of Death conversing with the ghost of the Preacher to testify
that the Layman was right to forge his own independent spiritual course, rather than
obediently following the Preacher’s official doctrine. Perhaps it might serve as a mark of
Weigel’s pessimism about ecclesiastical institutions that he does not have the Layman

are only one amongst many ways that God calls sinners back to himself. Also, in keeping with Weigel’s
theory of knowledge (see Chapter 2), words only carry meaning because they refer back to the source of all
meaning that is indwelling inside each person.
himself returning gloriously from Heaven to speak for himself, and in this sense, the Layman remains a Zuhörer even once he is no longer in danger of persecution on earth.

In Weigel’s application of Dionysian apophasis to the ecclesiological problems that Weigel observed in the Lutheran church in Saxony in the late 16th century, the Layman’s way of speaking—what I have termed indifferent signification in this chapter—will bring about peace amongst Christians, unlike the way of using language that he observed in official Lutheran religious practice of his time, which created and encouraged divisions within the church. The crucial distinction that Weigel’s indifferent signification undoes is the distinction between Law and Gospel that was so central to Lutheran theology, because Weigel is keen to demonstrate that God’s full self is indwelling in each and every person—baptised and unbaptized, Christian and heathen, orthodox and heterodox. As was also the motivation behind Weigel’s acute interest in Eckhartian Gelassenheit, Weigel’s writings emphasize repeatedly that every person has access to salvation and a harmonious relationship with God even without the mediation of the institution of the church.
CONCLUSION

INDIFFERENCE AND HERESY

The writings of Meister Eckhart and Dionysius the Areopagite, two of the principle writers from the tradition of negative theology, were not, in fact, lost to history between the Middle Ages and the modern era, but were indeed read in the sixteenth century. Moreover, both authors had a significant and substantial influence on the writer who is the subject of this dissertation, Valentin Weigel. Weigel was interested in Eckhart and Dionysius because both writers express ideas—*Gelassenheit* in the case of Eckhart, apophasis in the case of Dionysius—that can be described under the heading of what I have termed *indifference*. Both *Gelassenheit* and apophasis are rooted in a strong belief in the absolute unity of God and therefore God’s radical unknowability and radical unnameability.

*Gelassenheit* is the affective correlate of a belief in divine unity. Rather than recommending ascetic practices or suffering to his spiritual charges, Eckhart taught that the soul should strive to attain a state of complete detachment that will bring about full union with God. In *Gelassenheit*, the soul must surrender more than its attachment to material things and to self-will, and must, above all, give up its attachment to any knowledge, image, names or concept about God. The soul must even forgo calling God “good” or “truth,” because even these lofty concepts belong to the realm of created things and therefore do not do justice to God as he was before the act of creation, the ground of
all being. In relinquishing any created thing so as not to fracture God’s perfect unity, *Gelassenheit* is about achieving a state of indifference that mirrors the Godhead’s own undifferentiation.

Apophasis refers to the breakdown of speech that must occur when one tries to apply created language to God. Whereas Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* refers primarily to the union between God and soul, Dionysian apophasis grows out of his conviction that all created things participate in God. It was therefore appropriate to name God using language drawn from all creation, but that because these created things are by definition imperfect and limited, these names must also then be denied of God. In a final step, one must also deny that the denials say anything more true about God, which leaves nothing to do but lapse into silence. On this account, because God is both unnameable and omninameable, any name for God is just as correct or incorrect as any other: created language, in other words, is applied to God indifferently.

Indifference was not an abstract interest for Weigel but a way of answering an urgent question with important practical consequences for him: is one obliged to risk martyrdom by speaking up and defending one’s beliefs? Weigel asked this question because, in Saxony in the sixteenth century, Church and State had joined forces and attempted to purify doctrine by publishing doctrinal statements requiring subscription, backed up by secular power for those who refused to sign. Weigel disagreed with both the practice of producing confessional documents and with much of the theological content of the document he was asked to sign, the *Formula Concordiae*—but he signed it all the same. A central theme in Weigel’s writings is how to relate to a church in which he was an ordained minister, one whose theology had formed him, and one that he had
pledged to uphold and promote—but one from which his divergent beliefs left him alienated, fearful of what might happen to him if he were to voice questions about its theology and how it functioned as an institution. This is why indifference are key concepts for understanding Weigel’s writings: Gelassenheit and apophasis are both forms of indifference and both constitute Weigel’s response to confessionalization.

That Weigel signed the *Formula Concordiae* was part of a larger pattern of attempting to keep a low profile to avoid being censured by the Lutheran ecclesiastical authorities. He did not publish his works during his lifetime (with the exception of one sermon), which is sensible considering the disputatious culture of *Streitschriften* of his time. Also, in his works he gives positive examples of people not taking action, which he values as a way of fulfilling a truer form of Christianity than defend-to-the-death martyrs. Luther, on the other hand, felt the need to take action, and more importantly, to defend his beliefs no matter what the cost, famously remarking that he would rather see the world reduced to chaos and nothingness than go back on what he believed to be the truth.

What sets Weigel apart from Luther is not his strength of character (or lack thereof), but rather that he has a different attitude altogether towards the value of the earthly church. For Luther, the church ought to exist in some form and so ought to be the best that it could be, whereas Weigel did not believe that the church ought to exist at all, and that therefore all churches, even a thoroughly reformed one, would be equally undesirable. He thought that churches were *by definition* un-Christian, and as such, saw no point in taking personal risk to defend this church—or indeed, even taking personal risk to attack the church and militate in favour of secularism and abolition of the church. For Weigel, reforming the church would be like tying a ribbon over a gangrenous wound—it may
improve appearances but, because it fundamentally misdiagnoses the problem, it would do nothing to cure the patient.

As it happens, the decision not to publish his writings was a good instinct for somebody trying to keep a low profile and avoid causing controversy. When his writings were published after his death, they caused a great uproar, a panic about Weigelianer plotting against the Church, and a raft of anti-Weigelian Streitschriften by more establishment-minded Lutheran theologians. What so exercised Weigel’s critics was the fact that Weigel did not believe in the very idea of ecclesiastical institutions, which goes beyond simple anticlericalism or a dissatisfaction with a particular institution. Those who attacked Weigel saw clearly that his writings deprived the church of all of its functions, such that it had nothing to offer the laypeople it claimed to serve. Sermons, sacraments, theology, doctrine, interpreting the Bible: all of these Weigel said laypeople could perform, write or interpret themselves because these things were simply the created correlates of the uncreated original, which every person possesses as God’s most precious legacy to humankind, the gift of God himself. Each person, regardless of which church she belongs to, or even if she belongs to no church at all, carries within her a priest to perform sacraments, as well as a heavenly Book that is the source of all wisdom and saving knowledge. Moreover, although this precious treasure might be buried under deep layers of ignorance after the Fall, people’s faculties have not been so corroded by sin that the relationship to God is functionally severed.

The uproar about Weigelianism, to put the matter another way, stems from the fact that Weigel represents a peculiar limit-case of heresy. The idea he embraces—namely that no earthly Church can possibly be truly Christian—is not accidentally
heretical (i.e. he holds divergent beliefs on one matter or another), but rather necessarily so, because it is opposed to the very structure and process that produces heretics in the first place. Seen from a structural perspective, heresy is not a quality that naturally inheres in certain ideas, but rather arises the moment another idea is proclaimed orthodox. As such, a heretic does not exist per se, but rather only because he or she has been made one by a certain church body.\footnote{Leszek Kolakowski, \textit{Chrétien sans Église: La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionel au XVIIe siècle}, trans. Anna Posner (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 23.} Weigel was acutely aware of how ideas create social organizations, and, conversely, how social organizations create ideas. In the case of institutional churches, the ideas in question are contained in that church’s doctrinal documents, a doctrine that is articulated and administered by a group of organizers (priests and pastors). Orthodoxy, then, simply means the doctrine particular to that group of organizers.\footnote{Ibid, 70.} Moreover, heresy can itself become orthodoxy if heresy manages to attain an organized form, sustained by the activity of the splinter group of organizers—and it can then pursue other opposing ideas as heresy, and so on \textit{ad infinitum}.

This schema is, at the very least, a good description of the religious history of the \textit{sixteenth} century, where the initial schism that Luther provoked did not bring about the once-and-for-all purification of the church that Luther imagined and desired, but rather proved to be only the beginning of a series of schisms. Weigel saw this dynamic very clearly, and dismissed the \textit{Formula} for creating a false peace by force rather than real peace by consensus. Consequently, he struggled to break through the religious disputes that so destabilized Saxony in the late \textit{sixteenth} century. However, Weigel makes clear that any attempt to come up with another ultimately authoritative (and ultimately persuasive) credo or confessional document would only aggravate the situation rather...
than resolve it, because the problem was not that the doctrinal statements produced until that point were in some way defective, but rather the fact of producing them in the first place was mistaken.

In other words, Weigel didn’t think it was necessary to bring his material reality into line with his mental life, and so figured out a way of accommodating his divergent beliefs to the ecclesiastical reality that was his milieu. Whereas many historians writing about Weigel read his theology with admiration but dismiss him personally as a coward, one historian, Steven Ozment, attempts to rescue a revolutionary desire in Weigel by imagining that Weigel wrote with the hope that one day, his ideas would be welcomed by the church and acted upon. This revolutionary desire is deduced precisely from Weigel’s interest in Gelassenheit that renders the world utterly irrelevant: “one is above popes and kings, beyond sacraments and laws, immune to worldly praise and condemnation,” such that “even if the experience (or the theory) does not issue in dissent, reform, or revolutionary activity, it uniquely drives home the ideological prerequisite for such, viz. an understanding of the penultimate character of all worldly power and authority.”

Thus, “medieval mystical writings uniquely contain the raw material of dissent,” which early modern dissenters (including Weigel, in Ozment’s estimation) “were most adept at exploiting.” However, Weigel did not express a faith to which any future era would in fact be receptive—but rather that all churches necessarily devolve into violence and repressive sectarianism.

In light of his pessimistic outlook about ecclesiastical institutions, Weigel proposes that the highest form of religious devotion is not martyrdom but rather the

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699 Ibid.
cultivation of an attitude of indifference. Indifference, for Weigel, is a principled non-participation in the earthly ecclesiastical body, in which Weigel consents to the self-limitation of a life lived in secret for the sake of other people—for his family, for his congregation, for other like-minded Christians, for the unity of the truly catholic Church. Weigel wrote admiringly of the Holy Family persecuted by Herod in Bethlehem, who slipped away quietly at night, to give the infant Christ time to perform his earthly mission.¹⁰⁰

Unlike the Holy Family, Weigel could not slip away because, as an ordained minister of the Lutheran Church, he had put himself in a position of responsibility, ministering to his congregation; though he had lost faith in the church he belonged to, he nonetheless felt bound by his oath. He could, however, slip away in spirit—which is what I have discussed under the term indifference in this dissertation. One form of anticonfessional indifference Weigel is interested in is Eckhartian Gelassenheit, the attainment of which silences human intellectual faculties, preventing them from stubbornly inventing subjective interpretations of the Bible, and then, once they have been hardened into doctrinal statements, foisting these onto other Christians. Instead, the soul is united to God, and allows God to interpret God’s own self in man. The indifference of Gelassenheit can be attained only because God is indwelling in man in the ground of the soul, the most precious legacy given to Adam at creation.

Apophasis is another form of anticonfessional indifference that plays a key role in Weigel’s works, because it offered him a way of speaking about God that does not produce doctrine. Unlike the writing of doctrine, which is a way of doing theology that

parcels God, who by rights is supremely One, into a series of articles and propositions that can be analyzed and catechized. Moreover, Lutheran theology functioned on the fundamental division of God’s Law from Gospel, what was referred to as orthotomia. In Weigel’s view, God’s unity is further fractured when assent to these propositions is made the condition of salvation—how could God ever be irrevocably lost to man if man relates to God simply by virtue of existing? By using indifferent signification, Weigel thus declines to consider doctrine as either an important activity for the church or indeed a condition of salvation, and his writing thus becomes an irenic—a way of using language that brings about peace.

Because Weigel considered God to be radically unknowable and unnameable, truth about God always slips away in the process of articulating it, and as a result, neither doctrine nor Scripture can function as the basis of a truly Christian church: no institution can say what is true and what is not. Salvation cannot be allocated on the basis of spoken or written words because it must be universally and naturally available, otherwise God must be cruel for denying it to some by not letting them hear his saving words, and thus his saving Word. The church cannot be only in Rome or in Wittenberg, and so it must be both nowhere and everywhere—which is another way of saying that people are not in fact sinners (not really, even though they do indeed do evil), and that they have no need of religion because they always have God.

In discussing Weigel’s writings, I have shown that the idea of indifference, though it is a term has negative connotations for many modern readers, is in fact key to understanding his oeuvre as a whole. Rather than simply dismissing Weigel’s failure to speak out about his divergent religious beliefs as cowardice, unravelling the complex
thinking behind his decision to remain silent while occupying an official post in the Lutheran church reveals a network of fascinating and unexpected intellectual connections. Weigel’s ideas on indifference were informed by his reading of two other pre-modern proponents of indifference, Dionysius and Eckhart. The outcome of his engagement with the idea of indifference is his reflections on how decisions about orthodoxy and heresy are made, on what authority, and by whom. Weigel’s writings thus draw attention to the social circumstances in which theological truth is written and proclaimed, and indeed the process by which heresy is discovered and disowned.
Appendix

The Works of Valentin Weigel

This list of Weigel’s works is based on the one found in Andrew Weeks’ monograph on Weigel, as well as on the contents of the new critical edition of Weigel’s works. Works with a star are the ones that Weeks gives an approximate date for.

1570 Zwene nützliche Traktate
   De vita beata
   De luce et caligine divina
   Vom Gesetz oder Willen Gottes (shortly after 1570)

1571 Bericht zur “Deutschen Theologie”
   Die vernünftige Kreatur
   *Gnothi seauton
   *Scholasterium christianum

1572 Vom wahren seligmachenden Glauben

1573 Daß das Wort Gottes in allen Menschen sei
   De vita Christi (after 1573)
   Handschriftliche Predigtensammlung (1573-1574)

1574 Einfälltiger Unterricht
   Wie der Glaube aus dem Gehör komme
   Vom himmlischen Jerusalem
   Von Betrachtung des Lebens Christi
   Seligmachende Erkenntnis Gottes

1575 *Vom seligen Leben
   *Gebetbuch (Büchlein vom Gebet)
   Vom judicio im Menschen

1576 Bericht vom Glauben
   Unterricht Predigte

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*Vom Ort der Welt

1577  Natürliche Auslegung von der Schöpfung
      Vom Ursprung aller Dinge
      Viererlei Auslegung von der Schöpfung (1577/1582)

1578  Vom Leben Christi
      Der güldene Griff
      Informatorium
      Kirchen- oder Hauspostille

1582  Von Vergebung der Sünden
      Gespräch Laie-Beichtvater

1584  Dialogus de Christianismo
      Lazaruspredigt
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Weigel, V. (1647). *Van de Betrachtigh des Levens Christi: En, Hoe Christus tot onsen nut, moet gekent worden; Vervat in vijf Cappittelen; Noch is hier by ghevoeght de Korte Invleydinghe Tot de Duytsche Theologie*. Amsterdam: Pieter la Burgh.


