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Hidden Lives: Asceticism and Interiority in the Late Reformation, 1650-1745

By

Timothy Cotton Wright

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jonathan Sheehan, chair

Professor Ethan Shagan

Professor Niklaus Largier

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## Abstract

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This dissertation explores a unique religious awakening among early modern Protestants whose primary feature was a revival of ascetic, monastic practices a century after the early Reformers condemned such practices. By the early seventeenth-century, a widespread dissatisfaction can be discerned among many awakened Protestants at the suppression of the monastic life and a new interest in reintroducing ascetic practices like celibacy, poverty, and solitary withdrawal to Protestant devotion. The introduction and chapter one explain how the absence of monasticism as an institutionally sanctioned means to express intensified holiness posed a problem to many Protestants. Large numbers of dissenters fled the mainstream Protestant religions—along with what they viewed as an increasingly materialistic, urbanized world—to seek new ways to experience God through lives of seclusion and ascetic self-deprivation. In the following chapters, I show how this ascetic impulse drove the formation of new religious communities, transatlantic migration, and gave birth to new attitudes and practices toward sexuality and gender among Protestants. The study consists of four case studies, each examining a different non-conformist community that experimented with ascetic ritual and monasticism. Chapters two and three examine the prayer practices of two semi-monastic Protestant communities—the ‘Angelic Brethren’ led by the mystic Johann Gichtel and a circle of Quietists led by Charles Héctor Marquis de Marsay. These communities fused the ascetic, mystical teachings on self-renunciation and union with modern mystical traditions in creating their own withdrawn, mystical devotions in an attempt to separate themselves from the world and their own carnal wills. In chapter four, the familiar story of a Protestant cloister in North America, the Ephrata Cloister, is recast as a part of the broader ascetic revival in this dissertation. Particularly attention is given in this chapter to the prevalence of celibacy in Protestantism. The final chapter and conclusion examines the afterlife of ascetic theology and mysticism in the late enlightenment and romantic period which saw a fierce divide over the value and meaning of solitude. From northern Germany, Amsterdam, and across the Atlantic in colonial North America, these dissenters formed utopian communities that strove to keep their distance from civilization even as they engaged in the project of global European expansion, empire, and settlement.

To Mirjam and Elias

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# Hidden Lives: Asceticism and Interiority in the Late Reformation, 1650-1745

## INTRODUCTION

In Hans Grimmelshausen's (1621-1676) famed seventeenth-century picaresque novel, *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus*, the figure of the solitary, world-fleeing hermit features prominently. The novel's hero, young Simplicius, first stumbles onto a forest hermit in the opening chapters as he flees Swedish soldiers pillaging and burning his village. The hermit's long, tangled hair and "wild beard" makes him look fierce and nearly indistinguishable from the beasts of the forest, marking his separation from society. Adopting the orphaned Simplicius, the hermit teaches him that a Christian's whole duty consists in "diligent prayer", introspection, simple work to sustain oneself, and avoiding the evil around him, a formula elsewhere reduced to three principles: "These three things: know thyself, avoid evil company, and remain constant" (*beständig verbleiben*).<sup>1</sup> At the end of the novel, Simplicius remembers his hermit father's teachings and lives out his days alone, on an island, declaring that "here is a quiet solitude without wrath, disputes, or quarrels...a peaceful calm wherein one can worship the almighty alone, ponder his works, and sing and praise him."<sup>2</sup> The novel presents a meandering meditation on the evils of the world, with the conclusion that the Christian's safest course is withdrawal and serving God in simplicity and solitude. It evokes parallels to Voltaire's *Candide* a century later where the exhausted Candide resolves to "cultivate [his] garden." As one scholar has summarized the moral lesson stemming from Grimmelshausen's use of the hermit, "The hermit ideal is for him [Grimmelshausen] the result of his ethics aimed at transcending the world".<sup>3</sup>

Published in 1669, Grimmelshausen's account of this hermit's simple, ascetic faith is significant for yet another reason. Initially, the text offers surprisingly little evidence indicating the hermit's confessional identity, be it Catholic or Protestant, despite such an ascetic lifestyle being long associated with Catholic devotion. Even amidst the polarizing Thirty Years War, his prayers and teachings conspicuously contain no confessionally-specific dogmas. The cross he wears, although large and ostentatious, evokes a Christo-centric focus on the Lord's suffering and rejection by the world that is confessionally ambiguous. We gain one clue, however, when we learn that once a week the hermit and Simplicius go to a Protestant "Pfarrherrns Kirche" for worship in a nearby village. Only later in the novel, do we learn that the hermit had been a Protestant noble whose distaste for all "worldly business" led him to abandon his considerable material wealth, and "[flee] the entire world". The unusual step for a Protestant to flee civilization and embrace an ascetic existence, moreover, is commented on within the novel itself. When Simplicius encounters a Lutheran pastor familiar with the hermit, the pastor explains that the drastic step was a result of his reading un-Protestant, "papist" literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Grimmelshausen, *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (Stuttgart: Parkland Verlag, 1985), 40-43. The novel describes this as a story of a strange vagrant, what he learned and saw in the world and "why he left it of his own free will".

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 703.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Hendrik Scholte "Der Religiöse Hintergrund des Simplicissimus Teutsch", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 82 (1950), 273.





Figure 1 Gerrit Dou, “The Hermit”. Amsterdam, 1667

“In my opinion”, claims the pastor, “he was led astray by reading so many papist books about the life of the old hermits”.<sup>4</sup>

The pastor’s belief that only Catholic seduction could explain the Protestant nobleman’s rejection of the world has a history. For the pastor, as for us today, such an act ran counter to certain basic assumptions about Protestantism’s understanding of the holy life, and its assumption that holiness and life in the world are not irreconcilable. Written into Lutheranism’s official creed itself, the Augsburg Confession, was Melanchthon’s warning against those monks preaching “fleeing from the world, and seeking a kind of life which would be more pleasing to God” in celibacy, poverty, and solitude. True holiness did not

consist, Melanchthon insisted, “in celibacy, in begging, or in vile apparel”, apart from the world, but in “conceiv[ing] great faith” and “to expect his aid in all things *according to our calling*” [my italics] be it a lawyer, a peasant, or a prince.<sup>5</sup> For early modern theologians and modern thinkers alike, Luther and Melanchthon’s rejection of monastic withdrawal represented a reconciliation of an otherworldly, religious ethos and worldly materialism. Protestantism had abolished monasticism and proclaimed the holy, even sacerdotal nature of secular professions. The nineteenth-century liberal historian, Thomas Macaulay, wrote of his “firm belief” that the superior advances of northern Europe in “arms, arts, sciences, letters, commerce, [and] agriculture” was due to “the moral effect of the Protestant Reformation.”<sup>6</sup> The century of Grimmelshausen’s Protestant hermit was also the century of the Dutch Golden Age and of rising British might, when northern European Protestant economies amassed spectacular commercial wealth, uninhibited, as

<sup>4</sup> Grimmelshausen, *Simplicissimus*, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession”, Article XXVII “Of Monastic Vows” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds., Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 279-283.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Babington Baron Macaulay, “Scenes and Characters from the writings of Thomas Babington Macaulay, Being a Selection of his Most Eloquent Passages” (New York: G.H. Derby and Company, 1846), 66.

Macaulay believed, by notions of the superior spiritual value of poverty. As Max Weber wrote in *The Protestant Ethic* in 1905, “The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.”<sup>7</sup> Amidst all of this, the nobleman’s adoption of an eremitic life and rejection of the world would appear an aberration, a unique response to the suffering brought on by the Thirty Years’ War and its judgment on a corrupt world.<sup>8</sup>

But—far from unique—the hermit in *Simplicissimus* and his ‘seduction’ by stories of the ancient desert hermits points to a much broader interest in ascetic devotion and sheds light on a fundamental, structural problem facing the Reformation in its second century of existence. The seventeenth-century, much like the sixteenth, was one of a succession of religious awakenings stirred in large part by dissatisfaction at the depraved, worldly condition of Christians and the seeming incapacity of the confessional state churches to remedy this. For many awakened Protestants, it was precisely the absence of a theology and institutional pathways for practicing an ascetic, withdrawn Christianity that prevented the spirit of true Christianity from penetrating the uncovered soul. Johann Arndt (1555-1621), an early representative of one of these revivals, recognized that the Reformation had, by its abolition of monasticism, produced a religious culture in which the ascetic dimension of Christianity had almost entirely been forgotten: “Christians nowadays want a respectable, splendid, wealthy and world-conform Christianity, but no one wants to have, confess, nor follow the poor, meek, humble, despised, lowly Christianity”<sup>9</sup>. In the same vein, Jodocus Lodenstein [1620-1677], a Dutch admirer of Arndt known for his ascetic lifestyle in rejecting marriage, wine, and meat<sup>10</sup>, made the case to his fellow Protestants that aspects of monastic self-denial could be edifying for inward piety when he wrote that “certain disruptions must be recognized at the beginning of the Reformation” in which due to overzealousness, much “good was rejected”. Among such ‘good’ were practices of ‘various orders and cloisters of monks and religious’ whose origins lay in the ‘ancient ascetes’, which had “serve[ed] to holiness...[and] all types of good works of mercy and others.”<sup>11</sup>

Unsurprisingly, writings in praise of the intense, challenging, and heartfelt devotions of the early christian desert hermits that Grimmelshausen’s Protestant hermit stood accused of, became increasingly common among seventeenth-century Protestants

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<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Dover, 2003), 45. Based on Charles Scribner & Sons 1958 translation.

<sup>8</sup> Historians noting this upsurge in interest among Protestants for a life of solitude, self-denial, and to flee the world have developed various explanatory models. One prominent approach has been to view this ascetic mood as a result of the terrible diseases, loss of life, famines, and cold that wracked the seventeenth-century, and Germany in particular in what has been termed the “crisis of the seventeenth-century”. With life so fleeting, and men so cruel, peace could be found in withdrawing from the world to contemplate the glory and permanence of the next world. Often this is cited as the approximate cause of ascetic Protestantism in this period. See Hartmut Lehmann, “Ascetic Protestantism and Economic Rationalism: Max Weber Revisited after Two Generations” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 80, No.3 (Jul., 1987) pp. 307-320; Bernard Gorceix, *Flambee et agonie: mystiques du xvii siecle allemande* (1977) who both emphasize the ravages of the century as the reason for an upswing in interest for the contemplative life.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, (Braunschweig: Andreas Dunckern, 1605), preface.

<sup>10</sup> See Douglas Schantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 56-7.

<sup>11</sup> Jodocus von Lodenstein, *Beschouwingen van Zion* (Amsterdam, 1675), 11.

seeking a means to practice such an intensified spirituality. New German editions of the *Lives of the Desert Fathers* appeared by key figures in this ascetic revival such as Gottfried Arnold's *Vitae Patrum: Oder Das Leben der Altväter* (1700), and Johann Glüsing's *Der erster Tempel Gottes in Christo* (1720), both translations of the Jesuit's Herbert Roseweyde's 1615 Latin *Vitae Patrum*.<sup>12</sup> The interest in the desert fathers signaled a renewal of interest in the ascetic, contemplative lifepath, or the *vita religiosa*, in seventeenth-century Protestantism, a path that had long been closed to adherents of the evangelical religion. The prominence given to the ancient Christian desert fathers in the writings of major proponents of renewal, such as Johann Arndt, Christian Hoburg, and Gottfried Arnold, revealed to contemporary Protestants a tradition of pre-Catholic asceticism unsullied by the hypocritical and worldly medieval monasteries.<sup>13</sup> Gottfried Arnold would write in the early eighteenth century that "the first solitaries, likewise without outward gatherings, services, or sacrifices, originally grew very quickly in solitude, and witnessed through *praxis*, how much better obedience is than sacrifice, and how God should be worshipped in spirit and in truth."<sup>14</sup>

Besides the desert fathers as models for pure religion, the themes of contemplation and denying the things of this world drawn from across the Christian tradition are strongly present among seventeenth-century Protestant renewalists. In the realm of art, the Protestant painter Gerrit Dou frequently depicted hermits in the 1660s (see above) while Johannes Vermeer portrayed the biblical representative of the contemplative life, Mary, against the temporal Martha.<sup>15</sup> Above all, proponents of a Protestant reform movement emphasizing greater holiness in the lives of Christians, began turning in greater numbers to the mystical (used widely as a synonym for 'ascetic') theology found in the texts of late medieval devotion such as the *Theologia Deutsch*, Tauler's *Nachfolge des armen Leben Christi* and Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*.<sup>16</sup> In these

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Héctor Marsay, the subject of our fourth chapter, wrote in the radical Protestant periodical, *Geistliche Fama*, in 1741, that "the description of the outward lives and acts of these holy hermits and about their manifold enacted miracles, are found in the beautiful book *Vitae Patrum* from Roseweyde, in the German language by Gottfried Arnold. The best, however, is Otto Glüsing's "First Temple of God". *Geistliche Fama*, vol. 27 (Berleburg, 1741), 771.

<sup>13</sup> Bernd Jaspert, "Einleitung", *Mönchthum und Protestantismus: Probleme und Wege der Forschung seit 1877*, vol. 1. (Regensburg: EOS Verlag, 2005), 30-31. Jaspert credits these reforming Protestant theologians at the turn of the seventeenth-century such as Moller, Arndt, and Gerhard with developing an interest in the ascetic Patristics and realizing that asceticism had a Christian foundation. Aiding greatly in this effort was the editorial efforts of a Jesuit, Heribert Roseweyde who published one of the first printed editions of the lives of the desert hermits, *Vitae Patrum* in 1615.

<sup>14</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Vitae Patrum, oder Leben der Alt-Väter*, (Halle, 1700), 23. The English Puritan, Richard Baxter, would write in his *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (London, 1691) "...I cannot but think that (though there was a mixture of good and bad) there was more of the good spirit than of the bad in most of the ancient monks and hermits, that lived so strict and mortified lives. And as I find, not only by Erasmus, but by the complaint of Protestant divines, that it was a desire of liberty from the Papists' austerities that prevailed with most of the vulgar to cast off popery, so the case of many monasteries; their mortification and devotion (though ignorant) doth make me hope that in many such monasteries there is more of the Spirit of God than among the common, worldly, sensual sort of Protestants." 102-3

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Vermeer, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*. 1655. National Gallery of Scotland. Edinburgh.

<sup>16</sup> See Hermann Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit: Johann Arndts "Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christentum" als Programm einer spiritualistischen-hermetischen Theologie*. (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2001), 39-50. Klaus Deppermann, *Johann Jakob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002), 73-5. Johannes Wallmann "Mystik und Kirchenkritik in der lutherischen Theologie des 17. Jahrhunderts.

works the path to a mystical union with Christ was depicted as achieved through self-denial and resignation from the world. Johann Arndt helped introduce the Catholic classic, *Imitatio Christi* into mainstream Lutheran spirituality with his edition from 1605.<sup>17</sup> Between 1601 and 1650, there would be 24 editions of that text in the German language.<sup>18</sup>

Not limited to the realm of imagination, by the latter half of the seventeenth-century, large number of non-conformist Protestants in Germany and the Atlantic World inspired by such readings could be found experimenting with chastity, solitary living, and other ascetic practices like fasting and prayer vigils.<sup>19</sup> Small house-communities of Protestant devotées of the ascetic life sprang up in tolerant enclaves like Amsterdam and Berleburg. One of the leaders of such a house-community, the mystic Johann Gichtel (1638-1710), an avid proponent of the celibate and solitary life, wrote often of the false, worldly path that Lutheranism had taken, speaking of Luther's theology "as a middle path" that "imagined a salvation without struggle, bringing its listeners into a carnal security." The result was that the "cross of Christ is now considered pure foolishness, and those who deviate only slightly from the general path of the children of the world are persecuted, hereticized, and condemned."<sup>20</sup> In the North American colony of Pennsylvania, heavily populated by German radical separatists, experimentation with solitary withdrawal and communal celibacy was particularly pronounced in the final years of the seventeenth-century and into the eighteenth. One observer of the most prominent example of such ascetic communities, the Ephrata commune, wrote that Ephrata's inhabitants "...strongly emphasize self-denial and rejection of the world, satisfy only the most urgent needs with regard to food and clothing, reject unnecessary goods and animals, greet nobody on the street, but walk straight ahead..."<sup>21</sup> By the early eighteenth-century, for the most fervent heirs of the Reformation, ascetic worship seems to have become a solution to staid, outward ceremonialism, not the problem.

This dissertation is not meant to further revise Weber's thesis tying Protestantism to the rise of capitalism by showing the persistence of outward asceticism in seventeenth-century Protestantism. Such objections have already been amply made.<sup>22</sup> Rather, I seek to

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Johann Arndt, Joachim Lütkemann, Philipp Jakob Spener" in *Pietismus und Orthodoxie: Gesammelte Aufsätze III* (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2010), 103-127. See Köepke's "Theologia Mystica, oder Ascetica"

<sup>17</sup> Wallmann, "Mystik und Kirchenkritik", 79. "Arndt führte die *Nachfolge Christi*, das klassische Erbauungsbuch der katholischen Kirche, in den Gebrauch der lutherischen Kirche ein..."

<sup>18</sup> Maximilian von Hapsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425-1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller* (London: Routledge, 2016), 251.

<sup>19</sup> These communities, around which the following chapters revolve, have often been grouped in the category of "radical Pietists", a broad term catching all types of non-conformists, millenarian and sectarians. I focus more narrowly on a set of experimental communities squarely interested in the contemplative life and self-denial, traits praised by many radical Pietists but not put into practice in a concrete communal form.

<sup>20</sup> Johann Gichtel, *Theosophia Practica, Halten und Kämpfen ob dem H. Glauben bis ans Ende* vol. I, (Leiden: 1722), Der CXXIII. Brief. An einen andern. Amt. 1702, 531.

<sup>21</sup> From Johann Adam Gruber, letter from Germantown Oct. 28 1730. *Geistliche Fama*, No. 3 (1731), 51. Cited in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*. Eds. Felix Reichmann, Eugene Edgar Doll (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1952), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Economists have often looked with suspicion upon cultural explanations for economic behavior. One early critique of Weber and the origins of capitalism is H.M. Robertson's *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism: A Criticism of Max Weber and His School* (Kelly and Millman, 1933). A new perspective differing from these economic critiques of Weber has appeared showing a correlation between

examine a theological, and devotional crisis in Protestantism created by the early reformer's suppression of the monastic and ascetic life and the difficulties this posed for Protestants in conceptualizing and expressing religious fervor or conversion in a purely 'interior' fashion. In suppressing what they considered the corrupt, institutionalized medieval markers of the holy, "religious" life—chastity, poverty, and physical withdrawal from the world—the Reformers likewise curtailed what had been for centuries the typical means by which many Christians expressed intensified spirituality. This can be seen, for example, in the medieval meaning of 'conversion.' When a lay Christian experienced a change of heart and an acute awareness of his or her sin, the standard response was the adoption of some, or all aspects of the "vita religiosa", strict rules requiring abstaining from worldly comforts or joining an order—that is, one displayed a new spiritual condition by distancing oneself from the world.<sup>23</sup> 'Conversions' amidst awakenings in Protestantism did not have such an accepted, institutionalized outlet. Holiness was now a matter of inward conviction, not measurable by the austerity of one's life, or the number of prayers offered. All Christians stood equally before God, regardless of their profession. This flattening of religious expression presented a fundamental problem for those "hotter" Protestants of the seventeenth-century wishing to follow the Gospel injunction to "deny oneself" and imitate Christ and those who believed the essence of the Gospel was precisely in such an overcoming of worldliness. In the words of one such Protestant ascetic who figures prominently in this study, Johann Gichtel, "among the Protestants, not a trace of self-denial and the imitation of Christ is to be found."<sup>24</sup> How could then the converted Lutheran or Calvinist express a desire to imitate Christ when the traditional path of a consecrated life no longer existed?

The answer to this question for many Protestants in the seventeenth-century was to pursue, what I will call in this dissertation the 'hidden life'. This term appears often in the letters, essays, and treatises written by the Protestants of this period interested in reviving practices of self-denial, solitary withdrawal, and the values of the contemplative life.<sup>25</sup> The term comes from the Greek word *μυστικός* ('mystikos') whose root means 'hidden' ('verborgen' in German). The use of the word 'hidden' as its translation united the love of 'mystic' theology with what my dissertation's subjects believed to be the practical meaning of mysticism, that is, a life of self-denial, away from the world in God's presence. Describing one's life and religion as 'hidden' conveyed a turning away

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Protestantism, literacy, and economic growth. See Sascha O. Becker and Ludger Wößmann, "Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History", in Munich Discussion Paper No. 2007-7, 22 January 2007; and Ulrich Blum and Leonard Dudley, "Religion and Economic Growth: Was Weber Right?" February 2001, University of Montréal, Cahier 2001-05. I accept that Protestantism fundamentally changed Christian culture and certain habits that impacted other areas of human activity, without necessarily giving it credit for the rise of 'capitalism'.

<sup>23</sup> Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 127. "Thus conversion meant turning away from the world and turning ascetically toward God; that was the medieval monastic tradition."

<sup>24</sup> Johann Gichtel, *Theosophia Practica* vol. VII, "Der Wunder-volle und heilig-geführte Lebenslauf des Auserwehlten Rüstzeugs und hochseligen Mannes Gottes Johann Georg Gichtels", (Amsterdam, 1722), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Marquis de Marsay, TP 1246 A 1/9 a Hayn ce 10 9bre 1738, "la vie cachée nous est toujours plus recommandée et l'oeuvre de Dieu se fera en secrèt, son règne s'establira..." Marsay's correspondence is found in the university library archive at Lausanne university (Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire BCU Lausanne) under the call number TP 1246.

from the view of the world, to the depths and secrecy of one's soul, and remaining in constant prayer to unite with God. Rooted in these group's deep reading of the *theologia mystica* tradition, the 'hidden life' meant to them pursuing mystical death and self-mortification. Conrad Beissel, whose communal order of hermits is the focus of this dissertation's fourth chapter, wrote that "we read of a hidden comportment [*Wandel*] and intercourse with God which the holy fathers led in the desert" that consisted of mortifying and 'crucifying' the 'natural senses'.<sup>26</sup> The goal of this 'hidden' devotion was to remove all attachments to the exterior world, its pleasures, the desires of the flesh, secular pursuits, and reliance on outward ritual. One chapter's protagonist called this the 'dying life'.<sup>27</sup> All outward action ceases, but the intense occupation and communion of the soul with God is inward, hidden from the world. Of central importance to this hidden life as practiced in the networks and experimental communities that make up this dissertation, were a set of practices associated with the ascetic, monastic life: voluntary poverty, chastity, and mystical contemplation. Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), an eighteenth-century editor, compiler, and practitioner of solitary withdrawal entitled his translations of the work of a French hermit, Jean Bernieres de Louvigny, *Das Verborgene Leben in Christo mit Gott*.<sup>28</sup> In his introduction he described the main features of Louvigny's devotion as an "inward and outward conformity with the life of Christ, especially in his love of poverty, despisal and suffering, which is achieved through the inward union with him, through the unceasing prayer of the soul, and a child-like walking in the presence of God."<sup>29</sup> With the individuals, networks, and communities of this dissertation who practiced this hidden life, there is contained a complete reframing of the value of ascetic devotion for evangelical religion.

Historians of the seventeenth-century transformations in Protestant piety have long noted the resurgence of ascetic mysticism in this period, but they have failed to recognize the period's widespread fascination with solitude, contemplation, and self-denial as anything more than metaphors, a "spiritualizing" or "interiorizing" of monastic tropes.<sup>30</sup> Not willing to sacrifice the thesis of Protestant belief as inherently 'interior' and

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<sup>26</sup> Conrad Beissel, *Deliciae Ephratenses pars I: oder des ehrwürdigen Vaters: Friedsam Gottrecht, (Geistliche Reden)*, (Ephrata, 1773), 87-88.

<sup>27</sup> The Marquis de Marsay uses the term quoting Augustine, and Conrad Beissel regularly wrote of the "dying life". Beissel: "...reduce our ascending Will unto a sinking and dying condition..." *Dissertation on Man's Fall*, (Ephrata, 1765), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Tersteegen, *Das Verborgene Leben in Christo mit Gott* (Frankfort, 1727).

<sup>29</sup> Tersteegen, *Das Verborgene Leben in Christo mit Gott*, preface, viii.

<sup>30</sup> Elke Axmacher, in *Praxis Evangeliorum: Theologie und Frömmigkeit bei Martin Moller (1547-1606)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), characterizes post-Reformation piety as 'ascetic' in its tendencies (pgs. 2-25) and shows that Moller, Jakob Böhme's pastor, popularized the spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux. Historians of Reformation Germany like Bernd Moeller and Susan Karant-Nunn, have both argued that strong traces of monastic discipline and metaphors strongly shaped Protestant theology but always in an 'inward' sense. Karant-Nunn in her *The Reformation of Feeling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) finds "Lutheranism and Calvinism to espouse monastic elements and to attempt to ingrain them in the populace" but these were of a different nature such as female chastity in marriage. She claims that for Protestants, the "best religiosity was calm, interior, and unrelated to material objects" (68). See also Bernd Moeller, "Frühe Reformation in Deutschland als neue Mönchthum" in *Die Frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch* (Munich: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996). While "Abscheidung von der Welt und die Aufrichtung einer Gegenwelt der Frommen und Heiligen" is "wesensfremd" to Protestantism, the "seriousness" of monasticism is reflected in its quest to make the *special* path of monastic purity into the universal quest of all Christians (90-91).

thus modern, they have overlooked or misinterpreted the literal dimensions of Protestants professing the path of self-denial. Klaus Depperman, in discussing the early, radical roots to Pietism, describes two such advocates who figure in this chapter—Justinian von Welz and Christian Hoburg—as important to an evangelical rediscovery of the “originally ancient Christian monk-mysticism” but which they then “interiorized and spiritualized in a contemporary fashion”.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Maximilian von Hapsburg in a study of Protestant translations of the famous *Devotio Moderna* text, *The Imitation of Christ*, maintains that Protestant interest in such semi-monastic texts was primarily metaphorical: “For Protestants, the notion of withdrawal from the world was not interpreted literally to mean flight from the world, but rather a departure from its values.”<sup>32</sup>

Such conclusions reproduce the assumption that early modern Protestant spirituality was ascetic only in a moral sense without interrogating fully the complexity of what ‘interiority’ looked like in practice, relying instead on a Weberian analysis of Protestant asceticism as relegated to an inward, moral realm or in non-religious economic habits.<sup>33</sup> But, what we find in reality is that the devotion of so-called radical Protestant spiritualists was inextricably linked to outward ascetic practices. This confusion as to the meaning of ‘interior’ worship is, in part, a consequence of the paradoxical nature of radical Protestant language as reformers interested in ascetic, practical forms of devotion described this as the true interior, “worship in spirit and truth” against the corrupt formal worship of the state churches.<sup>34</sup> When they spoke of rejecting all outward religion, they did not thereby reject certain, moderate aspects of asceticism—but rather sacramental religion as well as institutional monasticism and excessive self-deprivation. They nonetheless embraced embodied practices drawn from the storehouse of Christian devotion, practices that followed a method to discipline the body, and focus the soul in divine matters. This could be anything from sleep deprivation, to celibacy, to diet.<sup>35</sup> John Wesley, inspired by Thomas à Kempis and the Boehme enthusiast William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, created his own well-known methodical devotional program in his ‘Holy Club’, with fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, several minutes of prayer each hour, and celibacy.<sup>36</sup> Far from progressing towards a plain style, purely textual liturgy, the evidence from evangelical awakenings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests a laity clamoring for embodied and arduous worship.

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<sup>31</sup> Depperman, *Johann Jakob Schütz*, 80. Depperman’s analysis follows closely that of Ernst Benz’s reception history of Macarios, an Egyptian desert hermit, by Protestants in *Die Protestantische Thebais: Zur Nachwirkung Makarios des Ägypters im Protestantismus des 17 und 18. Jahrhunderts in Europa und Amerika* (Mainz: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1961). Benz shows how the reception of Makarios “reveals a totally neglected movement” of a Protestant eremitism. Pietists like Gottfried Arnold “mobilized” the asceticism of Macarios to fight against the institutionalized churches. Focus was on a “practical” christianity that pursued a “radikalen Heiligungs und Vollkommenheits-Streben.” (16).

<sup>32</sup> von Hapsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> The assumption of Protestantism tending toward a ritual, material-free interiority, especially in its more radical sects, has not only informed much of Weber’s analysis on modernity but Charles Taylor and others as well.

<sup>34</sup> Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 119.

<sup>35</sup> The Angelic Brethren practiced methodical sleep deprivation and Beissel’s Ephrata hermits experimented with various strict diets before settling on vegetarianism.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003), 35-40.

In the introductory chapter, I trace the origins of a Protestant ‘hidden life’ to a large number of Protestant theologians, clergy, and laymen who strove in the early and middle decades of the seventeenth-century to articulate and legitimize a Protestant “*vita religiosa*” that involved self-denial, solitude, and contemplative prayer. These Protestants re-opened an unsettled Reformation debate on the value of ascetic practices, vows, and the nature of holiness in their efforts to reclaim elements of outward ascetic, monastic practices. In so doing, they reaffirmed the value of a consecrated, holy life separate from the world for Protestants.<sup>37</sup> This reform program can be discerned in a genre of devotional literature popular in the years leading up to, and during the Thirty Years War which took as its primary theme the *inward* practice of ‘dying to the world’ and ‘mortification of the flesh’. This genre—popularized mostly by Johann Arndt and the mystic Jacob Boehme—extolled the spiritual value of suffering, self-denial, and spoke of a spiritual renewal in terms of ‘rebirth’ of human nature at odds with the purely imputed understanding of righteousness in Lutheran doctrine. The central argument of the chapter is that the notion of ‘dying to the world’ and ‘mortification of the flesh’ quickly transformed from a metaphor for a profound ‘inward’ moral change and rebirth to calls for externalized ascetic practices for ‘crucifying the flesh’ by the middle of the century. In the hands of Arndt’s and Boehme’s more radical followers, it proved impossible to contain the historical and rhetorical power of Christian self-denial in a purely ‘interior’ sense. Followers of Arndt and Boehme, such as the separatist theologian Christian Hoburg’s *Praxis Arndiana* and *Theologia Mystica*, Joachim Betke’s *Mysterium Crucis* and *Leydens-Gemeinschaft*, and the noble Austrian exile Justinian von Welz’s *De Vita Solitaria* (1663), among others, preached a passion mysticism teaching the essential nature of an imitation of Christ’s suffering. This mid-century spiritual trend, I maintain, is the key to understanding why the second half of the seventeenth-century saw an explosion of ascetic, contemplative Protestant communities intent on correcting the early Reformation’s conflation of the secular and spiritual realms to, in their eyes, the denigration of the latter.

In three case studies, I describe the formation of these heterodox communities and networks along with an analysis of the practices at the heart of their ascetic devotion. Each community practiced an *Imitatio Christi* and ‘crucifying the flesh’ in slightly different ways, but all strove to introduce into Protestant practice the traditional hallmarks of the eremitic monastic life: celibacy, poverty, solitude, and contemplative prayer. Despite different emphases depending on which mystical authors they held most dear (some following Boehme, others the early modern Catholic quietist, ‘negative’ mysticism) they all shared a love for the ancient desert fathers, the *Devotio Moderna* with such authors as Kempis and the *Theologia Deutsch*, and Johann Tauler. In the first case study (chapter two), I explore an esoteric network of Protestant hermits centered in Amsterdam in the last two decades of the 1600s through the 1720s known as the ‘Angelic Brethren’ or ‘Gichtelians’. Led by an eccentric former lawyer from Regensburg, Johann

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<sup>37</sup> The first decades of the seventeenth-century saw the spread of late medieval mystical texts within the circles inspired by Arndt and Boehme. Through these texts, the themes of withdrawal, imitation of Christ, and ascetic self-denial became a major theme of radical Protestant devotion. In one heterodox Frankfurt printer’s shop for example, the pseudo-Tauler text *Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi* was sold. This edition had been assembled by the Schwenckfeldian Daniel Suderman. See Depperman, *Johann Jakob Schütz*, 11.



Gichtel, the group ultimately comprised hundreds, perhaps thousands, of followers across Germany, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia all practicing a unique devotional system based on hermit house-communities devoted to withdrawn contemplation and a single-minded obsession with Bohme's theosophy and celibate self-denial as the key to rebirth. The group is an important window into a broader theme found in all the communities, that of how mystical suffering and prayer was practiced and fashioned by this group as a central feature of the contemplative life and *imitatio Christi*. In what turns out to be a practice in each ascetic community surveyed here, the Angelic Brethren took the idea of asceticism and 'crucifying the flesh' to an unexpected place: the revival of intercessory prayer. This does not simply refer to praying for other Christians for God to intercede, a practice common to all Christians, Catholic or Protestant. Rather the Angelic Brethren imagined their chastity, self-denial, and hidden lives as a literal imitation of Christ's own sacrifice for humanity, whereby their own suffering could help other Christians. In Gichtel's and his followers letters, we find them boasting of mystical experiences where they suffer vicariously for others, interceding and alleviating their sins and pains. In turn, the Angelic Brethren argued that these intercessions served to refute Protestant biases toward the contemplative life as 'idle' by fashioning their prayers as 'useful' work for Christianity. Such a practice calls into question a host of assumptions about early modern Protestant religion, the boundaries of confessional identities, and the thesis, most adamantly argued by Carlos Eire, of a disenchanting Protestant notion of the relationship between living and dead, intercession, and the 'economy of salvation'.<sup>38</sup>

The third chapter examines another circle of withdrawn sufferers who share many of the same features of Gichtel's Angelic Brethren, located in the hilly, rural countryside of Hessen in the early eighteenth-century. This single house-community consisted of about 20 souls at its height, and was led by a French Huguenot refugee by the name of Charles Héctor Marquis de Marsay (1688-1752). Its members strove to keep themselves withdrawn from the world, practiced celibacy or 'chaste' marriages, and longed to achieve a union with God through an existence of continual prayer and contemplation. An embrace of suffering and a similar emphasis on 'spiritual martyrdom' characterized the group. But, in contrast to Gichtel, this community developed its particular ascetic practices on a major current of seventeenth-century Catholic mysticism known as Quietism, which taught that not only must one withdraw from the world and carnal pursuits, but that one must stop all willing and let oneself be taken over by God. The chapter contains a description of Marsay's spiritual development from a mainstream Reformed Protestant to a mystical separatist, his absorption in early modern French and Spanish Catholic ascetic mysticism, and his founding of a Protestant eremitage in Germany. The theoretical question at the heart of this chapter is that of how ascetic, contemplative practices can produce a certain type of interiority imagined as receptive and passive to God. This question burst into Protestant discussions in the late seventeenth-century with the reception of a Catholic tradition of mystical 'passive interiority' stretching back to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross but newly expounded at the end of the seventeenth-century by Miguel de Molinos and Madame Guyon.<sup>39</sup> This

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<sup>38</sup> Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 108.

<sup>39</sup> For the influence of Quietist mysticism in Protestantism see Patricia Ward, *Experimental Theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fénelon, and their Readers* (Baylor University Press, 2009); Dietrich Blaufuß

chapter is thus a window through which to explore the debates and problems arising in Protestant discussions of the new Catholic mysticism such as mediation, passivity, and interiority. It illustrates, furthermore, the rich cross-currents in Catholic and Protestant piety as the circle around Marsay demonstrates how many Protestants eclectically patched together mystical teachings from across confessional lines to build their own ascetic worship.

In the fourth chapter and final case study, I turn to how this emerging Protestant form of ascetic communalism crossed the Atlantic and became a part of colonial North American experimental religion. Northern European separatist and heterodox religious communities had increasingly looked to the Americas over the course of the seventeenth-century such as the Puritans and Quakers, and German radicals began to join them already in the 1680s. Among them was one man, Conrad Beissel, a reformed Protestant from the Palatinate who soon found his way into radical Protestant circles in the separatist hub of Berleburg. Beissel there absorbed a theosophic-tinged devotion to the ascetic, celibate and withdrawn life through Gichtel and other Angelic Brethren's writings. Emigrating to Philadelphia in 1720, Beissel quickly pushed on further, seeking to live as a hermit in the wilderness in Pennsylvania's interior. The chapter describes the gradual development of the cloister community that developed around Beissel at Ephrata near Lancaster over the course of the 1720s, 30s and 40s. Reaching its peak in the 1740s, the Ephrata Cloister boasted a large male celibate order and a separate female celibate convent, with members sporting monastic hoods and robes, tonsuring, and vigils. The sight of Ephrata's monks and nuns caused visitors to wonder at such a Protestant approximation of Catholic monasticism. The chapter investigates the practice of celibacy at Ephrata and contextualizes the renewed popularity of religious celibacy among Protestants throughout our ascetic revival. Importantly, this chapter provides the opportunity to reflect on the large number of women within this ascetic revival, their motivations, the nature of frontier life for women, as well as how the experimental communities described here spread across the Atlantic to the colonies.

In the dissertation's final chapter and conclusion, I ask what relationship this ascetic revival had for Romantic authors whose fascination with solitude and Catholicism is well known. What I find is that the feuds between the radical and orthodox Protestants as to the value of solitude, asceticism, and mysticism carried over into the Enlightenment with famous Romantic authors often directly emerging from the ascetic communities surveyed here. Their continued use—or rejection—of the motif of solitude must thus be seen in the context of this ascetic revival. Finally, I ask what the persistence of a form of Protestantism harkening back to pre-modern traditions means for a religious tradition seen as the modernizing force in European culture.

In a broader sense, this study of the early modern Protestant interest in asceticism addresses what I view as a resurgence of progressive, triumphalist narratives of the Protestant Reformation, directly linking that movement's theological innovations and legacy to numerous aspects of contemporary life, politics, and thought in often hasty ways. Rooted in neo-weberianism, such narratives often advance an all-too linear narrative of historical change, cause and affect, conflating mainstream Lutheran theology and sermons with complex economic and cultural shifts. A recent article in *The*

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und Hanspeter Marti, "Der Seelenfrieden der Stillen im Lande: Quietistische Mystik und radikaler Pietismus" in *Gottfried Arnold: Radikaler Pietist und Gelehrter* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011).

*Economist* announced that “Protestantism may be good for the wallet after all” citing a study done by Yale and LSE economists showing slight rises in income after subjects undertook a Sunday school course in evangelical Christianity.<sup>40</sup> A recent Berkeley university lecture bearing the title “The Protestant Impulse in Modern Islam” reflects the power of this narrative far beyond western contexts, as it is argued that the ‘modern’ critique of spiritual mediation and authority initiated by Protestant reformers has deeply shaped modernizing movements in Islamic societies. Alec Ryrie proclaims that the Reformation gave us “free enquiry”, “democracy”, and “limited government”.<sup>41</sup> In a decidedly pessimistic vein, Brad Gregory lays the ills of modernity such as selfishness, consumerism, and what he terms “hyperpluralism” at the feet of the Reformation. In the Protestant model of faith, knowledge and experience was ‘privatized’, and an emphasis on interiority made the ego the center of knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

Although it is heartening to see the meaning of the Reformation for modern life and culture still deeply debated by historians—and, excitingly, society at large—the complexity of the question at hand leaves gaping holes in any straightforward narrative. The variegated nature of early modern evangelicalism, a modern flowering of evangelical monasticism, pentecostal charismatics, and the persistent centrality of a Christian ambivalence toward secularism keeps historians’ and thinkers’ guessing as to the ultimate nature and long-term consequences of the Protestant Reformations.

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<sup>40</sup> “Protestantism might be good for the wallet after all”, *The Economist*, February 22, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21737282-evangelical-charity-helps-randomised-controlled-trial?fsrc=scn/fb/te/bl/ed/protestantismmightbegoodforthewalletafterallbothgodandmammon>

<sup>41</sup> Interview by Eric C. Miller with Alec Ryrie, “How Protestants Made the Modern World” in *Religion and Politics*: <http://religionandpolitics.org/2018/02/20/how-protestants-made-the-modern-world/>

<sup>42</sup> Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Harvard: 2016), 74-75.

## Chapter One

### ‘Dying to the World’: Rethinking Ascetic Worship in Seventeenth-Century Protestantism

*“It is also not impossible/ that one turns away from the world/ and yet does not retreat to a wilderness. Right amidst the bustle of worldly commerce/ life can be spent in solitude. O how blessed is he to praise who learns wisdom from fools and virtue from vice? He who in a court or market sees all the vanity, evil and useless work of men/ but does not take part...”<sup>43</sup>*

In early 1635, Christopher Besold [1580-1638], one of the most important legal philosophers of the seventeenth-century and a professor at the arch-Lutheran university of Tübingen, finally made public his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. Politically speaking, Besold seems to have timed his dramatic act carefully. Just the previous fall, in September 1634, the Hapsburg Army, bolstered by 18,000 Italian and Spanish troops, had dealt the previously indomitable Swedish forces and their German allies a crushing defeat at the Battle of Nördlingen. Shortly thereafter, with southern Germany cleared of the Swedes, Imperial Catholic troops occupied Tübingen and the entire duchy of Baden-Württemberg, sending Duke Eberhard III fleeing to French-controlled Strasburg.<sup>44</sup> Now, under the cover of Catholic troops, Besold need fear no reprisals for proclaiming his new faith.<sup>45</sup> Besold’s conversion was made yet more painful for Lutherans as he immediately took up an appointment as a commissioner in the service of the emperor, granting him unfettered access to the duke’s archives from which he sought to demonstrate the unlawful seizure of church property by the Protestants, a key point of contention and cause of the war.<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of his fellow Protestants, Besold’s conversion and subsequent writings added insult to injury at a low point for the Protestant cause. Johann Jakob Andreae, a close friend, pupil, and collaborator of Besold’s, bitterly voiced his hurt by suggesting that the timing of the conversion at the moment of Catholic ascendancy indicated an insincere, opportunistic motive: “If only he had distanced himself from us at a different time than this sorrowful time for our fatherland, then we would not have to believe that his religion changed according to fortune.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Pierre du Moulin, *Heraclite ou de la vanité et misere de la vie humaine* (1609). Translated from the German edition by Christopher Besold, *Heraclitus oder Spiegel der Weltlichen Eytelkeit vnd Ellends Menschlichen Lebens* (Tübingen: 1622), 26-7.

<sup>44</sup> Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe’s Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 470.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Zeller-Lorenz, “Christoph Besold (1577-1638) und die Klosterfrage.” Inagural Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Juristischen Fakultät der Eberhards-Karls-Universität zu Tübingen. (Tübingen: 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Besoldus’ conversion was yet more significant for Catholics than just the publicity coup of turning one prominent university professor. He had been a leading work on one of the primary legal disputes leading to the Thirty Years War—that of ‘restitution’, whether appropriated church property such as cloisters and parishes should be returned to the church. See Zeller-Lorenz, “Christoph Besold (1577-1638) und die Klosterfrage.”

<sup>47</sup> Johann Jakob Andreae, *Ioannis Valentini Andreae, Theologi Q. Württembergensis, VITA, ab ipso conscripta.*, ed. F.H. Rheinwald, (Hermann Schultz, 1846), 164.

But, contrary to Andreae's accusations of political expediency, Besold's religious transformation in 1635 seems to have been a much longer process, the roots of which lay in a sincere spiritual crisis. Not altogether different from other conscientious Protestants of his day, Besold's writings in the early years of the seventeenth-century reveal a stark belief in an acute moral deficiency in the world around him. His speeches and writings are littered with oft-repeated admonitions for reform and stricter devotions to address impiety.<sup>48</sup> In a 1614 speech at Tübingen titled "Of the Perils of our Century", Besold lamented the increasing epicureanism and moral depravity around him and the complete lack of any true imitation of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Adding to the sense of crisis and divine punishment, the speech followed a devastating outbreak of the plague in Tübingen in 1609 that lasted for two years, causing the death of 2,668 souls, and forcing the university to relocate.<sup>50</sup> In 1621-22, the period that Besold later stated marked his true inward conversion to Catholicism<sup>51</sup>, Besold was busy publishing German translations of two classic devotional texts whose main themes dealt with the futility of mortal life and self-renunciation. In 1621 he published one of the first German editions of the pseudo-Tauler, *The Imitation of the Poor Life of Christ* (1621) and a translation of the Huguenot pastor Pierre du Moulin's *Heraclite ou de la vanité et misere de la vie humaine*<sup>52</sup>. The unifying theme of these texts is the practice of "true works of renunciation" by a turning away from the riches, vanity, pride, and temptations of the world.<sup>53</sup> Moulin even took up, from a Protestant perspective, the dangers—but also the benefits—of the cloistered life as a means of remaining pious in a fallen world. In 1621 Besold published one of his own essays on the relationship between philosophy and virtue, arguing for a practical, moral orientation to the humanities.<sup>54</sup> Besold's religious and academic work clearly revealed a preoccupation with the question of virtue and his efforts to plumb Christian history and mysticism for a practical piety that could produce true godliness, traits he felt sorely lacking in the world around him sliding to war and the destruction of Germany.

Along with this perception of a world not aright went a search for spiritual

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<sup>48</sup> Besold's mystical inclinations go further back, however, as he was also an important founding member of Jakob Andreae's Rosicrucian order with its calls for an exclusive, esoteric Protestant fraternal order. See Frans A. Janssen, "Ad Fontes. On the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica" *Quaerendo*, Volume 27 (4). 1997, 277. Janssen discusses Christian Besold as one of the inspiring personalities behind the Rosicrucians who owned three versions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He is considered a co-author of the three texts surrounding the foundation of the Rosenkreuzer. *Fama Fraternitatis* (1610), *Confessio Fraternitatis*, *Chymische Hochzeit*, etc.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Brecht, "Christoph Besold: Versuche und Ansätze einer Deutung" in *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 26 (2000), 18.

<sup>50</sup> Gottfried Lammert, *Geschichte der Seuchen, Hungers- and Kriegsnoth zur Zeit des Dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Wiesbaden: J.F. Bergmann, 1890), 21.

<sup>51</sup> This is found in a letter to Maximilian von Bayern. Barbara Zeller-Lorenz, "Christoph Besold (1577-1638) und die Klosterfrage." Inagural Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Juristischen Fakultät der Eberhards-Karls-Universität zu Tübingen. 1986.

<sup>52</sup> Moulin's *Heraclite ou de la vanité et misere de la vie humaine* was originally published in French in 1609, and became a popular text with translations into English and German with several editions. Besold's edition, *Heraklites, oder Spiegel der weltlichen Eytelkeit und Ellends Menschlichen Lebens* is from Tübingen in 1622.

<sup>53</sup> Johannes Tauler, *Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, 12-13. This edition is from 1621 printed in Frankfurt by Lucas Jennis.

<sup>54</sup> See Brecht, "Christoph Besold", 24. Besold, *Dissertatio De studio liberalium artium et philosophiae* (Tübingen, 1621).

remedies beyond the pastoral salves provided by the Lutheran ministers in Sunday church. From the early 1600s and his days as a student in Tübingen, Besold held in high regard the texts of late medieval mysticism and the practical, ascetic devotion they contained. In his 1637 *Christliche und Erhebliche Motiven*, a text laying out his reasons for converting, Besold wrote that even during his years when he wrote vehemently against the Catholic church, he “held fast to the belief that the true piety was found...in the texts of the godly Johann Tauler, Johann Ruysbrock, Henry of Suso, and Thomas of Kempis.”<sup>55</sup> Besold’s earliest writings stretching back to 1612 are filled with plentiful quotations and admiration for these authors.<sup>56</sup> This mysticism’s emphasis on the imitation of Christ’s humble life, renunciation of the world, and a spiritual union of the soul with God, was termed by Besold a “higher theology”.<sup>57</sup>

But what did Besold’s concern with virtue, piety, and his love for such popular devotional texts like Kempis’s *De Imitatione Christi* and *Theologia Deutsch* have to do with heterodoxy and Catholicism? Over the course of the 1610s and 20s, as can be seen from letter exchanges with his good friend, the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), Besold’s praise of these mystical texts revealed a religious outlook that saw true Christianity as existing not necessarily in the Lutheran confessional documents and finer points of scholastic theology, but in a Christianity whose essential outline could be found in the early church and in mystical texts of Kempis, Tauler, and the *Devotio Moderna*. This mystical devotion spoke of an ‘inward Christianity’, where the regenerate soul renounced the world, purifying itself and bringing it into union with God. Mystical theology, as the orthodox polemicist Ehregott Daniel Colberg (1659-1698) would argue, was built on monkish “self-denial”, “direct revelation, the inward light and word, essential *Gelassenheit*, inwardness, transformation, and achieving complete holiness.”<sup>58</sup> Besold certainly, like Arndt, had begun to perceive a timeless, ‘true’ Christianity existing beyond the narrow definitions of his Lutheran confession. Besold wrote to Kepler on 17 September 1626 that his answer to those who questioned his orthodoxy, was that he held to the ancients, and would rather err with them than be beholden to this or that side of contemporary disputes.<sup>59</sup> Such an irenic outlook and willingness to praise Catholic authors, in the midst of religious conflict, could provoke suspicions. And, in the same year of 1626, Besold underwent an investigation of his orthodoxy by the theologians Thumm and Lucas Osiander, suggesting that Besold’s consistent references to medieval

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<sup>55</sup> Besold, *Christliche und Erhebliche Motiven, warumb Christoff Besold...zu solcher Alten Catholischen Kirchen sich begeben/ vnd alle andere new auffkomne Secten/ oder Lehren/ verlassen hat.* (Ingolstadt: Gregorio Hänlin, 1637), ‘Dedicatoria’.

<sup>56</sup> Brecht, “Christoph Besold: Versuche und Ansätze einer Deutung”, 11-29.

<sup>57</sup> Besold, *Christliche und Erhebliche Motiven*, 122. See also M. Pohlig, “Gelehrter Frömmigkeitsstil und das Problem der Konfessions-Wahl: Christoph Besold’s Konversion zum Katholizismus”, in M. Pohlig and U. Lotz-Heumann (eds). *Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit. Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* (Munich: Gütersloh, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Ehregott Daniel Colberg, *Das Platonische-Hermetische Christenthum* (Franfort and Leipzig: Weidemann, 1690), 3. They build their entire theology on “unmittelbaren Offenbahrung, inwendigen Licht und Wort, wesentlicher Gelassenheit, Einkehrung, Verenderung und Ergreifung der völligen Heiligkeit” (Colberg, I S. 3f).

<sup>59</sup> Johannes Kepler. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 18. Letter, Nr. 1030, 17. September 1626. See Brecht, “Christoph Besold: Versuche und Ansätze”, 25-6. “Ex animi sensu ijs semper soleo respondere, qui me nescio cuius novitatis suspectum habent: antiqua, imò antiquissima me sequi, malleque cum primitivae Ecclesiae Doctoribus errare, quam novatorum obscuram diligentiam imitarj.”

and early modern mystics was not seen as harmless.<sup>60</sup>

What is obvious, as emerged more clearly after his conversion, is that Besold's interest in this heterodox, mystical literature contributed to his doubt that the religion established in the Reformation taught the same, humble and world-hating Christianity as the early church. In his justifications for his conversion published in 1637, Besold gives his verdict on the Reformation as lacking the teachings and practices necessary to transform the natural man into a holy being. Despite the Reformers' goal to achieve a reformation "in Capite & Membris", Besold posed the question of whether the Reformation actually brought about greater virtue and holiness. His answer was a decided no. Even though the Lutherans are still politically strong, he accuses them of not having successfully achieved an improvement in morals: "Nevertheless, the Lutheran reformation of the churches and hoped for improvement of morals had quickly ceased and even still during the lifetime of Luther [the reformation] could in no way properly effect a change" ("in keinem weg sich recht schicken wollen").<sup>61</sup> The answer to why this was, is simple. Explaining why there existed so many more saints and holy men and women in Catholicism than in Protestantism, Besold pointed to a difference in the 'doctrine of living' ("doctrine/vitae instituto") of the two confessions and specifically Protestantism's rejection of ascetic devotions like the imitation of Christ, 'mortification of the flesh' and mystical contemplation:

The cause, however, of such a great difference between the Catholic holy and pious people/ and all of the Lutheran clergy, not one excepted, is to be ascribed alone, in truth, to the doctrine of living [*Lehr/vitaeß instituto*]. Since among Lutherans in many places, the *Imitatio Christi* is held to be a superstition, the mortification of the flesh and oneself, meditation, mental prayer, contemplation, the elevation of the soul to God, cases of conscience, the examination of conscience, heartfelt compunction, the union with God through the path of purgation, illumination, and union, and similar blessed, high things are not at all taught nor practiced. Yes, such terms are not simply misunderstood, but are

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Häcker, "Universität und Krieg: Die Auswirkung des Dreißigjährigen Krieges auf die Universitäten Heidelberg, Tübingen und Freiburg", in *Universitäten im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, ed. Thomas Kossert (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag, 2011), 106. Thumm and Osiander were specifically trying to snuff out Arnd and Weigel texts based on a suspicion of their spiritualistic contents which resulted in the affair of the publisher Eberhard Wild (See Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*, pg. 54-71). Also, a letter from Konrad Dieterich from Ulm mentions that Besold stood at the center of a "Arndischen oder Weigelianischen Gesindlein in Tübingen" (Geyer, 61). The dangerous potential in Besold's turn to mysticism and heartfelt calls for reform in Lutheranism cannot be seen in isolation from his central involvement in a circle of students known as the 'Tübingen Circle'. This included men such as Johann Jakob Andreae and Tobias Adami, authors of, along with Besold, pseudonymous texts employing theosophic, alchemical, and mystical terms to call for a general reform of Christianity. The texts told of a 'fraternity' founded by "all bachelors, and of avowed virginity", who rested in a 'sacred silence' apart from the 'clamours..[of] an effeminate, idle, luxurious, and pompous life'. This fictional fraternity proclaimed their possession of the secrets to illumination in divine matters. Besold's central participation in producing these writings has been well documented, but much more important to his non-fictional work was the promise of divine illumination from a holy life renouncing the world. See *Fama Fraternitas* (1610) and *Confessio fraternitas* (1615) in *The Rosicrucian Manuscripts*, with an introduction by Benedict J. Williamson (Arlington, VA: The Invisible College Press, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Besold, *Christliche Motiven*, 114.

derivisely laughed at.<sup>62</sup>

In Besold's estimation, the Protestant failure to require of their flocks a physically and morally challenging devotion had produced a religion too at ease with the world. Protestant devotion is "only science" while Catholic practices like kneeling, fasting, prayer vigils, sackcloth and ashes, has the ability to "change the soul" and "withdraw the soul from the world".<sup>63</sup> No doubt influenced by his friendship with the head of the Carmelite monastery in Rothenburg am Neckar<sup>64</sup>, Besold mentions the hallmarks of monastic life such as "chastity, voluntary poverty," and "earnest prayer/diligent study"<sup>65</sup> as "ceremonies and practices...contribut[ing] more to piety" than the short prayers, passive sermon-going, and homilies that Protestants practiced.<sup>66</sup> Unmoved by Protestantism's devotion of the word and regret at its suppression of the monastic life, Besold, a prized son of the Reformation, returned to the fold of the Roman rites.

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Besold's conversion, based on his re-evaluation of ascetic practices and the need for sanctification, bespeaks a much broader rediscovery in Protestantism of the devotional value of the ascetic elements of the *vita religiosa*. Before his conversion, Besold's calls for a more austere, practical Christianity identified him as a clear sympathizer in a controversial, and burgeoning evangelical awakening in Protestantism, sometimes referred to as the 'nadere Reformatie' in the Netherlands and 'Pietism' in Germany.<sup>67</sup> Amidst his general praise of medieval Catholic authors, Besold also recommended a number of Protestant authors in this piety movement, among whom was the theologian and devotional author Johann Arndt. Arndt, in his 1605 work *True Christianity* (1605-9) energized a generation of fellow Protestants by his call for a reformation of Christian morals to accompany the earlier Reformers' reformation of doctrine. In the introduction to *True Christianity*, Arndt had written that Christians "should not only believe in Christ, but should also *live* in Christ...heart, mind, and soul must be transformed so that we conform to Christ and his holy gospel."<sup>68</sup> The means to this transformation involved what Arndt described as an arduous "path of repentance", a change of one's base desires into a holy love through a "mortification of the flesh". Arndt and other Lutheran devotional authors such as Martin Moller and Johann Gerhard drew

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<sup>62</sup> Besold, *Christliche Motiven*, 119.

<sup>63</sup> Besold, *Christliche Motiven*, 123-4.

<sup>64</sup> L.T. Freiherr v. Spittler *Ueber Christoph Besolds Religionsveränderung*, (Greifswald 1822), 130-138.

<sup>65</sup> Besold, *Christliche und Erheblichen Motiven*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, 112, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Proponents of a narrow definition of Pietism favor beginning with Spener's *Pia Desideria* from 1670, but most recognize that the reforms initiated by Spener and his followers stem from Arndt's wildly popular devotional works. See Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und neuer Mensch. Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus vol. 2 (Wittenberg, 1969).

<sup>68</sup> Johann Arndt, *Sechs Bücher Vom wahren Christentum*, (Johann Christoph Heilmann: 1765), 1605. Introduction. The force of Arndt's new emphasis on living versus doctrine can be understood in contrast with Luther's statement that "I cannot say it often enough, that we must carefully differentiate between doctrine and life...The least little point of doctrine is of greater importance than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot allow the least jot of doctrine to be corrupted. We may overlook the offenses and errors of life, for we daily sin much." Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Chapter 5, verse 10. trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1949).



inspiration for their new emphasis on pious living from medieval mystical sources replete with themes of dying to the world, the imitation of Christ, and contemplative mysticism central to Besold's conversion to Catholicism. Arndt's edition of Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* in 1605 and his edition of *Theologia Germanica* along with Moller's *Meditationes Sanctorum Patrum* (1584) made available to a broad evangelical audience a mystical and ascetic form of Christianity pulled from the eremitic and monastic traditions. The significance that Arndt and these authors held for Besold's changing spiritual inclinations is unmistakable. Besold's first mention of Arndt is from 1612 after which he remained a consistent presence in his writings, grouping Arndt, Moller, and Gerhard along with the great medieval authors preaching true Christianity. Besold's 1619 "De verae philosophiae fundamento Discursus" was dedicated to Arndt and Tobias Adami (1581-1643) two men he praised as "divines" and "men of wisdom."<sup>69</sup> Besold called Arndt's *True Christianity* the most "devout and spirit-filled" text within Protestantism.<sup>70</sup> The truth of ascetic devotion shining through Arndt's work, Besold claimed, was due to his heavy borrowings from late medieval catholic authors such as Thomas à Kempis and Tauler<sup>71</sup>.

Besold's invocation of Arndt and other representatives of the new piety as inspiration for a life of poverty, chastity, and self-denial, brings into relief a central conundrum in the pursuit of a more spiritual existence and 'interior' devotion in the evangelical awakenings of the seventeenth-century. Arndt, in his *True Christianity*, had wanted to emphasize the necessity of individual moral rectitude and practical devotions while avoiding the false and hollow works-righteousness of the papists. The true holy life, insisted Arndt, did not require physical separation from the world or outward ascetic acts. Rather, the moral renewal taught by Arndt consisted in what he characterized as an *inward* separation from the world, that is a change of one's moral being, and a change of heart in which true repentance consisted. Arndt affirmed that the believer suffers a deep *mental* anguish in this process, but underlines throughout the distinction between an inward and outward practice of asceticism:

This yoke of Christ, our cross/that we must carry/ is called 'dying to the world'. But this does not mean running to a cloister, joining special orders and rules/ and yet, all the same, nothing but the vain world remaining in your heart...for this dying to the world is the mortification of the flesh and everything for which the flesh desires; constant inward, hidden contrition and suffering, through which you inwardly turn away from the world and toward God, and daily in your heart die to the world.<sup>72</sup>

As the early Reformers had taught in arguing against monastic vows and a life of asceticism as the superior path to holiness, Arndt maintained that one could die to the world by transforming one's inward desires and intentions, while still being married, pursuing a vocation, and living in a bustling city. Arndt attempted in his emphasis on

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<sup>69</sup> Besold, *De verae philosophiae fundamento*, (Tübingen, 1619), in "Discursus". illi divinae, huic humanae sapientiae antistiti primario observantiae amicitiaeque testanda ergo hoc quidquid est dedicat, dicat Auctor

<sup>70</sup> Hermann Geyer's massive tome on the radical spiritualism in Arndt's writings also identifies Tübingen and the circle around Johann Jakob Andreae as a major center of the fight between those suspicious of Arndt's writings and those mystics enthusiastic about him. Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*, 51-78.

<sup>71</sup> Besold, *Christliche und Erhebliche Motiven*, 122.

<sup>72</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, 25.

holy living, as we will see, to repurpose the legacy of early Christian and Catholic monasticism and asceticism as a pedagogical tool for Christians in a new context where the relationship between works and faith had been better illuminated. One needed the *spirit* of monasticism's zeal and renunciation of the world, without physically leaving the world behind.

A moral, interiorized revision of monasticism is indeed the meaning that many historians of Protestantism have seen in the zeal and spirit animating the Reformers efforts to increase the holiness of the world.<sup>73</sup> A pedagogical use of asceticism, shorn of Catholic overtones and mortifications fit for Protestants in all stations of life will indeed be an important part of the story this dissertation tells. But it is only half the story. The historian of religion and Protestantism in particular must also ask—as Arndt's enthusiastic readers themselves did—what such an inward Protestant 'spiritual' mortification of the self looked like in practice? How could one understand a call for more holiness and to 'flee the world' couched in the language of monastic self-renunciation, mortifying the flesh, and imitating Christ, a tradition inspiring Christians across the centuries to leave family and possessions, in a merely 'inward' way? The difficulties of drawing practical meaning from a theological metaphor in a way that did not spill over into literalism becomes clearer when we consider those Protestants inspired by the medieval mystical texts and Arndt's writings themselves. For they found it increasingly difficult, in practice, to understand what a Christianity of suffering, self-denial, and carrying the cross of Christ could mean without outwardly renouncing the world's company and its pleasures. Christian Hoburg (1607-1675), one of Arndt's greatest admirers and author of two tracts expounding how to put his teachings into practice<sup>74</sup>, wrote that "believing Christians also find, in fact,/ how greatly damaging it is/ when they engage too much with the world/ and that also external withdrawal and abstinence from the world can be a great aid on this path of repentance".<sup>75</sup> Johann Gichtel, the fiery, mid-century Protestant advocate of celibacy, self-denial, and poverty from whom we will hear more of in the next chapter, made it clear in his life and writings that 'spiritual mortification' required outward deprivations and sexual continence. Speaking of the solitary, world-renouncing devotion of the ancient desert hermits, Gichtel denounced the Lutheran doctrine of 'imputed righteousness' as inadequate, and that "our Lutheran teachers and professors...allow only for a historical science, which is termed 'justitiam imputativam'".<sup>76</sup> Balthasar Köpke (1646-1711), a well-known pastor and author, wrote in 1700 along similar lines that "...the asceticism and examples of virtue from the first founders of the monastic orders...should not be rejected suspiciously."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Reformation und Askese. Das Pfarrhaus als "Evangelisches Kloster" in *Kommunikation und Transfer im Christentum der frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Irene Dingel, Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele (Darmstadt: P. Von Zabern, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Christian Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana, das ist Hertzens-Seufftzer über die 4. Bücher Wahren Christenthums S. Johann Arnds/...* (Amsterdam: 1642); Hoburg, *Arndus Redivivus, das ist Arndischer Wegweiser zum Himmelreich* (posthumous, 1677). For more on Hoburg and the genre of ascetic devotion inspired by Arndt, see pgs 16-23.

<sup>75</sup> Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica, das ist Geheime Krafft-Theologie der Alten/Anweisende den Weg/ wie die erleuchtete Seele in die Vereinigung und Gemeinshaft ihres Gottes komme* (Amsterdam, 1655), 29.

<sup>76</sup> Gichtel, Amsterdam, 2 May, 1702. *TP* vol. VI, 1487.

<sup>77</sup> Balthasar Köpke, *Sapientia Die in Mysterio Crucis Christi Abscondita/ Die wahre Theologia Mystica oder Ascetica*, (Brandenburg: 1700), 66.

Along with solitude, other practices meant to tame the body like fasting, celibacy, and meditation no longer evoked the same papist connotations among many seventeenth and eighteenth-century Protestants. One early eighteenth-century Protestant in colonial Pennsylvania, lamenting the absence of celibacy and the closure of all cloisters in the early Reformation, outlined a wish that new communities could be established for a celibate, withdrawn, and holy life.<sup>78</sup> He wrote of how “often horribly afflicted, distracted, and confused serious, resolved souls among the Protestants must be by temporal affairs and other diversities.” Continuing, he reasoned,

Would it not be much better, soothing, and advantageous if those few who were of one mind with Christ, so that they might occupy themselves only with that which belongs to the Lord, and remain holy both in body and spirit, and remain constantly attached to the Lord, without being pulled here and there, when such ones six or twelve or more with such a purpose, drawn by God, came together outwardly without partisanship, without forced conscience, without obstinancy, nor harmful idleness, and lived together humbly and communally as brothers, I believe such a community could be a light to the world, and a city on a hill.<sup>79</sup>

Beyond Besold’s outright embrace of the monastic and mystical articulation of ascetic worship, it is clear that many Protestants could imagine a utility and value to what earlier Reformers had considered tinged with idolatry and papal heresy.

This chapter, then, is about how the seventeenth-century reopened a debate that the early reformers considered closed. I will show here that seventeenth-century representatives of an evangelical awakening revisited the value of ascetic devotion, even in its embodied forms such as chastity, self-denial, and solitude, revising the earlier Reformer’s judgment that ascetic devotion possessed a primarily pedagogical value and should be treated with extreme caution. Whereas the early reformers proposed their own answers for how the believing soul achieves righteousness and proper worship to achieve this based on the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, their seventeenth-century counterparts saw the inadequacies and problems with such a formulation. True repentance and moral renewal required change and action in this life, and a purification of the soul, positions which raised anew the relationships between grace and works. But even within this renewal, positions were divided, and the debate often hinged on what ‘interior’ repentance and self-denial meant in practice.

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## *Part II: The Reformation and the Problem of Asceticism*

The seventeenth-century ambiguity on the proper use of outward ascetic acts in the work of conversion takes us back to a debate that began in the late medieval period

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<sup>78</sup> Christopher Saur, *Spiegel der Eheleute, Nebst schönen Erinnerungen vor Ledige Personen, Welcher willens sind sich in den Stand der Ehe zu begeben*. (Germantown, PA: Christoph Saur, 1758), 21.

<sup>79</sup> Much of this answer is actually borrowed straight from Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769) who followed a strain of early modern quietist mysticism and had praised the strict-observance movements of Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross. “Ja, ich sage es frei heraus, wären die Klöster so beschaffen gewesen wie diejenigen, so die Theresa zur Zeit der Reformation aufgerichtet, niemand würde sie ohne schwere Beleidigung Gottes abgeschaffet haben!” Gerhard Tersteegen, *Auserlesene Lebensbeschreibungen Heiliger Seelen*, (Essen, 1785), preface, xvi, 21.

and the Reformation, a debate that explains Arndt's careful articulation of self-mortification as 'inward'. Amidst anxieties surrounding the explosion of lay devotion in the late medieval period such as pilgrimages, the cult of relics and saints, ascetic vows such as fasting and other renunciations, a backlash emerged led by humanists such as Erasmus who viewed such devotions suspiciously. Fears of externalized devotion included that their rote nature would cause no deeper change in human behavior, that they could be motivated by vanity or pleasure in fleshly devotion or become tools of political and spiritual oppression. Representatives of the *Devotio Moderna* tradition of lay spiritual Christians increasingly warned against 'outward' devotions. The author of the *Imitatio Christi* had written "learn to despise outward things and to give yourself to inward things". Erasmus, leaning heavily on Plato's dualist attitude toward the body, emphasized that perfection consists in shaping the affections toward reason, and not in any particular ceremony or manner of living<sup>80</sup>. Warning against the carnal devotions of monks, Erasmus wrote that many of these "put the chief point of religion either in ceremonies or in a certain manner or form of saying, that they call their divine service, or in a labour of the body, which monks if a man should examine and appose of spiritual things, he should scarce find any at all that walked not in the flesh."<sup>81</sup>

The Reformers—and especially the anxious, frustrated monk Luther—took this critique of externalized devotion and made it into a new religion. For Luther and other reformers, ascetic devotion and externalized works not only contained dangers distracting the individual from true repentance, but also fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Christ's sacrifice, grace and human righteousness. Whereas medieval Catholics, like St. Bonaventure had written that bodily austerities can "prepare, foster and preserve perfection."<sup>82</sup> Luther would emphasize the human incapacity to root out our sinful nature, making bodily penances and works futile. Rather, righteousness comes alone by faith on Christ's sacrifice, the one saving work that covers the sinful Christian with its grace. The believing Christian thus always remains *simul justus et peccator*, saved by the merits of Christ's works, not his own. Following from this theology, any good works or ascetic acts *follow* the inward experience of faith, whereas for medievals and early modern Catholics, ascetic works were a *means* of conditioning the soul for faith and justification. A theology where acts could induce faith was a dangerous error according to Luther: "...As a consequence of this error and false opinion of the soul, all the works of the body also become evil and damnable, even though a person killed himself with fasting and performed the works of all the saints. In order, therefore,...that we may become truly holy, it is necessary that God preserve, first, our spirit, and then our soul and body, not only from overt sins but much more from false and apparent good works."<sup>83</sup> The motion with Luther is always from the inner to the outer, with works a manifestation of a prior inward change.<sup>84</sup> Those without such faith, the monk for example, have miscalculated

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<sup>80</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, (1503). This edition, London: Methuen & Co., 1905), 22.

<sup>81</sup> Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, 168-169.

<sup>82</sup> St. Bonaventure wrote in 1269 that bodily austerities "prepare, foster and preserve perfection" in his "Apologia pauperum contra calumniatores" (Cologne, 1485), section V, c. viii.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret R. Miles, "The Rope Breaks When It Is Tightest": Luther on the Body, Consciousness, and the Word", *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Jul.-Oct., 1984) pp. 239-258. 246. (Magnificat LW 21. 305-6) on Luke 1:46.

<sup>84</sup> Miles, "The Rope Breaks When It Is Tightest", 251.

how God's grace becomes an active presence in the life of a Christian: "Day and night they wear themselves out with these works. But they are never still in the presence of God or subject to him in faith."<sup>85</sup> Calvin, similarly, maintained that asceticism represented a kind of slippery slope whereby a Christian would adopt an ever stricter rule to achieve the elusive outward purity it promised. "Finally", Calvin reasoned, "at length he will come to this point, to think it unlawfull (as the common saying is) to tread upon a straw lying a crosse."<sup>86</sup> The Christian is, regrettably or not, always in the world and never completely free of it, even in a cloister. Righteousness, so Luther and Calvin argue, can therefore not consist on physical abstinence from the world.

Irrevocably within the world and a sinner, it followed that Christian holiness understood as faith and conviction, could be found in all walks of life, in marriage, the realm of civic duty, and other secular paths. Luther emphasized that in whatever station Christians found themselves, one can "exercise oneself and suffer". Married or not, you should "toil and labor to kill the flesh and accustom it to death."<sup>87</sup> Characteristic of Luther's emphasis on passivity as the Christian's proper response to God, this required no extravagant ascetic renunciation, but a silent giving over of one's will to God: "The true way of salvation is to be subject to God, to yield to him in faith, to stand silent before him, to set aside the offensive presumption of good works whereby the ungodly seek to find him, and to yield ourselves to God's guidance so that he can work in us and not we ourselves."<sup>88</sup> In his polemic against the monastic belief that the life of perfection consists in ascetic vows in *De Votis Monasticis* from 1521, Luther took aim at, among other things, celibacy's ability to sanctify its practitioner "as a thing existing in its own right".<sup>89</sup> He references passages from *The Lives of the Fathers* to show that married people were considered just as holy if not holier than the hermits. St. Anthony (as well as St. Francis and other holy men) "knew absolutely nothing of vows..."<sup>90</sup> but "willingly chose to live as a hermit, and of his own will chose to live unmarried, after the pattern of the gospel."<sup>91</sup> Christ "neither invites anyone to take up celibacy, nor calls men to it. He simply refers to it."<sup>92</sup> It is then not the condition of chastity, poverty, or obedience, that makes one holy but rather the faith residing in the believer that sanctifies one's actions and life to God's glory, preventing any self-aggrandizement or evil from corrupting those actions. "We learn from these testimonies that in the lives of God's saints it is not the outward appearance of the works, but faith that has to be heeded."<sup>93</sup>

But Luther and other reformers' views on outward acts of 'mortification' did offer some space for practicing them, as long as they were performed freely, and motivated

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<sup>85</sup> Martin Luther, *De Votis Monasticis*, (Wittenberg, 1521). This edition, *Luther's Works*, American Edition. Vol. 44. The Christian in Society I. ed. by James Atkinson. General Editor Helmut T. Lehmann. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 271.

<sup>86</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 405-6.

<sup>87</sup> Luther Werke, vol. 35, 39). See Miles, *The Rope*, 251.

<sup>88</sup> Luther, *De Votis*, 271.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, 306.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, 253.

<sup>91</sup> Luther, *De Votis Monasticis*, 253. Luther's interpretation of Paul's seeming endorsement of celibacy as a higher choice is that even if Paul "counsels" or advises it, he still "leaves the matter open" and not a command: "If you obey the Gospel, you ought to regard celibacy as a matter of free choice". Luther, *De Votis*, 262.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*, 261.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 268

first by ‘sublime faith’. Luther took the position—as did many who followed him on the subject—that ascetic acts constituted ‘adiaphora’, or ‘indifferent’ things, free to be practiced if they were useful for the individual, but not necessary. In *De Votis*, Luther concludes, saying “Let us bring this discussion to an end now by reaching the conclusion that lifelong poverty, obedience, and chastity may be observed, but cannot be vowed, taught or imposed. The freedom of the gospel may still be retained by observing these things (poverty, obedience, and chastity), but as soon as you teach them, vow them, and demand them, then evangelical freedom is lost.”<sup>94</sup> If practiced, Luther emphasizes that the consecrated life served either a useful purpose, in freeing one from other obligations to focus on God, or were the result of an inscrutable, individual choice between the believer and God.<sup>95</sup> As mentioned in the third of his 95 Theses, faith should produce ‘outward mortifications of the flesh’. The young Luther who wrote this was still a monk and it is clear that his definition of what constituted appropriate ‘outward mortifications’ became more and more restrictive as time passed. In his later writings, Luther emphasizes that for the vast majority of Christians who do not take up chastity or solitude, ‘self-mortification’ is still necessary but it is an internal, moral and spiritual change, not produced by punishing the flesh. This mortification happens in the worldly station you inhabit, such as in marriage, as mentioned above. One historian has called this interiorizing rhetoric a ‘domestication’ of the ideal of asceticism.<sup>96</sup>

At the turn of the seventeenth-century, however, this early Reformation consensus on the limited value of asceticism and outward self-renunciation would be challenged by a host of Protestant clergy and layfolk dissatisfied with the progress of the reformation in achieving a moral renewal of Christianity. In a trend that has not gone unnoticed by historians, the period toward the end of the sixteenth- and the early seventeenth-centuries saw a rise in ascetic themes in devotional texts and literature such as the *vanitas* motif, historical interest in early Christian ascetes, and a re-emphasis on precisionism in practical morals and piety.<sup>97</sup> Susan Karant-Nunn has explored the dour mood in the genre of *ars moriendi* writings in the works of Martin Moller (1547-1606), a pastor who also helped to introduce Protestants like Jacob Boehme to contemplative monasticism in his *Meditationes Sanctorum Patrum* (1584-91).<sup>98</sup> Bernard Gorceix has likewise examined the ascetic impulse in the ‘Silesian school’ of mysticism through such figures as Daniel

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<sup>94</sup> Luther, *De Votis*, 315.

<sup>95</sup> *De Votis*, 264, 253. Philipp Melanchthon wrote the following on the value of ascetic acts: “Second, obedience, poverty, and celibacy, provided they are not impure, are nonobligatory forms of discipline. Hence the saints can use them without sinning, as did Bernard, Francis, and other holy men. They used them for their physical benefit, to have more leisure for teaching and other pious duties, not because the works themselves are services that justify or merit eternal life. Moreover these things belong to the class of which Paul says [1 Tim. 4:8] “physical training is of some value.” Melanchthon, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession”, Article XXVII, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Edited by Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, Charles P. Arand. Translated by Timothy J. Wengert and Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 281.

<sup>96</sup> Simon Grote “Domesticating Religious ‘Fanaticism’ in Eighteenth-Century Germany: A Tale of Two Books” in *Church History and Religious Culture* Vol. 98 Issue 1 (2018), 111-138.

<sup>97</sup> See Hartmut Lehmann, “Frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Auswirkung der ‘Kleinen Eiszeit’”, in *Religion und Religiosität in der Neuzeit. Historische Beiträge*. Eds. Manfred Jakobowski-Tiessen, Otto Ulbricht. (Göttingen., 1996), 62-82.

<sup>98</sup> Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Modern Germany* (Routledge: New York, 1997).

Czepko, Quirinus Kuhlmann, and Angelus Silesius.<sup>99</sup> Gorceix, along with other historians, have attributed the new ascetic mood to various factors such as a new ice age and the accompanying famines, the destruction of the Thirty Years War, the emotionally distant orthodox confessional churches, and the return of an innate spiritual need for otherworldly, ascetic worship repressed by the Reformers.<sup>100</sup> The frequency and severity of war, revolution, and the accompanying famines in the first half of the century—when Germany’s population declined by between 33 and 70% depending on region—made death and impending judgment a reality no one could long ignore.<sup>101</sup> The ‘Little Ice Age’ that reached its peak in the period 1560-1650, decreased grain yields, lowered wages, and, according to one study, decreased average human height by 2cm.<sup>102</sup> It also increased famines and susceptibility to disease. One recurrence of the plague in 1609 took 2000 lives alone in Besold’s Tübingen, causing the entire university to flee to Calw.<sup>103</sup> Sabine Holtz, studying Lutheran sermons on the topic of death and the ‘insecurity of life’ concludes that these horrors encouraged “preachers...to focus everything therein to move the believer to repentance, in order to avoid the judgment of damnation at the final judgment.”<sup>104</sup> One preacher in Tübingen, Johann Georg Sigwart, wrote that he preached on the plague as a punishment of God in order to move his listeners “to a more sincere repentance/Christian life and behavior”.<sup>105</sup> In order to not be condemned with ‘the world’, Christian preachers turned to moral improvement as a means to avert God’s judgment.

The period’s crisis extended not only to the ravages of the natural world and war, but as well to the institutions of the Reformation churches and state. An accelerating urgency to Christian moral reform in a time of crisis was likewise coupled with the perception in many quarters of an unresponsive confessional church preoccupied with scholastic points of doctrine more than practical piety. Particularly in spiritualist theology, the doctrinal emphasis on justification by faith alone and ‘dead letter’ external worship served to turn many intense Protestants to mystical, contemplative worship. The spiritualist mystic Jacob Boehme derisively called the state churches “Stone churches full of pride and honor-seeking”, suggesting true worship and authority lay in the spirit, not in physical buildings.<sup>106</sup> Echoing Besold’s criticism of the morally ineffectual nature of

<sup>99</sup> Gorceix Bernard, *Flambée et agonie: mystiques du xvii siecle allemande* (Paris: Édition Presence, 1977).

<sup>100</sup> Lehmann, “Frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Auswirkung der ‘Kleinen Eiszeit’”; Gorceix, *Flambée et agonie*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of Thirty Years War demographics, see John Theibault, “The Demography of the Thirty Years War Re-visited: Günther Franz and his Critics”, *German History*, volume 15, Issue 1 (1997), 4.

<sup>102</sup> David D. Zhang, Harry F. Lee, etc. “The Causality Analysis of Climate Change and Large-Scale Human Crisis” in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2011 October 108 (42), 17296-17301.

<sup>103</sup> Sabine Holtz, “Die Unsicherheit des Lebens. Zum Verständnis von Krankheit und Tod in den Predigten der lutherischen Orthodoxie.” In Hartmut Lehmann and Anne-Charlott Trepp, *Im Zeichen der Krise: Religiosität in Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1999), 135-157. In the same volume, see Otto Ulbricht, “Gelebter Glaube in Pestwellen 1580-1720”, 159-188; and Britta Echle, “Magisches Denken in Krisensituationen”, 189-201.

<sup>104</sup> Holtz, “Die Unsicherheit des Lebens”, 154.

<sup>105</sup> Johann Georg Sigwart, *Drey Predigten Von Dreyen Vnderschiedlichen Hauptplagen vnd Land-straffen*. Tübingen, 1611. Vorrede. In Holtz, “Die Unsicherheit des Lebens”, 140.

<sup>106</sup> Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum* (1624). Cited here in *Jakob Boehme’s Sämtliche Werke*, Edited by L.W. Schiebeler, (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1843), 518.

Protestant worship and liturgy, Gottfried Arnold would later in the seventeenth-century, lay down his post as professor at Giessen in protest at a culture interested more in scholastic definitions than piety. Arnold's withdrew likewise in revolt against the grouping of immoral, hypocritical Christians together with reborn Christians. A contemporary of Arnold's Johann Heinrich Reitz railed against "superficial listening and reading" as a reason the "Christian learns so little with all the external tools, preaching, and catechisms?"<sup>107</sup> Reitz recommended, like Arnold, a more exclusive, holier, and more contemplative Christian community consisting in a "Unabläßig stetes Gebet"<sup>108</sup>. As scholars on the seventeenth-century awakenings have long argued, such dissatisfaction led to turning to the mystical piety of the late medieval period to rejuvenate evangelicalism and the appearance of a 'new piety'.<sup>109</sup>

The turn to such late medieval mystical texts amidst the acute sense of crisis, both moral and political, brought with it a greater attention to the category of practical piety that would continue as a primary feature of the seventeenth-century awakenings in Germany, the Low Countries, and England. In most cases, a greater appreciation and openness to ascetic worship is observable, all the while being careful to articulate the ideal devotion as 'interior', focused on killing the flesh while remaining in the world. The above-mentioned Pierre du Moulin (1568-1658) harped repeatedly on the corruption and vanity of the world and the necessity of rooting out such desires from the soul in his *Heraclite ou de la Vanité et misere de la vie humaine* (1609), a work translated by Christian Besold in 1622.<sup>110</sup> In considering all the ways this life is corrupt and vain, and the remedies for this condition, Du Moulin mentioned physical withdrawal from the world and the solitary life, concluding that though often pure and beneficial, it is much better to remain in society and 'despise' the world and the flesh inwardly: "For as it is possible to be worldly and vicious living far from the world, it is also possible to flee the world without fleeing to the desert, and living as if alone among the multitude."<sup>111</sup> The most "certain way is to separate yourself from the world not physically but in your affection and to destroy firstly the world in you and your heart...rather than removing your talent from the battlefield and withdrawing yourself from the body of civil society as a useless member."<sup>112</sup> In a similar fashion, the Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) wrote an exhaustive tome on ascetic devotion, including a chart that mapped devotional acts according to their 'inwardness' and 'outwardness'.<sup>113</sup>

But among the new Protestant voices interested in practical piety and the theme of turning away from the world, none matches the significance of the pastor and devotional author, Johann Arndt (1555-1621) and the lay mystic and visionary Jakob Boehme (1575-1624). Close contemporaries in time and location, the two mens' writings, despite differing sharply in style, would exert an outsized influence on the awakenings of the

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<sup>107</sup> Johann Heinrich Reitz, *Das Fürbilde der heilsamen Worten/vom Glauben und Liebe*, (Johann Friedrich Regelein: Büdingen, 1729), 151.

<sup>108</sup> Reitz, *Das Fürbilde*, 149.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Brecht, "Das Aufkommen der neuen Frömmigkeitsbewegung in Deutschland" in *Geschichte des Pietismus: Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, (Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1993), 127.

<sup>110</sup> See footnote 11.

<sup>111</sup> Du Moulin, *Heraclite*, 16.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Gisbertus Voetius, *De Praktijk der godzaligheid* (Amsterdam, 1664), 29-30.



seventeenth-century, challenging the consensus on the doctrine of *sola fide* with their emphases on rebirth and moral renewal. Arndt, whose devotional text, *True Christianity*<sup>114</sup>, would become the most influential devotional text in German Protestantism, is largely considered the inspiration for Pietism, the seventeenth-century movement emphasizing practical morality over doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>115</sup> Arndt's writings struck a chord with readers by directing attention to the necessity of leading a holy life in addition to having faith in Christ's sacrifice, igniting debate in an attempt to correct misunderstandings with the early Reformers' emphasis on faith alone. Boehme's influence is no less significant, even if the highly heterodox and esoteric nature of his writings generally confined them to underground networks. Boehme's writings, inspired by Paracelsian alchemy and Weigelian spiritualism, contained a theosophic vision in which the soul is the stage for a cosmic struggle between lower 'elemental' matter and divine love, a vision which fired the imaginations of not only contemporary Protestant mystics but future philosophers and romantics.

In both authors an emphasis on moral regeneration and rebirth that called for 'mortifying' one's fleshy nature through rejecting the world stood in contrast to the earlier Lutheran opposition of good works and faith. Their extensive reliance on medieval mystics like Tauler, Kempis, and the Protestant mystic Weigel brought accusations of catholic and spiritualist errors. Arndt was one of the most eager translators and editors of ancient and late medieval mystical texts associated with inward self-mortification and the mystical *imitatio Christi*.<sup>116</sup> Boehme wrote in *Weg zum Christo*, that the "true faith in man, is that he dies to himself". One major critic of Arndt, the theologian Lucas Osiander, took issue with Arndt's repeated citations of the "old writings of the monks" like Tauler, and his position that "man must put away from himself all that which is not God/ and from all creatures."<sup>117</sup> Osiander and other orthodox Lutherans worried that Arndt's emphasis on sanctification, and the life of faith bordered on attributing merit to human works characteristic of monastic asceticism.

These orthodox accusations may have warped both Arndt and Boehme's intentions and simplified their theological argument. But their embrace of the mystical vocabulary of rebirth such as crucifying the flesh, and dying to the world, I will argue, did introduce into Protestant devotion a powerful imperative to self-denial and 'inward' mortification that, crucially, more radical followers would interpret as necessary in outward practice as well. But contemporaries and modern analyses of this influence have erred in focusing on how Arndt and Boehme's and his followers' unorthodoxy tended to a radical interiority and 'spiritualism' which supposedly rejected all external mediation

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<sup>114</sup> Spener would write in 1711 that Arndt's writings were "fast unzählige mal und offer als einiges andern Theologi Schrifften an vielen Orthen...edirt worden" *Predigten über des seeligen Johann Arnds Geistreiche Bücher vom Wahren Christenthum*. (Frankfurt. A.M: Johann David Zunner, 1711), 5.

<sup>115</sup> Spener's text, *Pia Desideria*, which laid out the program for pietistic reforms in the 1660s, was first published as an introduction to a new edition of Arndt's *True Christianity*.

<sup>116</sup> Arndt edited a new edition of the *Theologia Deutsch* with Luther's old foreward in 1597 and again in 1605 with a new foreward. Attached to the 1605 edition of *Theologia Deutsch*, Arndt prepared his own translation of Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi*. See Johannes Wallmann, "Johann Arndt und die Protestantische Frömmigkeit: Zur Rezeption der mittelalterlichen im Lutherthum" in *Theologie und Frömmigkeit im Zeitalter des Barock: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen, 1995), 11-15.

<sup>117</sup> Lucas Osiander, *Theologisches Bedencken und Christliche Treuhertzige Erinnerung/welcher Gestalt Johann Arndten genandtes Wahres Christenthumb* (Tübingen, 1623), 221, 7.

and corporeal ritual.<sup>118</sup> In line with the argument of this dissertation, scholars of radical interiority in spiritualist Protestant mystics have failed to consider the ascetic and contemplative practices adhering to such interiority. Arndt's mystical formulation of true Christianity as moral regeneration by inwardly 'crucifying the flesh' set out a practical devotional program tending to the revival of ascetic practices in the pursuit of holiness among Protestant nonconformists. A careful reading of this trope of inward self-mortification in his *True Christianity*, and its importance in radical circles fills in an important chapter in the story of re-legitimizing ascetic and contemplative worship in seventeenth-century Protestantism. The principle of inwardness ('Einkehren') and silence ('Silentio') of Tauler was used by seventeenth-century Protestants to recreate aspects of the consecrated life characterized by chastity, poverty, withdrawal, and contemplation. In Arndt's case, we see an initial attempt to employ a radical spiritualist understanding of asceticism in a way that overcame both the rote, Catholic practices of self-denial but also the Lutheran ridicule of the value of such acts. The answer, for Arndt, is a rich attention to the interior self and its cultivation that draws on ascetic motifs and imagery to shape a holy, resigned subjectivity. The zeal of the desert fathers and their punishment of the body, while not to be imitated, should nevertheless serve as a pedagogical tool to understand the required level of devotion to God. This 'higher repentance', we shall see, was not to be found in a cloister, but also not in the self-assured confidence that one's belief in 'faith alone' is sufficient for salvation.

We will consider the two in turn, beginning with Arndt. The son of a pastor, Arndt's resume includes serving as pastor for numerous Protestant princes in Saxony, Braunschweig, and finally Celle, near Hannover. He preached to his congregations the sober message that "you must let your repentance be in righteous earnestness, or you have no righteous faith".<sup>119</sup> In his *True Christianity* and other works, Arndt's controversial formulation of the duty of a Christian rests on his definition of repentance (*Busse*) as a regeneration of the believer's fleshy nature into a sanctified, holy being. Arndt defines repentance as a "mortification and crucifixion of the flesh and all carnal desires/ and evil habits of the heart/ and a quickening of the soul". It is, he says further, the death of the old man (Adam) and the birth of Christ in the soul: "and just as through Adam's flesh we were born to pride, avarice, lust, and all uncleanness, so must our nature be renewed, cleansed, and sanctified through the holy ghost and...from Christ born again."<sup>120</sup> As Hermann Geyer has shown, repentance in Arndt closely resembles the stage of purgation, or purifying of the flesh, the first step in the mystical path to illumination and union.<sup>121</sup> In emphasizing the essentiality of this regeneration, Arndt closely follows the *Imitatio Christi*, and the concept of *Gelassenheit* in Tauler where the believer's ever increasing realization of his own sin, 'contritio cordis', results in a renewal of the soul, and its ultimate resting in God.<sup>122</sup> Revealing his mystical,

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<sup>118</sup> The discussion in Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit* shows how radical Arndt's thought was (20-50). But for Geyer, Arndt's thought points to spiritualism which he understands as a kind of worship completely lacking in any outward mediation, the very opposite of the monastic tradition in its inwardness. I am here arguing for a different understanding of the practical, devotional side to spiritualism.

<sup>119</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, Vorrede.

<sup>120</sup> Arndt, *Sechs Bücher vom Wahren Christenthum*, 1 Book, Chapter 3, 14-15.

<sup>121</sup> Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*, 279.

<sup>122</sup> What made Arndt's "True Christianity" so troubling to orthodox Lutherans was how central the late medieval mystical language of purgation, illumination, and union, was to his efforts to introduce inward

confessionally non-specific understanding of repentance as regeneration, Arndt wrote that this ‘higher’ repentance had been taught by the prophets:

teach us a much higher, inward repentance/ where man must die to / pride/  
avarice/ lust/ deny and hate himself/ depart the world/ and give himself and all  
that he has to God/ crucify his flesh/ and carry in their body a crushed, hurt/ and  
fearful heart/ and moaning soul/ like the inward repentance of the heart as is  
described in the penitential Psalms.<sup>123</sup>

In this formulation of repentance, Arndt subtly alters one of the most significant Lutheran doctrines, that of justification, when he writes that man’s sinful nature must be changed before forgiveness, and divine comfort can follow. He writes in Book I, chapter 4 that the “perverse and evil habits of man must now be changed/ or improved/...in order for forgiveness of sins to take place.”<sup>124</sup> Arndt emphasizes that without this change the fruits of the salvation already won by Christ cannot be enjoyed by the Christian: “for without such inward repentance, Christ cannot be of use to man/that is,/ he is not able to receive his grace and the fruit of his merits/ which must be grasped with a contrite/broken/repentant/ faithful and humble heart.”<sup>125</sup> The “evil” (unart) of man that must be rooted out is specifically his orientation to the world and its values, his “avarice, care for food and money, fleshy lusts, lustful eyes, and luxurious life”<sup>126</sup>. In a manner that at once evokes Luther’s notion of faith as a precondition for good works but also contradicts his pessimism on man’s ability to change his nature, Arndt emphasizes this interior, moral transformation must take place before any outward acts can be worthy: “Without the mortification of the flesh, there can be nothing spiritual in man/ neither true prayer nor devotion”.<sup>127</sup>

It is important to note that Arndt himself does not see this “crucifixion of the flesh” in terms of a justifying work—he insisted that his emphasis on regeneration and holiness in no way equated to the heretical doctrines of “synergism/papism/maiorism” giving human effort and regeneration a place in earning salvation<sup>128</sup>. One should be careful, Arndt wrote, not to “confuse the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the Christian life but make a clear distinction.” Johannes Wallmann attempts to clarify Arndt’s position on the doctrine of *sola fide* by arguing that this ‘clear distinction’ between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of a Christian life is that of justification and sanctification. Justification, the prior forgiveness and satisfaction of man’s sin by Christ through faith is never questioned or qualified by Arndt. But beyond justification, there is in this life a host of graces and gifts available to those who sanctify their flesh by rooting

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sanctification. As Peter Erb, and others have made clear, Arndt identifies “mystical theology” with asceticism like most of his contemporaries. Introduction, *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 6.

<sup>123</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, Book I, Chapter IV, 49. See Thomas Illg, *Ein anderer Mensch werden: Johann Arndts Verständnis der Imitatio Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 49.

<sup>124</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> *Vom Wahren Christentum* I (1605 edition), Chapter IV, S. 48.

<sup>126</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, 55.

<sup>127</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, Book I, Chapter XII, 69.

<sup>128</sup> One should be careful, Arndt wrote, not to “confuse the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the Christian life but make a clear distinction.” Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christentum*, Preface.

out evil and pursue a ‘holy life’.<sup>129</sup> Arndt’s language indeed suggests such a solution to the apparent contradiction. He writes that “although in Christ we are all perfect, when he applies and gives us his holiness through faith; but when it comes to the life of faith, then there is much to be desired. For even among the faithful and reborn there are found many remaining sins, crimes, and faults over which they must daily sigh, repent, and pray to God.”<sup>130</sup>

But far from clearing him of all unorthodox suspicion, the distinction between justification and sanctification only heightens the challenge to Lutheranism. Arndt’s significance lies precisely in making and emphasizing this distinction between a forensic justification and the importance of applying faith to practical living in the here and now. To be free of sin in this life of faith takes time, effort, and moral reform. This language of gradual sanctification would evoke for radicals the idea of regeneration, or the possibility of perfecting human nature through a union with God in this life. In *True Christianity*, Arndt writes that through the “confidence and trust” of faith, the soul “receives from him [God] new powers/new life/new comfort/peace and joy/ peace of justification and holiness/ and man is born from God through faith”.<sup>131</sup> This is very different than the definition of faith put forward by Gerhard, for example, where the substance of faith rests in the “*promissio dei*”, the promise of God for justification, and not resting in God himself where the soul is sanctified.<sup>132</sup>

The question of Arndt’s orthodoxy and significance for later Protestant reform movements has long been a lively topic of debate. Most discussions have revolved around what meaning should be ascribed to his extensive use of late medieval mystical texts and their message of inward rebirth and regeneration. Against the view of a radical, spiritualist Arndt, the church historian Johannes Wallmann, calls Arndt a propagator of a “piety of inwardness”<sup>133</sup>, and insists that what is significant with Arndt’s use of medieval, mystical sources is not the simple fact he uses them, but how he translates them into a form acceptable to bourgeois, orthodox Protestantism. In Arndt’s use of Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*, for example, the title of chapter 17 in book I ‘*De Vita Monastica*’ is changed to ‘*Von des Menschen Pilgerschaft*’. And Arndt himself felt it necessary to clarify that when he uses the term “crucifying the flesh” or “dying to the world” he does not have in mind practices from monastic asceticism. Arndt states that his practice of dying to the world is not one achieved by self-flagellation or abstemious behaviour but rather that such self-denial and fleeing the world comes by practices of reading about, meditating on, and contemplating the example of Christ. No monastic rule such as St. Benedict’s physical withdrawal is necessary, but rather a different rule based on Christ: “Thus he is the example, model, and rule of your life. He is the true *regula vitae* of our life, not the rule of St. Benedict/ or acts of other men/ rather the example of Christ/to which the Apostle directs us.”<sup>134</sup>

What does taking Christ’s example as our *regula vitae*—and not a monastic rule—mean in practice? The way that moral regeneration can occur in the absence of actual

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<sup>129</sup> Johannes Wallmann, “Johann Arndt (1555-1621): Die Unvergleichliche Verbreitung seiner Schriften”, *Pietismus-Studien: Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen, 2008), 76.

<sup>130</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, Book V, Part I, Chapter 1. 831.

<sup>131</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, Book I, Chap. 5, 51.

<sup>132</sup> Wallmann, *Pietismus-Studien, Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2008), 95.

<sup>133</sup> Wallmann, *Pietismus-Studien*, 78.

<sup>134</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, 19.

abstinence, withdrawal, or corporeal penances, relies on a Protestant *Imitatio Christi*, in which the values exhibited by Christ's life are internalized by us through meditation on his life. Christ is the "proper Book of Life" Arndt states, insisting that all Christians must emulate his holy life.<sup>135</sup> In answer to a Catholic apologist like Besold, Arndt claimed that our nature can be improved through meditation on Christ and uniting with him through faith, a practice not requiring monastic withdrawal.<sup>136</sup> In the sixth chapter of the first book of *True Christianity*, Arndt explains that Christ's image must be "born within us" in a 'spiritual' manner by imitating his 'humility', 'patience', and 'forgiving one's enemies':

For as Christ was conceived and born by Maria through the Holy Ghost, so also must he be conceived and born in me spiritually: He must grow and increase in me spiritually. And as I am created as a new creature in Christ, so must I also live and walk in him: I must be exiled and tormented with him; I must walk with him in humility and in despising the world, in patience and meekness and love. I must with him forgive my enemies, and do the will of the father...be crucified with him, die and resurrect with him...not alone through the holy cross, but also through daily repentance and inward remorse and suffering at sin.<sup>137</sup>

This practice of imaginative emulation, where one cultivates "inward remorse and suffering" is a higher practice than the outward punishment of one's body as practiced by the ascetic monastics. It preserves, however, the necessity of transforming one's sinful nature and becoming holy as the seed of faith grows and we develop the "image" of Christ within us. The image of Christ's suffering, his meekness, his self-denial serves as a pedagogical instrument, shaping the believer's affective responses on a moral level.

In Boehme, many of the same themes of inward rebirth, self-mortification—couched in more esoteric, alchemical terms—and a renewed emphasis on practical piety in contemplation and holiness can be seen. Born to a well-to-do peasant in 1575 in a village near Görlitz, Jacob Boehme became apprenticed at a young age to a shoemaker and later established his own shop as a master cobbler in Görlitz. In 1600, the young cobbler experienced a vision while observing sunlight reflecting off a pewter dish that he believed open the inner structure of the world to him. He only began committing his theories to paper, however, in 1612 with *Aurora*, that described creation, the universe, good and evil, in terms of the interaction between elemental forces and 'qualities' such as light and darkness, heat and cold, bitter and sweet.<sup>138</sup> Alchemical and astrological symbols thickly populate Boehme's works alongside the traditional Christian doctrines and mystical tropes they are meant to illuminate. The official and popular religious world in late 1500s Bohemia, and in Görlitz especially, teemed with religious controversies as well as an incredible ferment of hermetic and alchemical theories fusing a new empirical interest in the natural world with Christian doctrines. Numerous figures close to Boehme would be accused of Calvinist heresies as Lutheranism lost ground to Reformed theology. Paracelsian medicine—rooted in hermetic notions of the microcosm and alchemical

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<sup>135</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, 58.

<sup>136</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, 60.

<sup>137</sup> Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, Book I, Chapter VI, 28-9.

<sup>138</sup> Boehme, *Aurora* (1612), see Chapter 1.

principles where three ‘principles’, salt, mercury, and sulphur caused all disease—was the subject of a 1570 investigation in Görlitz. Indeed, much of Görlitz’s humanistically trained elite, including the mayor, appears to have espoused Paracelsian views—many of his texts were collected and edited in Görlitz.<sup>139</sup> Protestant spiritualism and its call for authentic, heartfelt religion likewise held sway over many in Görlitz. Many of Boehme’s eventual followers were from Schwenckfeldian backgrounds, introducing Boehme to his texts. A relative of Boehme, Jacob Behem, corresponded with Anton Weigel, explaining how much of Weigel’s cosmology found its way into Boehme’s thought.<sup>140</sup>

But Boehme’s theology, dominated as it is by alchemical, Kabbalistic, and Paracelsian symbolism, had no less a grounding in late medieval monastic mysticism with its themes of imitating Christ’s life, his passion, and his disregard for the things of this world. In Görlitz, well before he began writing, Boehme was a member of a study group organized by the pastor Martin Moller (1547-1606) called the ‘Conventicle of God’s Real Servants’. Moller, who had earlier been accused of crypto-calvinism was the author of two devotional works, *Meditationes Sanctum Pastorum* (1584-1591) and *Praxis Evangeliorum* (1601), texts which Moller presented as “useful exercises of faith from the holy ancient fathers, Augustine, Bernhard, Tauler, and others...” Along with Arndt, Moller is credited with introducing the piety of contemplative mysticism into Lutheranism, especially the passion mysticism with its focus on Christ’s wounds and the necessity of suffering for true piety. Will-Erich Peuckert and others have shown the similarities between Boehme’s first work, *Aurora* (1612) and Moller’s texts.<sup>141</sup>

In Boehme’s thought, this mysticism and an emphasis on the freedom of the will led to the same divergence from a purely forensic notion of justification as Arndt. Aimed more at the orthodox codifiers of Luther and censors with whom he had to contend than with Luther himself, Boehme railed against those “false shepards of Christ” who failed to recognize that “the suffering of Christ is of no value to anyone, unless they turn away from their false, evil endeavors”.<sup>142</sup> He took clear aim at the notion that righteousness is only an imputed quality given to cover the every sinful Christian, saying that “it is not an imputed righteousness—a foreigner cannot inherit God’s Kingdom, rather it must be an innate righteousness from God’s essence.”<sup>143</sup> The believer’s very being must be transformed into a holy, divine substance.

This rebirth, described by Boehme in terms of restoring a unity before Adam’s fall and the transmutation of lower, base substances into higher a spiritual one, light to darkness, a change aimed at a union of a purified soul with God. Boehme speaks of fallen man standing in the principles of ‘flesh’, and ‘darkness’, ‘wrath’ and the ‘astral’ plane, and that through an influx of divine love and light, the pre-lapsarian balance can be

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<sup>139</sup> Andrew Weeks, *An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 29-31.

<sup>140</sup> Weeks, *An Intellectual Biography*, 50.

<sup>141</sup> Will-Erich Peucker, *Die Rosenkreuzer, zur Geschichte einer Reformation*, (E. Diederichs, 1928), 259-60.

<sup>142</sup> Boehme, *Vom Dreifachen Leben des Menschen* in *Aus Alten Bücherschränken: Eine Sammlung vergessenen und gefährdeten deutschen Volksgutes*, edited by Wilhelm Stapel (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt), 489.

<sup>143</sup> Boehme, *Theosophische Send-Schreiben* (Amsterdam: Henrich Betkuis, 1658), 20, 7. See also Boehme, *De regeneratione, das ist Von der neuen Wiedergeburt*, 9. (1622). This edition Berlin 1770.

restored.<sup>144</sup> But the precise means and practices to bring about this transformation included themes and practices of ascetic mysticism such as withdrawal, contemplative prayer, and chastity. While explaining true repentance, Boehme, like Arndt, returns to a contemplative tradition of passion mysticism using Christ's suffering as a model for self-mortification and renunciation, absorbing one's will into Christ's. Boehme described a practice of imaginative, contemplative prayer that conditions a deep sense of remorse in the soul. This remorse occurs by "enveloping oneself in Christ's suffering and death" imaginatively. Boehme's wrote in *Weg zum Christo*, that "thus you should not imagine to yourselves anything else but the bitter suffering and death of our lord/and his ignomy and derision/ as well as his poverty in this world/ what he did for us poor people/ and set your desire and entire will therein/ that you eagerly desire to become like his image/ and willingly and gladly follow him in his trial."<sup>145</sup> In the same section in *Der Weg zum Christo* on true repentance, Boehme employs a scripture from Luke 14:26 loved by spiritualists about self-renunciation "For Christ also said: whomever will not leave wife/children/brother/sisters/money/possessions/ and everything he has/yes, even his earthly life/ and follow me/ such a person cannot be my disciple."<sup>146</sup>

Boehme likewise articulated the process of rebirth and joyful mystical union with Christ in terms of the soul turning away from earthly lusts and experiencing a chaste union with a 'heavenly bride' in the figure of Sophia, or divine wisdom. In what has typically been read as a metaphor, Boehme speaks of divine wisdom as a virgin, Sophia, who 'woos' the soul to repentance and to a chaste marriage with her. "And at all times she calls to the fiery soul as her groom/and admonishes it to repentance/and doing away or removing oneself from the abomination of vanity."<sup>147</sup> Boehme's account of the fall had implications for human sexuality as well. Before the fall, Adam enjoyed the indwelling companionship of the divine Sophia, and she constituted the feminine principle complimenting his masculine. Adam was thus androgynous, "Man and woman" simultaneously and procreation occurred "through imagination, for the Verbum Fiat was in him revealed".<sup>148</sup> No earthly Eve and no division between male and female existed until a desire arose in Adam to be like the animals around him, copulating with one another. By arguing that humankind before the fall was a composite of the male and female sexes and that sexual desire only arose after they were split by Adam's fall, Boehme implied that sexuality was temporal and that overcoming the fall also meant overcoming sexual desire.

For many of his followers, Boehme's tale of the soul's journey back to a chaste condition would have literal implications. The historian Andrew Weeks maintains that Boehme's theology of self-emptying and elemental sanctification does not mean he is "recommending a monastic denial of life" such as in asceticism and celibacy. He points out that Boehme was happily married with children and ran a successful business. But as with Arndt, we are examining long-term processes that transcend the intentions of an

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<sup>144</sup> Boehme, *De regeneratione, das ist Von der neuen Wiedergeburt*, 9. (Originally published in 1622. This edition Berlin: Christian Ulrich Ringmacher, 1779).

<sup>145</sup> Boehme, "Theosophische Sendschreiben IX" in *Christosophia, Das ist: Der Weg zum Christo* (1718 edition), 440.

<sup>146</sup> Boehme, *Weg zum Christus*, 15.

<sup>147</sup> Boehme, *Von der neuen Wiedergeburt*, Chapter 4. 253. 1718 edition of *Weg zum Christo*.

<sup>148</sup> Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum, oder Erklärung über das erste Buch Mosis*, (1640), 94. This edition states it was published "by the lovers" of Boehme and is the Franckenberg 1640 Amsterdam edition.

individual, looking to shifting values and theologies that ultimately produce new practices and communities later in the century. To this end, it is interesting that within circles of late seventeenth-century Boehme followers, one of the most marked features is the practice of celibacy, a topic we will turn to in chapter four. Boehme's writings, and especially his descriptions of the soul's 'chaste' union with Sophia, became the language that numerous circles of Protestant ascetics used to justify their rejection of marriage and withdrawn lifestyles. The German theosophists like Gichtel and Beissel made the observance of celibacy the condition for the soul's rebirth which they imagined as a result of their spiritual union with Sophia. Gichtel wrote in 1697 that he only understood the 'mystery' of Sophia "after I had denied the woman in this world".<sup>149</sup> The English 'Behmenists', as enthusiasts of Boehme were called, such as John Pordage, Jane Leade, and William Law, taught the necessity of keeping oneself free from earthly marriage because of the impending age of 'Philadelphia' and Christ's return when the saints would be wed with Christ.<sup>150</sup> Remarkably on this connection between ascetic practice and Boehme's later followers, one Protestant historian of Boehme admits that in Boehme's writings "here and there a monkish asceticism rings ominously through the beautiful words."<sup>151</sup>

### *Part III: The Rise of Ascetic Worship in Radical Protestantism*

But, despite Arndt and Boehme's own rejection of ascetic, monastic implications to their calls for renouncing the world, the energy and breadth contained in their reintroduction of medieval mysticism and the motif of "dying to the world" ensured that not all would interpret it in equally orthodox terms. As Hermann Geyer points out in his study of Arndt's reception by radical spiritualists, the meaning of Arndt is not exhausted by his own proclamations to orthodoxy. Rather, the meaning of this new renewalist movement initiated by Arndt and Boehme must also take into consideration how their followers interpreted the practical application of this call for moral regeneration in the life of faith. But proponents of a 'radical' Arndt (all agree on Boehme's radical implications) have erred in only thinking of this heterodoxy in terms of an eschewal of outward ceremony and worship, taking their claims to a purely 'inward' asceticism at face value. On this model, the radical content in Arndt and Boehme's theology consists in its tendency toward a spiritualistic notion of faith, where regeneration and union comes alone through the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, without the aid of corporeal or ritual practices. I argue, however, that within the mystical theology of renewal and "inward" worship as put forth by these early seventeenth-century reformers, an outward ascetic practice was born resting upon solitude, contemplative prayer, self-denial, and chastity, all heterodox practices strongly associated with monasticism. Of central significance is the mystical teaching of purgation, reworked into the more orthodox term of "Busse" as a necessary stage before mystical union. Gorceix, in his study of the

<sup>149</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. I, 79 Brief. 20 Aug. 1697.

<sup>150</sup> Jane Leade, *The Laws of Paradise, given forth by wisdom to a translated spirit* (London: T. Sowle, 1695), 26-7: "...thinking with these who are Spiritual, thou maist be more free, and more bold. True it is, thou mayest; but yet here it is good to be limited, that thou be not circumvented, and suffer thy Virgin Head to be deflowered. Wherefore from all keep thy self an unspotted Mirrour, and so shalt thou come to be the Chaste Bride of the Lamb, and to enjoy the Nuptial Bed."

<sup>151</sup> A. Kielholz, *Jacob Boehme. Ein psychographischer Beitrag zur Psychologie der Mystik*, (Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1919), 35.



upswing in mystical asceticism in this period argues that underneath all the various strands of baroque mysticism (Paracelsus, Boehme, Weigel) is an asceticism aimed at such a mystical union: “là, un récit débordant de symbols alchimiques sous-tend une description relativement détaillée de l’ascèse, puis de l’union.”<sup>152</sup> What’s more, Peter Erb argues that Arndt identifies “mystical theology” with asceticism like most of his contemporaries.<sup>153</sup>

The manner in which Arndt and Boehme’s call for inward ‘repentance’ and self-denial became tied to outwardly ascetic practices (along with inspiration from others such as Weigel and Schwenckfeld) can be seen, *in nuce*, in a letter from August Franckenberg, an important early propagator of Boehme, and an admirer of Arndt. Writing to a Georg Fischer in Breslau in 1637, Franckenberg emphasizes repeatedly that ‘remaining withdrawn’ and in silence is a key to achieving the union of the soul with God of which Arndt, Tauler, and Kempis are witnesses:

I advise that one should hold to simplicity, and prayer, and love, stay withdrawn, regulate oneself, read diligently in the Bible, especially the new Testament with a child-like spirit, put away the commentaries and polemical texts, and go to God in faith in secret (‘ins verborgen’), do not tie yourself to ceremonies, and do not get upset about the uninitiated; stay close to God, let the world be upset; remain still and silent, consider the divine words, miracles, works, and mysteries, do not indulge in too many books, except for some that serve to enlivening, or in the miracles and mysteries of nature or good, useful histories and examples of the pious...this is for tying and binding the soul to God, in the hidden holy place, in the sabbath and calm of the soul. Tauler, The German Theology, Thomas à Kempis [Book 3], *Arndt’s book on the spiritual inward life...* are sufficient witnesses.<sup>154</sup>

Franckenberg’s inclusion of Arndt as a principle inspiration for a withdrawn, silent devotion here, the same year as Besold’s defense of his conversion, is part of a larger pattern in which Arndt was cited as a prominent Protestant voice advocating for an ascetic turn in Lutheran worship. Arndt is often mentioned as a teacher of interiority along with Tauler, Schwenckfeld, Kempis, and Böhme.<sup>155</sup> Those interpreting Arndt’s theology in a spiritualist manner have been termed “radical Arndtians” by some, extending his critique of contemporary Christianity to a complete rejection of the confessional churches liturgical and sacramental order.

Two of the principle figures belonging to these “radical Arndtians” who took up Arndt’s message of spiritual self-denial and dying to the world were the radical pastors Joachim Betke (16-16) and Christian Hoburg. Betke’s call for all Protestants to renew the idea of a universal “spiritual priesthood” and Hoburg’s denunciation of a hypocritical,

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<sup>152</sup> Bernard Gorceix, *Flambée et Agonie: Mystique du xviiie siecle allemand*, (Paris: Editions Présence, 1977), 41.

<sup>153</sup> Peter Erb, *True Christianity*, Introduction, 6. That ‘theologia mystica’ was a synonym for ‘ascetic’ theology can be seen from Balthasar Köpke’s text *Theologia Mystica oder Ascetica. Sapientia Die in Mysterio Crucis Christi Abscondita/ Die wahre Theologia Mystica oder Ascetica* (Halle, 1700).

<sup>154</sup> See Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*, 24-5.

<sup>155</sup> Johannes Wallmann, *Johann Arndt*, in Carter Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth-Century*, (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons, 2008), 34.

worldly Christianity made both important figures in the separatist, spiritualist underground of the 1650s and 60s. Hoburg in particular would be widely read by later Pietists, with his texts printed in Berleburg, Philadelphia, and Antwerp<sup>156</sup>. Both Betke and Hoburg were in close contact with Friedrich Breckling and a host of Antwerp religious radicals, oftentimes staying with the exiled pastor.<sup>157</sup>

As a young pastor in Lauenberg, a village near Hamburg, Hoburg became an enthusiast of the writings of both the spiritualist Caspar von Schwenckfeld (1481-1561) and Arndt. Soon, Hoburg himself was writing stinging criticisms of the hollow, routinized liturgy and sermons of the Lutheran church, criticisms which soon led to repeated confrontations and exile from his various posts. In this time, Hoburg also published two works directly inspired by Arndt and focused on the concrete practices of Arndt's 'inward' Christianity. The appropriately named, *Praxis Arndiana* (1642) contains a chapter by chapter elaboration of the main themes of Arndt's *True Christianity* and his 1655 *Theologia Mystica, das ist Geheime Krafft-Theologie der Alten* gathers quotes and teachings from across the early Christian mystical and eremitic tradition on spiritual rebirth. In *Praxis Arndiana*, Hoburg says that Arndt's book gives the "means and ways" to practice a "daily exercise of an inward Christianity" against the hypocritical, worldly devotion of contemporary Christians. The emphasis here is on a *practice* of interiorized Christianity: "And so I have desired to share with my fellow Christians this method, so true and right as found through practice, and how the same can apply this, and bring into holy exercise..."<sup>158</sup> Beyond Arndt's text, Hoburg says he will use the writings from the "Holy Fathers/Augustine/Bernhard, Anselm, etc" and "spirit-filled meditations".<sup>159</sup>

What is this practice? And to what extent did it employ practices we could term 'ascetic'? Like Arndt, this "holy exercise" is a daily dying to the world through what is termed inward "Buße" or repentance. "The inward repentance and mortification of the flesh/ is the true cross/ that we must daily carry with Christ."<sup>160</sup> Initially, Hoburg, like Arndt, states that the flesh is mortified through contrition: "Through a crushed/ broken/ and contrite heart, the lusts of my flesh are mortified."<sup>161</sup> But, unlike Arndt, there is not the same attempt to reconcile this language of mystical purgation with secular pursuits and vocations. He states that this practice requires much more than just the "going to church" and "prayer" required by Lutheranism, but a true imitation of the life of Christ and turning away from the world which produces a whole new creature. We must be transformed "...into a new creature/ such that even my outward senses/ are closed to the world and all secular things/ and are open to thee alone/ my eyes see only you/ my ears hear only you/ my mouth tastes only your goodness and sweetness/ and after the flesh in me has been mortified/ a spiritual life is awakened in me with a holy life/spiritual

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<sup>156</sup> Christoph Saur, an important figure in the early history of the Ephrata Cloister (see chapter 4) published a *Sprüche aus Christian Hoburgs Postilla mystica* in 1748. See *Der Deutsche Pionier: Erinnerungen aus dem Pionierleben der Deutschen in Amerika*, vol. 10 (Deutsch Pionier Verein: Cincinnati, Ohio, 1878), 25. See also, Willem Heijting's "Christian Hoburg's *Lebendige Hertzens-Theologie* (1661): A Book in the Heart of Seventeenth-Century Spirituality", in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*, ed. August den Hollander (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 203.

<sup>157</sup> Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 34.

<sup>158</sup> Christian Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana*, preface.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid*, preface.

<sup>160</sup> Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana*, 36.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

thoughts/ and spiritual words and works.”<sup>162</sup> Repentance, in this Arndtian mode, is the exercise of decreasing one’s sensual, worldly drives and attachments and replacing them with spiritual ones.<sup>163</sup> It is what allows the holiness of Christ to be applied in the moral life of Christians. “Only in daily repentance (*Busse*), does the application of the merits of Jesus Christ have space and room” with constant purification of one’s soul making “your entire bloody work useful”.<sup>164</sup>

Hoburg makes it further clear, in both texts, that an integral means to achieving the “inward dying to the world” is a physical withdrawal and abstinence from the world. As cited in the introduction to this chapter, Hoburg wrote in *Theologia Mystica* that “outward withdrawal [‘äusserliche Abgeschiedenheit’] and abstinence from the world can be a great help on this path of repentance.”<sup>165</sup> In *Praxis Arndiana*, he wrote that “the more a person separates himself from the world with his heart, being, and life, the closer he comes to you O God/ you true, only life of all believing souls. For this reason your saints also have fled the company of the children of this world, and in quiet devotion separated from the tumult of the world, they have worshipped you inwardly with the their hearts greatest desire and joy.”<sup>166</sup> Later in *Theologia Mystica*, Hoburg says that he agrees with the “dear ancients” that “nowhere does one find God so perfectly and fruitfully than *in solitude/physically and spiritually*”. When we busy ourselves, he adds, with “much society/and much conversation” we cannot “stand against the attacks of the natural passions”.<sup>167</sup> Speaking the language of Tauler and Theresian quietism and recollection, Hoburg recommends the outward senses’ retreat from the “multiplicity” of the world, and turn inward so that the “senses receive that much more powerfully the influence of the heavenly sun”. Throughout *Theologia Mystica*, Hoburg makes extensive use of the teachings and sayings of the greatest exemplars of the solitary life, that of the Desert Fathers. One popular quote (also found among later mystics like Gichtel) attributed to Anthony is that a soul must continuously remain in the element that keeps it burning with God’s love just as a piece of iron must remain in fire to stay bright or a fish must remain in water.<sup>168</sup> Hoburg therefore does not equivocate on the value of a devotion employing renunciatory acts.<sup>169</sup>

The importance of physical withdrawal and silence for the practice of *Busse* can

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>163</sup> Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica*, 121-122. Hoburg talks about going to God in prayer as the means to accomplish this “Vernichtung sein selbst”. That is, a meditation on the nothingness of oneself and the suffering Christ as the means to deny oneself. Meditation on Christ’s life, his suffering, the vanity of the world, is an integral tool to fill one’s mind with “spiritual thoughts”.

<sup>164</sup> Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana*, 113-4.

<sup>165</sup> Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica*, 29.

<sup>166</sup> Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana*, 153.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, *Theologia Mystica* 336-7.

<sup>168</sup> Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica*, 252.

<sup>169</sup> More examples of Hoburg specifically recommending physical solitude are as follows: “Daher befinde ich mich nicht wenig geholfen / wann ich von der bösen Welt je länger je mehr und lieber entfremdet/ so viel es seyn kan/ und Beruffs halber sich leiden will/ mit Lieb und Geist mich in eine Einsamkeit und Stillheit begeben / an einen Ort gehe/ da ich allein mit meinem Gott reden/ mein Herz für ihm ungescheuet ausschütten/ Psal. 62” (*Theologia Mystica*, 30) “*Secretum meum Deo & mihi* sage ich billig mit dem heiligen Bernhard.” (30-1) Attacks “Äussern Geschäfte”... “damit sie desto inniger und öfter / ja je öfter je besser diesen göttlichen Übungen in der stillen Einsamkeit abwarten können” (31) He says that there is an incredible “Gespräch der Seele mit ihrem Liebsten” which requires solitariness. (33).

be understood in terms of the extreme effort required to keep the soul focused on God as opposed to the things of the world. Hoburg consistently connects purging the old man with a continuous interior ‘examination’ of the heart to check if “Christ or Adam rules in me”. This self-examination requires vigilant “watching/praying/fasting/” so that the senses are constantly gathered inward at the end of which the carnal man is driven away and a perpetual resting in God is achieved: “...let my heart be daily honestly assaulted/yes, let it be examined by the hour/ and if it were possible, every moment/and change the evil/ and let the impurity of my heart be cleansed in the blood of Christ/ O, let my whole life by a daily repentance of the heart”.<sup>170</sup> It should be no surprise then to find that Hoburg’s writings praise the traditional figure of the contemplative life, Mary, and her choice to dwell with the Lord as opposed to helping Martha with household duties: “and therefore the dear Lord said ‘one thing is necessary’ by which he meant this inward unity/ that man should turn inward with Mary/, gathering all one’s senses inwardly to the abode of the heart/...”<sup>171</sup> Combined with Hoburg’s above affirmation that repentance is greatly helped by physical withdrawal, it is hard to understand his stance as one of a purely inward orientation of the soul while one’s secular occupations are left unaltered.

Joachim Betke, a fellow radical Arndtian, lived a less turbulent life than Hoburg, spending first his study years in Berlin and then presiding for 30 years over a small parish in Linum outside of Berlin. But, belying his uneventful life, Betke incessantly called for a reformation of Lutheran devotion and criticized the professional clergy for failing to teach all Christians their duty to live consecrated lives. His corpus also reveals the recurring theme of the importance of suffering in imitation of Christ as the principle duty of Christians, articulating his criticism of contemporary Christianity likewise in terms of a missing ascetic dimension. In his *Mystery of the Cross* (1637) and *Divine Community of Suffering* (1660), Betke makes the case that true christianity, as with Arndt, is an imitation of his crucifixion but one in which we die to our worldly self and lusts.<sup>172</sup> The true mark of a Christian, the ‘circumcision’ of the new covenant, is how much one imitates Christ’s rejection of the world by mortifying carnal pleasures and desire to sin.<sup>173</sup> The unifying message of these writers is that Christians do have a duty to lead a “holy life” and they further agree that such holiness consists in mystical purgation modeled on Christ’s suffering. One must “at least fall into consternation/ fear and trembling, and feel everything that Christ suffered on the cross.” Importantly, this ‘dying to the world’ likewise requires a “quiet, solitary life” and intensive practice of contemplative, meditative prayer.<sup>174</sup> “For which then such diligence/such divine meditation on the word/such earnest prayer and crying/ such exercise of piety/ such eagerness of soul and

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, *Praxis Arndiana*, 390.

<sup>171</sup> ibid, *Theologia Mystica* 336-7. “Ach verleihe mir/daß ich mit der lieben Maria/möge dises einige Ein erwählen/dises höchste Gut: alle Güter in der Welt sind trieglich / ohne dich...” Hoburg, *Praxis Arndiana*, 6.

<sup>172</sup> Betke, *Mysterium Crucis: Crux Angusta Porta Est, & Stricta Via, Quae Abducit ad vitam: hoc est schriftliche Eröffnung der Geheymnissen und Krafft deß Creutzes Christ nebenst Beweynung, daß dasselbe Creutz die enge Pforte, undd schmaler Weg* (1637); *Göttliche Leydens-Gemeinschaft* (1637).

<sup>173</sup> Betke, *Göttliche Leidens-Gemeinschaft*, preface.

<sup>174</sup> Betke, *Mysterio Crucis*, 13, 10. “...Vnnd hergegen Haß/ Wiederwillen/ Unlust zur Bibel Betrachtung stillen einsamen Leben/Christi Creutzes. Nachfolge/ der Welt Absterbung/sich Verläugnung/ein Neuw vnnd Nichts zu seyn/etc. Betke, *Mysterio Crucis*, 13.

serenity is required/ that one cannot even express.”<sup>175</sup>

Boehme’s influence tended perhaps even more explicitly toward an ascetic interpretation, and in some cases, led to conversions to Catholicism. Boehme’s writings, only saw the light of day haltingly, stopped in his lifetime by censors and only copied by hand by patrons in the early years after Boehme’s death in 1624. His texts abounded in particular in the radical networks of Silesia, termed sometimes by historians as the “school of Silesian mysticism”, and represented by such figures as Johannes Scheffler (1624-1677) whose pen-name was Angelus Silesius, August Franckenberg and Daniel Czepko (1605-1660).<sup>176</sup> Franckenberg, the noble friend of Boehme who began to publish and spread his writings, supplied Angelus Silesius with a number of ascetic-contemplative texts such as Tauler’s “Contemplations or Devotional Exercises on the Life and Suffering of Jesus Christ”, the pseudo-Tauler, *Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi*, along with texts by Thomas a Kempis, Böhme, John of the Cross, Maximilian Sandäus, and Weigel.<sup>177</sup> The speculative mystical poetry of the Silesian Daniel Czepko, likewise developed in this same milieu, with his contacts to Franckenberg giving him access to Boehme’s mystical texts and others from the 1630s onward. Czepko’s writings such as *Das innwendige Himmel Reich oder in sich gesammlete Gemüthe* (1633) and *Sexcenta Monodisticha sapientium* (1648) describe an interiorized transformation of the soul, what he terms “a hidden transfiguration”, achieved by rejecting and dying to all exteriority so that the soul can rest in a tranquility and union with God.<sup>178</sup> Deeply influenced by the mystical themes of Gelassenheit, resignation, and the imitation of the poverty of Christ, Czepko’s 35<sup>th</sup> verse of the *Sexcenta* concisely summarized the mystical practice of self-resignation leading to illumination as “Hate yourself/renounce all/comprehend God” (*Sich Hassen/Alles Lassen/Gott Fassen*).<sup>179</sup>

In a case reminiscent of Besold, the above-mentioned mystical poet and theosophist Johannes Scheffler so keenly felt the absence of the ascetic, quietist existence that he converted to Catholicism in 1653 at the age of 29.<sup>180</sup> It seems that Scheffler’s ideas on asceticism also had something to do with his interest in and attempts to publish defences of Boehme’s theosophy. Scheffler wrote in 1665 that his conflicts with Lutheran censors over his positive statements on Boehme and the “innigsten Gebethe” of S. Getrudis, was that which gave him the “last push...to be rid of Lutheranism”. In Scheffler’s defence of his conversion from his 1653 *Gründtliche Ursachen und Motiven*, he argued for Catholicism’s superiority because of the space given there to fleeing the

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<sup>175</sup> Betke, *Göttliche Leidens-Gemeinschaft*, preface.

<sup>176</sup> Lucinda Martin, “Jacob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, eds. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 125.

<sup>177</sup> Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit*, 28. *Angelus Silesius: Sämtliche Poetische Werke. In drei Bänden. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Hans Ludwig Held. Band 1: Angelus Silesius, Die Geschichte Seines Lebens und Seiner Werke. Urkunden* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1949)

<sup>178</sup> Gorcéix, *Flambée et Agonie*, 64.

<sup>179</sup> Daniel Czepko, *Sexcenta Monodisticha Sapientium in Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1 Unter Mitarbeit von Ulrich Seelbach. Herausgegeben von Hans-Gert Roloff und Marian Szyrocki (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989). 35.

<sup>180</sup> On Scheffler’s repeated conflicts with Lutheran censors in his efforts to publish Boehme, see *Angelus Silesius: Sämtliche Poetische Werke. In drei Bänden. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Hans Ludwig Held. Band 1: Angelus Silesius, Die Geschichte Seines Lebens und Seiner Werke. Urkunden*. (Munich: Carl Hanser-Verlag, 1949), 34.

world in monasticism, allowing for the inward mystical practice of ascetic contemplation. He wrote “that the spiritual Cloister-life which is removed from the commotion of the world” has been “through and through eradicated and still today declared by many to be totally unreasonably condemned”.<sup>181</sup> The cloisters were established by “the ancient ascetics” to be places to practice virtue, a practice that Scheffler identifies with mystical theology and calls the “art of secret communion with God” that “carries man to divine contemplation”.<sup>182</sup> This practice can be found in the “countless writings of the ascetics”, the “holy eremitics”, along with modern monastic mystics like “John of the Cross, Primi Carmelitarum Discalceati and the holy Virgin Theresa” who all practiced this method in a “most inward manner”. In rejecting this tradition as “enthusiasts, fanatics, and I know not what else”, modern Protestantism lacked, according to Scheffler, a necessary key to producing virtue, rebirth, and union with God.<sup>183</sup>

### *Justinian von Welz (1621-1668) and the Foundations of the Protestant Hidden Life*

By the mid-seventeenth century, Arndt’s call for Christians to reject the world through a more demanding, holy devotion and Boehme’s alchemical imagery of spiritual rebirth had nourished a growing reform movement that would take diverse forms. In its more moderate, conservative wing led by Philipp Jakob Spener, the recognition arose that holy living required Christians to isolate themselves to a certain degree from the world and its unregenerated masses and to practice more methodical, practical devotions in settings like conventicles, scripture study, and fasting.<sup>184</sup> Along with this desire to increase personal holiness and piety, and Protestants rediscovering and re-working the motifs and texts of earlier Christian contemplative traditions such as the desert fathers, the *Devotio Moderna*, and the *theologia mystica*, there likewise began to appear individuals calling for a more structured Protestant practice of the contemplative life and elements of the monastic life. This is the story that will preoccupy the rest of this dissertation. In the section that follows, we will see how one figure in the 1660s, Justinian von Welz (1621-1668), united many features of this upsurge in interest for ascetic devotion with his call for the revival of eremitic devotion among Protestants.

A religious refugee from Catholic Austria, Welz’s admiration for Arndt and the medieval mystics seems to have been the primary inspiration for his text *De Vita Solitaria* (1663) praising the ascetic piety of the ancient Christian hermits and recommending such a life to contemporary Protestants. Von Welz is also significant for our story as his efforts to reform Christianity in the mid 1660s ignited the imagination of the leader of this dissertation’s first experimental ascetic community, Johann Georg

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<sup>181</sup> Johannes Scheffler, *Gründtliche Ursachen und Motiven, Warumb er Von dem Lutherthumb abgetretten/und sich zu der Catholischen-Kyrchen bekennet hat*, (Ingolstadt: Georgio Hänlin, 1653), section VI.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Scheffler says that Protestants reject this as “papist self-activity”: “So kan ich auch in den Kyrchen und öffentlichen Versamblungen kein würcklich Exempel sehen; es wäre dann/daß man das Stillsitzen/Lesen/Singen und Praedig hören darfür wolte anziehen; welches doch noch lange nicht Tugend geübet heist. Und ob zwar in den Praedigen vil geschrieben wird/daß man sollte Gottsförchtig und Tugendhafft seyn: So wird doch die Übung derselben/als eine Pöpstliche Eigenwürckung/jederzeit verworffen.” Scheffler, *Gründtliche Ursachen und Motiven*, section VI.

<sup>184</sup> Johannes Wallmann, *Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus*, (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck, 1986), 264-289. See F.A. von Lieburg *Confessionalism and Pietism: Religious Reform in Early Modern Europe*, (Darmstadt: Philipp von Zabern Verlag, 2006).

Gichtel. Von Welz was born on December 12, 1621 into one of the oldest and most honorable noble families in Austria. The family could trace its line back to 1240 with Siegfried Weltzer “der getreue Weltzer” who defended Kärnten against the Venetians. In 1368 a Friedrich von Weltz helped the Hapsburgs defeat another invading Venetian force. Siegmund von Weltz zu Payersdorf was named in 1498 as a counselor to the emperor Maximilian I. Justinian’s great grandfather, Rupert von Welz, was a counselor to Erz-Herzog Carl and later the Ober-Jägermeister for Austria. The von Welzs, in short, were families of high social stature, serving kings and princes as officers or important functionaries, and possessing vast worldly wealth.<sup>185</sup> This service to the Hapsburgs continued even when Justinian’s ancestors converted to Lutheranism.<sup>186</sup>

The family’s fortunes changed dramatically, however, when on 1. August 1628 all Austrian nobles belonging to the Evangelical confession were ordered to leave Hapsburg territories.<sup>187</sup> The von Welz family, with the seven-year-old Justinian and one other son, fled, selling all their possessions at a considerable loss like so many other religious exiles of the Reformation era.<sup>188</sup> They first went to Chemnitz in Saxony, where the elder von Welz died soon after arriving in 1631 at age 42. The fatherless family thereupon removed to Ulm to live with an uncle. This violent, childhood encounter with the Catholic counter-reformation, the loss of worldly wealth and stature for the sake of religion, and extended rootlessness clearly had a deep impact on the young Justinian. When Justinian was sent to in 1638 to study law and history in Leyden, his thesis, *Tractatus de Tyrannide* (1643), denounced the unrestrained power of monarchs over their subjects, especially in matters of religious conscience.<sup>189</sup> Justinian’s later letters to Protestant princes rallying support for his plans to improve the evangelical religion underline further his self-image as a martyr as they often included the fact that he had been driven out of Austria “on account of religion.”<sup>190</sup>

The historical record provides very few details about the next two decades in Justinian’s biography. In 1648, he was in Nürnberg helping his family recuperate funds left there by his father and socializing with other Austrian Protestant exiles, the majority of whom had settled in lower Bavaria.<sup>191</sup> The family must have continued to possess considerable wealth as Justinian appears to have passed much of his time in uninhibited study. But in 1663, Justinian’s silence ended as he engaged in a flurry of literary and organizational activity spanning the next three years. He wrote letters to the leading political and religious figures of seventeenth-century Lutheran Germany, often traveling

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<sup>185</sup> Fritz Laubach, *Justinian von Welz: ein Österreicher als Vordenker und Pionier der Weltmission, seine Schriften* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1989), 7.

<sup>186</sup> No sources exist for whether Justinian’s parents or grandparents were the first Lutherans in the von Welz line.

<sup>187</sup> Robert Bireley, *Ferdinand II: Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578-1637*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 165.

<sup>188</sup> See, Mack Walker, *The Salzburg Transaction: Expulsion and Redemption in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>189</sup> Justinian von Welz, *Tractatus de Tyrannide* (Leyden, 1641).

<sup>190</sup> Justinian von Welz to Ernst von Sachsen-Gotha, 22. Februar 1664. Weimar Staatsarchiv. In Laubach, *Justinian von Welz*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> Werner Wilhelm Schnabel, “Justinian oder Wie man zum Schwärmer wird: Genese, Programmatik und Scheitern des Welzschen Missionsprojekts”, in *Heterodoxie in der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 340.

to meet them in person, and published ten books and pamphlets.<sup>192</sup> Barely registering previously in seventeenth-century records up to that point, Justinian's exchanges with the princes of Württemberg and Saxony-Gotha, the famed theologians Johann Gerhard (1620-1672), Abraham Calov (1612-86), Michael Havemann (1597-1672), and Friedrich Breckling populate the epistolary and publishing record of the 1660s.<sup>193</sup>

The reason behind this sudden activity had to do with a grand vision conceived by Justinian to reform Christianity from the ground up through the formation of a special society to spiritualize and re-educate all Christians and also to train a smaller number to take the evangelical faith to convert the heathens in America. This second part of Justinian's plans has been his lasting historical heritage as he is considered the first Protestant to propose and work toward the creation of specialized overseas missions. Starting with a short text in fall 1663, *A Short Report on How a New Society Could be Established among the Believing Christians of the Augsburg Confession*, Justinian attempted to convince his fellow Protestants that Christ's command in Matthew 28:19-20 to teach the Gospel in all lands was still in effect.<sup>194</sup> Directed especially to "unmarried students," it detailed his plan to preach the gospel to the unbelieving.<sup>195</sup> There followed around the turn of the year 1663/4 a longer text outlining in more detail the structure of a potential society to bring about fulfilling the command.<sup>196</sup> Over the course of 1664, Justinian worked tirelessly at the Protestant estates at the Holy Roman Empire's Reichstag in Regensburg, with acquaintances in Nürnberg, and writing letters to princes, theologians and others to rally funding and support for his plan.<sup>197</sup> The initial response from most was positive, but cautious as to the practicality and undeveloped nature of the plan. Justinian decided that before he could receive more support, he needed to begin his society himself. Justinian moved to the Netherlands from where the ships would be launched, training some students, and living with the radical pastor Friedrich Breckling in Zwolle from whom he received his missionary ordination. Indeed, such was Justinian's commitment to this calling that, upon failure to bring about immediate wider institutional support for the realization of his plans, he himself set off as a missionary to what is now Suriname in 1665, dying there in 1668, reportedly devoured by wild beasts.<sup>198</sup>

A key aspect of Justinian's plan to reform and spread Christianity that has received less attention was the necessary spiritual renewal of European Christians before they could convert non-Christians in the new world. Justinian's ideas on this renewal focused specifically on weaning them away from a love of the world through the adoption of the

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<sup>192</sup> Schnabel, "Justinian oder Wie man zum Schwärmer wird", 340. Schnabel's long biographical article on von Welz is the best overview of his life currently in print.

<sup>193</sup> A full overview of Justinian's fundraising efforts and letter-writing can be found in Schnabel's essay "Justinian oder Wie man zum Schwärmer wird".

<sup>194</sup> Justinian von Welz, *Ein kurzer Bericht, wie eine neue Gesellschaft aufzurichten wäre* (1663).

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, preface.

<sup>196</sup> von Welz, *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung An alle rechtgläubige Christen, der Augspurgischen Confession, Betreffend eine sonderbahre Gesellschaft, Durch welche, nechst Göttlicher Hülffe, unsere Evangelische Religion möchte außgebreitet werden* (1664).

<sup>197</sup> The Lutheran superintendent there, Johann Heinrich Ursinus, wrote an anonymous pamphlet against Justinian's plans in 1664 titled *Wohlgemeinte Treuhertzig und Ernsthafte Erinnerung an JUSTINIANUM, Seine Vorschläge/Die Bekehrung des Heydenthums und Besserung des Christenthums betreffend*. (Regensburg, 1664).

<sup>198</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener reports this in *Theologische Bedencken Und andere Briefliche Antworten auf Geistliche/sonderlich zur erbauung gerichtete Materien* [...] vol. III, (Halle, 1715), 207.



ideals of the solitary life. This aspect of Justinian's thought is outlined in his first text from 1663, entitled *De Vita Solitaria Das ist/ Von dem Einsidler Leben/ Wie es nach Gottes Wort/ und der Alten Heiligen Einsidler Leben anzustellen seye*. Similar to the discontented Protestant devotional authors in the previous section, Justinian grounds his recuperation of the hermit ideal with Mark 8:34, Christ's command that true Christians must "deny themselves" and "take up his cross." Justinian writes, "Whoever now will be a disciple of Christ, he must deny himself, which means he must turn his eyes away from the world and turn them toward God. He must look to the humility of the god-fearing people, not to the riches of the children of the world. He must consider the cross of Christ, not the lusts of foolish men."<sup>199</sup> To practice this self-denial and diminish love for the world, Justinian counseled his fellow Christians to read edifying literature, to pray and contemplate death and Christ's suffering (to be discussed more below), to avoid evil company, not to pursue money-making enterprises, luxurious clothing, sumptuous food, and so forth.<sup>200</sup>

The two aspects of Justinian's reforms were deeply intertwined as he believed the consequence of rejecting the world through this inward self-denial would be a burning love for Jesus and all of mankind and the conviction to spread the saving message of the evangelical faith to unbelievers. In his missive to Ernst I of Saxony-Gotha, he wrote that only those following a pious lifestyle, "such as I have described in my booklet on the solitary life" should be taken up for membership in the missionary society.<sup>201</sup> Justinian's society to improve Christianity in many ways mirrored the ethos and structure of other elite seventeenth-century societies like the Rosicrucians of Johann Valentin Andreae, the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft, and the Academia della Crusca in Florence. These societies often had ascetic rules governing their members, an ideal of purity, commitment, and exclusivity seen as necessary to attain intellectual insight and increased morality. The conditions that Justinian set for entry into his own society were that only "just, true Christians" who "have Jesus living in their hearts" could join.<sup>202</sup> Justinian likewise calls his society a "spiritual brotherhood"<sup>203</sup> with chastity included as one of the requirements for the missionaries, a resolution that Justinian himself had taken to avoid the cares of the world that marriage entailed.<sup>204</sup>

Justinian's emphasis on the withdrawn life of self-denial is, among other things, significant as an example of cross-confessional devotion and the positive value placed on the contemplative life by a Protestant. Several historians have noted the similarity between Justinian's inward-looking approach to church renewal to the spirituality of orders like the Theatines from the counter-Reformation, the same movement to which his

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<sup>199</sup> von Welz, *Vita Solitaria*, 100-101.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>201</sup> Von Welz, *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung An alle rechtgläubige Christen*, 240.

<sup>202</sup> Von Welz, *Einladungs-Trieb zum heran-nahenden Grosse Abendmahl: und Vorschlag zu einer Christ-erbaulichen Jesus-Gesellschaft Behandelnd die Besserung des Christentums und Bekehrung des Heidentums [...]* (Nürnberg: Wolf Eberhard Felsecker, 1664), 20. See Laubach, *Schriften*, 21.

<sup>203</sup> von Welz, *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung* (Nürnberg, 1664), 63.

<sup>204</sup> von Welz, *Ivstiniani Verlaeugnung sein selbst: verfasst in eine Rede, Welche er gehalten hat in Beyseyn etlicher Jesus - liebenden Herten, als Er der Welt absagte* (Leipzig, 1701), 304. This was a speech given by von Welz in Zwolle at the residence of Friedrich Breckling on the occasion of his ordination as missionary.

family fell victim in Austria.<sup>205</sup> These orders emphasized an initial intense program of isolation, asceticism, and contemplation to then be followed by a turning outward to proselytize and serve the church. In the 1664 *Christliche Vermahnung* text outlining his plans for a mission society, Justinian sheds light on the withdrawn life and spiritual journey he himself has been on by retelling the story of St. Jerome's purpose in seeking out the solitary life:

From the ancient church father Jerome we read that he, for various reasons, led a solitary life. As he now in his solitude had occasion to reflect on the vanity of the world, he resolved in the future to completely reject the world and give himself alone to God. He wanted to serve him with all diligence in the edification and expansion of his church. But when he had been in his solitude for around four years, he betook himself again among mankind and began to share his his beneficial hermit-thoughts with his fellow man in private conversations as well as in public sermons and writings. With this, he brought about great usefulness. This year I have not chosen quite the same raw wilderness, nor such a great solitude or strict living, but I have been reflecting on the same thoughts to serve God the almighty. I have also undertook such an improvement of my life and the same edification of my fellow Christians. And thus I have made public through this writing my thoughts on bidding the world farewell.<sup>206</sup>

Justinian recounts here a recurring theme among this dissertation's subjects, that of his new-found conviction to give himself completely to God or as he puts it elsewhere, "to live in a spiritual state" ("geistlichen Stand zu leben")<sup>207</sup>. To do so required separating oneself from the world to access divine inspiration. In Justinian's characteristic fashion and similar to the reforming orders of the Catholic counter-Reformation, the sanctity, spiritual strength and insights gained from solitude should ultimately be shared with one's fellow Christians. Although we can only guess at what events or circumstances initially brought about Justinian's conversion to this new, world-despising, ascetic Christianity, we can see some of his motivations and the deep reading in Christian devotional literature from the texts he published from 1663-4. They reveal, among other things, a nobleman's disgust at the vanity, pomp, and frivolity of his class, the Baroque themes of *vanitas* and fleeting nature of life, as well as an appreciation for monastic ascetic and contemplative spirituality as transmitted by the *Imitatio Christi* and *Devotio Moderna* tradition. As we will see, Justinian's efforts to create an elite society of spiritualized, ascetic Christians would provide a very direct inspiration to our first case-study of a Protestant contemplative society.

Taking a closer look at his texts *Justiniani, Verleugnung sein Selbst* (published in fall 1664) and *De Vita Solitaria* (1663), we see how Justinian's ruminations on the fleeting value of worldly goods, life, wealth, and achievements leads to the insight of the higher calling of self-denial. *Selbst Verleugnung's* opening epitaph is the pessimistic Psalm 39: "How great is the nothingness of all men who live so securely!" Likewise, *De Vita Solitaria* begins with Justinian's portrayal of Protestantism's vain, false hermits, the

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<sup>205</sup> See Benz, *Die Protestantische Thebais*, 63.

<sup>206</sup> Von Welz, *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung An alle rechtgläubige Christen*, 1-2.

<sup>207</sup> Von Welz, *Ivstiniani Verlaeugnung sein selbst*, 304.

scholastics and theologians who shut themselves away with learning to increase their reputations.<sup>208</sup> This pessimistic view of human nature and secular pursuits is most pungent with Justinian's comments on his own noble class whose members are forced to "wear ostentatious clothing, to attend parties, to play, to participate in masquerades, to conduct oneself in a courtly manner, to get drunk, and fight, and to do all those things that correspond to his estate, and as rich people do."<sup>209</sup> Justinian tells us that these considerations on the vanity of his estate led him to live in solitude for a while and there it came to him with greater force that his "status as noble would not last longer than [his] life"<sup>210</sup> He then took the resolution to lay down his noble title, and "not only will I reject the disdainful world. But rather I will also deny myself with everything that I am and possess, according to the teachings of my faithful savior Jesus Christ."<sup>211</sup>

In *De Vita Solitaria*, Justinian primarily takes a historical approach to ground the practice of self-denial and fleeing the values of the world, with the second half of the book laying out the practices essential to a "true solitary life." Justinian shows that hermits have always been a feature of holy Christians. Well before even St. Anthony of Egypt, the Old Testament patriarchs Elias and Enoch, along with the Jewish Essenes embodied the hermit ideal. But—in a point distinguishing his Protestant version of the solitary life from the ancient, external asceticism of the desert fathers—Justinian sought to show that one could reject the world "spiritually" without fleeing physically to the "desert." It should be possible to "separate your soul from the children of the world; but only fleeing the sins/not the people."<sup>212</sup> In Justinian's Protestant version of the solitary life, Enoch and Elias surpassed Anthony in that they practiced a more mature form of world-denial, as they separated themselves from evil "mehr mit dem Gemüt als mit dem Leib." The true spiritual hermit should be dead to himself and the world in his soul all the while living "in a city, amongst the people" and be preoccupied with serving mankind.<sup>213</sup>

But to conclude, like Ernst Benz does, that Justinian—along with the rest of seventeenth-century Protestants praising solitude—rejects all aspects of externalized asceticism would be false.<sup>214</sup> In chapter ten on the "true hermit's special rules and laws of conduct", Justinian follows Luther in rejecting the *necessity* of vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience<sup>215</sup>, but writes that "I will counsel you this/that you undertake to observe such things, but without an oath."<sup>216</sup> As with Luther and other Protestants, chastity and poverty in themselves were not dangerous—Luther argues they can be of great help to holiness—but only when approached as free choices and not as requirements of the law. As regards the "bodily" activities belonging to the hermit's life, these Justinian says "should always be mixed with the spiritual." These included "living moderately"

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<sup>208</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 1-2.

<sup>209</sup> Von Welz, *Ivstiniani Verlaeugnung sein selbst*, 303.

<sup>210</sup> Von Welz, *Ivstiniani Verlaeugnung sein selbst*, 304.

<sup>211</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 304.

<sup>212</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 25.

<sup>213</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 25.

<sup>214</sup> Ernst Benz, *Die Protestantische Thebais*, 68.

<sup>215</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 98. "Ich begehre nicht aufzubringen ein Gelübd der Keuschheit" (98) nor a „Gelübd der Armuth.“ He maintains that it is still possible to follow the hermit ideal if one is married, as Enoch did. (98). Justinian is obviously very aware of Luther's text on oaths, as he restates Luther's primary arguments that vows are nothing more "than the commands of men" (97).

<sup>216</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 99.

rejecting alcohol, fine foods, not “consider[ing] it a shame for the sake of Christ to suffer poverty or poor clothing”, and avoiding “much company.”<sup>217</sup> Justinian goes so far as to recommend that a Christian hermit should “undertake to live in the world completely as a pilgrim and wanderer/as if he didn’t belong to the world.” The type of separation Justinian recommends here is a real, external separation that fundamentally changes the Christian’s relationship to the world not just in internal moral terms, but also in form. The Protestant hermit does not live in a cloister cell, or in a cave in the wilderness as in Grimmelshausen’s depiction, but in a city, trying to help his fellow Christians from his vantage point of a higher level of holiness.

Such a conception of urban solitude is in line with the nature of ascetic Protestant devotion sketched so far, in that it sought to find a middle ground between the ‘idle’ monastic existence rejected by the Reformation but also to recover the practices of a higher, holy calling contained therein. Justinian’s hybrid solitary life, emphasizing the value of service in the world alongside world-rejection, is also a result of his heavy reliance on texts from the semi-lay *Devotio Moderna*, and Johann Arndt. Justinian tells his readers repeatedly that a copy of Thomas à Kempis’ *Nachfolgung Christi* is essential reading along with Arndt and several other reformist Lutheran devotional authors.<sup>218</sup> In his 1664 *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung An alle rechtgläubige Christen*, Justinian tells his audience that those wishing to join his mission and reform society must not simply confess Christ with their mouths, but

Rather, he must have learned the true Christianity from the word of God, from Luther, from Thomas à Kempis’s first two books on the Imitation of Christ, from Johann Arndts “Christianity”, Joachim Lütkemans “Taste of Heavenly Goodness”, from M. Heinrich Müllers “Heavenly Love Kiss”, or from my simple text called “The Eremitic Life.”<sup>219</sup>

These texts have in common a description of a hard-fought struggle against the ego and denial of the world for a personal experience of grace. Arndt is classified here along with the *Devotio Moderna* tradition from which Justinian drew much of his inspiration. That tradition is likewise known for pioneering an interiorized, spiritual separation from the world through reading and meditation practices focused specifically on Christocentric themes of the passion.<sup>220</sup> In addition to their semi-monastic external practices, intensive reading and meditation should condition the soul to think less and less on the world and more on God. In Justinian’s text, a similar relationship is drawn between withdrawal, “zealous prayer”, reading, and contemplation on various themes such as Christ’s and the martyr’s passion, death, and the final judgment, as the means to effect one’s inward separation from the world.<sup>221</sup> The eleventh chapter on reading the history of Christian martyrdom is especially exhaustive. Justinian asserts that “reading the joyful farewell of the martyr from this world/can arouse the desire in a hermit/ to go to God in heaven

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<sup>217</sup> Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 103.

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>219</sup> Von Welz, *Eine Christliche und treuhertzige Vermahnung An alle rechtgläubige Christen*, 261.

<sup>220</sup> John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 300.

<sup>221</sup> Von Welz, *Iustiniani Verlaeugnung sein selbst*, 309.

soon.”<sup>222</sup> In the fifteenth chapter, Justinian describes how a Christian hermit should have a room devoted to quiet reading and contemplation in which he places books on the history of Christian martyrs, Thomas à Kempis, and then a crucifix or several images of the passion of Christ.<sup>223</sup> This image of the suffering Christ, upon which you meditate daily, should be a “mirror” to you for the life you should lead.<sup>224</sup> The *Devotio Moderna*’s urban hermitages of men and women pursuing contemplative existence alongside limited secular vocations (handywork, printing, etc.) matches closely the small house communities sketched later in this dissertation’s case studies.

In addition, Justinian provides descriptions of a wordless, inward prayer that should go along with the heavy, somber reading. Justinian argues that the proper form of prayer is a word-less devotion consisting of exhaustive longing and sighs, to excite the love of God in the soul: “eagerly praying is a good habit, but the best way to pray is to sigh in reverence.” And again, “It is, foremost, a true, proper prayer and confession before God when your tears are more than your words.”<sup>225</sup> Spiritualist Protestants called this emotional form of prayer the “Herzens-Gebet” or “stoß-Gebet”.<sup>226</sup> It should also be an ongoing, continuous prayer that the solitary attempt to hold in their hearts and minds at all times. In the initial sections on the history of eremitic devotion, Justinian mentions Anthony’s famous unceasing prayers, a practice seen as distinctive to ancient and medieval hermits.<sup>227</sup> With such deep desire, filled with thoughts of the passion of Christ and our own worthlessness, the ego will soon be consumed, leaving only a desire to be with Christ:

Solitary Christian, if your heart is ignited with love to God, flames will soon appear. If it has a desire for God, it will send sighs and longings to him in prayer, the one after the other. Yes, it will be completely exhausted from desiring, longing, and repeatedly deep sighs. It desires to be annihilated and to be with Christ. It longs for the heavenly fatherland. It sighs for the grace-filled answer to its wishes. It becomes exhausted at the delay of help.<sup>228</sup>

The same descriptions of an intensive, consuming practice of prayer, focused on the passion of Christ can be found everywhere in Arndt, Hoburg, and our later experimental ascetic communities. It constitutes a central practice of the world-renouncing, ascetic Christian communities to be sketched in this dissertation.

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<sup>222</sup> Von Welz, *Vita Solitaria*, 123.

<sup>223</sup> Von Welz, *Vita Solitaria*, 143-4. “1. Und vor allen Dingen sol sich ein Gesellschafter befließen eines gottseligen Lebens, und auff solche Weise seinen Wandel anstellen, wie ich eß in meinem Büchlein von dem Einsiedlerleben beschrieben habe, oder wie sehr schöne Anleitungen darzu geben Thomas a Kempis in seinen zweyen ersten Büchern von der Nachfolgend Christi, D. Joh. Gerhardus in Schola Pietatis, und andere die von Verachtung der Welt, in der inbrünstiger Liebe gegen Gott geschrieben haben, welche Bücher er dann nicht nur einmal durchlesen solle, sondern täglich morgens und abends nur ein Capitel darauß vor sich nemmen und wol betrachten, neben einem Capitel auß der Bibel.” See also Welz, *Vermahnung*, 240.

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> von Welz, *Vom Einsiedler Leben*, 107-108.

<sup>226</sup> For more on the “Stoß-Gebet” see Johann Frick, *Eines Noth-Leidenden Christen kräftiges Stoß-Gebet*, (1738), 11.

<sup>227</sup> Von Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 21. “Dieser Antonius betete/ und lobete Gott ohne Unterlaß”.

<sup>228</sup> Von Welz, *De Solitaria Vita*, 108.

Von Welz is clearly an exemplary case in the story of a Protestant return to certain ideals of the contemplative, monastic life. But just what impact did Justinian have on the story of our specific communities if any? His activity only spanned two years, from his first text in 1663 to his disappearance from the European continent in 1665. Nonetheless, Justinian's activity in that brief period was accompanied by an eager reception among large numbers of separatist, mystical Protestants, the very circles most interested in the type of ascetic Christianity outlined in Justinian's *De Vita Solitaria*. Justinian exchanged letters with the Frankfurt radical Johann Jakob Schütz, the famed Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard, and Friedrich Breckling, a Lutheran pastor exiled in the Netherlands whose home had become a meeting place for radicals like Hoburg, Betke, and others. It was to Breckling that Justinian went after his reform efforts did not come to fruition in Germany. But by far the most consequential connection made by Justinian, for our story at least, was a chance encounter he made while lobbying for his reforms in Regensburg.

While browsing a Regensburg bookshop sometime in February or March 1664, Justinian fell into an animated conversation about his ideas on improving Lutheranism with a local jurist by the name of Johann Georg Gichtel (1642-1710). The two men quickly discovered that they had much in common on the topic of religion, as Gichtel was himself drawn to self-denial, chastity, and had already begun exploring more intense, ascetic means of practicing Christianity in the many Catholic cloisters in Regensburg.<sup>229</sup> Justinian and Gichtel quickly decided to cooperate with Gichtel becoming an energetic secretary for the project. Gichtel's biography records that "after only a few words that they exchanged with each other, God so inflamed their hearts with his love, that they decided to join together as one man..."<sup>230</sup> The biography further claims that von Welz was overjoyed at finding an assistant with legal expertise who could draw up in proper written form "what he wished to present to the Protestant Holy Roman Empire". Gichtel and von Welz thereupon set out to gather financial support from Lutheran courts and princes as the Baron von Welz "traveled to various Electorate and Princely courts for this purpose and conferred with many theologians and politicians." Welz's letters to the ambitious Prince Ernst of Saxony-Gotha presenting his plans and requesting support are preserved as are fragments of his overtures to important reformers like Breckling and Johann Jakob Schütz in Frankfurt.<sup>231</sup> Gichtel himself traveled at one point to Vienna to gather funds from Protestants there and eventually got himself exiled from his hometown because of his denunciations of the Regensburg clergy shortly after the final rejection of von Welz's reform plans. In the accounts of why the project failed to gain more traction, the significance of Justinian's and men like Gichtel's ideals of an inward rebirth and rejection of the world comes to the fore. Placing the blame on recalcitrant clergy, Gichtel said that their pamphlets insistence that the education for missionary work "must not only consider scholarship, but rather focus on the illumination of the Holy Spirit", brought home the point that "with them [the clergy], the start of the reform must be made".<sup>232</sup>

With little progress being made in official circles in Germany, and with Gichtel's fiery writings causing trouble, the two men left to Holland to put their plans into action

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<sup>229</sup> Johann Gichtel, *Theosophia Practica*, vol. VII, 14.

<sup>230</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol. VII, 27-29.

<sup>231</sup> Depperman, *Johann Jakob Schütz*, 79-81.

<sup>232</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, V, 3113.

on their own. In Holland, they stayed with the exiled pastor Friedrich Breckling in Zwolle around whom Boehmists, mystics, and separatists gathered. Friedrich Breckling thereafter ordained von Welz a missionary whereupon the nobleman set off for South America to embark on one of the first overseas Protestant missions.<sup>233</sup>

Gichtel, however, stayed behind in Amsterdam despite entertaining the idea to join von Welz in the Americas.<sup>234</sup> Over the next few years, Gichtel's views on the condition of contemporary Christianity hardened as he "learned to see the apostasy of Christianity" and to rely on God to guide him through the "wilderness of flesh" that was the world.<sup>235</sup> After returning to Regensburg and spending time in jail for his harsh writings against the clergy there, Gichtel was exiled and returned to Zwolle near Amsterdam to live with Friedrich Breckling at the end of 1666. Gichtel attempted for a while to continue his public activity, preaching and writing against the Lutheran church, but soon fell out with Breckling when he criticized his decision to have children, a grave sin for the celibate, abstemious Gichtel.<sup>236</sup> Moving to Amsterdam, Gichtel thereupon chose to lead a less active existence and "keep himself in solitude"<sup>237</sup>. Working for a period as an editor for a local printer, Gichtel slowly attracted ascetic-minded persons around him interested in a life of solitude, contemplation, and chastity, an especial concern for Gichtel. He and his "house-brethren" developed more and more a regulated hermit existence with Gichtel tying von Welz's ideal of solitude, chastity, and contemplative prayer to the theosophy of Boehme, his new-found obsession from the mid 1670s onward. Gichtel would write in 1680 of his life that "I am shut up in my house like a monk in his cloister, living in Christ through God; I seek not this world and am in God dead to it..."<sup>238</sup> His restless and meddlesome character did not quite fit with such a quiet lifestyle and Gichtel ultimately spent his energies in cultivating a large network of correspondents, proselytizing for the withdrawn life, chastity, and self-denial. By the early 1700s, Gichtel's small hermitage in Amsterdam had become the hub of a network known as the "Angelic Brethren" with hundreds of cells across northern Europe, as far as Lithuania, all practicing the 'hidden' life.

### ***Conclusion***

It has been the argument of this chapter that in the years around 1600, large numbers of Protestant Christians in Germany began to revive and rehabilitate ascetic devotion in Protestant worship. This effort was tied to these authors and laymen's desire to re-emphasize the practical dimensions of repentance and moral improvement, and the importance of self-sacrifice, self-denial, and holiness in the life of faith. Their writings—foremost among them Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* and Jacob Boehme's mysticism—began a century long discussion among Protestants about the value of self-denial and ascetic devotion. What did it mean to 'mortify the flesh' and "die to the

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<sup>233</sup> Schnabel, "Justinian oder Wie man zum Schwärmer wird", 394.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 395.

<sup>235</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. VII, 32-3.

<sup>236</sup> *ibid*, 65.

<sup>237</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. I, 99. Der XXVII. Brief. An denselben. 20 Aug 1678.

<sup>238</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. I, 111. Another similar statement by Gichtel: "Denn man widerspricht uns, und wil sich den Geist Gottes nicht mehr strafen lassen, ja man wil nicht von der Verläugnung mehr predigen hören, es ist etwas Neues! Welches zum Theil wahr ist, denn sie ist so veraltet, daß man ihrer gänzlicher vergessen; darum halten wir uns still zu Gott, und bitten ohn Ablaß." (177)

world,” a duty that all agreed was at the heart of Christianity? The problem was a knotty one that required seventeenth-century radicals to articulate how practices associated with monasticism and corrupt Catholic idolatry such as celibacy, poverty, and withdrawal in fact could and should be used by Protestants. Some were unable to make this case and converted to Catholicism where the holy life as separation from the world could be pursued with the church’s blessing. Others, like von Welz with his assistant Gichtel, sought to convince fellow Protestants that true Christianity looked similar to the devotion practiced by world-fleeing hermits of ancient Christianity. In the pages that follow, we will see how distinct communities and networks of Protestants formed in the latter half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth who practiced the ‘hidden’ life of withdrawal, celibacy, and contemplative prayer. They sought to resurrect the ideals of the contemplative life as a useful and necessary element of Christian devotion.



## Chapter Two

### ‘To Burn in the Love of Jesus’: Asceticism, Spiritual Martyrdom and Vicarious Suffering in Radical Protestantism c. 1700

In the first years of the eighteenth-century, a largely forgotten scandal broke out in Lutheran Germany over the strange practices of a reclusive sect known as the ‘Angelic Brethren’. The members of this heterodox group consisted primarily of a far-flung network of correspondents and small house-communities at the center of which stood Johann Georg Gichtel (1638-1710), an enthusiastic devotee of the theosophic mystic Jakob Boehme (1575-1624). Gichtel’s eccentric and withdrawn lifestyle earned him the title “hermit of Amsterdam”, as he practiced strict celibacy, shunned any dealings involving money, and spent his days expounding the theosophy of Boehme and mystical rebirth in long letters to his followers spread across Lutheran regions of Germany, Scandinavia, and the Low Countries. The activities of this group that so greatly alarmed local authorities and pastors had to do with the Angelic Brethren’s particularly ascetic understanding of Christianity that involved a refusal to engage in commerce, avoiding social interactions as much as possible to live in contemplative solitude, and especially their total rejection of sexual intercourse, an issue close to Gichtel’s heart.<sup>239</sup> Lutheran theologians and pastors attacked the sect as “enthusiasts” and “fanatics”, seeking to revive the false merit-based institution of monasticism with celibacy and poverty.<sup>240</sup> One theologian, Johann Balthasar Reinhard, wrote in his *Scriptural Examination of the Spirit of the New Angelic Brotherhood* (1720) that the mystical sect’s practice of solitary withdrawal, celibacy, and voluntary poverty are “so similar to the papist institution of monkery and nunnery as one egg is to another.”<sup>241</sup> In 1716, numerous pamphlets and periodicals published alarming reports of a married Berlin woman, Frau Wildenau, who had been seduced by a cell of Angelic Brethren and now refused any conjugal relations with her husband, declaring herself born into the ‘kingdom of grace’ where marriage was a ‘sin’.<sup>242</sup> To the orthodox, such cases hardly seemed an isolated phenomenon. The Lutheran pastor Johann Kindervater, reporting on the arrest and interrogation of one member of an Angelic Brethren cell in Nordhausen, claimed to have seen “[...] one of

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<sup>239</sup> Gichtel’s zeal for proselytizing focused particularly on convincing men and women to give up sexual relations. In a number of heavily-publicized cases, the Angelic Brethren developed a reputation for seducing married women into celibacy. See J. Jürgen Seidel’s article “Zwischen Theosophie und Pietismus” which provides a good overview of the different cells, their members, and Gichtel’s life and circle in Amsterdam. J. Jürgen Seidel, “Zwischen Theosophie und Pietismus. Einblicke in die Korrespondenz der Schweizer ‘Gichtelianer’”, *Zwingliana*, (2007), 95-119.

<sup>240</sup> Kindervater calls their spiritualist principles ‘enthusiastic’ in his *Die neue Engels-Brüderschafft als eine veritable Quäckerey* (1719), 102. Joachim Lange, describes as ‘enthusiastic’ the Gichtel and Boehmian principle of every soul containing a ‘spark’ of God within them. *Christliche Prüfung des Geistes in den so genannten Theosophischen Sendschreiben* (Halle: 1714), 32.

<sup>241</sup> Johann Balthasar Reinhard, *Schriftmäßige Prüfung des Geistes Der neuen Engels-Brüderschafft* (Nordhausen: 1720), 80.

<sup>242</sup> Jacob Michelmann to Herr Rautenberg, 27 Oct. 1716. This letter appeared in the popular orthodox Lutheran theologian Valentin Löscher’s journal *Unschuldige Nachrichten* in 1720. “Eines Gichtelianers Jacob Michelmanns Brieff / welcher von unterschiedenen Personen und Principiis der neuen Engels-Brüder Nachricht giebet. Berlin den 27. Oct. 1716.

their catalogues from 1714 that shows a great number in Berlin and in Neumark among which contains old cobblers, old tailors, barbers, whigmakers, masons, weavers, seduced wives and virgins [...]”<sup>243</sup> Reconstructions of their networks places the group’s numbers in the hundreds, if not thousands by the early eighteenth century.<sup>244</sup>

But one additional practice of Gichtel and the Angelic Brethren shocked contemporary Protestant sensibilities more than all the others, a practice that flouted the Lutheran and Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Gichtel, over the course of the 1670s and 80s, had become convinced through his reading of Boehme that a contemplative, ascetic Christian by virtue of his or her purifying renunciation of the world could, in deep prayer, share in Christ’s power to suffer and atone vicariously for other souls, helping them to overcome sin and even freeing them from the clutches of hell after death. In a manner reminiscent of monastic intercessory practices, Gichtel described this intercessory power as a ‘priestly’ attribute belonging to reborn souls, calling it an ‘anathematizing’ (“anathematisierung” or ‘cursed’ in Greek), referring to a passage from Romans 9:3 in which Paul expressed a desire to be cursed for his brethren.<sup>245</sup> Gichtel’s letters describe several occasions in which his prayers for acquaintances were accompanied by vicarious suffering for others and success in freeing other souls from spiritual pain and damnation. In one instance Gichtel prayed for a wayward lady plagued by a powerful ‘spirit of concupiscence’ (“Lust-Geist”) causing this spirit to descend upon Gichtel himself which “vexed and anguished him violently for four days”. Gichtel’s suffering, he tells us, ultimately freed the woman from this spirit.<sup>246</sup> In another instance, Gichtel prayed for a deceased friend whose suicide had left him stuck in a type of limbo, unable to enter an eternal rest. Despite reservations about praying for the dead “against Lutheran teachings” Gichtel nevertheless struggled for seven years and ultimately, according to his biography, the “faithful intercessor Gichtel, finally succeeded through God’s co-operative power, that the love overcame the wrath, and released his soul from hell-fire and from the terrible prison...”<sup>247</sup> Gichtel subsequently fashioned such experiences along lines similar to the ancient monastic trope of ‘spiritual martyrdom’ where the lengthy prayers and sufferings of the monastic functioned as a sacrifice akin to Christ’s and a means to channel grace to other souls. Gichtel, assuming this sacrificial role to himself, wrote in 1694 that “often I have wished to die for my brethren. Often I have sacrificed my soul for them as an anathema and curse, and passionately wrestled for their souls. Day and night I have lain on my face and prayed, that God would give them to me.”<sup>248</sup> Gichtel’s language and attribution of a ‘priestly’ power to forgive and intercede transgressed flagrantly the precise evangelical objections to Catholic sacerdotalism and justification: “A Priest of God must put on Christ, and follow in his footsteps, carry all the sins of the world, and burn in the love of Jesus.”<sup>249</sup>

Not limited to Gichtel, the correspondences of other Angelic Brethren as well as many other ascetic Protestant communities in this dissertation demonstrate that such

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<sup>243</sup> Johann Henrich Kindervater, *Die neue Engels-Brüderschaft*, 9.

<sup>244</sup> Seidel, “Zwischen Theosophie und Pietismus”, 95-119.

<sup>245</sup> See below, pgs 42-44.

<sup>246</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol VII, 103-4. The VII volume of *Theosophia Practica* consists of Gichtel’s hagiographic *Lebens-lauf* most likely written by Überfeld.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 109-112.

<sup>248</sup> Gichtel to Martin John. 23 Febr. 1694 in *TP* vol I, 203.

<sup>249</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol I, 265; Gichtel to Johann Gottfried Pronner, 20 Aug. 1697 in *TP* vol I, 282.

vicarious suffering was widespread in mystical circles by the early eighteenth-century. One Angelic Brother by the name of Johann Otto Glüsing (1675-1727), in relating his own experience suffering for a fellow Christian, declared that the duty of “the truly perfect Christian, or men in the office of Christ, is, that they as Priests of God, must project [vortragen] their brethren’s needs and misery deep in prayer to God, which is called sacrifice; in such purifying prayer, God really places on him the others’ burdens, that he is placed in the others’ condition, and such pain as he cannot manage.”<sup>250</sup> Charles Héctor Marsay (1688-1753), the leader of a quietist circle near Wittgenstein, spoke often of contemplative souls as intercessors for the rest of humanity. He mentioned in one letter that he and his wife had the experience of being “connected in the spirit” to one of their companions, such that “we could feel inwardly and help carry his condition and temptations”.<sup>251</sup> And for Conrad Beissel’s North American hermits, a group who were close readers of Gichtel, a life of solitude in “continual prayer” constituted a “sacrifice of the will...your daily spiritual work until you yourself are placed on the altar of God.”<sup>252</sup> Reports abounded at Ephrata of a similar ‘Melchizedek Priesthood’ whose members were capable of interceding for other souls.<sup>253</sup>

Orthodox Protestants who caught wind of Gichtel’s and his followers’ practices and teachings on this matter immediately sounded the alarm. The Lutheran theologian, Johann Joachim Lange (1670-1744), in a polemical text against the Angelic Brethren from 1715, denounced Gichtel and his circle’s claims that one Christian’s prayers can atone for another’s sins, “and that he also truly feels these in his senses and on his soul”<sup>254</sup>. This is a “violation and obfuscation of the doctrine of justification” Lange insisted.<sup>255</sup> He framed the theological problem and objection in terms of the Protestant rejection of the intermediating powers of a holy, priestly class: “Can and should a believing man assume the office of intermediary at Christ’s side and affect in other men something through God in an atoning, meritorious, way? This is flatly rejected because such 1) is against the holy scriptures that completely deny all merit to the works of men and the works of the faithful.” Such intercessions were clearly “against the Augsburg Confession/ which in the 21<sup>st</sup> article has rejected this intercession and the merit of the saints.”<sup>256</sup> Another orthodox theologian, the above-mentioned Reinhard, contended that although no one denied the requirement for Christians to petition God in prayer for other

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<sup>250</sup> Glüsing to Marselis. 15 July, 1712, Folio 94. This exchange is found in the “Paul Friedrich Lehmann Letters” at the Forschungsbibliothek in Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha, Charta A 298. 61-107.

<sup>251</sup> Marsay, Letter to Koch on 22 September, 1736. (Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire (BCU) Lausanne), Ms TP 1246/2/9, Folio 2. “uns im Geist dermaßen / zu verbinden, daß wir seine Zustände und Anfechtungen innerlich haben fühlen und tragen helfen müssen.”

<sup>252</sup> Conrad Beissel, *Erster Theil der Theosophischen Lectionen betreffende die Schulen des einsamen Lebens*, (Ephrata, 1752), 4.

<sup>253</sup> See Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 42. The German version of the *Chronicon Ephratense* states in its preface that Christian souls can only be connected by self-sacrifice: “wo durch Aufopferung seines Selbst-lebens der Zorn versöhnet und in Liebe verwandelt wird”. Accusations of Ephrata’s practice of atoning prayer can be found in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*. Eds. Felix Reichmann, Eugene Edgar Doll (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1952), 79, 100.

<sup>254</sup> Johann Joachim Lange, *Christliche Prüfung des Geistes in den sogenannten Theosophischen Send-Schreiben*, (Halle 1715), 165.

<sup>255</sup> Lange, *Christliche Prüfung des Geistes*, 165. See Hermann Olshausen, *Die Briefe Pauli an die Galater* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1840), 350.

<sup>256</sup> Reinhard, *Schriftmäßige Prüfung des Geistes*, 130-133.

souls and that this can even be metaphorically understood as a ‘spiritual sacrifice’, Gichtel’s circle’s claims to a ‘meritorious’ act akin to Christ’s was a “blasphemous twisting” of Biblical passages.<sup>257</sup> He compared their belief and sufferings to the useless and vain acts of the ‘silly’ flagellanti who ‘whip their bloody backs’ or ascetic monks who mounted crosses. To these Lutheran pastors and theologians it appeared that Catholic blasphemies had found a backdoor into Lutheranism in the form of radical Protestantism.

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As far as the broader canon of Christian monasticism and mysticism is concerned, the experience of vicariously taking the suffering or sins of others upon oneself and to alleviate such suffering was a widespread and important feature of Late Medieval devotion. All the groups in this dissertation were avid readers of the passion mysticism traditions as found in the desert fathers, Thomas a Kempis, Tauler, and the supernatural intercessions of female mystics like Angela of Foligno (1248-1309). Gichtel recounts in one letter Angela of Foligno’s petition to God to let her intercede for the devil, noting how she “prayed imploringly” to save even the greatest of sinners.<sup>258</sup> Gichtel and Überfeld both cite Kempis and Tauler repeatedly as important models for the process of rebirth<sup>259</sup> and Marsay wrote that Kempis’s *Nachfolge Christi* served for a time as his “inward guidance”.<sup>260</sup> The annals of ancient and medieval devotion furnish us with countless examples of Christian mystics and monks suffering for others while wrapped up in the contemplation of Christ’s sacrifice. The *imitatio Christi*, or ‘imitation of Christ’ most commonly meant a departure from the world by leading a life of ascetic self-denial, prayer, and service in emulation of the holiness of Christ’s own life. Perhaps its most fervent practitioner, the fourteenth-century mystic Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) taught that the *imitatio* extended even to an imitation of his intercessory passion. True Christians, she wrote, must be willing to bear for others “any pain of torment to win them the life of grace, ready to die a thousand deaths, if that were possible, for their salvation.”<sup>261</sup> She herself records praying for, and receiving the ability to vicariously suffer and atone for her deceased father.<sup>262</sup> The phenomenon of vicarious, Christ-like suffering during mystical contemplation has been termed by Ernst Benz a “visionary

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<sup>257</sup> Reinhard, *Schriftmäßige Prüfung des Geistes*, 16.

<sup>258</sup> Gichtel retells the passage from Angela of Foligno in a letter to Johann Gottfried Pronner from 21 Sept. 1697 in *TP*, vol I, 327.

<sup>259</sup> For Gichtel, see letters from 18 Januar 1678, in *TP* vol. I, 74 and 30 Juli 1676, *TP* vol. I, 41.

Überfeld: “Den Thomam de Kempis laß er gleichfalls, über welchem Lesen ihn der Stan besprang. Weil er aber die Pforte zu Gottes Heilighum in seinem Herten offen hatte, so ging er mit diesem Büchlein ein zu dem inwendigen Licht und Recht, Urim und Thumin genannt, wodurch der Satan zu Schanden wurde, und sich schämte, ihm wieder einzureden. Überfeld to Schönholtz, 1. Febr. 1711 cited in Reinhard’s *Schriftmäßige Prüfung des Geistes*, 325.

<sup>260</sup> Marsay, *Biographie*, 4.

<sup>261</sup> Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, translated and edited by Suzanne Nofke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 44.

<sup>262</sup> Raymond Capula, *The Life of Catherine of Siena* (rp. 1980) II.7, 209-11. See Barbara Newman, “On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women” in *From Virile Women to Women Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 120, 129.

*imitatio Christi*<sup>263</sup> in which medieval ecstasies in their desire to experience Christ's passion (often monks or women) described the appearance of 'stigmata', or physical marks of Christ's side and hand wounds, on their own bodies.<sup>264</sup> The outward signs that one suffered like Christ, whether through stigmata or the supernatural pains accompanying intercessory prayer for others allowed one to participate in Christ's holiness and thus stood as the proof of the successful conformity of one's soul to Christ's in the *imitatio Christi*.<sup>265</sup>

A prominent feature of medieval and early modern Catholic devotion, Protestant examples of supernatural suffering as part of a mystical *imitatio Christi* are harder to find. In the context of the great schisms of the sixteenth-century, the theological space in which Protestant versions of the *imitatio* could be expressed in terms of a participation in Christ's salvific work or take the form of outward, corporeal manifestations shrank drastically as Reformers railed against monkish asceticism and the practice of intercessory prayer<sup>266</sup>, emphasized Christ as sole mediator between man and God, and derided mystical visions of Christ and stigmata as papal deceptions.<sup>267</sup> Luther dismissed the famous stigmata of St. Francis as "foolish devotion" as he propounded a new reformed exegetical model in which the outward devotional *imitatio* (*imitatio operis*) was inferior to an inward, spiritual *imitatio* or conformity of attitude (*conformitas Christi* or *imitatio mentis*).<sup>268</sup> The Protestant tradition, insofar as it retained externalized, ascetic forms of the imitation of Christ, chose to emphasize a life of sacrifice in acts of charity and pastoral care for the soul as opposed to the superstitious and useless visions and intercessions of a mystical *imitatio*. Thus, Caspar Schwenckfeld's 1530 translation of the central text of the *imitatio Christi* tradition, Thomas a Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi* (1418), replaced his admonitions to channel Christ's love into intercessory prayer with an admonition to help the poor.<sup>269</sup>

With such Protestant suspicion of vicarious suffering and intercessions by a holy class of priests or monks, how then did the practice of intercessory prayer—such a clear violation of Protestant theological principles—become a popular aspect of evangelical awakenings around 1700? And how does such a practice change our understanding of the nature of early modern Protestant religion? In answering these questions, this chapter will elucidate two central themes of my dissertation. First, it furthers this study's exploration of an ascetic revival in late Reformation Protestantism by explaining one of the universal symbols and practices of Protestant contemplative communities, that of mystical death

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<sup>263</sup> Ernst Benz, "Die Visionäre *Imitatio Christi*" in *Die Vision: Erfahrungsformen und Bilderwelt* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1969), 540-562.

<sup>264</sup> Paul's reference to his 'bearing the marks of Jesus on my body' in Galatians 6:17 spurred a long medieval and even modern speculation on the nature of stigmata. See Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24-28.

<sup>265</sup> Andreas Hammer, *Erzählen vom Heiligen: Narrative Inszenierungsformen von Heiligkeit im Passional*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 278.

<sup>266</sup> Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77.

<sup>267</sup> See Mark U. Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 117.

<sup>268</sup> see Lowell Gallagher, "The Place of the Stigmata in Christological Poetics" in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, eds Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 100.

<sup>269</sup> Maximilian von Hapsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425-1650*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 133.

and renunciation and its fashioning as a ‘spiritual martyrdom’. A term whose roots go back to the ancient Christian church fathers, spiritual martyrdom refers to the struggle to eliminate one’s ego, fleshy desires, and will, and to the symbolic fashioning of this struggle as a ‘death’ akin to Christ’s and the saint’s ‘bloody’ martyrdoms. This spiritual death occurred often as a specific stage of mystical prayer but could also describe more generally a Christian’s ‘death’ to the world through celibacy, solitude, and a life of prayer. Whether huddled in their urban hermitages like the Angelic Brethren in Amsterdam and Berlin, in the rural estate of Marsay’s quietists, or in the larger communal cloisters of Beissel’s Ephrata commune, the practice of modeling one’s own ascetic self-denial, seclusion, and contemplative prayer to a ‘death’ and to the sacrificial suffering of Christ unites our disparate circles of contemplative Protestants. Marsay described his group’s contemplative practices as “giving oneself to God firstly as a sacrifice of ourselves” for which Christ’s sacrifice “was a model to us”.<sup>270</sup> For Beissel’s North American hermits, a life of ascetic solitude in “continual prayer” constituted a “sacrifice of the will...your daily spiritual work until you yourself are placed on the altar of God.”<sup>271</sup> Gichel too wrote that “we should be spiritual martyrs, and crucify and kill ourselves with all lusts and desires”<sup>272</sup> emphasizing that the pains of self-mortification of the will and its desires should be likened to Christ’s death. He wrote that only those who “with Him [Christ] have denied, crucified, and mortified themselves, which is a martyrdom of our entire lives...will be fellow citizens with Christ”.<sup>273</sup> Somewhere during the development of this practice of a Protestant ‘spiritual martyrdom’, however, the symbol of ‘martyrdom’ became literal and a Protestant practice of intercession appeared.

Second, this chapter answers the question of how such Protestants legitimized their contemplative lives within a Reformation tradition opposed to monastic ideals. It is through the peculiar phenomenon of vicarious intercession described above that we glimpse how Gichtel, Marsay, and other Protestant contemplatives justified their withdrawn, hidden lives as useful to all of Christianity. In response to old Protestant critiques of the monastic life as egotistical, parasitic, and idle, Gichtel, Marsay, Beissel and others argued that groups of withdrawn, elite Christians played a *useful*, necessary role in Christendom. Celibate, prayerful, and withdrawn, such reborn Christians functioned as ‘spiritual martyrs’ to instruct and assist inferior Christians further along the path to rebirth, serving as models, and yes, even interceding with God spiritually for their souls. Mixing mystical and Protestant language of rebirth with monastic ideals of an ascetic elite, spiritual martyrdom as a contemplative, intercessory practice functioned as an important means to legitimize, sustain, and connect these disparate communities of semi-monastic Protestants in theological terrain hostile to the consecrated ascetic life. Marsay, in a chapter on ‘Martire Spirituël’ in his text *Nouveaux Discours* from 1738, explained how, just as the early church needed the blood of the first martyrs to encourage

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<sup>270</sup> Charles Héctor Le Marquis de Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant de la Vérité et droiture des voyes de l’Esprit. Ou Explication mystique et literale de l’Épître aux Hébreux*, (Berleburg, 1740), 112.

<sup>271</sup> Conrad Beissel, *Erster Theil der Theosophischen Lectionen betreffende die Schulen des einsamen Lebens Ephrata*, (Ephrata, 1752), 4.

<sup>272</sup> Gichtel, 20 Jan. 1701, in *T.P.* vol. I, 392.

<sup>273</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, 3 May, 1701 in *T.P.* vol I, 403. “sich selbst verläugnet, gecreuziget und mortificiret werden haben, welches ein Martyrium unseres ganzen Lebens ist, und heisset: wer treu bleibet bis in den Tod, wird gekrönet”.

other Christians to testify and non-Christians to belief, so still today are ‘spiritual martyrs’ needed to give their “interior lives for their brethren”:

Just as there has been in earlier times martyrs, whose blood had been shed for the testimony of Christ, and this blood had been the tincture, which served to subsequently convert many of their persecutors by leading them to Christ;...Likewise, it is still necessary that those who are called to the spiritual sacrifice unceasingly give their interior life for their brethren; they must shed the blood of their true being in sufferings and by the interior death; even by the persecutions of their brethren who misunderstand them, despise them, and condemn them, not understanding their ways; they consider them lazy people and useless and this because of their withdrawn life and because they cannot engage in the worries and the activity of the senses, first staying in silence and free from all these things, in order to attend unceasingly to the operations of God in their interior by the unceasing death of themselves. And it is this spiritual service, that these good souls, who still live after the life of their senses, cannot understand. But have courage! Suffer! Die! Be put to death every day! (Psalms 44:23). By this, you will serve them and the secret virtue of your shed blood will give them a tincture of life, they will near God more and more. Suffer patiently you sacrificers of the Most High! Stay in silence!<sup>274</sup>

Gichtel, as we will see, likewise employed the language of utility to describe the ‘spiritual work’ that contemplatives do for the church, employing various metaphors such as the ‘idle’ watchman, or the traditional contrast between Martha and Mary with their ‘temporal’ versus ‘spiritual’ almsgiving.<sup>275</sup> This is the language not of a modern, individualistic spirituality that we are told radical Protestantism would usher in, but rather a *cri du coeur* from some of Luther’s followers well into the eighteenth century calling for the continued relevance and necessity of a spiritual elite to intercede for common Christians.

This vision of a class of Protestant contemplatives, serving the church through vicarious spiritual suffering has broad implications for our understanding of popular Protestant devotional culture in the late Reformation and for the Reformation’s metaphysical and theological underpinnings. The existence of such practices represents a partial refutation of scholars like Carlos Eire and Charles Taylor who see in Protestantism the birth of an entirely immanent, individualistic ontology with the lively medieval commerce between heaven and earth, living and dead, gradually snuffed out.<sup>276</sup> The practices of spiritual communication, intercession, and powers of the reborn accompanying the ascetic devotion in this dissertation’s subjects reflects a hybrid devotion weaving immanent, interiorized Protestant worship with older traditions of externalized, transcendent spiritual community. Lovers of the writings of the ancient

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<sup>274</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours Spirituels sur Diverse Matières de l’esprit de la Vie interieure* (Berleburg, 1738), 52.

<sup>275</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, Amsterd. D. 26. October 1700 in *TP*, vol. I, 380; Gichtel to Pronner, *TP*, vol. I. 285.

<sup>276</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 258. Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1989).

desert fathers, radical Protestants evoked the figure of the holy man interceding for society prevalent in ancient and medieval monastic practices<sup>277</sup>. Joyce Irwin, in explaining the thought of one, seventeenth-century spiritualist, Antoinette de Bourignon [1616-1680], the Catholic turned theosophic mystic, shows how spirit to spirit communication had become the new currency for christian belonging in such circles.<sup>278</sup> Bourignon believed, like Gichtel and Marsay, that the reborn soul could communicate and be in the presence of other faithful Christians living or dead. Joyce explains Bourignon's conviction that "through the intercessions of souls united to God, those suffering and struggling are aided. She harshly criticized Calvin for believing that the dead cannot hear the prayers of the living. Referring not only to the dead but also to the living, she asserted, "When a soul is in the presence of God, it hears all that can touch it".<sup>279</sup> Bourignon, at times, describes being aware of other souls' inward condition, souls far removed from herself. Irwin continues arguing that "the invisible church is thus for her no theoretical concept but a vital spiritual presence."<sup>280</sup> For many historians, the significance of mystical, interior piety found in the evangelical awakenings of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries has been that it produced 'subjective', individualistic forms of worship through new mediums and theologies to express the nature and identity of a non-confessional "invisible church" of awakened christians.<sup>281</sup> The new mediums to express such a spiritual community involved new devotional genres like spiritual autobiographies and biographies of pious souls<sup>282</sup>, journals, and also new forms of interior devotion, such as spontaneous, free-form prayer.<sup>283</sup> But this chapter will demonstrate that, to a certain degree, the theological experimentation and proliferation of mystical traditions in separatist circles around 1700 also contributed to reviving a Protestant tradition of intercession, purgatory, and a new spiritual economy as many Protestants sought to revive the contemplative life.

This chapter will consist of two sections. First, I will explore the phenomenon of the Angelic Brethren's and other radical Protestants' practice of intercessory spiritual martyrdom. This section will show how Gichtel and others overlaid newer, theosophic terminology from Boehme on the nature of reborn souls and the cosmos onto older traditions of mystical and monastic spiritual martyrdom. Secondly, I will show how

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<sup>277</sup> see Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 80-101.

<sup>278</sup> see Joyce Irwin, "Anna Maria van Schurman and Antoinette Bourignon: Contrasting Examples of Seventeenth-Century Pietism" *Church History* Vol. 60, No. 3 (Sept 1991), pp. 301-315. Bourignon had written that "If you are true disciples of Jesus Christ, it is a pity that you are attached to a particular church, since there is now no assembly in the world where the holy spirit presides" (*ST*, p.16).

<sup>279</sup> Antoinette de Bourignon, *Témoignage de vérité, part I* (Amsterdam, 1682) in *Les oeuvres de Mlle Antoinette de Bourignon, contenues en dix neuf volumes, volume XI* (Amsterdam: Wetstein, ), 187. Bourignon says in the same section that it is "pure ignorance" to say that our prayers cannot touch those who are dead in a fascinating departure from Reformation doctrine.

<sup>280</sup> *ibid*, 311.

<sup>281</sup> Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England and Ireland, 1690-1850*. Edited by John Coffey. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>282</sup> Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and Johann Heinrich Reitz's *Historie der Wiedergeborenen* (1717) are two prime examples of such works.

<sup>283</sup> Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).



Gichtel and Marsay employed the metaphors and arguments from the long tradition of *vita contemplativa* to argue for the usefulness and legitimacy of the contemplative existence within a Protestant context.

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In a letter written in September 1712 by Johann Überfeld (1659-1732), the new spiritual head of the Angelic Brethren after the death of Johann Gichtel in 1710, we find a vivid description of the night vigils that the Angelic Brethren described as a ‘spiritual martyrdom’ as they sought to ‘mortify’ all inward inclinations toward earthly attachments through prayer. In Überfeld’s letter, we glimpse the physical and spiritual pain that the Angelic Brethren endured, and how they fashioned these pains, even in their physical gestures, after Christ suffering on the cross:

I can say to you, that the nighttime has been our spiritual martyrdom. In the cold of winter, I have considered the nightwatchman blessed because he strolls the streets and must not submit to the torture which we have had to endure by the will of God for the salvation of our brethren...How oft have we spent the nights on the cross with Christ, stretched out, standing, with both arms held high, and hands tied tightly because there was not the strength to keep the arms up, and this at a time when other people could sleep peacefully.<sup>284</sup>

Of particular importance in this letter is Überfeld’s statement that the Angelic Brethren’s nightly prayer vigils were performed “for the salvation of our brethren.” In the excellent studies hitherto written about the radical Protestant practice and notion of rebirth, the emphasis has been on the devout soul’s own transformation, underlining the inward, individualistic nature of what historians have taken as a quintessential Protestant form of devotion.<sup>285</sup> Scholars of Pietism have also pointed out that the seventeenth-century emphasis on rebirth reflects a departure from the orthodox Lutheran position on justification by faith alone toward a more Catholic notion of renewal and redemption of the soul.<sup>286</sup> But nowhere do we find a description of Protestant mystics struggling to overcome their fallen natures who also imagine this struggle as interceding or ‘saving’ other souls in the manner of Catholic practice. Is Überfeld’s reference a metaphor or reference to a simple prayer on behalf of their brethren?

Fortunately, in the letters of Überfeld and other Angelic Brethren from the same years, we find exchanges that explain in greater detail what precisely is meant by this ‘torture’ endured for the ‘salvation’ of other Christians. In particular, one extraordinary exchange carried on from 1708 to 1715 between Überfeld and the Hamburg radical theologian and philologist Johann Otto Glüsing (1675-1745) with a potential convert, a Danish merchant named Marselis, offers an extended discussion of how Angelic Brethren

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<sup>284</sup> Johann Überfeld to Jacob Michelmann, 2 Sept. 1712. In Johann Balthasar Reinhard, *Schriftmässige Prüfung des Geistes der neuen Engels-Brüderschafft* (Leipzig 1720), 125.

<sup>285</sup> Burckhard Dohm, *Poetische Alchimie: Öffnung zur Sinnlichkeit in der Hohelied- und Bibeldichtung von der Protestantischen Barockmystik bis zum Pietismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000) See also Hans Georg Kemper, *Aufklärung und Pietismus* (Max Niemeyer Verlag: De Gruyter, 1991), 79-82.

<sup>286</sup> Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und neuer Mensch. Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus*. (Wittenberg: Luther-Verlag, 1969).

practiced a form of contemplative intercession and vicarious suffering.<sup>287</sup> Early in the letter exchange, the merchant Marselis had expressed interest in learning more about the Angelic Brethren's claim to possessing a knowledge of how to pray in 'spirit and truth' that were described in Gichtel's writings.<sup>288</sup> Initially, Überfeld's letters to Marselis focused on the precondition of celibacy, or 'spiritual castration' before one could expect to practice the "essential form of prayer".<sup>289</sup> But Marselis, who was married with children, resisted this and instead begged for more precise information on what Überfeld had described as "the most hidden of all exercises [Übung]," where "one has miraculous encounters in the spirit." Glüsing, responding to Marselis's request, spoke of a "spiritual daily sacrifice the one for the other, or the most inward intercession and sharing of all the gifts of the holy spirit, or the anathematization vis-à-vis one's naked brother, or the veritable assumption of the sufferings and sins of the brethren" that "one will find obvious examples of in the letters of the blessed Gichtel."<sup>290</sup>

In order to illustrate how "anathematization", and the "veritable assumption of the sufferings and sins of the brethren" functioned, Glüsing related to Marselis one of his own experiences of praying for another soul in need. In a letter from [date], Glüsing related his reaction to hearing that an acquaintance of his had beaten one of his servants. This, Glüsing, states, "went deep to my heart" and in an effort to alleviate the suffering of the servant, he "went before God for him in prayer".<sup>291</sup> Subsequently, upon falling asleep Glüsing relates that he fell into a "deep dream" in which he himself "received just as so many blows as [the servant]". "I relate this simply" Glüsing states, because it is "otherwise the most basic and simple way—because it happened in a dream but usually when one is awake—that the spirit carries a burden."<sup>292</sup> This projection of another soul's suffering into the soul of the reborn, Glüsing explains, is the office of a 'true, perfect Christian' or 'priest of God':

The truly perfect Christian, or men in the office of Christ, is, that they as Priests of God, must project [vortragen] their brethren's needs and misery deep in prayer to God, which is called sacrifice; in such purifying prayer, God really places on him the others' burdens, that he is placed in the others' condition, and such pain as he cannot manage [vor qual nicht zu bleiben weis], according to the condition of the sick brother; is the other in wrath, then [the priest] is plagued with wrath, is he proud [Hoffart], then he will also be tempted therewith, and in this office, the priest of God truly and sensitively [empfindlich] carries the burden of the other, but which does not happen by one's own will, rather as God accepts the sacrifice in inwardness.<sup>293</sup>

Such an exchange should astonish any historian of early modern Protestantism. Descriptions of experiencing the pains of other souls, a vicarious suffering done in virtue

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<sup>287</sup> This exchange is found in in Gotha, Charta A 298. "Paul Friedrich Lehmann Letters". 61-107.

<sup>288</sup> Glüsing to Marselis, 94.

<sup>289</sup> J.W. Überfeld, *Briefe*, vol I, 473. Überfeld's letters are found in 11 volumes of unpublished manuscripts located at the Oberlausitzische Bibliothek der Wissenschaften in Görlitz, 5.00.7 a, b, c....

<sup>290</sup> Glüsing to Marselis. 15 July, 1712, Folio 94.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid*, Folio, 89.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, Folio, 89.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid*, Folio, 90.

of a ‘priestly’ calling that is also efficacious in lessening other’s pain, is far from the received understanding of a Protestant tradition shunning any trace of priestly mediation.

The formation of the Angelic Brethren’s practice of spiritual martyrdom and intercessory prayers takes us back to the youth of the Angelic Brethren’s founder, Johann Gichtel, in Germany and the Low Countries in the 1660s and 70s and his peculiar interest in self-denial and the monastic life. Born in 1638 to a prominent family in Protestant Regensburg in Bavaria, Gichtel’s education included briefly studying theology under the Pietist reformer Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) in Strasburg, before studying law. Gichtel’s hagiographic biography, published in 1722, along with his own correspondence portray him as a spiritually sensitive youth, fascinated with the Biblical prophets who communicated with God, along with the tell-tale melancholy of many conscientious, awakened evangelicals. Gichtel related to one correspondent that “in my youth...because I had read in the Holy Scriptures that Moses, Joshua, David, and other holy men had spoken with God, I went wandering many half days in the fields, looking at the heavens, but not achieving my intention.”<sup>294</sup> We learn that in the early 1660s, his intense spiritual energies began to be directed to an ascetic life, as Gichtel shunned women, and spoke of his despair that ‘among the Protestants, no trace of self-denial or imitation of Christ could be found.’ Gichtel therefore “turned to the cloisters for which he in his hometown had great opportunity and thoroughly investigated papistry.”<sup>295</sup> Gichtel was disappointed, however, at not finding the simple life of self-denial in contemporary Catholic monasticism, but rather “great cloisters, endowed with rich incomes”.<sup>296</sup>

In 1664, the young Gichtel’s budding interest in the solitary, withdrawn life received an important and formative direction from a chance encounter with a fellow Protestant likewise deeply interested in the ascetic life. As related in the previous chapter, Gichtel met the exiled Austrian Protestant nobleman, Justinian von Welz (1621-1668) while browsing a Regensburg bookshop whereupon he immediately joined von Welz in his grandiose plans to reform Protestantism with the aid of monastic devotional discipline and convert heathens in the New World.<sup>297</sup> The next few years saw Gichtel and von Welz energetically traveling to, and petitioning various Holy Roman Princes and noblemen to support their plan. Ultimately, the plan failed and Von Welz departed alone to South America where he died in 1668, reportedly devoured by wild beasts. The importance of von Welz, however, lies in the clear influence of his most famous text, *De Vita Solitaria*, on Gichtel’s later choice for the life of a hermit, and introducing him in to a tradition of medieval passion mysticism focused on practices of interior suffering and contemplation of Christ’s own sufferings.

Von Welz’s booklet sought to introduce Protestants to the path of self-denial through the ideal of inward renunciation in his book on the solitary life. In those pages, one finds lengthy reiterations of Kempis’s meditation on Christ’s sufferings, death, martyrdom, and self-denial. Welz, in detailing what “domestic instruments belong to a Christian hermit’s daily solitude”, wrote that his prayer chamber should contain “a bible, a prayer and song-book...and that glorious booklet on the Imitation of Christ from

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<sup>294</sup> Gichtel, *Kurze Eröffnung*, 3.

<sup>295</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol. VII, 13.

<sup>296</sup> Gichtel to anonymous, Amsterdam, 1702. *TP*, vol. I, 531.

<sup>297</sup> See Werner Wilhelm Schnabel, “Justinian oder Wie man zum Schwärmer wird: Genese, Programmatik und Scheitern des Welzschen Missionsprojekts”, in *Heterodoxie in der frühen Neuzeit* (De Gruyter, 2006).

Thomae de Kempis” as well as histories of the martyrs by Eusebius.<sup>298</sup> His use of the book along with its emphasis on an imitation of Christ’s suffering in one’s outward and inward life is prominent throughout. He writes that “Whosoever will be a disciple of Christ, he must deny himself, that is to say, he must turn away his eyes from the world and turn them to God...he must look to the cross of Christ, not to the lusts of foolish men.”<sup>299</sup> Welz likewise wrote that the “image of the suffering Christ” [Trauerbild] should serve as a “mirror” to the soul striving for conformity to Christ.<sup>300</sup> This suffering is one of exhaustion through a prayer of intense inward desire whose aim is to be annihilated with Christ: “Solitary Christian, if your heart is aflame in the love of God, it will show soon its flames. If there is longing for God, it will send in the midst of prayer a sigh, one after the other, to him. Yes, the soul becomes exhausted through desires, longing, and repeated, deep sighs. It wishes to be annihilated and to be with Christ.”<sup>301</sup>

Following the failure of von Welz’s efforts to rally princely support for his reform efforts and his departure to Suriname, Gichtel’s zeal to continue the fight against the lax, worldly orientation of Christianity quickly got him exiled from his German homeland. In 1666, he launched a scathing attack against the ‘corrupt’ evangelical clergy of Nuremberg and Regensburg, seeking to expose their “falseness, hypocrisy, and godlessness” amid a denunciation of the doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>302</sup> After spending several months in a Regensburg jail, Gichtel relocated to the Low Countries residing for a time in Zwolle within the radical milieu there around fellow Lutheran radical and exile Friedrich Breckling (1630-1705)<sup>303</sup>. Gichtel’s arrival in Amsterdam accelerated his immersion in radical Protestant mysticism as he immediately tapped into the radical spiritualist circles flourishing in the relatively liberal environment of seventeenth-century Netherlands.

In the mid-1660s, when Gichtel arrived in Amsterdam, he would have found one of the most commercially active, most international, and intellectually diverse urban centers in Europe. In 1660, the population of Amsterdam stood at 192,000, triple the city’s population in 1600. By 1700, it would rise to 235,000, making it the fifth biggest city in Europe. This growth owed itself primarily to the Netherland’s new leading position in Europe’s trade with Asia and the New World, as its ideal location allowed it to fill the vacuum left by the declining Spanish and Portuguese empires. The thriving merchants of the Dutch East India Company, despite punishing trade wars and embargos by England, kept the docks and warehouses humming with cargoes from across the burgeoning Dutch empire. Ships brought in pepper, nutmeg, silks, and porcelain from Asia and the East Indies, sugar, tobacco, and coffee from the Carribean, and indigo from Guatemala. A new innovation in European finance, the limited-liability joint-stock company, was pioneered in Amsterdam in the early seventeenth-century at the Beurs in the inner city. Against the background of Amsterdam’s worldly wealth, Gichtel’s refusal

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<sup>298</sup> Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 170.

<sup>299</sup> Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 100-101. He also repeats the motif of raised arms: “Ein rechter Kreuzträger Christi muß im Leiden seine Hände zu Gott aufheben und zuerst bei ihm und nicht bei den Menschen Hilfe suchen. Er muß aufrichtig leben, Gott fürchten und keine Menschen scheuen.”

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>301</sup> Welz, *De Vita Solitaria*, 109.

<sup>302</sup> ‘Gnaden-Wahl’. Gichtel, *TP*, vol. VII, 37.

<sup>303</sup> See Lucinda Martin, “Jacob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (ed) Ariel Hessayon (London: Routledge, 2013), 122.

to deal with money and withdrawn life would have set him even more apart than elsewhere. In a letter from 1678, Gichtel wrote derisively to a confidante, that “Money! Money! Screams the world and is never satisfied. They richly keep their homes, but get little from it. The blessing of God is in faith...”<sup>304</sup> Another observer, independent of Gichtel’s radical rejection of worldly engagement, wrote that “Mammon has many devotées in this country.”<sup>305</sup>

Apart from its teeming trade, Golden Age Amsterdam boasted, by the middle of the seventeenth-century, a majority-immigrant population composed of large numbers of religious refugees, radicals, and dissidents, a setting primed to produce novel religious experimentations and expressions.<sup>306</sup> Refugees from numerous early modern diasporas, fled to Amsterdam, starting with refugees from Belgium and Antwerp during the destructive 80 Years War and followed by English radicals like the Quakers after the re-imposition of censure in the 1650s. Many of the Sephardic Jews driven out of Spain and Portugal found their way to Amsterdam including the famous heretic Baruch Spinoza. In 1681, as Louis XIV stepped up his persecution of France’s Huguenot population, Amsterdam again became the destination of a Protestant diaspora.<sup>307</sup> Further, small sects and individuals who did not fit neatly into any confessional category found in Amsterdam’s *mélange* the anonymity to pursue their religious experimentations, publishing, using their new-found freedom to argue and convert one another.<sup>308</sup> The city’s commercial character and religious liberty went hand in hand as the city’s government strategically avoided a religious settlement that would make the city inhospitable for diverse visitors. “It is well known”, declared one Swiss military officer stationed in Amsterdam in 1673, “that in addition to the Reformed, there are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Brownists, Independents, Arminians, Anabaptists, Socinians, Arians, Enthusiasts, Quakers, Borelists, Muscovites, Libertines and many more...I am not even speaking of the Jews, Turks and Persians.”<sup>309</sup>

Gichtel’s early years in Amsterdam found him caught up in this sectarian maelstrom, discussing and disputing the true interior and apostolic Christianity with other Protestants claiming the truth. Gichtel’s letters from this period describe extensive contact with Quakers, Labadists, Mennonites, and other sects that he ultimately condemned as too tepid in their pursuit of the perfect ‘Nachfolge Christi’, especially the command to refrain from women.<sup>310</sup> Gichtel’s comments on these groups reveal not only his close contacts with them—he mentions long, sustained discussions with a Labadist leader by the name of Yvon and multiple Quakers—but also his characteristic complaint that no other Protestant group has grasped the true nature of imitating Christ in this life

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<sup>304</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, Aug. 20, 1678 in *TP*, vol. I, 101.

<sup>305</sup> Jean-Baptiste Stoupe, *La Religion des Hollandois* (Paris: François Cloussier, 1673), 141.

<sup>306</sup> *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic: Studies Presented to Piet Visser on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Edited by August den Hollander, Mirjam Veen, Anna Voolstra, and Alex Noord. (Amsterdam: Brill, 2014).

<sup>307</sup> *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*. Edited by Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong, and marc van Vaeck. (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>308</sup> Richard H. Popkin, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam.” *Quaker History* 73:1 (Spring, 1984), 14-28.

<sup>309</sup> Stoupe, *La Religion des*, 43. Quoted in Hsia R.P.C., “Introduction” in: Hsia R.P.C., Van Nierop H. (eds), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>310</sup> Gichtel, Amsterdam d. 22. December 1676 in *TP*, vol. I, 51.

and the self-denial it requires. Hypocrisy is the hallmark, in Gichtel's view, of the Quakers and Labadists. In a letter from 1680, Gichtel asserts that the Quakers have been corrupted and pursue worldly wealth and trade, despite their rhetoric of living in the spirit. "Therefore let us depart from the flesh, and enter into the spirit, and then we shall find peace for our souls. The world is so full of sectarian false-spirits. Like the Quakers who have drunk out of this whore's cup, they speak outwardly of the 'inward light' but live like all the children of the world, in worrying about caring for nourishment, gathering riches, and filling their stomachs."<sup>311</sup> The same with Labadie's society that Gichtel accused of failing to heed the obvious truth that imitating Christ's original message required celibacy: "How high did Labadie's holy society fly! They believed they had the Kingdom of God in their hands most assuredly. What persuasive speeches didn't Yvon use to get me into their gathering? But if I had followed, I would have of course found a wife, but not the Kingdom of God."<sup>312</sup> Gichtel's disputes here, as with so many of his later debates with fellow radical Protestants, showcases his commitment to a very literal interpretation of the command to 'deny oneself' and to an outwardly ascetic devotion, and not just a 'spiritual', inward dying to the world.

As his letters suggest, Gichtel quickly fell in with a particular mystical path from the many options at hand in Amsterdam. Among the Protestant spiritualist and radicals in Amsterdam fleeing the censors and state church persecutions elsewhere were devotées of Jacob Boehme's and his theosophical mysticism. The Silesian nobleman Abraham Von Franckenberg (1593-1652) had parts of Boehme's commentary on Genesis, *Mysterium Magnum*, published in Amsterdam in 1631, and the German Professor Johannes Werdenhagen published a few years later, also in Amsterdam, Boehme's *Vierzig Fragen von der Seele* and *Aurora*. The wealthy Dutchman and former merchant Abraham van Beyerland (1586-1648) did perhaps more than any other individual to disseminate Boehme's writings, assiduously collecting over 100 of his manuscripts, translating and publishing many of them between 1634 and 1648.<sup>313</sup> The son of the radical spiritualist pastor Joachim Betke, Henricus Betkuis (1625-1708), continued van Beyerland's work in the 1650s, printing 27 different Boehme texts between 1658 and 1678.<sup>314</sup> From the 1640s onward, adherents of Boehme flocked to Amsterdam including Christian Hoburg, Paul Felgenhauer, Friedrich Gifftheil, and Johann Theodor von Tsesch. Many of these Behmist exiles found refuge in the home of Friedrich Breckling (1629-1711), an exiled pastor from Flensburg, including Gichtel himself.<sup>315</sup> Breckling's home in Zwolle outside of Amsterdam was at this time a refuge for such exiled radicals as the above-mentioned Hoburg and Betke, and a major center for the German dissemination of spiritualist,

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<sup>311</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, Amsterdam 14. Jul. 1680. *TP* vol. I, 112.

<sup>312</sup> Gichtel, Amsterdam. 22. December, 1676., *TP* vol. I, 51.

<sup>313</sup> See *Jacob Böhmes Weg in die Welt. Zur Geschichte der Handschriftensammlung, Übersetzungen und Editionen von Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland*. Edited by Theodor Harmsen (Amsterdam: Pimander, 2007).

<sup>314</sup> Betkuis was to become the preferred publisher of many spiritualist, Hermetic and Rosicrucian texts in Amsterdam including those of Christian Hoburg. See Willem Heijting, "Christian Hoburg's *Lebendige Hertzens-Theologie* (1661): A Book in the Heart of Seventeenth-Century Spirituality" in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*, 204-207.

<sup>315</sup> Lucinda Martin, "Jacob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism" in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centures of Thought and Reception*. Edited by Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014), 122.

mystical theology including Boehme.<sup>316</sup> Breckling had housed and ordained Justinian von Welz (accompanied by Gichtel) in 1666, and Gichtel later lived with him for several years upon returning to the Low Countries after his exile from Regensburg in 1668. While at Breckling's home, Gichtel mentions being introduced to the Boehme publisher Gifftheil and he very likely met Hoburg there as well. Gichtel often cited Breckling as his "erster Anleiter" and the cause of his ultimate discovery of the necessity to suffer and crucify oneself inwardly in prayer. Filled with "ego" because of his disagreement with Breckling on the question of celibacy, and his inability to convince him on this point, drove Gichtel into prayer. As with all the others, Gichtel broke with Breckling for his refusal to follow Gichtel into a total renunciation of the world. He would later write that "Breckling runs here and there, fishes day and night, but catches nothing; but he who serves God in the spirit silently, gains meanwhile a soul that becomes desirous to seek out the Lord."<sup>317</sup>

Gichtel's immersion in this milieu led directly to his deepening immersion in Boehme's theosophy and his role in producing the first full edition of Boehme's works in 1682.<sup>318</sup> The edition was made possible by van Beyerland's earlier work and Gichtel securing the Ender Boehme manuscript collection held by him. With the help of an Arnhem mayor, Willem Huygens, Gichtel served as chief editor and publisher, even buying a printing press to facilitate the printing. The collected edition was titled *Alle theosophische Wercken*, and came complete with illustrations, seen below, interpreting the significance of anatomical references in Boehme's writings.

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<sup>316</sup> Martin, "Jacob Boehme", 122.

<sup>317</sup> For Gichtel's contacts with Breckling and other radicals through him see several letters from Gichtel in *TP* vol. I pg 470, 404, 418, and 100.

<sup>318</sup> Martin, "Jacob Boehme", 123.



Fig. 1. *Theosophia Practica*

For Gichtel, the fascination with Boehme was above all for how Böhme’s writings explained the mystery of ‘rebirth’ as a struggle between the ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ man that appealed to the ascetically inclined Gichtel. The ‘inward man’, who Boehme describes as the image of God, dwelled deep down in the center of our souls, and must be “hewn out” or “reborn” within us by slaying the “Dragon of the Self (Drachen der Eigenheit)” in a spiritual battle against the carnal will, temptation, demons, and fleshly weakness.<sup>319</sup> The collected letters of Gichtel, published in 1722, were titled ‘*Theosophia Practica*’ suggesting that Boehme’s theosophy represented the theoretical guide to rebirth and Gichtel’s ascetic life presented the ‘practical’ application of those ideas. In a letter from 1702 delineating the “mighty struggle” between the “outward life in Adam” and the “inward man” Gichtel states that Böhme’s “*Theologia mystica* exceeds...all other mystics” because “in this battle these writings are incredibly useful, for they open the understanding for us.”<sup>320</sup> The individual’s struggle for rebirth, in Boehme’s complex fusion of alchemical, astrological, and mystical symbols, constituted a microcosm of the reintegration of the fallen elemental world through Christ’s sacrifice. Boehme’s characteristically cosmological scope earned him the title of the “first German philosopher” and his dialectical approach to cosmogony and theodicy would inspire

<sup>319</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, 20 Aug. 1678 in *TP* vol. I, 100. Gichtel stated that Boehme’s writings “bring understanding, make many complicated things clear, open up many dark scriptural sayings, elucidate the rebirth, and bring wisdom to the understanding”.

<sup>320</sup> Gichtel to George Vechtman, 17. June, 1702 in *TP*, vol. VI, 1508.



Hegel and Schelling.<sup>321</sup> Gichtel's immersion in Boehme's theosophical vision was so complete by the 1680s that in his letters and biography, Boehme's imagery and ideas soon became the retrospective structure for Gichtel's earlier experiences. Gichtel even claimed that Böhme is "my only book."<sup>322</sup> Gichtel became fascinated by the harmony found there with his own spiritual wanderings in deep prayer in the 1660s and 1670s adopting Boehme's description of a mystical union with divine wisdom in the form of a virgin Sophia, underscoring Gichtel's renunciation of sexuality. By the mid 1670s, Gichtel had made the study, editing, and dissemination of Boehme's texts his primary preoccupation.

Dissatisfied with the many sects in Amsterdam and increasingly driven by the pursuit of rebirth and the promise of esoteric knowledge and mystical experiences through deep prayer, Gichtel, by the early 1670s, had begun to shun all outward, communal religious life, opting instead for the hermit spirituality of von Welz's *De Vita Solitaria* on the model of the ancient desert hermits popular among radical Protestants at this time.<sup>323</sup> Gichtel's life from this time forward, mirroring the pattern that would take shape among his adherents across northern Europe, was described by him in 1680 in the following way: "I live as a monk, closed away, praying to God without ceasing".<sup>324</sup> In 1697, he counseled one of his adherents "to stay withdrawn, visit few people who only live the world-spirit, and to sacrifice constantly your soul in the blood and death of Christ for all men."<sup>325</sup> Among his many ascetic practices were sleep deprivation, refusal to handle money, prayer vigils, and, of course, his lifelong antipathy to sexual intercourse.<sup>326</sup> Gichtel rented a house, partially through the help of rich donors, with a small group of exiled dissidents as house brothers. Among these included a mystic from Eisenach named Erasmus Hoffmann, a fellow Regensburg citizen Georg Christian Fuchs, and a theology professor named Alard de Raadt who lost his position owing to his chiliast positions.<sup>327</sup> During the 1670s, the men periodically performed editing work for a local publisher.

Revealing the influence of von Welz's *De Vita Solitaria* and his own fascination with the history of monasticism, the withdrawn life that Gichtel began to cultivate in Amsterdam explicitly took the desert hermits' solitary lives of prayer and self-denial as the primary model for his efforts to crucify the "ego".<sup>328</sup> Accounts of these ancient

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<sup>321</sup> see Glenn Alexander Magee, "Hegel and Mysticism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 257-258. 253-280.

<sup>322</sup> Gichtel to Herr A.M. 1696 in *TP* vol. V, 3109.

<sup>323</sup> Angelic Brethren held in high esteem the *Vitae Patrum*, sharing, editing, and publishing new versions. Georg Kirmß, an Angelic Brother in Nordhausen, wrote a letter to a brother Warmstich in Franckfurth containing two stories from "Vite Patris, sind von einem lieben Bruder ins teutsche übersetzt worden/ sehr nützlich zu lesen & c. Hält kaum 20. Seiten und über ie. Schutzer wieder die Orthographie." (10) in Kindervaters Neue Engels-Brüderschaft. on sharing of *Leben der Väter*, and Glüsing's 1720 edition.

<sup>324</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, Amsterdam 17 May, 1680. In *TP* vol. I, 107.

<sup>325</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 30 May, 1697 in *TP*, vol. I. 267.

<sup>326</sup> Gichtel spoke repeatedly of staying up all night to pray, and that he "wore himself out" in these efforts. See Gichtel to Pronner, 4. Sept, 1696 in *TP* vol. I, 236: "Wie manche Nacht bin ich auf meinen Knien gelegen, und habe gerungen mit Gott, daß mir der Odem mögen ausgehen: welches ich nicht mir zum eitlen Ruhm schreibe, sondern nur zu zeigen, welchen Ernst es kostet, wan man Christo wil nachfolgen."

<sup>327</sup> See J. Jürgen Seidel, "Zwischen Theosophie und Pietismus. Einblicke in die Korrespondenz der Schweizer "Gichtelianer", in *Zwingliana* vol. XXXIV, 2007. 95-96.

<sup>328</sup> Gichtel to Schmitz, 18 Sept. 1703 in *TP* vol I, 506.

hermits' daily and nightly prayer vigils, struggling against the flesh while prostrating themselves face down or with raised hands clearly aroused a deep interest among Gichtel and his hermit followers whose own instructions referred regularly to the prostrate, or outstretched positions one should assume in self-sacrificial prayer.<sup>329</sup> Gichtel often reverently cited Anthony, of whom it was written that, failing to be a bloody martyr, he "undertook greater and more intense asceticism" to be "a daily martyr to conscience".<sup>330</sup> Gichtel's account of the desert fathers and their spiritual sacrifice is significant for how it highlighted the particularly inward nature of their mortifications and recast their account of rebirth in theosophical terms. Gichtel believed that "the practice of the mystery of rebirth has mostly remained hidden, except that which was revealed to the Fathers in the desert"<sup>331</sup>. In a condensed history of monasticism given by Gichtel in 1702, we see, firstly, that he read the ascetic trials of the early desert fathers as motivated by their desire for martyrdom, a standard reading of the phenomenon of early monasticism. But his account also emphasizes the special power of "Magia of Faith" that came to these 'reborn' souls through their practice of rebirth, prayer and self-annihilation:

After the first persecutions fell into a still-stand and outward calm, the souls of the righteous had no longer the opportunity to be able to witness their heartfelt love to their bride Jesus, and were finally forced to flee into the desert, the wasteland, and caves of the mountains, to deny all things earthly and even their lives, and to exercise [üben] themselves in faith, love, and hope. It was then that the powers of Christ in prayer and faith were grasped and were revealed in great wonders, as is seen in the *Lives of the Fathers*, until finally in Papistry the knowledge of Jesus was completely extinguished, the Magia of Faith disappeared [untergegangen], and great Cloisters with rich endowments were established, and the monks along with the nuns fell into calling upon the saints, as is known. Luther, on the other hand, blazed a middle-path, by which one imagines a salvation without struggle, and which brings its adherents into a carnal security, such that one considers the Cross of Christ as pure foolishness, and therefore persecutes, hereticizes, and damns those who deviate only a little from the common path of the children of the world."<sup>332</sup>

Gichtel clearly signalled his departure here from Lutheran orthodoxy on the question of asceticism and works, condemning a 'salvation without struggle'. The influence on Gichtel and later Angelic Brethren from these traditions 'spiritual martyrdom' is clear from the popularity of *Lives of the Desert Fathers* among them, with

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<sup>329</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)*.

<sup>330</sup> Athanasius's *Life of St. Anthony* was the original version included in early modern editions of the *Vitae Patrum*. The followers of Macarius, another anchorite, spoke of the main task of the solitary monk as "emulating Him [Christ] in his suffering" through the inward struggle against not only the concupiscent self but also against the demons and dark spiritual forces plaguing man, citing Paul's words that our struggle is against the "spiritual forces of evil". Edward Eugene Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1950), 57.

<sup>331</sup> Gichtel to Anonymous, 2 May, 1702 in *TP* vol. VI, 1488-99: "Ich dürfte fast kühnlich schreiben, daß das Mysterium der Wiedergeburt in seiner Praxi mehrentheils verborgen geblieben, ohne was den Patribus in der Wüsten ist aufgegangen".

one Angelic Brother, Johann Otto Glüsing, even making his own German edition of the text.<sup>333</sup>

By the 1680s, Gichtel's unique Protestant monastic devotion, with his ardent message to the exile community in Amsterdam that Protestants had forgotten the core Christian duty to renounce the world in ascetic self-denial, had begun to gain followers. One convert, Johann Wilhelm Überfeld, traveled to Amsterdam to meet Gichtel in early 1683 after learning of Gichtel's edition of Boehme's texts. The then 24 year old had read many mystics including Tauler, Thomas à Kempis, and Boehme in search of the "lost path of the imitation of Christ in faith".<sup>334</sup> Überfeld would remain Gichtel's most loyal follower, living in close-by Leiden, and take up his mantle to lead the expanding network after Gichtel's death in 1710. Gichtel's correspondence network and followers grew as he presented himself as a leading authority on the texts of Boehme, thrusting himself to the head of a growing international community of Boehme enthusiasts at the end of the seventeenth-century. Active cells of Angelic Brethren appeared in Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, and Nordhausen, alongside the communities in the Low Countries. The list of Gichtel's correspondents eventually included the leading figures in Lutheran Pietism and radical Protestant circles at this time, such as Gottfried Arnold, Jane Leade's London 'Philadelphian' theosophists, and even the wife of August Hermann Francke, Anna Magdalena, who he successfully encouraged to break off sexual relations with her husband for a time.<sup>335</sup> In each case, Gichtel's message was the same: those who wished to truly take up the painful *Nachfolge* or imitation of Christ, must remove the world from their souls through celibacy, poverty, and withdrawal into solitary, contemplative prayer. Those who undertook this 'wrestling' with their carnal selves would experience great suffering, but would also discover miraculous powers and experiences in their prayers as members of a holy spiritual 'priesthood'. It is to the foremost of these miracles, that of suffering for other Christians, we now turn.

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### ***From 'Spiritual Martyrdom' to Intercessory Prayer***

This section is concerned with the question of how the experience of suffering *for oneself* in imitation of Christ's suffering migrated to suffering *for others* and the development of a Protestant practice of intercession? The first clue for this shift is indicated in a letter from 1675 in which Gichtel reports a supernatural encounter with God's love while locked in "battle" to "inwardly suffer, die, and resurrect with Christ".<sup>336</sup> Gichtel noted that on the heels of this struggle to purge the self of its sinful ego, he began to experience Christ's love for the world as a desire to be "banned" or sacrificed 'for one's brethren': "In such a state, the soul stands before the abyss, Christ is within the soul everything in everything. It falls into God's arms, it turns away plagues, it desires to be "cursed"

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<sup>333</sup> Johann Otto Glüsing, an Angelic Brethren located in Hamburg, published in 1720 the *Der erste Tempel Gottes in Christo: darinnen das teusche Leben der I.H. Alt-Väter, II. H. Matronen und III. H. Märtyrer in der ersten Kirchen abgebildet ist.* (Hamburg, 1720).

<sup>334</sup> Cited in Reinhard, *Schriftmäßige Prüfung des Geistes*, 322.

<sup>335</sup> For one representative case, that of Anna Francke, see Gertraud Zaepernick, "Johann Georg Gichtel und seiner Nachfolger Briefwechsel mit den Hallischen Pietisten, bes. Mit Anna Magdalena Francke" in *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983), 96, 109.

<sup>336</sup> Gichtel to Herrn J.H.B. Churfurstl. Cammer-Musicanten, 1675, in *TP*, vol I, 36-7.

(‘verbannet’) for its brethren.”<sup>337</sup> Gichtel’s description of such the impulse to die for others in the union with God first occurred, according to Gichtel’s biographer, one night as he went before God in prayer shortly after moving to Amsterdam in 1668. His biographer writes that Gichtel offered himself to God in the following manner in that prayer: “He [Gichtel] united his soul with his beloved Jesus not only in a marital love-bond for life, but rather also, according to his beloved will, wishing to die for the sake of his love. He forfeited to him spirit, soul and body, with the firm intent, to give up his life rather than to turn away from him in love or suffering.”<sup>338</sup> Immediately upon offering this prayer, the “words of Paul came to his mouth: ‘I desire to be cursed for my brethren’ (Rom. 9:3) in which he offered his soul for all mankind, Jews, Turks, and Heathens, in the blood of Christ”. Upon saying these words, a “gentle beam of love fell into his soul.”<sup>339</sup> There then followed a vision of spiritual baptism in which his soul was dunked in a “Light-flaming or glassy sea” full of “fiery waves”, which “that washed gently over my soul”. This happened five nights in a row and caused his soul to become “a pure flame of love”. Following this experience his soul was “so filled with the love of Jesus”, that “he did not sleep more than two hours that night”.<sup>340</sup>

In effect, Gichtel’s experience constituted a version of the “breakthrough” articulated by earlier mystics such as Tauler<sup>341</sup> when the soul’s suffering is transformed into an experience of sweetness, a sign of union.<sup>342</sup> Gichtel wrote in 1678 that we “envelop [verbergen] ourselves in the death of Christ at all times so that the bitterness of the death of nature may become sweet. How then the love of God transforms within us all bitterness into sweetness and all fear in our souls into great joy.”<sup>343</sup> Gichtel’s version, however, lays emphasis on one of the fruits of this love—that of a love for the world—and entwines it with the trope of spiritual martyrdom desiring to be crucified for the world. The reference to Paul’s ‘anathematization’, his ‘being cursed...for the sake of my people’, was to become Gichtel’s primary scriptural justification for a practice of self-sacrifice he sensed running through scripture. The Greek word for ‘cursed’ used by Paul in Romans 9:3 to describe his desire to be “*cursed* and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people” was ‘anathema’ for which Gichtel use the German ‘verbannen’. The Old Testament usage of this word appears as a part of the Israelite practice of ritual sacrifice and literally meant that which is ‘set-apart’ or ‘consecrated’ to God. Any object (usually a sacrificial animal) designated for sacrificial use was thus ‘anathema’.<sup>344</sup> Holy men

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<sup>337</sup> *ibid*, 37.

<sup>338</sup> Gichtel, *Lebenslauf*, TP vol VII, 81.

<sup>339</sup> Gichtel, *Lebenslauf*, 82.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>341</sup> For Tauler’s use of the term, see Caroline F. Mösch, “*Daz disiu Geburt geschehe*”: *Meister Eckharts Predigtzyklus Von der ewigen geburt und Johannes Taulers Predigten zum Weihnachtsfestkreis* (Saint-Paul: 2006), 361.

<sup>342</sup> This experience of ‘sweetness’ following spiritual dryness is described in detail by Bonaventura, Teresa of Avila, and others. See, for example, St. Bonaventura in *De Triplica Via*, in *Writings on the Spiritual Life*, (Franciscan Institute Publications), 108. He describes there in very similar terms the soul experiencing a strong feeling of love and desire to die for the world after suffering through contemplation of Christ

<sup>343</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, 20 Juli 1678, in TP vol. I, 95.

<sup>344</sup> Paul was often seen as the beginning of the mystical ascetic tradition with his remarks on ‘crucifying the flesh’, ‘putting on Christ’, the experience of stigmata in Galatians 6:17, and his eventual martyrdom. St. Bonaventure had likewise used Paul in the above explanation of the soul’s desire to die for the world, citing 2 Corinthians 12:15 “I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes”.

throughout scripture had practiced the same ‘anathematization’, according to Gichtel, by laying down their lives for others such as Christ in John 3:16, Moses on Mount Sinai, and David.<sup>345</sup> A passage from Gichtel’s biography describes how he developed this ‘anathematization’ into a central theme of his mystical devotions:

After now God had opened to him in which form one must give oneself for his brethren, he continued this in such a manner for the rest of his life, and for the atonement of the creaturely wrath which is in mankind, he laid down his soul in all prayers, as an anathema of Christ, to a sweet-smelling offer, because he found, that he thereby became much inflamed with love, and through such simple sacrifice of love, a very loving taste filled the soul.<sup>346</sup>

By the 1680s, Gichtel was touting his spiritual intercessions as the central practice of a new, “Melchizedek” priesthood order of the reborn. In 1702, he reported to one correspondent that God had “from time to time revealed more deeply through practice the mystery of the Melchizedek priesthood” which originally had been “revealed from the prayer of anathematization in Romans 9 in which I have practiced from that time forth into the 34<sup>th</sup> year and have experienced so many miracles.”<sup>347</sup> The essence of this ‘Office of the Melchizedek Priesthod’—for which the “the Aaronic priesthood was a foreshadowing”—was the practice of “sacrific[ing] onself” (sich selbst opfern) inwardly in prayer (“Diese wünschen für ihre Brüder verbannet zu seyn, und stellen ihr Leben für ihre Brüder dar”). The process of becoming a Melchizedek priest mirrored, roughly, the mystical triad of *purgatio-illuminatio-unio* as summed up in one passage by Gichtel: one “must overcome and kill the will” after which the soul is filled with light and the essence of Christ as it “conforms to the image of Jesus Christ”. Only thereafter can the Melchizedek priest “offer its life for his brethren.”<sup>348</sup> Strict celibacy and poverty were prerequisites in Gichtel’s understanding of this higher priesthood that mirrored that of the Old Testament: “David would not have been able to eat the holy shew-bread of the Aaronic Priesthood along with his men, if he had not abstained from women. How much more must the priests of the Melchizedek office in their spiritual service refrain [from women], those who desire to eat from the word of God.”<sup>349</sup>

This experience of love for one’s fellow man amidst spiritual self-sacrifice followed from a notion of rebirth as a real union of essences with Christ, allowing Gichtel to identify his sufferings with Christ’s. The imaginative identification with the suffering Christ in the throes of one’s own contrition, and struggle against the carnal will, I argue, is the key to the leap that Gichtel and his circle made from understanding spiritual martyrdom as sacrificing their souls for their own salvation to a sacrifice made *for other* souls. For Gichtel and other spiritualists, the mystical union with Christ—in contrast to orthodox Lutheranism—was accompanied by a total regeneration of the soul and its rebirth as divine matter. The soul, through suffering, dying, and resurrecting, *becomes* Christ in an ontological blending of essences, or in Paul’s words, it “put on Christ”,

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<sup>345</sup> Gichtel to Johann Schulze, 1 Jan. 1701 in *TP*, vol. IV, 2834.

<sup>346</sup> Gichtel, *Lebenslauf*, in *TP* vol. VII, 90.

<sup>347</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, Amst. 28 April, 1702 in *TP*, vol I, 417-18. Gichtel in another letter he states that “Paul has opened an felicitous door with his “anathematization” and taught how we can walk in love and should offer our lives for our brethren.”, *TP*, Vol II, 533-4.

<sup>348</sup> Gichtel, to anonymous, Amsterd. 8. May, 1703 in *TP*, vol I, 483.

<sup>349</sup> Gichtel to T.S. 1 July, 1701 in *TP*, vol VI, 1514.

(Christum anziehen).<sup>350</sup> Gichtel's counsel that we must "die daily" so that "the inner, new, godly or divinized man may increase and grow",<sup>351</sup> and references to 'Putting on Christ', or experiencing a oneness with him, as with earlier passion mystics, was accomplished by concentrating on Christ's suffering to evoke an affective response in the soul, specifically the experience of God's love, the sign of rebirth.

The overpowering experience of God's love for humanity in the midst of the contemplation of Christ's suffering and one's own 'spiritual martyrdom' has roots not only in medieval practices, but also in Catholic circles much closer to Gichtel's Regensburg upbringing and radical Protestant milieu. Early modern Catholic practices offer us a first clue to start understanding where Gichtel's intercessions came from. Many early modern Catholic monastic orders, most prominently the discalced Carmelites represented by St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591), popularized a stadial approach to mystical contemplation, one stage of which included intense spiritual suffering, or "dryness", which was later transmuted into a 'sweet pain' by erotic encounters with divine love in the higher stages of mystical experience. This mystical pain could likewise turn outward to compassion for humanity as in Teresa's description of the 'prayer of union' in her 1577 *The Interior Mansion*. Teresa describes this prayer as being accompanied by an acute spiritual pain that is, in fact, "the pain of God's love", a suffering "too severe for the person to have even the strength to hold a pen". The soul in this state yearns for even more such bitter-sweet suffering ("strong desire for suffering") and likewise "wishes to be either always alone, or else occupied on what benefits the souls of others". God's love causes the soul to feel a "special love" for its enemies and the soul thereupon occupies itself in "earnestly interceding with God on their behalf."<sup>352</sup> A gradual conformity of the soul to Christ, aided by outward and inward imitation, thus lent suffering a supernatural, charitable character as it became wrapped in God's love.

Nowhere did such Baroque Catholic mysticism of supernatural suffering take more of a hold than in Gichtel's homeland of Bavaria. Under the Holy Roman Emperor Matthias (1557-1619) and Maximilian I of Bavaria (1573-1651), Bavaria became a major center for reforming, strict observance orders like the Carmelites.<sup>353</sup> Importantly, Gichtel's hometown of Regensburg teemed with the spirit of Catholic Tridentine devotion as evidenced by the establishment of three new orders, the Jesuits (1589), the Capuchins (1613), and a chapter of the Decalced Carmelites (1641).<sup>354</sup> Likewise, post-Tridentine Catholicism's emphasis on dogmas under attack by Lutherans, such as purgatory and the Cult of the Saints, helped to intensify the practice of intercessions for

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<sup>350</sup> Gichtel speaks of the "mystery of Christ in us", in a letter to G. H. Amsterdam, 9 Oct. 1669 in *TP*, vol. I, 18: "und von dem unsichtbaren göttlichen Mysterio oder Geheimniß Christus in uns". The process of spiritual death—destroying one's ego—culminated in a mystical transformation and union of the soul with Christ's image being born within us (*Christus in uns*).

<sup>351</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, 20 Juli 1678 in *TP*, vol I, 95.

<sup>352</sup> *Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle. The Classics of Western Spirituality*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez with an Introduction by Kieran Kavanaugh. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 183-184.

<sup>353</sup> Thomas A Brady, *German Histories in the Age of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 310.

<sup>354</sup> Karl Hausberger "Zum Verhältnis der Konfessionen in der Reichsstadt Regensburg". 134-146. In Hans Schwarz (editor) *Reformation und Reichsstadt: Protestantisches Leben in Regensburg* (Regensburg: Universitätsverlag, 1994).

deceased souls in Bavarian monasteries.<sup>355</sup> Ulrike Strasser and others have noted that this environment made seventeenth-century Bavarian nunneries important sites for the practice of mystical intercession and vicarious spiritual martyrdom.<sup>356</sup> Shut away by strict rules of cloister with no avenues for influencing the outside world, nuns found in intercessions a means to cultivate “charismatic sanctity and intimate ties beyond the confines of the cloister.”<sup>357</sup> Strasser highlights the example of one nun who strove for spiritual martyrdom, that of Hortulana of Embach (1673-1689) in the Franciscan monastery of St. Clares in Munich. Hortulana’s Franciscan chronicler, Kirchhueber, describes how she “dedicated herself to ceaseless prayer and contemplation” in order “to liberate poor souls from purgatory for whose redemption she prayed day and night, often carried out strict fasts, sharp disciplines, stayed away all night, and bore great and lengthy pain on their behalf...”<sup>358</sup> Over the course of the seventeenth-century, such intercessory prayer for suffering souls had become a defining dimension of pious life in all of Munich’s nunneries.<sup>359</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Protestant examples of devotion to Christ’s passion in Austria and Southern Germany reveal a significant degree of syncretism with Catholic passion mysticism, but omitting any hint of intercession for others. Rather, the imitation of Christ’s suffering was turned inward, described as having a healing, purifying effect on the believer’s soul. The radical spiritualist Caspar Schwenckefeld (1489-1561) whose followers were strongest in south German cities such as Ulm and Augsburg, published a *Passional and Prayer Book*, which recommended that Christians practice a ‘healing’ contemplation in which they ‘mirror’ Christ’s sufferings into their own: “The suffering of Christ, correctly understood and contemplated in faith, is a type of healing medicine for all types of sicknesses on body and soul. Thus man should in all affairs, sorrows, and trials, also in all types of temptations to sin and evil spirits run to the cross of Christ...so that he fruitfully imagines the entire innocent suffering, death, and life of Christ, and every trial that comes to his soul and body, project therein all together as in a mirror... (Gegenwurf).”<sup>360</sup> Love—the antidote to spiritual trial and suffering—figured as a principle derivative of the empathetic suffering induced by contemplation on the passion. In the Baroque passion poetry of the Austrian-Lutheran author, Catharina von Greiffenberg (1633-1694) such meditation turned her “entire body into a wound/full of love and pain”. Her poetry contains what Burckhardt Dohm calls a mystical, “affective

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<sup>355</sup> Wilhem Smets (ed.), *Die hochheiligen, ökumenischen und allgemeinen Concils von Trient Canones und Beschlüsse* (Bielefeld, 1869; rpd Sinzing, 1989), 65.

<sup>356</sup> Trent dictated the “need for intercessory prayers for suffering souls”. Ulrike Strasser, *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>357</sup> Strasser, “Clara Hortulana of Embach or How to Suffer Martyrdom in the Cloister” in *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: An Interdisciplinary Overview*, Cordula van Wyhe (ed.), (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 41.

<sup>358</sup> in Strasser, “Clara Hortulana of Embach” in *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe*, 46. See also Strasser, *State of Virginity*, pp. 119-48, and Nancy E. van Deusen, “Introduction” *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula de Jésus* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

<sup>359</sup> Strasser, “Clara Hortulana of Embach”, 66.

<sup>360</sup> Caspar Schwenckefeld, *Deutsche Passional*, (1575), 23-4.

absorption in the Passion” (“affektiv Eingehen in die Passion”)<sup>361</sup> as the sight of the savior’s pains arouse a supernatural suffering in Greiffenberg: “...how can I see you wounded/without my entire body becoming a wound/for love and pain well up and burst...how can I see you torn/and my most inner, noble place of sensitivity be not penetrated and melted?”<sup>362</sup>

However important this Catholic passion mysticism was for inspiring his intercessory practices, the particular shape that it eventually took is indebted mostly to Gichtel’s immersion in Jacob Boehme’s theosophy. The mature Gichtel described the practice of experiencing Christ’s atoning love for mankind as achieved by “placing the desire, will, and imagination in love” or ‘setting our Imagination in Christ’ through an “unceasing prayer”. The language of ‘Imagination’ and ‘desire in our Will’ employed here to describe the new practice points to the clear influence of Jacob Bohme’s theosophy in Gichtel’s practice of spiritual martyrdom. Also referred to by Gichtel as “absorption”, the prayer involved a silencing of the carnal will and ‘absorbing ourselves in the Will of God’ [Senken uns in den Willen Gottes in uns ein]. The suffering of Christ—the image of divine love—should be the model before us as described in this letter from 1703:

What he took upon himself in our assumed humanity, through his bitter suffering, death, resurrection and ascension is well enough known to you in the holy scriptures; but it must not just be a historic ‘knowledge’, for such ‘knowledge’ is not faith’. Rather, we must put on Christ through our powerful imagination and desire in our Will, and deny ourselves along with all worldliness, and follow Christ in the rebirth. We must place our Imagination within our hearts, and constantly dig into the depths of our soul, until we find the treasure in the field; for the deeper our spiritual mind of the senses pushes into the center of the heart with the powerful imagination, the closer it comes to God, and finds, or feels, the powers of Jesus.<sup>363</sup>

Gichtel’s biography asserts that the key realization of true spiritual sacrifice in the above-described ‘sweet’ experience of wishing to be anathema for his brethren happened at a time when “Boehme had not come into his hands”. Only after reading Boehme and with “lengthy practice and much struggle” did he recognize this experience as being prefigured in Boehme’s theosophic system.<sup>364</sup> Although the exact timing of the initial inspiration to such an intercessory spiritual martyrdom may be uncertain, it is abundantly clear that Gichtel quickly found evidence in Boehme’s texts to substantiate his mystical practice and began to describe his spiritual intercession in heavily theosophic terms.

The theosophic imagery borrowed from Boehme used the language of ‘sacrifice’ in particular to describe the process of spiritual rebirth. Boehme, borrowing from Paracelsian anthropology, had conceptualized rebirth as the growth of the divine seed

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<sup>361</sup> Burckhard Dohm, *Poetische Alchimie: Öffnung zur Sinnlichkeit in der Hohelied- und Bibeldichtung von der Protestantischen Barockmystik bis zum Pietismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 37.

<sup>362</sup> Quoted in Dohm, 38. “...wie kan ich dich verwunden sehen/ daß nicht mein ganzer leib eine wunde werde / vor lieb und schmerzen aufspringe und zerberste ... wie kan ich dich aufritzen sehen / daß mir nicht die innerst-edelste empfindlichkeit-theile durchdrungen und zerschmelzet werden?”

<sup>363</sup> Gichtel to Martin John, 16 Nov. 1703 in *TP* I, 516.

<sup>364</sup> Gichtel, *Lebenslauf*, in *TP* vol. VII, 86.



(*spiraculum vitae*) of Christ within us, for which the soul waged a constant battle against the carnal man, to achieve the *mortificatio carnis*.<sup>365</sup> In Boehme's texts, this struggle is described as offering oneself as a sacrifice in imitation of the Old Testament prefiguration of Christ's martyrdom. He writes in *Von der neuen Wiedergeburt* that a Christian must not give himself to the "carnal man" but must "rather, with our father Abraham, carry the son of our will to Mount Moria, and in obedience sacrifice him to God, always desiring to die to our sins in the death of Christ."<sup>366</sup> By dying to ourselves just like Christ did, we 'put on' his sufferings that for spiritualists such as Boehme constituted a true union of essences and a divinization of the soul. We must be "reborn through his offering...and put on the offering of Christ in his suffering and death, not outwardly like the monk's hypocrisy, but only with spiritual comfort..."<sup>367</sup> The soul "should completely absorb (einwickeln) itself in the life and death of Christ, in his offering."

Elsewhere, Boehme speaks of "entering the Process of Christ", a phrase heavily used by Gichtel, connoting an empathetic and imaginative entering into the salvific action of Christ's sacrifice. Underlying these passages is Boehme's articulation of a theory of sacrifice contingent upon faith. In his text, *Die Menschwerdung Christi*, Boehme describes Abel's animal sacrifice as sufficient because it was based on the true sacrifice of the heart, in faith. The fires consuming his offering were ignited by his "Faith-desire" magically activating the atonement in the blood sacrifice with the sweet smell of the offer rising to God. Now, however, in the new covenant, we sacrifice by devoting our lives through faith, prayer, baptism, and repentance, a sacrifice permitted at any time and anywhere now that the "Alter of God" is in the awakened soul: "And now, where the living knowledge of Christ is, *there* is the altar of God in all places/ where the hungry soul may sacrifice the just, pleasing sacred offering in prayer/there it may insert its prayer of words in hunger into a faith-substance."<sup>368</sup> For the exiled Lutheran pastor and Boehme enthusiast Christian Hoburg (1607-1675), and who likewise lived for a time with Friedrich Breckling in Amsterdam a few years before Gichtel<sup>369</sup>, the practice of 'crucifying the world' in oneself is accompanied by intense interior suffering: "then there is screaming, sobbing, there comes moaning upon moaning/ there arises a pain/pains/ that one does not feel enough pain as one desires/ and should for God".<sup>370</sup> But the climax of this inward crucifixion, with Hoburg, is the infusion of a supernatural love from God's "Love-Fire" which drives away all bitterness. Hoburg powerfully exclaims "Sweet Love of God! Drive away with your delectable taste all the bitterness of my heart, so that all

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<sup>365</sup> Valentin Weigel's (1530-1590) and Jacob Boehme's conception of rebirth borrowed heavily from the alchemical theories of Paracelsus (1481-1548). Paracelsus's dualism of flesh and spirit, locking man into a struggle to crucify the carnal self, heavily influenced. See Thomas Illg, *En anderer Mensch werden: Johann Arndts Verständnis der Imitatio Christi als Anleitung zu einem wahren Christentum*. (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 130-134.

<sup>366</sup> Boehme, "Von der neuen Wiedergeburt", in *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1831), 117.

<sup>367</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum, oder Erklärung über das Erste Buch Moses*, (1640), 168-169.

<sup>369</sup> Little mention of Hoburg or Betke is made by Gichtel but they very likely knew each other as they moved at the same time in Breckling's circle. See Willem Heijting, "Christian Hoburg's 'Lebendige-Herzens Theologie (1661) A Book in the Heart of Seventeenth-Century Spirituality'", in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic* eds Michael Driedger, Gary Waite (Boston: Brill, 2014), 203.

<sup>370</sup> Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica* (1655), 10.

the bitterness still clinging to me is consumed through this, your Fire-Love, and nothing remains in my heart but pure, sweet love for all men, even my worst enemies, from here on until eternity!”<sup>371</sup>

In Gichtel’s later letters describing his intercessions for other souls, he mentions several passages from Boehme as justification. In one instance, Gichtel claimed to have interceded for a deceased friend stuck in a form of purgatory.<sup>372</sup> Initially, Gichtel was unsure as to what could be done for his friend, since “according to Lutheran doctrine, he believed in the impossibility of redeeming such souls as the saying goes, ‘where the tree falls, that’s where it lies’”. But while pondering his problem, he discovered a passage from Boehme’s *40 Fragen* that calmed his mind as to the possibility of interceding for his friend. The passage in question consists of a discussion of the state of deceased souls and their condition, and mentions the possibility that “heartfelt” and “fiery” prayers can have an effect on those souls who are neither in heaven or hell but caught in between in anguish. Boehme writes that for these souls “a fiery, prayer of the heart can aid a man/for a faithful, stirring prayer has the power to burst the gates of the deep”<sup>373</sup>.

Boehme’s description of a “fiery” faith-filled prayer evokes the image of Old Testament burnt sacrifice ritual employed repeatedly by Gichtel and other writers describing the heartfelt prayer of self-sacrifice. As we have seen above, the ‘fire’ animating the soul is the experience of the love of God through contemplation of Christ’s cross and sacrifice. Boehme, in a passage from chapter 15 of his *Aurora* regularly cited by Gichtel, described the reborn as wielding this divine love, rooted in the cross of Christ, as a principle of power by which they can negate the contrasting force of ‘wrath’. Boehme writes in the passage from *Aurora* that, for the reborn, the “cross weighs on them and is heavy” and it is by the strength taken from the encounter with Christ’s cross that they “with their love, meekness, and diligent ignitions [Anzündungen] quench the ‘wrath-fire’ with their prayers.”<sup>374</sup> Boehme continues in the same chapter with a description of the reborn playing a central role in a cosmic struggle between two warring ‘principles’ or elemental forces of the universe: that between ‘wrath’ (an outgrowth of the Father’s judgment) and ‘love’ (associated with the love of Christ for the world): “If there were not at all times and everywhere a few pious men on earth, who quenched the Wrath of God with their opposing principle, then the hell-fires would have long ago ignited.”<sup>375</sup>

Gichtel, increasingly from the 1680s onward, uses such cosmic terms to describe his intercessions for others. In a letter from 1697, he cited the above passage from *Aurora* in describing how the reborn in their worship must “live from the altar”, an act

which now happens spiritually, that we present our lives constantly as an Anathema, in the blood and death of Christ, for all men, friends, and enemies, and must ask for grace for them, so that God’s wrath in them may be quenched and that they may be reconciled with God. As is to read in J.B. [Boehme] in Aur.

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 303.

<sup>372</sup> See Gichtel, *Lebenslauf*, TP vol. VII, 108-10.

<sup>373</sup> Boehme, *Psychologia Vera oder 40 Fragen von der Seele*, cited in *Jakob Boehme’s Sämtliche Werke*, edited by K.W. Schiebler, vol. VI, (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1846), 99.

<sup>374</sup> Boehme, *Aurora, oder Morgenröte im Aufgang*, Chapter 15, (Original from 1612. This edition Berlin: Karl Maria-Gruth, 2016), 189.

<sup>375</sup> Boehme, *Aurora*, “Wenn nicht noch je und allewege etliche fromme Menschen auf Erden wären, die den Zorn Gottes löschet mit ihrem Gegensatze, so hätte sich das höllische Feuer längst angezündet”, 189.

C.15,19,25, for a Priest of God must put on Christ, and follow in his footsteps, and carry the sins of the world, and burn in the love of Christ.”<sup>376</sup>

The burning in the ‘love of Christ’ is something that required intensive, incessant prayer for the Holy Spirit to infuse the soul with this love. It is in the same terms of an infused, burning love quenching an elemental negative force in the soul that he describes the experience of praying for the deceased friend (which lasted seven years) in a letter from 1697: because “Jesus saw my heartfelt love for my brother, he imparted power to me...until finally the soul was torn from the bands of darkness and wrath.”<sup>377</sup> Gichtel told one correspondent that we have to “pray diligently and without ceasing” that “God make our souls a temple...for the holy ghost” in which he “ignites a fiery love within [us] which binds, quenches, and sets aside the Wraith.”<sup>378</sup> The experience of union as the infusion of love into the soul is elaborated by Gichtel (following a standard mystical trope) with the Holy Ghost making the soul a temple with the accompanying Old Testament imagery of a priest (the reborn now mediating in the office of a Christ-like intercessory) offering sacrifices of prayer on an inward altar: “For she [Sophia] makes us royal priests of God/ and her heavenly essence [himmlische-Wesenheit] clothes us in a Power and Tincture-frame [einem Krafft- und Tinctur-Leib]/ such that our souls sacrifice themselves as an anathema and cursed-offering in the blood and death of Jesus for our brethren (see. Aur. C.25.19. Seq.) and we must serve the altar.”<sup>379</sup>

The ‘fiery’ prayer of love, articulated here as the means by which the reborn could successfully intercede for others and overcome the cosmic principle of wrath, points, in fact, to a much wider theology of voluntaristic (will-centered) inward devotion in Boehme’s thought. The affective faculties—understood as the will, love, and the imagination—played key roles in the transformation of the soul otherwise known as ‘spiritual rebirth’. Gichtel, in trying to articulate the specifics of how his intercessory prayers functioned, borrowed heavily from Boehme’s notion of faith as a magical power that could be projected to others through the will, imagination, and love. In Boehme, ‘will’ or ‘desire’ [Begierde] was conceptualized as a ‘magical’ or divine force, the very same force through which God had given birth to himself through an act of self-willed theogony.<sup>380</sup> Becoming is thus an act of will, desire, or lust, directed first at the self but with ripple effects outward. All movement and natural processes of growth and becoming, have at their base this primal desire. In Boehme’s system, even *Glaube* (faith)

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<sup>376</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 30 May, 1697 in *TP* vol I, 265.

<sup>377</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, Amsterdam sub initio Octobr. 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 336.

<sup>378</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 26 July, 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 287.

<sup>379</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 3 Sept. 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 312.

<sup>380</sup> The process of rebirth in fallen man through desire is analogous to the cosmological forces at the root of creation and of nature. It is out of an undifferentiated divine will that God gave birth to himself and the world through a reflexive act. Boehme’s theogony and cosmogony—an important inspiration for Hegel and Schelling—imagines God as the primal creative urge which turns into itself and thereby sets in motion an unfolding of divinity in a dialectical process from which also emerges the world. “Als der inneren Gestalt Begierde hat sich äusserlich gemacht”. The spiritual struggle here is obviously not purely ‘spiritual’ as it is tightly connected for Boehme with an antagonism existing in natural forces expressed in tensions within the soul. This original divine desiring for being gives birth to the first ‘principle’ of darkness (the ‘father’ in the trinity), which it needed to further develop and recognize itself, and then this darkness brings forth its opposite, the light (the ‘son’). See John Yost Stoudt, *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Thought* (New York: Seabury Press, 1957), 197-200.

is understood within this model as a ‘magical’ force able to transform the self, and influence the world, as Boehme and Gichtel both cite from Matthew 19:26 that ‘all things are possible to him that believeth.’<sup>381</sup> Faith, as ‘magic’ (‘Glaubens-Magie’) is thus a “sacred generation of something out of the nothingness of the will.”<sup>382</sup> Faith permits us to “ignite the Fire of the Soul” with the divine will which dwells in the heart (the love of Christ).

The effort to awaken, purify, and direct the will through the fire of love is at the center of the practice of theosophic prayer in Boehme as taken over by Gichtel and his circle. Gichtel’s prayer-form emphasizes the power of the will and desire which, when preceded by self-abnegation and sanctification can be transformed into a magical act with power to transform the soul and influence the world. He wrote that “the unceasing prayer with the right earnestness can do great damage to the enemy, especially when it happens ‘with united powers’ [conjunctis Viribus] and in the Will, namely, Love, as we have planted [eingentet] you in Jesus through the magical Faith.”<sup>383</sup> In Gichtel’s only published treatise on his theosophic system, his *Kurze Eroffnung und Anweisung* from 1697, he speaks of the “correct form of prayer” as an “absorption of the will in God” through the power of a “Faith-Desire”. Gichtel explained this prayer as a magical act by which the Will ‘seizes’ [fasset] its object, that which “the will wants and asks to have through Magic and Desire”<sup>384</sup> This ‘absorption’ [ersinkung] or ‘gathering’ [‘sammlen’, or ‘einkehren’] of the senses to God, is achieved by ‘unceasing’, and ‘earnest’ prayer, which transforms the human will or desire into the divine will. He writes that one must “*unceasingly* gather [einkehret] the senses into God and pray earnestly, and not cease until he is *essentially* [essentialiter] heard, that is, until one’s Desire is reborn in God with very severe pains, which is a mystery, understood by few.”<sup>385</sup> Gichtel, in the same letter, reveals that this practice of “sinking of the senses in God” and “earnest prayer” with ‘Begierde’ and “empfindlichen Schmerzen” is something he learned from reading Boehme:

...all of our prayers must be given birth to in this manner, which now no man can teach another, but rather the holy ghost itself must teach us how to pray. Jacob Böhm did, however, exhaustively indicate in his writings the art and manner how this occurs through *earnest Desire*, and through the seven forms is given birth, but which, however, is not understandable without one’s own practice; we must therefore call fiery upon the spirit of prayer, and *out of ourselves give birth*, as Böhm in *Menschwerdung* Part 2 Chapter 10.11 testifies.<sup>386</sup> [my italics]

The section of Boehme to which Gichtel here refers is found in Böhme’s *Die Menschwerdung Christi* (The Incarnation of Christ) and the tenth chapter cited is where Bohme describes how man inversely imitates Christ’s incarnation by giving birth to the

<sup>381</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, Amsterdam sub initio Octobr. 1697, in *TP* vol. I, 336.

<sup>382</sup> Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), 151.

<sup>383</sup> Gichtel to Anonymous, 29 July, 1703 in *TP* vol. I, 490.

<sup>384</sup> Gichte to Anonymous, 1683 in *TP* vol I, 122.

<sup>385</sup> Gichtel to Anonymous, Amsterdam, 24. April, 1703 in *TP*, vol I. 477.

<sup>386</sup> Gichtel *ibid*, 478-9.

“spirit of God” through his own will. By the “will of Man” man “himself become[s] God in the Will-Spirit” for God manifests himself through “Desire” [Begierde].<sup>387</sup>

In order to better understand the precise mechanism and prayer praxis by which the human will transforms itself into a divine will through a magical act of ‘faith-desire’, we have to turn to the significance of another concept of Boehme and Gichtel’s theosophy, that of the faculty of the imagination. The imagination plays a central function in our discussion of the means by which the Angelic Brethren imagined their prayers as interceding for others. Boehme identifies the faculty of imagination as the part of the psyche in which this ‘faith-magic’ and ‘desire’ are exercised, concentrated, and are allowed to perform their function in purifying themselves or influencing the external world. In Boehme’s system, the imagination is the concrete part of the human psyche in which the battle between the divine will and the fleshy, earthly will takes place. Adam’s fall came about because of the unbridled desire for earthly things in his imagination (*phantasia*) and spiritual birth is brought about by a process of concentrating and directing the power of desire to divine things through the imagination (*imaginatio*). The *vis imaginativa* had been termed by scholastics as one of the ‘inward’ faculties of the soul connecting the senses to the intellect, and played a central function in explaining the power of external images on the soul in worship and meditation.<sup>388</sup> Early modern thinkers and especially mystics like Paracelsus thought of it as a form of psychic magnetism, allowing one to penetrate the world of correspondences, to communicate, as it were, between substances and souls.<sup>389</sup> By ‘pulling’ external images into the soul, the outer world, through imagination, could influence the soul, as by the strange phenomenon of vicarious sympathy described by Montaigne in his “Of the Power of Imagination”.<sup>390</sup> Or we could influence the outer world by ‘impressing’ (in Boehme’s terms) our image onto objects and persons.<sup>391</sup> Imagination thus bestows form on the outer world or form on us. By concentrating the imagination—i.e. turning away from perverted desires and the corrupt will—we can hereby ‘impress’ God’s image onto ours.<sup>392</sup>

From comments on his own prayer practice, it is clear that Gichtel understood the imagination as the means to concentrate the power of the soul, i.e. the will and desire, on love, with such concentration transforming the principle of Wrath into love. He wrote on February 9, 1697, that “I have remained in the same exercises, and know the spirit’s

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<sup>387</sup> Bohme states in *Von der Menschwerdung Chritsi* that “Ja auß deß Menschen Willen muß Gottes Geist geboren werden/ er muß selber Gott werden im Willen-Geiste/ oder er erlanget nicht Göttliche Wesenheit/ als die Weißheit.” God is the “mittel” and “offenbaret er sich in der Menschheit/als im Gemüthe / Sinnen und Begehren” in *Theosophia Revelata d. i. alle göttliche Schriften des gottseligen und hoch erleuchteten deutschen Theosophen Jacob Boehmens*, Band II, 182.

<sup>388</sup> This is following Teresa of Avila’s description in Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*. Translated by Rev. John Dalton (London: T. Jones, 1852), 150.

<sup>389</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*. Translated by Christine Rhone (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>390</sup> Montaigne, “Of the Power of the Imagination” *Michel de Montaigne: Essays*. Translated by J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1958), 38-39. Montaigne speaks about the power of imagination as allowing us to feel, in reality, the pains of others within us. “It is said that by it bodies are sometimes lifted from their places.”

<sup>391</sup> See Andrew Weeks, *Jacob Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (SUNY Press: New York, 1991).

<sup>392</sup> The German word for imagination is “einbilden”, connoting an outward to inward movement and physical impressing.

condition. I have held on to love, however, and placed my imagination, will, and desire in love. As long as I now can hold it firmly in the imagination, so long will the wrath not be able to break through to the soul; if, however, the imagination through external occurrences or thoughts from the astral soul should be otherwise weakened, then the wrath triumphs.”<sup>393</sup> Again, He wrote on May 24, 1698 of the role that the imagination plays in ‘introducing’ the love into the wrath” in order to transmute it: “He that wants to drive a poison or disease out of his body, must use a counterpoison, or medicine. Thus he that wants to overcome the wrath in flesh and blood, must by imagination and desire, introduce the love into the wrath.”<sup>394</sup> This ‘love’ he further specifies, “is God’s fire, which alone can dampen [tingiren] the wrath and transform it into love...herein is the divine magic by which we can in no other way than with our imagination and desire reach the Center wherein the Holy Trinity dwells.”<sup>395</sup>

Gichtel makes it explicit that it was by a “magical” process in which the imagination “carried” the “powers” of the suffering intercessor into other souls, so that they can benefit themselves from this intercession. Gichtel explains this process in a letter from 1697:

...and we must always lay down our lives in prayer for all men, especially for believing companions and fellow workers, and for those who give to us wood for burning, that is love, and their carnality [Irdisches]; and this is our constant work with God. And because it exacts strength, God also gives it [strength] to us. For we constantly by magic insert our powers in prayer through imagination into other souls, so that in them they also feel [empfinden] the same, and from the same powers grow in divine knowledge.<sup>396</sup>

This quote and the foregoing citations of Boehme make clear how Gichtel fused the longer tradition of spiritual martyrdom with the theosophic language of faith as a ‘magic’ power that the will could direct by the imagination to quench the principle of ‘wrath’ in others and the universe, concepts taken from Boehme. The resulting practice represents a fascinating example of cross-confessional devotion and numerous early modern mystical currents in a fashion that defies our assumptions of Lutheran norms.

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### ***Contemplative Protestants, Intercession, and ‘Useful’ Spiritual Labor***

It goes without saying that the appearance of numerous, secretive cells of Protestants practicing celibacy, voluntary poverty, and mystical intercessions would encounter stiff resistance from Lutheran and Calvinist religious authorities. And they did.<sup>397</sup> But, it is the argument of this section that an important function of the Angelic Brethren’s intercessions—or the way they were fashioned to fellow Protestants—was

<sup>393</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 9. Febr. 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 253-4.

<sup>394</sup> Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children*, 160.

<sup>395</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 9 Febr. 1697 in *TP* vol I, 255.

<sup>396</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, Sept. 3, 1697 in *TP*, vol. I, 315-6.

<sup>397</sup> In numerous instances, Angelic Brethren cells were broken up and members arrested and interrogated. See Kindervater, *Die neue Engels-Brüderschaft* (1719) in which the Lutheran pastor recounts the break-up of a cell in Nordhausen.

meant to counter a powerful Protestant bias against the withdrawn, solitary life as idle and parasitic on society. Luther, for example, had written in the apology for the Augsburg Confession that “many become monks on account of their bellies, so that they can be idle and have sumptuous kitchens, and so they become beggars in rich rich cloisters.”<sup>398</sup> In their own day, Gichtel’s group was subjected to the same criticisms. Joachim Lange, who took issue with the intercessory practices of the Angelic Brethren, also wrote of the ‘weakness’ of those who retire from society, failing to do their active part in building up their fellow Christians: “The danger of withdrawing into the wilderness/to escape/ was a symbol not of strength, but of a weakness of the spirit. Others who remained among mankind and confidently confessed Christ with their mouth and with their lives, proved themselves much stronger.”<sup>399</sup>

In the context of these Protestant polemics against the idle, parasitical nature of the contemplative lives of monastics, a pressing concern for our Protestant hermits was rebutting such accusations against their withdrawn existences by their co-religionists. Gichtel’s letters are filled with bristling references to those who accuse him and his fellow hermits of being “idlers” (Müßiggänger) and of living off the generosity of others. “The world chastises us as idlers”<sup>400</sup> Gichtel wrote in one letter from 1695, and in another, speaking of their hidden prayers, that “reason does not understand, but rather judges it as living idle, wanting to use up the riches, sweat, and blood of others in idleness, and to lead a lusty life of pleasure.”<sup>401</sup> The same sensitivity is abundantly present in our other ascetic groups, particularly in Marsay’s writings on interior passivity. A major theme of Marsay’s writing—repeating other quietist writers before him like Guyon, Fénelon, and Francis de Sale—is his rebuttal of the ubiquitous early modern fear that interiorized prayer leads to idleness and demonic possession. Marsay’s response to this was to assert that these prayers are in fact “useful”, and “fecund”. “...God by no means leaves these souls who he has taken in his care, in idleness or laziness. O certainly not! He rather prepares and awakens them almost without ceasing by temptations, and trials of all sorts which he sends to them by his providence.”<sup>402</sup>

Gichtel, in response to these (partially true) accusations that he and his band of hermits simply lived off the wealth of others while contributing very little back to society, frequently reached for the metaphor of the sentry, or city watchman, who, though outwardly idle, nevertheless received pay for his invaluable service in protecting the encampment or city. “Observe the lonely sentry in a field!” Gichtel wrote, “he goes around idly, but yet he receives his pay, just like those who have to work and dig in the camp. So is it with the warriors and followers of Christ; reason judges them to be idlers, and wants to coerce them to follow its own way, and brings a lot of rational arguments to bear, such as ‘you must earn your bread by the sweat of your brow’, or ‘six days you shall labor’...But such reason knows nothing of faith and the struggle for faith; it does not know the enemy, who wants to lead the world astray...”<sup>403</sup> That this unique, seemingly ‘idle’ labor of the sentry, watching over the otherwise preoccupied soldiers or

<sup>398</sup> Luther, Apologie der Augsburger Confession, Abschnitt 6. No. 1030. Pg. 1337.

<sup>399</sup> Lange, *Christliche Prüfung des Geistes*, 152.

<sup>400</sup> Gichtel to anonymous Feb. 25, 1697 in *TP* vol. II, 1078 and Gichtel to J.S, 14 March, 1698, *TP* vol. II, 988.

<sup>401</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 3 Sept. 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 316.

<sup>402</sup> Marsay to Monsieur Frey, 28 March, 1729 in *TP* 1246 A 6/4 Folio 5.

<sup>403</sup> Gichtel to Anonymous, 26 Oct. 1700 in *TP*, vol. I 380.

citizens, refers to Gichtel's intercessory prayers is made clear when Gichtel immediately follows these accusations of their troupe being "idlers" with defending their special labor as "working in God's vineyard, *servicing the altar, and offering his life for his brethren.*" [my italics]<sup>404</sup> And both Gichtel and Marsay insisted that their inward prayer was "hard work" ("schwere Arbeit").<sup>405</sup>

These inward prayers of the reborn, directed as they were by the spirit against demons and base cosmic elements, were truly "fecund", (in Marsay's terms), fruitful acts of charity for mankind. In one passage from Gichtel's letters in which he compares his intercessory prayers to "spiritual almsgiving" and serving one's fellowman, Gichtel adopts for his own practice the language that Luther uses to redefine intercessory prayer and sacrifice as a practical service that all Christians can perform. Reworking a Matthew 25 passage on serving one's fellow man, Gichtel explains that this "service" of providing "spiritual gifts" consists not only in praying for temporal blessings, but for their salvation as well as holding back with their prayers the "wrath" of God which is ready to "destroy entire countries":

Now, just as a natural man gives temporal gifts, and outwardly serves the humble Christ with Martha: in this way does the spiritual Christian give spiritual gifts. Firstly, he serves his neighbor with his prayers by not only asking God for temporal blessings, but rather, also that, if necessary, should be taken up into the heavenly abode. Second, he often holds back God with his prayer, so that his wrath is not kindled, and destroys entire lands, of which the holy scriptures are full of witnesses; and he does hereby in sum, much more good spiritually, as a rich man does temporally.<sup>406</sup>

Here Gichtel, in one go, imagines his prayers as both able to intercede on an individual level with the specific burdens, troubles, and sins of fellow Christians—as the numerous cases of vicarious suffering described earlier—but also as intervening on a much grander scale in a cosmic struggle with God, the "dragon", and the forces aligned against mankind. It is on this level that Gichtel and Marsay think of their prayers as supplying or transferring grace from the microcosm of their inward struggle against the wrath in themselves, to other, inferior Christians at large. Indeed, their language of the reborn Christian's soul being the "stage" or screen on which the struggle of others is played out evokes the idea of the microcosm/macrocasm. Speaking of the "true Christ" and his struggle, Gichtel writes that "He is the stage [schauspiel<sup>407</sup>] of angels and man; he stands

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<sup>404</sup> Gichtel in *TP*, vol. II, 1079. This defense of hermits goes back a long way of course. Carlo Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy, 1000-1700* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), 23. Cipolla argues that hermits 'had every right to be included in the category of producers' because they interceded with God and people paid for this."

<sup>405</sup> Gichtel to Anonymus, 12 Aug. 1695 in *TP*, vol. II, 1295.

<sup>406</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 26 July, 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 285.

<sup>407</sup> The term "Schauspiel" [play] was apparently not an uncommon means of describing Christ's passion drama in early modern devotional texts. The Jesuit Philipp Kisel (1609-1681), called his Passion sermons a "Schau-Spiel". See Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 44.



in the press [vor der Presse<sup>408</sup>] of his brethren, confesses their sins before God, and desires to be an anathema for them, and truly lays down his life for them, and works without ceasing in prayer and supplication in God's vineyard, that he might win many, and gain souls for God.<sup>409</sup>

Marsay's fashioning of the broader utility of the withdrawn soul's spiritual martyrdom follows Gichtel's ideas very closely, but without the theosophic framework. Although interested in topics like spiritual "magic"<sup>410</sup>, Marsay devotes less effort in explaining the exact nature of how spiritual communication functions, rather emphasizing the way in which more spiritual creatures become "fecund" through contemplation and can function as conduits to receive and pass on divine communication to other souls (which likewise could consist of vicarious suffering). Marsay's writings, like those of Gichtel and Beissel, are full of praise for the spiritually nourishing, germinating effects that the contemplative life has on the rest of Christianity. The point here is not to address again these groups' praise and articulation of the contemplative life as we have done in chapter one, but rather to focus specifically on the outward, communal benefit and blessing all of Christianity through intercession that a spiritual elite provides. In Marsay's commentary on the Old Testament patriarchs, in his *Témoignage* series *Les Saintes Patriarches*, from 1740, he depicts the patriarchs as prime examples of the contemplative life as well as the benefits this had for the entirety of God's kingdom. Singling out the patriarch Enoch for special attention, Marsay wrote that Enoch "walked and lived with God much more intimately...withdrawn, in abstinence from all carnal pleasures, in prayer and contemplation..."<sup>411</sup> God desires, by these means, Marsay tells us, to "prepare souls, who burn with his flames, and who become fecund in the holy union of his contemplation". Marsay emphasizes repeatedly how contemplation makes one far from 'useless' but rather 'fertile', and 'fecund' preparing them to do "excellent works":

This is what the spiritual children do, which our patriarch produced and gave birth to in divine union, in solitude, in which he appeared useless, separated as he was from their conversation, given to contemplation. He was nevertheless more useful, more fecund by this prayer, than all the others in their action, he was continuously in the presence of God [exposé devant Dieu], who like the sun,

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<sup>408</sup> This phrase comes up regularly in Gichtel's writing to signify the interceding, mediating role that Melchizedek priests play for other souls. It evokes the crushing, pressurizing action of a "press", squeezing a soul. It is at this point unclear from where Gichtel takes the term.

<sup>409</sup> Gichtel to J.S., 14 Mart. 1698 in *TP*, Vol II., 995.

<sup>410</sup> An article in *Geistliche Fama*, most likely authored by Marsay, talks in theosophic terms about "magia" noting its power in the hands of more spiritual souls to spiritually influence others. "Die Magie ist gleichsam die Hände, Füße und Flügel der Seele, womit sie auf eine höchst-subtile astralische Weise mit groser Krafft und Nachdruck wircket, und mächtige ja ganz erstaunliche Dinge zu thun vermag. Diese Magie bey reinen und heiligen Geistern ist eine ganz vortreffliche Eigenschafft...Die Magie ist in dem Willen und Imagination der Seele: und da die Seele aus der Quint-Essentz der Sternen geschaffen, diese aber auf die Materie der elementarischen Erde einen großen Einfluß haben; so konte der Mensch und alle seelische Geister nicht nur auf alle astralische-sondern auch auf alle elementarische Creaturen mit groser Krafft wirken, und die in der Subordination unter ihm stehende nach seinem Willen zwingen, beherrschen und regiren. Mit der Magie in Liebe konte er solche an sich ziehen, versammeln, und in Liebe gleichsam bezaubern, daß sie ihm auf eine slavische Weise unterworfen seyn nutzten." *Geistliche Fama* no. 27 (1741) (Cited in Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 14), 719.

<sup>411</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d'un Enfant, Les Saintes Patriarches*, 34.

penetrated him, and made him fecund, causing his unction to flow to mankind by him, to make angels; his God, his savior was his spouse, and wisdom his mistress; it was in their holy union that he was fertile, however tranquil, or active, however in great stillness; he did the most excellent works without anything seeming to occupy him apart from contemplation.<sup>412</sup>

The utility of such ‘fecundity’ is revealed in how such receptivity to grace can then be transferred along to other Christians. Further, his articulation of the way that the holy christian devoted to prayer influences “inferior” christians and directs divine grace to them, very clearly frames the relationship between reborn, hidden souls and the wider Christian body in hierarchical terms. In 1736, Marsay wrote in an article for the radical Pietist journal *Geistliche Fama*, that the ‘spiritual martyrdom’ of contemplative, withdrawn souls could help direct “the fire of divine love” in which they stand to “those of an inferior status.”<sup>413</sup> Stated even more clearly in his 1738 treatise *Nouveaux discours spirituels*, Marsay makes the case that contemplative souls should not consider themselves “idle and useless” to the church because of how they serve as conduits for the “fire of divine love”:

Contemplative souls, who are called by God to remain before him day and night in a respectful adoration, must not imagine themselves to be idle or useless to the church. No! It is they who receive the virtue and the fire of divine love, that God pours in silence into their souls, and causes thereafter to stream to all those who are open in all the world to receive it, that is to say, those in an inferior hierarchy. This most pure love of God is communicated in this fashion to such souls in this order, so that according to their diverse vocations and work, they can communicate it to them by the senses to those who are not yet ready for these more spiritual communications. It is in this manner that these souls help each other mutually, being driven to it by the spirit of God so that the body of Jesus Christ may be edified.<sup>414</sup>

These Protestant contemplatives thus carefully stylized their prayers and contemplative lives as a special type of spiritual ‘labor’, of significant usefulness to Christendom. The lack of understanding for the withdrawn life colored and encouraged these group’s embrace of the ancient and catholic trope of spiritual martyrdom and intercessory prayer as those aspects of the ascetic life which reached beyond the individual’s salvation to benefit society as a whole. Treating spiritual efforts such as prayer as labor was by no means new, but it took on special significance for Protestants as a means to recuperate and justify solitary withdrawal from society as a meaningful vocation.

Likewise novel was the manner in which this intercessory and contemplative labor was understood in virtue of one’s “reborn” condition, as opposed to a more institutional class such as a sacerdotal clerical and monastic estate. This is not to say that our Protestant reborn elites did not indulge in sacerdotal imagery to understand their special powers in warding off God’s wrath. On the contrary, this special spiritual labor had to be performed by a spiritual elite, the “Melchizedek Priesthood”, for whose special function

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<sup>412</sup> *ibid*, 36-7.

<sup>413</sup> Marsay, *Geistliche Fama* (1736).

<sup>414</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux discours spirituels*, (Berleburg, 1738), 53-54.

Gichtel employed a whole range of temple and sacerdotal imagery such as the altar, the holy of holies, the urim and thummim, etc. His use of such priestly imagery underlines the exclusivist, and superior nature of these modern contemplative, reborn Christians and further elucidates how he understood mystical contemplation as complementing Christianity.

What was the nature of this spiritual elite? What effects and utility did their principal office—their prayers and inward suffering—offer Christendom? The idea of an elite ‘Melchizedek’ priesthood of the reborn with special spiritual powers was a particularly esoteric (and theosophic) outgrowth amidst the larger phenomenon of Protestant renewal efforts after the Thirty Years War. In some authors, the term was used in conjunction with efforts to ‘spiritualize’ the laity within the Protestant tradition that considered all Christians members of the priesthood.<sup>415</sup> Although Marsay does not speak of it in such terms, the term widely used by Gichtel and other radical Protestants c. 1700. Gichtel’s letters speaking of the “mystery of the office of the Melchizedek Priest”<sup>416</sup> are repeatedly accompanied by references to “anointing”, the Old Testament temple and altar, sacrifice, and the holy of holies. In one passage, Gichtel writes of the “great secret” that “reborn Christians” are “anointed royal Priests, whose office it is, to pray for the people, hear their sins, and reconcile with God.” He continues that this “service is spiritual, and he must sacrifice his body” through, among other things, celibacy. Such sacrifice was prefigured in the Old Testament when David visited the Prophet Ahimelech and was asked if he had refrained from women as well as the priests who had to remain chaste to enter the “holy of holies”.<sup>417</sup>

Such an exclusivist ‘high’ priesthood order of Melchizedek consisting of a reborn elect arose in a number of radical groups with close links to Gichtel. The attributes associated with these reborn souls not only shows the persistence of a sacerdotal, and hierarchical idea of spiritual elites in Protestantism, but also demonstrates the new type of spiritual community which connected, bound, and sustained separatist, contemplative Protestants. Primary among these groups were the millenarians Johann and Eleonora Petersen, the Philadelphian Society in London, and Hochmann von Hochenau in Germany, all of whom used sacerdotal imagery as symbols to describe the advent of a new ‘age of the spirit’ to replace the formalistic Christianity signified by the ritualistic Old Testament Levitical priesthood.<sup>418</sup> Samuel Richter, an early eighteenth-century

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<sup>415</sup> *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, edited by Deryck W. Lovegrove (Taylor & Francis: New York, 2004).

<sup>416</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 26 July, 1697 in *TP* vol. I, 278.

<sup>417</sup> Gichtel to Theodor Schermer, 4 Sept. 1696 in *TP* vol. II, 640. Gichtel at one point tries to spell out the difference between a normal priest who just forgives sins and a Melchizedek priest who struggles in his soul to overcome the evil principle and plead for his brethren. See Gichtel to Anonymous, 21 Oct. 1698 in *TP*, vol. IV, 2955. See Bernard Gorceix, *Johann Georg Gichtel: Théosophe D’amsterdam* (Paris: Delphica, 1975).

<sup>418</sup> See Ruth Albrecht, *Johanna Eleonora Petersen : theologische Schriftstellerin des frühen Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 171. She discusses the orthodox theologian Feustking’s objections to Gottfried Arnold’s idea of a spiritual priesthood and the pietist in general that would allow the laity to perform outward actions generally reserved for clergy like sermons, baptism, the eucharist, etc. Apparently he concentrates in his sermons on the idea of “spiritual sacrifice”—this serves the inward edification. This is found in J.H. Feustking, *Miscellan-Predigten 2*, (1726), 11: “Christi sind wir theillhaftig, indem GOtt und Menschen, geistlich vereiniget, beysammen stehen, und als Könige herrschen

radical Pietist and codifier of Rosicrucian rules exemplified that community's adoption of theosophic ideas when he spoke of a "true brotherhood" whose members "served the unseen God in the hidden temple, before the altar of Jesus Christ, in spirit and truth as a spiritual melchizedek Priest, who stands in the press for his brethren, and must wrestle with the wrath in the love of Jesus Christ."<sup>419</sup> The new 'reborn' Christians would receive spiritual powers as God poured out his spirit on the elect. A prominent member of Leade's circle, Francis Lee, wrote that the Melchizedek priesthood was a property of those who have been "begotten" through mystical rebirth in and by which God "represents" himself in the awakened Christian. The Melchizedek priests are those within whom God "doth represent himself really and vitally and beget in them his express similitude". Jane Leade, a frequent correspondent of Gichtel's, further described the power of the 'Melchizedek' priest as a capacity to a deeper perception of mysteries and spiritual reality through visionary prophecies: "Thus these priests will have a deep inward search, and a divine sight into the *secret things* of the Deity. They will be able to prophesy in a clear ground, not darkly and enigmatically. For they *will know* what is couched in the *first originality of all beings, and in the eternal archetype of nature*, and so will be capacitated to bring them forth, according to the divine council and ordination."<sup>420</sup>

Part of these souls' special capacity was, as we've seen, the empathetic, vicarious sharing of the spiritual conditions of other souls. As mentioned in the introduction, spiritualists like Antoinette de Bourignon began to imagine in more concrete terms how the invisible church of reborn souls could communicate with each other across space and time.<sup>421</sup> The significant point here is the understanding of this vicarious practice as a type of spiritual communication and *community* to which one attained by deeper and deeper rebirth. As Arthur Versluis, a scholar of Boehme, explains, in discussing the English theosophers' practice of spiritually sharing burdens based on Boehme's theosophic principles: "Furthermore, all real communication, according to Böhme, must take place from an inward union, a meeting of inward "signatures." True communication, therefore, is a union of two beings. For true communication to take place, one spirit must "imprint its own similitude" in another, must participate in the other. This means that in reality communication takes place on an invisible level; and thus we can see why, later in the same century in England, theosopher Thomas Bromley could write that a theosophic circle shares in one another's spiritual joys and sorrows, even at a great distance from one another. For the theosophers all participate in the same paradisaical 'signature.'<sup>422</sup>

Gichtel often spoke of the Angelic Brethren network in just such terms of a reborn, spiritual community, and held up the ability to communicate, support, and sustain each other as one of its most important features. In a letter from 12 November 1697, he proclaimed that "our community is not only an outward coming together [*Beyekunst*],

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über Sünde, Tod und Teufel und Hölle, aber als Priester ihr Opfer für GOtt verrichten, daher sie geistliche Könige und Priester, ja gar ein Königliches Priesterthum heissen. Apoc. I.6 I Petr. I.9" (171)

<sup>419</sup> Sincerus Renatus [Samuel Richter], *Goldene Quelle der Natur und Kunst* (Breslau, 1714), preface V.

<sup>420</sup> Jane Leade, *Sixty Propositions* (London: J. Bradford, 1697), 52.

<sup>421</sup> "She herself claimed often to have seen the condition of souls corporally distant from her. The invisible church is thus for her no theoretical concept but a vital spiritual presence." In Joyce Irwin, "Anna Maria van Schurman and Antoinette Bourignon: Contrasting Examples of Seventeenth-Century Pietism." *Church History* Vol. 60, No. 3 (Sept 1991), 311, pp. 301-315.

<sup>422</sup> Versluis, *Wisdom's Children*, 15.

talking, from the Bible, but rather a marital union and bodily connection with our head, Christ, to whom we in one spirit speak with God, and humbly petition, that which is necessary for salvation for us and all mankind. And we perceive each other in prayer, feeling the need of each other, helping each other to wrestle in the spirit of the soul through unceasing prayer, and to give birth to the will of God, after the promise of Christ: ‘where two are united praying for something, it shall be given them.’ “Prayer” he continues “provides powers to others”.<sup>423</sup> In another, undated letter, he wrote that he and his brethren “stand bound together in love in Christ and struggle for each others as parts of a single body [gliederlich]” something permitted by his claim in the following sentence that “to me, through God’s revelation, the entire condition of all the brethren is sufficiently known...”<sup>424</sup>

Gichtel’s vision of community here is one where those souls who have penetrated to the ground or “Urgrund” of the soul, to God’s soul itself, can feel, perceive, and communicate spiritually with each other across time and space. In our other circles, this same understanding is clearly present in Marsay’s writings and accounts of vicarious empathy and suffering. As we’ve seen it is by “spiritual communication” that “Les âmes dans la Contemplation communiquent leur influence aux Personnet, qui sont dans un degré inférieur.”<sup>425</sup> Examples of such communication abound such as when Marsay wrote to a friend, Gottfried Koch on 22 September 1736 saying that God “placed him [Fleischbein] in a child-like subjection (or dependence) to me and my wife, and to unite us in spirit to such a degree that we have inwardly felt and help carried his condition and temptations...especially my wife has hereby in a miracouls manner felt and carried his condition.”<sup>426</sup> The idea comes up as well in a friend and correspondent of Marsay, the quietist hermit Gerhard Tersteegen. Tersteegen made the similar claim that souls are connected in the „seelen Grund“.<sup>427</sup>

In these many examples of spiritual communication and intercession, the direction of communication is clearly hierarchical. Reborn souls who have suffered with Christ and reached a state of union with him obtain the ability to communicate spiritually with other reborn souls or to assist their inferior brethren and sisters. The widespread, matching nature of these practices—often in conjunction with defenses of their contemplative existences as ‘useful’—offers us a view of a radical class of Protestants employing old and new traditions from mystical and monastic sources to articulate a vision of Protestant community at whose center stood a class of consecrated, ‘reborn’ contemplative souls.

## Conclusion

In his *To the Christian Nobility* from 1520, Luther wrote “to call popes, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, the religious class, but princes, lords, artizans, and farm-workers the secular class, is a specious device invented by certain time-servers; but no one ought to be frightened by it, and for good reason. For all Christians whatsoever really and truly belong to the religious class, and there is no difference among them except in so far as

<sup>423</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 12. Nov. 1697 in *TP*, vol. I, 345.

<sup>424</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. I, 158.

<sup>425</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours Spirituels*, 52.

<sup>426</sup> Marsay, Letter to Koch on 22 September 1736, *TP* 1246/2/9, 127-128.

<sup>427</sup> See Hansgünter Ludewig, *Gottes Gegenwart erleben: Das Herzensgebet einüben mit Gerhard Tersteegen*, (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 2005), 15.

they do different work.”<sup>428</sup> To many modern observers, Luther’s abolishment of monasticism created, in one fell swoop, an entirely new foundation for religion, one whose emphasis on faith and grace, not merit, pointed to a democratizing and individualistic modernity. Further, Luther reworked the theological foundations of the mass, priesthood, and the Christian community to conform to his new theology of non-meritous grace based on one’s faith. Luther’s new ecclesiology, although emphasizing individual prayer as a means of inward, moral sacrifice for the community, had a decidedly individualistic, metaphorizing bent in a break with the cult of saints and priestly mediation of Catholicism. As the historian William Cavanaugh remarks on Luther’s new notion of sacrifice, “...the benefits of the same sacrifice of Calvary cannot be passed on, for Luther is quite clear that the sacrifice cannot be communicated from one individual to another: individual believers can only receive the benefits of the sacrifice for themselves, in proportion to their faith.”<sup>429</sup> This new, individualistic, interiorized formulation of sacrifice, mediation, and community has been heralded as having broad ramifications for modern European culture and thought, promoting the processes of disenchantment and secularization. As Carlos Eire quips, the Reformation’s theology of immanence “was a significant first step toward the elevation of this world as the ultimate reality and towards the extinction of the soul.”<sup>430</sup>

The contents of this chapter should force us to revise such conclusions about the nature and consequences of Reformation practice and theology. Some may object that the examples here of monastic radical Protestants practicing intercessory prayer represent a marginal, inconsequential phenomenon—a few eccentrics absorbed in esoteric mystical pursuits. Such a conclusion would be hasty and contradictory. Scholars have long pointed to precisely the spiritualist wing of the Reformation as the clearest expression of the modernizing, secularizing tendencies of Reformation theology (i.e. Weber, Taylor). It is from their radical call for a purely ‘spiritual’ worship that so many historians and sociologists have seen their departure from material forms of worship. To suddenly discount this wing as marginal to historical processes only when it does not match the argument would be contradictory. Secondly, studies of ‘interiorized’ Protestant worship have often lacked an analysis that takes into account what concrete *practices* constituted such interiorized worship. One can misjudge the nature of early modern interiority if one only focuses on the rhetoric of interiority and fails to see the ascetic lives, outward rituals and prayers upon which this interiority was based. Far from meaning a renunciation of all corporeal worship, the early modern polemical use of ‘interiority’ was more squarely focused on a confessional church that connected its state-enforced doctrines, rituals, and liturgy to salvation. True interior worship, as seen here, encompasses much of what we thought Luther did away with, keeping his emphasis on individual belief, but also holding onto ascetic, monastic theologies.

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<sup>428</sup> Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, 21.

<sup>429</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, “Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (Fall, 2001), 597-8.

<sup>430</sup> Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 210), 153.

## Chapter Three

### “Cette passiveté agissante”: French Quietism and the Practice of Passivity in the Schloss Hayn Society, 1733-1745

*Wie die zarten Blumen willig sich entfalten  
und der Sonne stille halten,  
laß mich so  
still und froh  
deine Strahlen fassen  
und dich wirken lassen.*<sup>431</sup>

#### *Introduction*

Sometime early in the year 1736, the author and spiritual *grenzgänger* Johann Christian Edelmann (1698-1767) took a short journey from his new home, the small town of Berleburg, to a secluded manor known as Schloss Hayn twenty miles away over the heavily forested Hessian hills east of Cologne. The trip, as described in Edelmann's 1752 *Selbstbiographie*<sup>432</sup>, had been instigated by Edelmann's employer, the radical Pietist Johann Haug (1680-1753), for whom he worked as an editor and translator on the famous heterodox Berleburg Bible translation. Haug insisted that Edelmann take the trip in order to witness a strange mystical sect led by a local oddity by the name of Charles Hector Marquis de Marsay (1688-1753), a French émigré who had lived a withdrawn life in the hill country around Berleburg for the previous twenty years. The Hayn residence had recently become the home for Marsay and his small circle of enthusiastic followers when the young lord of the manor, Johann von Fleischbein, had invited Marsay to live with him in 1734 as his spiritual guide. In Edelmann's later accounting of his trip, the manor's new inhabitants appeared to him a “completely different type of saints” who had “submitted themselves...quite blindly” to Marsay, adopting his pessimistic view of human nature and withdrawn lifestyle.<sup>433</sup> Underlining the circle's fanaticism, Edelmann's account described in detail the household's unique spiritual exercises, offering a rare glimpse into a form of mystical devotion that had become widespread in radical Protestant circles in the years around 1700.

The main feature of their strange devotions, as becomes clear in Edelmann's account, was the practitioner's efforts to achieve absolute passivity in physical or mental activity in prayer. According to Edelmann, the entire household would gather on a daily basis for one hour in Marsay's quarters, where they sat “without speaking a word until the hour was over, sitting around in complete silence.” The only movement they made during this time was the occasional release of “furtive sighs” and rapid movement of the eyes under closed lids. During this “self-appointed stillness” the residents “only allowed themselves to think, according to the Bible and their spiritual guide, that which all poor

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<sup>431</sup> Gerhard Tersteegen, “Gott ist Gegenwärtig” in *Geistlichen Blumengärtlein inniger Seelen*. (12<sup>th</sup> edition, Frankfurt: Bernhard Rosshof, 1818), 277. Original from 1729.

<sup>432</sup> Johann Christian Edelmann, *Selbstbiographie*, edited by Carl R.H. Klose, (Berlin: Karl Wiegandt, 1849), 232. Originally written in 1752, the autobiography was only first published in 1849.

<sup>433</sup> Edelmann, *Selbstbiographie*, 232.

sinner confess aloud, namely that they were poor, corrupted creatures, incapable of doing any good”. Speaking to what effects this wordless exercise had, Edelmann wrote that “it seemed to carry the people inward to themselves in silence, relaxing for a time the noises (Geräusche) of the senses and affections, and desiring to make them aware of the voice of God speaking within them.”<sup>434</sup> In Marsay’s words, the goal of the exercises was to help the practitioner “to learn the voice of the shephard in his interior and follow it alone”<sup>435</sup>. Ceasing all physical movement, not making use of any vocal prayers or mental images that could excite the senses and prove distracting, the circle around Marsay strove to become aware of God’s presence deep in the silence of the soul. Edelmann, with his enlightened, optimistic view of human nature insisted that such a practice could not possibly have any benefits for “cheerful and active temperaments”, but nevertheless permitted that such an activity might be suitable for “melancholic and phlegmatic minds”. Returning to Berlenburg, Edelmann told Haug that although Marsay meant well, the circle displayed an unnerving fanaticism in their veneration of Marsay.<sup>436</sup>

### ***‘Interiority’ and Passive Contemplation in German Protestantism, c. 1700***

Such wordless, communal meditation practiced by Marsay and his circle was no anomaly in the sectarian whirl of late seventeenth-century Protestantism. As numerous scholars of the period have shown, the wordless ‘mental’ prayer, or spontaneous ‘heart prayer’ was a common feature in the evangelical awakenings of seventeenth-century Protestantism.<sup>437</sup> Over the course of the century, the Prayer Book and the Psalter gave way to free-form prayer in Pietism and in radical groups like the charismatic Inspirationists and Quakers, spontaneous outpourings of the spirit took the place of rote prayer.<sup>438</sup> The Quaker meetings had gained notoriety across the continent for dispensing with any sermons, recognizable liturgy, or even speaking, as members sat in silence waiting for God to speak directly to their souls. Robert Barclay, a prominent Quaker, wrote in his *Apology* in 1678 of the new religion’s practice of ‘inward quietness’: “each made it their work to retire inwardly to the measure of Grace in themselves, not being only Silent as to Words, but even abstaining from all their own Thoughts, Imaginations and Desires.”<sup>439</sup> Barclay’s treatise, as well as the works of other Quakers, circulated

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>435</sup> Charles Héctor Marsay to Gottfried Koch, 25 August 1736 (Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire (BCU) Lausanne, Ms TP 1246/2/8, Folio 1. Hundreds of Marsay’s letters are preserved in the Cantonal Library at Lausanne, most of which have only recently come to light and been catalogued.

<sup>436</sup> Edelmann, *Selbstbiographie*, 233.

<sup>437</sup> Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth*, (Baylor University Press: Waco Texas, 2011). See chapter One, “The Rejection of Liturgy, the Rise of Free Prayer, and Modern Religious Subjectivity”, 35-62.

<sup>438</sup> Johann Wallmann, “VI. Herzensgebet oder Gebetbuch? Frömmigkeit und Gebet im Pietismus” in *Pietismus-Studien: Gesammelte Aufsätze II* (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen, 2008), 284-307. One significant aspect of Pietist devotional culture was the rejection of the genre of “Gebetsbücher”. These texts which presented readers with a number of set prayers (or liturgies) had fallen out of use among Pietists who preferred unscripted, free-prayer; See Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers*. Chapter Three “The Community of True Inspiration” (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59-73.

<sup>439</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (T. Bowle: London, 1701), 354. Published first in 1676 in Amsterdam in Latin, Barclay’s defense of quaker practice garnered much attention on the continent, especially in radical circles such as the Mennonites, Labadists, and among early Pietist separatists and proved a vital tool for spreading quakerism on his extensive European journeys with



freely in the early separatist circles of Reformed and Lutheran Germans in Amsterdam and Frankfurt.<sup>440</sup>

Likewise, in Pietism, the silent ‘inner Prayer’ or ‘Prayer of the Heart’, had become the mark of true inward conversion as opposed to the rote, potentially meaningless, vocal prayers.<sup>441</sup> Johann Arndt (1555-1621), the spiritual father of German Pietism, wrote that this ‘inward prayer’ without words, “is so much better than the outward prayer as a thousand tonnes of Gold is than half a penny, for you are filled thereby with the fullness of God, so you cannot think anything else but God. There the tongue can no longer speak, and the soul can only sigh a little.”<sup>442</sup> Among awakened Protestants, wordless or spontaneous prayer was an important evidence of having achieved a rebirth and deep conversion to God. As Lori Branch describes in her work on free-form prayer in eighteenth-century England, speaking and praying spontaneously as if under the influence of inspiration was at once the means and evidence of conversion.<sup>443</sup>

Marsay’s circle of solitary mystics, united as a community of silent, passive worshippers, offers a case-study of the centrality of passive, mental prayer in the new ascetic awakening among Protestants around 1700. A devotional style exhibiting as little outward activity and self-willing as possible naturally appealed to Protestant spiritualists of an ascetic bent striving to silence all workings of the ego to make more room for God in the soul. The previous chapter’s primary antagonist, Johann Gichtel, wrote that the soul advancing to ever greater levels of passivity where no words are spoken in prayer is a sign of increasing union: “Regarding the inward condition of the soul, it is indeed a good sign that the soul is inwardly deeper carried by the spirit, where it no longer is able to make vocally audible words in the outer tabernacle, but rather learns to speak mentally with God...”<sup>444</sup> Marsay’s small circle resembles, on many points, Gichtel’s Angelic Brethren network in both communal structure and devotion to an ascetic mystical theology. As described in the previous chapter, Marsay, like Gichtel, saw his troupe of solitary contemplatives as following the central gospel message of imitating Christ through a suffering, dying life, rejecting marriage, comforts, and worldly involvement, and even seeing their ascetic renunciations as a spiritual elite interceding for Christianity. Their mantra was “to suffer, to die, and to renounce ourselves unceasingly, is our portion.”<sup>445</sup> Marsay and the other contemplatives in this dissertation enthusiastically read the same texts from the storehouse of mystical, ascetic worship such as the Desert Fathers, the *Theologia Mystica* and Tauler, as well as the main representatives of the

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William Penn to proselytize their beliefs and recruit colonists for America. Among these was Johann Jakob Schütz, an early radical chiliast and good friends with Spener corresponded and exchanged books with a circle of Quakers in Rotterdam that included Benjamin Furly, van Helmont, and others. See Andreas Deppermann, *Johann Jakob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus*, in series *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie*; 119 (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen, 2002), 322-326.

<sup>440</sup> *ibid*, 324.

<sup>441</sup> Wallmann, “Kapittel XVI: Herzensgebet oder Gebetbuch?” 284-307.

<sup>442</sup> Johann Arndt, *Vom Wahren Christenthum*, II. 20. “Von der Kraft des Gebets”, (Horn: Hamburg, 1849), 254. The Stoß-Gebet was likewise a popular form whose main characteristic was a deep cri-du-coeur and a wordless sigh, intended to express a deep need or longing of God that could not be rationally expressed.

<sup>443</sup> Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>444</sup> Gichtel, *TP* vol. I, Der XCIX. Brief. An denselben. Amster. D. 3. Maji. 1701, 398.

<sup>445</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 A 1 11 A M Duval. A Hayn ce 8 Avril 1739.

*Devotio Moderna*, Thomas à Kempis.<sup>446</sup> They strove to follow its command in their lives to “deny the world” and its business, seeking out secluded spots, and forming a unique new type of semi-monastic house-communities.

But Marsay’s circle and its passive devotions also adds a distinctive element to our study of Protestant contemplatives. Given Marsay’s Huguenot origins, his writings and life reveal an unsurprising indebtedness to the interiorized, mystical spirituality emerging from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Catholicism. In this regard, Marsay epitomizes through his own path the argument made throughout this dissertation of Protestants reaching beyond and across confessional boundaries to monasticism, early modern Catholic practices, and mysticism to ground their practices of a new, unique evangelical contemplative life. Only recently have historians begun to recognize the lively commerce of ideas and practices between early modern Catholic traditions of interiority and Protestant awakenings.<sup>447</sup> A closer look at the language and meditative techniques of Marsay’s circle offers an example of how deep a particular school of early modern Catholic mysticism had come to influence the spirituality of Protestant awakenings in the eighteenth-century. A clue in this regard comes first with Marsay’s oft-repeated use of the terms ‘simple’ and ‘easy’ to describe the type of contemplation his circle engaged in at the manor. This ‘simple’ method consisted in avoiding any ‘distinct’ thoughts or ideas of God, and to rest in a ‘general’ contemplation of divinity without the aid of words, images, or ideas. In a 1738 published commentary on Romans 8:26 where Paul mentions a type of prayer “too deep for words”, Marsay wrote “What is there *easier* than this, to look at you [God] lovingly with complacence, without it being necessary to form a distinct idea of you, which would be harmful, and would cheapen this contemplation! [my italics]”<sup>448</sup> Later, in the same passage, Marsay describes that in this contemplation “without words”, a “profound silence” comes over the soul as the soul becomes locked in a “*simple* and unique gaze” on the object of its desire.

Marsay’s terminology of a ‘simple’, ‘indistinct’ and ‘easy’ method of contemplation helps us to firmly locate his form of mental prayer in a late seventeenth-century French, and Catholic school of negative, passive mysticism that touted a new

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<sup>446</sup> Marsay states that they have followed the example of the Desert Fathers in “denying the outward things of this world” and mentions specific editions of their sayings done by Gichtel’s followers. Marsay TP 1246/2-36 Godelsheim d. 23 Feb. 1751; TP 1246 A 1/16 a Hayn ce 15 Juillet 1740 (Folio 3).

<sup>447</sup> See Patricia Ward, *Experimental Theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fénelon, and Their Readers* (Baylor University Press: Waco, Texas, 2009). Paul Althaus recognized this early on. He argues that the Catholic, mainly the Jesuit prayer form influenced the subjective “Selbstprüfung” and “Gewissenserforschung” characteristic of evangelical spirituality. Paul Althaus, *Forschungen zur Evangelischen Gebetsliteratur*, (Olms: Hildesheim, 1966), 88.

<sup>448</sup> Charles Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant de la vérité & droiture des voyes de l’Esprit. Ou Explication mystique & literale de l’Eptre aux Romains* (Christofle Michel Regelein: Berlebourg, 1739), 261. During his time at Hayn, Marsay published at a fast pace, with most texts coming in a series of biblical commentaries and explications of the interior life expounding the principles of Guyon and St. John of the Cross. The treatises were published under the title “Témoignage d’un Enfant” and were facilitated by Fleischbein as well as Marsay’s acquaintances at Berleburg where he periodically contributed to the Berleburg Bible translation as well as the radical Pietist periodical *Die Geistliche Fama*. For more information on Marsay’s publishing activities see Hans Fritsche, “Charles Hector de Marsay, Marquis de Saint George, in: Bautz, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 5 (Herzberg, 1993), 883-886.

‘easy’ method of mystical experience and contemplation.<sup>449</sup> This method was represented most famously by the French widow and lay mystic Madame de Guyon (1648-1717), whose “Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer” (1685) led to her imprisonment in 1695 and ignited the ‘quietist’ controversy in France.<sup>450</sup> The controversy pitted Guyon’s teachings on passive prayer against the most widespread early modern model of meditation based on the Jesuit *Spiritual Exercises* by Loyola Ignatius. In Guyon’s estimation, the Jesuit model of meditation which engaged the imagination, reason, and senses to mediate between the soul and God, was characterized by too much ‘multiplicity’. One of Guyon’s favorite terms, multiplicity is the state of a soul where the senses have the upper hand, preventing the soul from penetrating through the variegated and deafening sensual activity to the serene realm deep in the soul where God rests. Guyon, leaning on references to such a simple stage of prayer in the writings of Francis de Sales (1567-1622) proposed a ‘simple’ ‘unmethodical method’<sup>451</sup> of meditation, that, ultimately, would do away with the mediation of the senses, reducing the soul’s multiplicity, and allow the soul to rest directly in God’s presence.<sup>452</sup> The method proposed by these quietist authors consisted in what they termed a ‘simple vüe’<sup>453</sup> or ‘simple act of faith’—a controversial idea that the soul could think directly on God without ‘distinct’ images and ideas, simply resting in God’s presence with a ‘loving regard’ and “respectful silence”.<sup>454</sup> The suppression of vocal or imaginative means of prayer was seen as crucial to intensify this special awareness of his presence in the soul<sup>455</sup>. Just as Guyon’s writings began stoking debate in France, the embers of another Catholic controversy over passive contemplation were just cooling in Rome. There, on 2 September 1687, a Spanish priest named Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696) had been sentenced to life in prison for teaching the same quietist heresy, that the soul could reach a state in prayer where all its faculties rested and only God worked within.<sup>456</sup>

For Marsay, Guyon and the quietist tradition represented the most ideal guide to a purely interior, spiritual worship where the soul could free itself of the ego to commune with God. Marsay wrote that Guyon’s writings were “filled with the balm of grace” and

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<sup>449</sup> Sabrina Stroppa, “Une Glace Nette et Polie”: Paolo Segneri, Francois Malaval Et L’Oraison de Simple Vue”. *Revue D’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 79:3 (1999): 327-342.

<sup>450</sup> Jeanne Marie de Guyon, *Moyen Court et très facile pour faire l’Oraison* (Jacques Petit: Grenoble, 1685).

<sup>451</sup> “[...] cette petite methode sans methode”. Guyon, Preface, *Moyen Court*.

<sup>452</sup> Stroppa notes the connection of the simple view, especially in the writings of Francis de Sales, to a broader early modern Catholic tradition of interiorized spirituality such as John of the Cross’s ‘dark night’ of the soul, as both propose the soul seeing divinity not with the eye of the intellect, but in a ‘general’, ‘indistinct’ manner. Stroppa, “Une Glace Nette et Polie”, 329.

<sup>453</sup> In some sense, the idea of the simple view, a direct apprehension of deity, goes back to Henry of Susa, but it is in the works of Francis de Sales, a French bishop, and the Carmelite-influenced milieu around him and the lay Madame de Chantal that proposed the concept in its entirety as adopted by late seventeenth-century French mystics. See Francis de Sales, *Traité de l’Amour de Dieu* (Lyon: Coeursillys, 1654), 448-452. See also Stroppa, “Une Glace Nette et Polie”.

<sup>454</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, 22.

<sup>455</sup> François Malaval, *Practice facile pour élever l’ame à la contemplation* (Paris: Estienne Michaelet, 1670), 7.

<sup>456</sup> For more on Molinos, see Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 120-129.

“instructed souls in the paths of complete abandonment to God.”<sup>457</sup> Her texts, along with other representatives of this negative mystical tradition, the *via negativa*, such as Bourignon and John of the Cross, were to Marsay “the most terrific witnesses of the interior ways.”<sup>458</sup> Marsay and his devoted followers were not the only Protestants to drink deeply from this new spirituality. Protestants interested in the contemplative life had been observing the new quietist spirituality almost as soon as it appeared in the late seventeenth-century. Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), a French Protestant and refugee living in Amsterdam edited and published a number of Guyon’s essays and a biography.<sup>459</sup> He called Guyon’s writings “most compendious, easiest, and perfect’ guides to prayer.”<sup>460</sup> Other Protestants with an interest in an ascetic, mystical devotion saw in Guyon and Molinos the practical key to quieting the carnal man and putting the soul in the presence of God. Johannes Kelpius, the head of a millenarian band of hermits who settled in colonial Pennsylvania, wrote a guide to prayer modeled on Guyon’s *Short and Easy Method of Prayer*, borrowing its title with his *Short Concept and Simple Method of Prayer and Speaking with God* from 1700.<sup>461</sup>

This chapter is concerned with two main questions. First, in what ways did Protestants interested in the withdrawn life c. 1700 describe ‘interior’ worship, and especially efforts to practice ‘passive’ forms of devotion? Focusing on Marsay’s circle—a group standing so close to Gichtel’s Angelic Brethren in their adoration of the hidden life, the *imitatio Christi*, celibacy, contemplation, and its communal structure—I will highlight the discussion and tensions within Protestantism that arose in discussions of unmediated interiority and the attempt to remove not only one’s physical presence in the world, but the world’s presence in oneself. Central to this will be recognizing the reality that Protestant separatism c. 1700 was informed by a number of early modern mystical traditions of interiority and mysticism, with Marsay’s circle of quietists exemplifying how discourses of interiority fused and informed one another. What orthodox and awakened Protestants made of the new Catholic mysticism offers an ideal frame through which to identify the meanings attached to key terms employed by our ascetic Protestants such as inwardness, faith, self-denial, and passivity.

Second, the chapter will highlight the concrete, meditational techniques involved in cultivating a resigned, passive interiority. Paradoxically, the pursuit of abandonment and the ceasing of all self-willing entailed a broad set of active, external rituals, using

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<sup>457</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours sur Diverses Matières de la vie Interieure & des dogmes de la Religion Chretienne ou Témoignage d’un Enfant de la verité & droiture des voyes de l’Esprit*, (Berlebourg: Christoffle Michel Regelein, 1738), 198.

<sup>458</sup> Marsay to Gottfried Koch, 15. September 1738. BLU TP 1246/2/14 Folio 3.

<sup>459</sup> For Poiret’s activity as a transmitter of mystical texts see G.A. Krieg, *Der mystische Kreis: Wesen und Werden der Theologie Pierre Poirets* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 20-49; E. Schering “Pietismus und die Renaissance der Mystik: Pierre Poiret als Interpret und Wegbereiter der romanischen Mystik in Deutschland”, in *Pietismus-Herrnhutertum-Erweckungsbewegung: Festschrift für Erich Beyreuther*, ed. Dietrich Meyer (Cologne: Rheinland-Verlag, 1982), 39-70.

<sup>460</sup> This is in Gottfried Arnold’s, *Elliche vortreffliche Tractätlein aus der Geheimen Gottes-Gelehrtheit* (Frankfort & Leipzig: Joh. Christoph König, 1701), 7.

<sup>461</sup> Kelpius, *Kurzer Begriff oder Leichtes Mittel zu Beten und mit Gott zu reden*. (Philadelphia, Franklin & Armbruester. Mars. Marion Carson copy, 1756). located in the Library Company of Philadelphia 7693. The early German manuscript was not published until 1756 but the English versions were already available in 1741. Besides being obvious from its title and content, the claim to its connection to Guyon’s text is made by Patricia Ward in *Experimental Theology in America*, 65-66.

short prayers, ascetic self-denial, and outward silence. Our subjects themselves understood that in order to reach a state of passivity, the soul must be conditioned by ‘active’, positive means albeit ‘simple’ in nature. Such practices, most often drawn from mystical and monastic sources, offer us yet another example of how a circle of late Reformation Protestants repurposed the ascetic tradition to shape their own withdrawn, ‘hidden’ devotions. Far from a spontaneous and passive act as its rhetoric would suggest, silent prayer involved great effort on the part of the practicant and careful preparation to place the mind and soul in a condition to perform it.<sup>462</sup> Such inspiration required a process of intense inward dialogue in one’s heart and feelings—the seat of the spirit’s inspiration to the individual—by which one became familiar with God, building a relationship with him as one would a lover or friend. One prominent separatist Protestant, Johann Henrich Reitz (1665-1720) answered the question of “which means and ways must I use so that I imagine God gloriously and sensitively (empfindlich) present to me?” by recommending a constant inner dialogue with him as if he were present with you.<sup>463</sup> One should “constantly commune with God” and in one’s “heart speak with him”<sup>464</sup> and “gather to God your thoughts and pray to him.”<sup>465</sup> Further emphasizing the rooting of prayer in a cultivation of the individual’s affective subjectivity, Reitz includes a poem emphasizing the heart and prayer: “the heart is the temple itself...this was the sum of the doctrine: belief, love, suffer, shun, pray in all places.”<sup>466</sup>

Beyond this first sense in which I use the term ‘active practices’ of passive interiority, there is another sense by which our subjects understood their passive devotions to be ‘active’. The practice of ‘representing oneself to God’s presence’ without using ‘the faculties of the senses’ allowed the soul to achieve a perpetual attention to God, and ‘hidden’ activity a condition they believed not outwardly visible or susceptible to outward distraction.<sup>467</sup> This ‘secret’ action of the soul that Guyon called a ‘substantial’ act represented divine infusion where the soul acts, but only by a force given to it by the spirit. It represented the ultimate goal of our contemplative Protestants, a perpetual, ‘continuous’ resting in God’s presence and union. In this second section, I will rely on Marsay’s autobiography, penned in 1745 and supplemented by his letters and published treatises, to see how his reading of Guyon and Spanish mystics shaped his circle’s contemplative practices at Schloss Hayn. Those readings helped frame the overarching meaning of Marsay’s spiritual progression as a struggle between trying to maintain God’s perpetual presence by his own efforts—long prayer vigils, virtuous living, meditations,

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<sup>462</sup> See Elke Axmacher’s discussion of Martin Moller and Johann Arndt in *Praxis Evangeliorum: Theologie und Frömmigkeit bei Martin Moller (1547-1606)* (Ruprecht und Vandenhoeck: Göttingen, 1989), 114; and Paul Althaus, *Forschungen zur Evangelischen Gebetsliteratur*, (Olms: Hildesheim, 1966). While scholars have recently begun to recognize the influence of contemporary Catholic piety in early modern Protestantism, most debates through the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries looked to Luther’s discussion of the *Theologia Deutsch*, Kempis, and pre-Reformation mysticism.

<sup>463</sup> Reitz, *Das Fürbilde*, 15.

<sup>464</sup> Reitz, *Das Fürbilde*, 15.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>466</sup> Das Hertz der Tempel selbst...Es war die Summ der Lehre/ die gesund: Glaub/Liebe/Leide/meid/bet aller Orten!“ Reitz, *Die Nachfolge Jesu Christi nach seinem Leben/Lehr und Leiden/ Kürzlich vorgestellt.* (Offenbach am Mayn: de Launoy, 1707), cover page.

<sup>467</sup> Rufus Jones likewise thinks of the passivity of quietism as an active recollection methods, a type of deep concentration or attention. Rufus Jones, “Quietism”, in *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan., 1917), 3-4.

asceticism—and the gradual realization that the true means of maintaining the “presence of God” is achieved by a ‘simple’ and passive abandonment of such self-willed activity and resting in a state of silent and ‘obscure’ contemplation.

Finally, this chapter and the other case studies reflect the heightened centrality of individual, free-form prayer in the de-confessionalized modern landscape of Protestant practice. The de-ritualization of prayer (removing it from a “certain place or time” and doing away with rote words) and its personalization would likewise seem to suggest a removal of prayer from communal worship. But one of the more noted features of Pietist conventicles was the free-style nature and intensification of the practice of prayer. Pietist conventicle meetings began with and were punctuated by the offering of prayers among its members.<sup>468</sup> Such practices leads noted Pietist scholar Johannes Wallmann to the conclusion that Pietism developed a new sociological type of prayer practice that he terms “community of prayer” (“Gebetsgemeinschaft”).<sup>469</sup> Next to prayer in the church and prayer in the home, the “Gebetsgemeinschaft” describes the foregrounding of prayer as the activity by which “pious” individuals seeking to be serious Christians constituted their community. The conventicle, known popularly as the “Prayer-Hour” (“Betstunde”), became the setting to physically instantiate such a community.<sup>470</sup> The act of praying together became *the* quintessential element of evangelical liturgy. The above-mentioned Reitz stated that the true Christian “seeks everywhere and always to commune and speak with God and to keep a good conscience. And this is the true worship or religion”.<sup>471</sup>

Before turning to why and how Marsay absorbed French Quietism and constructed his practice of passivity, making him ‘more interior, little by little’, we must turn to the wider reception of Quietism and passive contemplation in German Protestantism from the last decades of the seventeenth-century up to 1715.

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### ***The Protestant Reception of Catholic Passive Interiority, 1680-1710***

In a letter dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 1693 to the south German anabaptist and spiritualist Martin John, the theosopher Johann Gichtel (1638-1710) communicated his excitement about a great spiritual awakening he perceived stirring across Christianity, even in Catholicism: “Piety is stirring almost everywhere, even in Papistry in Rome, Italy, and in France, such that the people are removing themselves from external worship. But they are being persecuted everywhere by popes and preachers.” In specifying more precisely who these persecuted Catholic separatists were, Gichtel likewise made the case that these awakened Catholics were, in all essential points, the same as Lutheranism’s own piety movement: “The Lutherans call theirs ‘Pietists’, meaning godly, and the papists call theirs ‘quietists’, which means the still ones, because they retire quietly to their homes, diligently pray, and do not go to mass.”<sup>472</sup> For a contemplative, reclusive separatist like Gichtel who proclaimed that “I pray without ceasing, stay completely

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<sup>468</sup> Wallmann, *Die Anfänge des Pietismus*, 264.

<sup>469</sup> Wallmann, “Frommigkeit und Gebet”, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 4, 92.

<sup>470</sup> Ulrike Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum: eine historische Anthropologie der Frömmigkeit, Württemberg 17.-19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005), 293.

<sup>471</sup> Reitz, *Das Fürbilde*, 171.

<sup>472</sup> Johann Georg Gichtel to Martin John, Amsterdam, 5 May, 1693 in *Theosophia Practica, Halten und Kämpfen ob dem H. Glauben bis ans ende* [hereafter *T.P.*], vol 1. (Amsterdam, 1722), 196.

silent, and rarely go out...” it is not difficult to see why he identified with the *en vogue* quietist mysticism out of France. In Gichtel’s view, the ‘quietists’ were separatists like himself, hounded by pastors for their unorthodox beliefs and possessed of a singular devotion to plumbing the depths of inward spirituality in prayer and retreat from the world. Although Gichtel’s writings are nearly devoid of any other reference to quietism, preoccupied as they are with the theosophy of Boehme, Gichtel nevertheless identified in the quietists’ doctrine of external and interior stillness a spirituality akin to his reclusive practices of dying to the self and the world. Beyond Gichtel, many other Protestants enthusiastically greeted the phenomenon of quietist mystics in Catholicism. In a letter from December 1699 to Steven Momfort, a settler in Rhode Island, the esoteric hermit Johannes Kelpius (1667-1708), wrote that a spiritual “Revolution” was taking place in Europe “which in the Roman Church goes under the Name of Quietism, in the Protestant Church under the Name of Pietism, Chiliasm, and Philadelphianism.”<sup>473</sup> Gottfried Arnold, the famed Pietist church historian, translated key Quietist texts starting in 1699, and praised the ‘prayer of quiet’ central to their practices as the model of evangelical “pure faith” (‘lauter Glaube’).<sup>474</sup>

Who were these ‘still ones’ in France and Rome and what did they teach that so excited a radical Protestant like Gichtel? The term first came into widespread use in the controversy around the teachings of Miguel de Molinos, a Jesuit-trained Spanish cleric who had settled in Rome in the 1660s, where he worked as a spiritual guide, leading nobility in devotional exercises. Molinos provoked the ire of his former Jesuit educators with the publication of a guide to prayer, *Guia Spirituel* in 1675, widely seen as an attack on the Jesuit meditation techniques where imagination, outward penances, and discursive reasoning played important roles. Molinos’s treatise, whose full title was ‘Spiritual Guide, which releases the soul and conducts it through the interior path to acquire the perfect contemplation and rich treasure of interior peace”, emphasized that active meditation using the intellect, words, images, or outward ceremonies could not lead the soul to union with God, quoting liberally the representatives of a Spanish tradition of mental, wordless prayer and the ‘negative’ mysticism such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Although he praised the Jesuit exercises, Molinos concluded that “they are not an immediate means to raise the soul to union and perfection.”<sup>475</sup> Molino’s wrote that “it is not by the means of one’s own Reasoning, or Industry, that a Soul draws near to him, and understands the Divine Documents; but rather by silent and humble Resignation.”<sup>476</sup> Molinos advocated that one’s prayer should be marked by silence and suppressing any rational thought whatsoever. One should “walk in Faith and Silence in his Divine Presence...without thinking or reasoning”. This is just like the “blinded beast...turns the

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<sup>473</sup> Johannes Kelpius, “Letter to Steven Momfort in Rhode Island, 11 December 1699” in *The Diarum of Magister Johannes Kelpius*. Annotated by Hans Friedrich Sachse (Pennsylvania German Society, 1917), 48.

<sup>474</sup> Arnold, *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie*, vol 3 (Frankfurt, 1700), 179. Gottfried Arnold, *Geistlicher Weg-Weiser: Die Seele von den sinnlichen Dingen abzuziehen, und durch den innerlichen Weg zur völligen Beschauung und innern Ruhe zu führen* (Joh. Christoph König: Frankfurt, 1712), Preface, 10. (Hist. Eccl. Sec. XVII. P. 472. Et Diskret de Quietistis.

<sup>475</sup> Molinos, *Defense*, quoted in ‘Introduction’ *Miguel de Molinos: The Spiritual Guide*. Edited and Translated by Robert P. Baird. Introduction by Robert P. Baird and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 10-11.

<sup>476</sup> Molinos, *Spiritual Guide*, 36.

Wheel of the mill” producing corn despite not knowing what it does.<sup>477</sup> By purging the soul of all sensible attachments and ratiocination, it can be lead to the ‘prayer of rest’ where one rests in tranquility and peace in the presence of God.

In its style and rhetoric, Molinos’s text is a quintessential early modern ode to inwardness, structured on the dichotomy of ‘inward’ and ‘outer’ acts, ‘passive’ versus ‘active’ devotion, ‘intellect’ versus ‘faith’, and the ‘sensible’ world versus the ‘spiritual’ world of the soul. Molinos calls the soul the “living Temple of God”, not susceptible to manipulation by the body or the material world. One cannot obtain to the “supreme internal peace” through “outward disciplines and mortifications.”<sup>478</sup> It is thus not difficult to see how Gichtel and other Protestants saw in Molinos and Guyon’s critique of Catholic devotion a potential renewed evangelical awakening in Catholicism.<sup>479</sup> Molinos, quoting Francis Lopez of Valenza, claimed “that a quarter of an hour of Prayer, with recollection of the senses and faculties, and with resignation and humility, does more good to the Soul than five days of penitent exercises, hair clothes, disciplines, fasting, and sleeping on bare boards, because these are only mortifications of the body, but with recollection the Soul is purified.”<sup>480</sup>

It is thus not difficult to understand the danger that Catholics perceived in Molinos’s ‘negative’ mystical devotions. Molinos was soon accused of advancing numerous heresies such as illumination—a charge leveled against sixteenth-century Spanish *Alumbrados* who asserted the ability to directly commune with God without the sacraments—the uselessness of works or outward mortifications, and denigrating human effort or the need to arouse feelings of love to God in oneself.<sup>481</sup> Jesuit writings, like that of Paolo Segneri’s 1680 *Agreement Between Effort and Quiet in Prayer*, attempted to defend meditation against the Quietist position that meditation was an inferior stage of prayer.<sup>482</sup> In 1685, the public onslaught against Molinos succeeded and Molinos was arrested and put on trial, with a list of errors was drawn up by the inquisition against his teachings. In 1687 Innocent XI condemned Molinos’s teachings, forcing him to abjure the 68 propositions attributed to him, and sentencing him to life imprisonment.<sup>483</sup>

Almost simultaneously with the events in Italy, a devotional movement was gaining ground in France that advocated a similarly passive, and ‘easy’ means to higher contemplation. The above-mentioned Madame Guyon, published her primary text, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer* in 1685 in Grenoble advocating a prayer “of the heart”, yet deeper, and more silent than mental prayer. The text advocated a pathway of total abandonment as the “key to interiority” an abandonment and resignation achieved by simple meditation techniques easy for all and that quickly advanced the practitioner to

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<sup>477</sup> Molinos, *Spiritual Guide*, 34, 38.

<sup>478</sup> Molinos, *Spiritual Guide*, 77.

<sup>479</sup> See Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, “Quietistic Pietists? The Reception of Fénelon in Central Germany c. 1700” in *Fénelon in the Enlightenment: Traditions, Adaptations, and Variations*. Edited by Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, Stefanie Stockhorst and Doohwan Ahn with a Preface by Jacques Le Brun (New York: Rodopi, 2014).

<sup>480</sup> Molinos, *Spiritual Guide*, 105.

<sup>481</sup> Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 121-124.

<sup>482</sup> Paolo Segneri, called the most popular Jesuit in Italy at the time, proved the most aggressive opponent of Molinos. Segneri, *Concordia tra la fatica e la quiete nell’ orazione*. (Florence, 1680), 42.

<sup>483</sup> “Introduction”, *The Spiritual Guide*, 16-20.



a state of silence and passivity towards God (“with an affection deep and yet restful, with a respectful silence”).<sup>484</sup> In short order, Guyon found herself thrown in prison on the order of Louis XIV who saw in both Molinos and Guyon subversive threats to his absolutism. Forced to abjure, Guyon found herself in and out of prison until the end of century, dying only in 1715.<sup>485</sup> Her movement and followers grew, however, with the adoption of her writings by the powerful archbishop Francois de Fénelon who carried on a debate with Cardinal Bossuet and others over his his proposition that the soul was capable of a pure love in which the soul willed nothing but God’s will.<sup>486</sup> In 1699, Innocent XII likewise condemned Fénelon’s semi-quietist positions on pure love, in a final blow to the French advocates of passive, resigned devotion.

The early reception of Quietism in Protestant quarters was marked by a similarly dismissive attitude by established theologians as the new mysticism was quickly labelled a new form of fanatical enthusiasm and quakerism. The first known mention of Quietism in Protestant publications came in January, 1687, in an article for Leibniz’s learned review journal *Acta Eruditorum*. The article contained a review of the Jesuit Paulo Segneri’s work, *The Agreement of Work and Quiet in Prayer* from 1680, by the Protestant church historian Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff and expressed concern for how such mysticism would mislead the laity into an unproductive idleness. The anonymous Protestant reviewer, although fairly objective, sided with Segneri stating that the “formula of the new mystics who are always harping on ‘pure faith’ in prayer and worship is suspect”.<sup>487</sup> Meditation that withdrew the subject away from the senses into an ‘obscure’ and ‘abstract’ contemplation of God was not only impossible but would devalue all external worship, a conclusion too radical to accept. There followed several disputations on the question of quietism in the Leipzig theological faculty in the same year as well as a publication of excerpts from Molinos’ work by a young, reform-minded Lutheran by the name of August Hermann Francke.<sup>488</sup>

Besides the dangers of idleness and disregard for outward works<sup>489</sup>, Molinos’s and Guyon’s pretension to being a universal practice for interiorized experience, free of doctrinal import or human willing, raised the ire of orthodox Lutheran theologians the most. Just as Catholic opponents of quietism questioned the ‘simple’ method for

<sup>484</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court et très facile pour faire l’Oraison* (Jacques Petit: Grenoble, 1685), 24.

<sup>485</sup> Catherine Randall, “Loosening the Stays: Madame Guyon’s Quietist Opposition to Absolutism.” *Mystics Quarterly* 26: (2000) 8-30.

<sup>486</sup> Known as the ‘Querelle d’amour pur’, Fenelon ultimately relented and submitted to Pope Innocent XII’s condemnation of his theses. See *Fénelon: mystique et politique (1699-1999)*. Edited by François-Xavier Cuhe and Jacques Le Brun. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

<sup>487</sup> Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff review of “Concordia Tra La Fatica e la Quietate nell’ Orazione & c. da Paolo Segneri. i.e.” in *Acta Eruditorum* (January 1687), 26.

<sup>488</sup> For an overview of the early reception of Quietism in Protestantism, see “Der Seelenfrieden der Stillen im Lande: Quietistische Mystik und radikaler Pietismus” in *Gottfried Arnold: Radikaler Pietist und Gelehrter*, edited by Antje Mißfeldt (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 130-143.

<sup>489</sup> Pierre Jurieu (1650-1720), the Reformed theologian famous for his polemics against Bayle and whose devotional texts Marsay mentions reading as a child, voiced one of the most oft-repeated concerns from orthodox theologians with passivity when he condemned the ‘catholic’ tradition of “passive contemplation” as misguided, in that it tended toward “suffocating the actions of the active life: that is to say stopping the course of good works.” Pierre Jurieu, *La Pratique de la Devotion ou Traité de l’Amour Divin*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, vol. II (Amsterdam, 1701), 181-82. Jurieu had likewise published in 1699 a tract against quietism and mystical theology titled “Traité contenant le jugement d’un protestant sur la théologie mystique, sur le quiétisme et sur les démêlés de l’evêque de Meaux avec l’archevêque de Cambrai.” Mostly against Poiret.

overestimating the soul's capacity to directly contemplate divinity, so did orthodox Protestants see heresies of perfectionism lurking behind this language of passive, simple faith. The exasperation with the rhetoric of passivity is palpable in the Greifswald theologian Konrad Rango's (1639-1700), writing against Quietism. In his *Neue Quäckerey in der Quietisterey* (1688) Rango placed the new teachings in the same category as the perfectionist, and enthusiastic writings of the Quakers and followers of Jacob Boehme, as well as Protestant spiritualists like Christian Hoburg, and late medieval authors such as Thomas a Kempis: "If anyone should simply speak of the 'inward man'/then it must be a glorious/spirit-filled/devout/heart-moving book/ regardless that it comes from a Calvinist in England or France/ yes, even sometimes quacked by a quacker/ or spit out from a half-possessed/or from a Shoemaker- or Taylor-Theologian..."<sup>490</sup> Rango further mocked quietist interiority by aguing that Molinos and other 'interior' Christians showed a superficial understanding of theology and practice with their use of the seductive words 'heart', 'soul', in derision at Molinos's hollow language:

[...] Molinos is indifferent to doctrine and it is the same for all; no dispute or debate about contentious articles is found there, only pure "practical mysticism" such as how the heart, and the soul is purified, enlightened, and reborn by God and yet again united with God's heart.<sup>491</sup>

Rango's ridicule at the fashionable language of interiority had a serious point however. This language of interiority, masked in references to deep, heartfelt sincerity, incorrectly placed the duty of a Christian in the ceasing of the will, as opposed to active, willing devotion and rational apperception of faith.<sup>492</sup> Rango criticized Molinos for preaching the path of "pure faith" by which a Christian "should let go of all ideas of God", full of "unclear, general, and confused knowledge". Not relying on distinct ideas and theological truths about God, such simple reliance on indistinct feeling is the "basis of blind faith/*Fidei implicitae*/" so fundamental to papism, according to Rango.<sup>493</sup> Another orthodox critic, Johann Wolfgang Jäger (1647-1720), a Lutheran theologian at Tübingen, criticized the prayer of quiet—which he identified with Francis de Sales' prayer of "simple remise en Dieu"—for an idle passivity as well as the impossibility of the soul operating independently of the intellect. The annihilation of the outward and inward senses that was necessary for the "*receptio immediatae operationis divinae*" was just as likely as 'outrunning your own shadow' he argued.<sup>494</sup> The soul and its operations

<sup>490</sup> Konrad Christian Rango, *Neue Quäckerey in der Quietisterey/Das ist/ kurze Beschreibung des Ursprungs/Lehre/ und ietzigen Zustandes/der alt-neuen Schwärmerey/der auf den Berg der Vollkommenheit steigenden Quietisten von D. Michael Molinos erreget/Derer Ungrund zeigt/ und dafür jedermann männiglich warnet* (Franckfurth und Leipzig, 1688), 128-9.

<sup>491</sup> Rango, *Neue Quäckerey in der Quietisterey*, 101-2.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 101-2. "Beyde beruffen sie sich auff des DIONYSII ertichtete Bücher. Homburg rühmet die Capuciner und Carthäuser / das sind ihm gute Mystici."

<sup>493</sup> Rango, *Neue Quäckerey*, 33-34.

<sup>494</sup> Wolfgang Jäger in his 1707 *Dissertatio Theologica: De oratione Passiva mysticorum* would describe passive prayer as a "*receptio immediatae operationis divinae*" and defined quietism as *Oratio passiva sit oratio quietis, quia omnes facultates animae in homine quiescant, cessant*," Wolfgang Jäger, *Dissertatio Theologica: De oratione Passiva mysticorum* (Tübingen, 1707), 9. Jäger had compiled and published a collection of "positive theology" in 1702 called 'Compendium Theologiae Positivae' full of pseudo-Augustinian prayers and meditations underlining orthodox willingness to adopt mystical theology of a

by definition “included the body”, and thus it could not withdraw from all ‘corporeal and sensible things’. Jäger’s objections go to the point that the human interaction with the divine includes the will, indeed it is the very basis of religion as God requires the Christian to strive and work and have a passion for divinity. Passivity is contrary to the fiery, ardent passion that fueled the martyrs, for example. Yet another theologian, Andreas Kühn (1624-1702), the Lutheran superior in Danzig, objected that quietist passivity, in which the soul “rests from the work of meditation and from all discursive...sensible and material activity” is “against the nature of faith which by definition entails apperception, and requires knowledge/assent or agreement.”<sup>495</sup> The ‘Pure contemplation’ or pure faith that “occurs without any sensible things” is a perfection that “no one in this world can hope for.”<sup>496</sup> Despite commending Molinos for critiquing Roman devotion that consisted in “purely outward ceremony”, Kühn argues that Molinos went too far the other way in emphasizing a purely “inward man”.<sup>497</sup>

In their responses to Catholic Quietism, however, these orthodox voices highlight a tension within Protestantism on the question of ‘external’ versus ‘internal’ worship and what constituted ‘pure faith’, a split that goes back to the beginning of the Reformation and can arguably be seen as driving much of the inter-Protestant tensions in the early modern period. Rango claimed that the quietism of Molinos, the primary focus of his book, was just another manifestation of that “initially well-minded, but in practice evil THEOLOGIA MYSTICA” and specifically the late medieval ‘Teutsche Theologie’ of Johannes Tauler.<sup>498</sup> Rango claimed that this older, German version of quietism—what he calls the “Weigelian/Hoburgian notion of ‘Gelassenheit’”—taught an idle and dangerous form of contemplation by asserting that a supernatural peace envelops a soul in union with God allowing it to rest from all activity, sinning, and works. Equivalent to the charge of ‘enthusiasm’, Weigelianism connoted a fanatical form of unmediated inwardness, a false interiority that could be traced back to Platonism, pseudo-dionysius, as well as the lazy and idle monastic contemplative tradition.<sup>499</sup> “Just like Molinos” Rango writes, “they [Weigelian mysticism] dearly wish to be logs and blocks/and then the great illumination will arrive. Their ways are well-known/via purgativa, illuminativa, unitiva.”<sup>500</sup> Such passivity and pure interiority, lampooned humorously by Rango here, was suspected of rendering its practitioners especially vulnerable to false spirits and possession, as the soul took affection—instead of doctrinal truth—for its guide.<sup>501</sup>

This late medieval German mystical tradition known as ‘spiritualism’ produced what George Williams has termed the “solitary brooders” of the radical Reformation, preaching a notion of the soul’s supernatural silence resembling later quietist writings.

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‘positive’ nature employing the understanding, will, and imagination. See Martin Brecht, “Der mittelalterliche (Pseudo-) Augustinismus als gemeinsame Wurzel katholischer und evangelischer Frömmigkeit” in *Jansenismus, Pietismus, Quietismus*, eds. Hartmut Lehmann, Heinz Schilling, Hans-Jürgen Schrader (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 2002), 60.

<sup>495</sup> Andreas Kühn, *Von der Mysticorum Quietismo Contemplativo oder Mystischen Beschauungs-Ruhe/welche Michael de Molinos...* (Danzig: Johann Zacharias Stollt, 1688), 60-61, 68.

<sup>496</sup> Kühn, *Von der Mysticorum Quietismo Contemplativo*, 138; 154.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; 18.

<sup>498</sup> Rango, *Neue Quäckerey in der Quietisterey*, 4.

<sup>499</sup> This charge was likewise made in a dissertation by Johannes Günther, a student of Abraham Carpzov at Leipzig, *De Religione Quietistarum* (Leipzig, 1687).

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>501</sup> Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 98.

Deeply suspicious of sacramental and institutionalized religion, radical reformers such as Sebastian Franck (1499-1543), Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561), and Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541) and their followers “met in fellowships apart but had little use for the traditional sacraments and ordinances. Such were the Dutch Sacramentists, the Schwenckfelders, the Loists, and the speculative solitaries such as Franck.”<sup>502</sup> Key to these spiritualists’ view of proper devotion and understanding of faith was the concept of *Gelassenheit*, variously translated as ‘resignation’ or ‘tranquil submission’.<sup>503</sup> In the words of Franck in his *Paradoxes* from 1534, the soul’s *Gelassenheit*, surrender, and “self emptying” allowed for it to receive a faith “without mediation” through the spirit of God.<sup>504</sup> Rango, in pointing out that whatever novel, Catholic sources this new Quietist craze among Protestants claimed, it also had, like any other heresy, predecessors closer to home and in antiquity. Indeed, these early Reformation mystics exerted a sizable influence on the imagination of later Protestant separatists. Weigel was read both by Arndt and Boehme, and Schwenckfeld found an eager reception by Christian Hoberg and Gottfried Arnold.<sup>505</sup> Luther’s own indebtedness to the *Theologia Mystica* tradition and spiritualist interiority—although offset by his commitment to the efficacy of the external word and sacraments—is likewise readily apparent in his early writings.<sup>506</sup> Although Marsay himself briefly experimented with Boehme, ultimately finding it not to his liking, he repeatedly mentioned and employed the *Theologia Mystica* tradition and Tauler, citing them as shining examples of ‘inward Christianity.’<sup>507</sup>

Rango and Jäger’s fear of the seductive appeal of the new mystical expressions of interiority was well-founded as Molinos and Guyon quickly found a positive reception

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<sup>502</sup> George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 1298-99.

<sup>503</sup> Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 117.

<sup>504</sup> Sebastian Franck, *Paradoxa*, edited and with an introduction by Siegfried Wollgast (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 332. Quoted in Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 251.

<sup>505</sup> See Astrid von Schlachta, “Anabaptists and Pietists: Influences, Contacts, and Relations” in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800* edited by Douglas Shantz (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 127-8. And Douglas Schantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 17. Hoberg was converted to the particularly spiritualist style of critique after reading Schwenckfeld’s *Heavenly Medicine*.

<sup>506</sup> See Heiko Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramification*, translated by Andrew Colin Gow (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1986), 77-89. The specter of this radical ‘spiritualist’ tradition long hung over the Reformed tradition in the decades to come. Spiritualism was seen as the theological kindling for the religious and social upheaval of Müntzer, Andreas Karlstadt, and the Anabaptists following Luther’s state-sponsored reforms. The discourse of purely ‘inward’ devotion, and ‘pure faith’ constituted a challenge toward ‘outward’ ecclesiastical institutions and devotional forms such as preaching, Biblical authority independent of experience, and sacraments like baptism and the eucharist, animated the polemics against voices critical of the confessional churches. See Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 199-211. In the debate over Arndt, the question of his definition of faith’s debt to spiritualistic authors who did away with preaching and sacraments structured the orthodox response to him. See Johann Wallmann, “Johann Arndt: 1555-1621” in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Edited by Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 26

<sup>507</sup> In one letter Marsay writes “Habe gar schöne außzüge die das innere Christenthum und mit den mistici vollkommen überein kommen. Sie sindt in der Tauleri Predigten und übrigen Schriften so die Nachfolge Christi und die Teutsche Theologie zu finden vor welchen es Lutherus eine Vorrede gemacht, also daß man die misticii mit diesen eigen worten Luther bestätigen kan.” Marsay, *TP* 1246/2-26 Lorbach d. 07 December 1749.

among Protestants drawn to mystical practices promising a practical, experiential approach to worship. Philipp Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke, leaders in the Pietism movement that criticized official Lutheranism's emphasis on doctrine and outward ritual, both made positive comments about Molinos, with Francke even translating excerpts from Molinos's *Guida* in 1687.<sup>508</sup> It was primarily in the wing of 'radical' or separatist Lutheranism and Calvinism, however, that Quietism found its most positive reception as a method for a purer, unmediated interiority. Gottfried Arnold, the most popular radical Pietist author and church historian of his age, praised Quietism's image-less and wordless contemplation in the 1712 introduction to his translation of Molinos's *Guida*, first published in 1699, saying that "it pleases as well most Protestants especially, that he [Molinos], as a Papist, nevertheless insists primarily on the *Interior*, and demotes, on the other hand, the *external* in its abuses [...]"<sup>509</sup>. The gloss which Arnold provided of the overall meaning of Molinos is that of the two means to approach God—discursive prayer and silent contemplation—the second is to be preferred. Although helpful to 'beginners', meditation (discursive prayer) constitutes a human work, an external means which depends on human effort. The prayer of quiet on the other hand, represented "pure faith" ('lauter Glaube') more interior in its nature: "The first [prayer] for the novices and is sensual and materialistic; the second is for the adults/ as it is more purely bare and interior"<sup>510</sup>. Another Lutheran church historian cited by Arnold, Erdman Uhse (1677-1730), likewise praised Molinos for a seemingly Protestant-conform contemplative prayer in that he taught that the "best in prayer, is not to turn one's mind to carved images, but rather to turn the mind by faith to God, and therein wait in silence, until he works in us, and guides us to good thoughts."<sup>511</sup> In addition to the translation of Molinos, Arnold devoted a chapter to Quietism in his famous *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie* in 1700 and would continue to publish numerous excerpted and full-length editions of Guyon, Molinos, and Carmelite mystics such as Laurence de la Resurrection.<sup>512</sup> Arnold's 1701 *Leben der Gläubigen* and 1712 *Inwendiges Christenthum*, contained excerpts and biographies of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Molinos.<sup>513</sup> His interest in quietist mystics was in line with a general upswing in popularity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Protestantism of lay devotional texts like Molinos, Francis de Sales, and Thomas à Kempis preaching an 'inward' christianity.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Klaus vom Orde, "Der Quietismus Miguel de Molinos bei Phillip Jakob Spener", in in *Jansenismus, Pietismus, Quietismus*, eds Hartmut Lehmann, Hans-Jürgen Schrader, Heinz Schilling (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 106-118.

<sup>509</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Geistlicher Weg-Weiser: Die Seele von den sinnlichen Dingen abzuziehen, und durch den innerlichen Weg zur völligen Beschauung und innern Ruhe zu führen* (Joh. Christoph König: Frankfurt, 1712), Preface, 10. (Hist. Eccl. Sec. XVII. P. 472. Et Diskret de Quietistis.

<sup>510</sup> Arnold, *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie*, vol 3 (Frankfurt, 1700), 179.

<sup>511</sup> Erdman Uhse, *Kirchen-Historie des XVI und XVII Jahr-hunderts nach Christi Geburt* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritschen, 1710), 591. Quoted in Arnold, "Introduction", *Geistlicher Wegweiser*, (1712), 10.

<sup>512</sup> See note 43 above, as well as Arnold, *Etliche vortreffliche Tractätlein*.

<sup>513</sup> In his summary of Molinos's primary tenets attached to the account of his trial in the *KKH*, Arnold categorizes Quietism as part of the 'Geheime Theologie' of medieval apophatic mysticism whose major representative, Tauler, Luther had himself praised. *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie*, vol 3 (1700), 169-70.

<sup>514</sup> For an increasingly literate and ecumenical Protestant reading public, the rhetoric of interiority sold. One historian has tallied the number of editions of Kempis's *Imitatio* in the seventeenth-century at 444, many published by Protestant presses<sup>514</sup>, and that of Molinos and Francis de Sales at 100 (before 1740). A further 45 German, French and Italian editions of Bayly's *Praxis Pietatis* appeared before 1740, along with

Besides Arnold, Guyon and many other Catholic mystics found a tireless Protestant disseminator of their works in the editor and translator Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), a native of France who early on fled to the Netherlands.<sup>515</sup> Poiret, a polymath who early in his career worked to reconcile Cartesianism with Christianity, turned later in his life to mystical theology, seeing in it a much more practical, rational and efficacious method of worship. Poiret spent the final fifteen years of his life editing and translating Guyon's work, adding prefaces and subtitles to shape the mysticism more to his liking. In the preface to the first volume of the edition, *Opuscules Spirituels* from 1704, Poiret plays down the role of supernatural experience in Guyon, denies that she gives no role to the will or freedom, and generally presents Guyon's prayer of resignation and silence as a *useful* and simple devotional aid to draw the individual closer to God and away from the world. Her books provide the most excellent guide to "the prayer of the heart & and to give one's heart and spirit to God in faith and abandon in order that he operates in us as he pleases."<sup>516</sup>

Guyon's writings were, importantly, also integral in shaping the communal forms of budding Protestant separatist circles. The above-mentioned Kelpius<sup>517</sup>, another Protestant separatist who absorbed the Catholic mysticism, appears to have almost entirely adopted Madame Guyon's 'simple' prayer of quiet as the model for the devotional exercises in his small circle of hermits in colonial Pennsylvania. Kelpius published a small, 32 page booklet on mental, passive prayer entitled *Kurzer Begriff oder Leichtes Mittel zu Beten*, a clear rephrasing of Guyon's famous *Moyen court et tres facile pour faire Oraison* (1685).<sup>518</sup> Like Guyon's text, Kelpius's booklet instructs the reader on how to give oneself over to God "by means of inward prayer", which is achieved by such a simple method that even "the most simple, the most stupid people" can practice it. This method, as opposed to the active prayer of words, thoughts, and images, is "the prayer of the heart" which is performed "without words or thoughts: and this prayer is incomparably more useful than the other prayer, and much more pleasing to God..."<sup>519</sup> The precise means to reach this silent prayer of the heart is a prayer Kelpius calls the prayer of "pure representation" (*blosse Darstellung*). To perform this "practice and representation of the presence of God" one must make the faith-act, or thought, that God, in the form of the

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an incredible 95 German editions of Johann Arndt's *Book of True Christianity*. W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1992), 48.

<sup>515</sup> Marjolaine Chevalier, *Pierre Poiret (1646-1719): Du Protestantisme à la Mystique* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), 47-60.

<sup>516</sup> Pierre Poiret, *Les Opuscules Spirituels de Madame J.M.B de la Motte Guion* (Cologne: Jean de La Pierre, 1704), préface, 22.

<sup>517</sup> Based on the numerology of the theosophic theologian Johann Jacob Zimmermann that the world would end in 1694. Living in the wilderness as solitary hermits gained Kelpius fame as a solitary mystic in pietist circles that was the motivation for Conrad Beissel, the later founder of the Ephrata Cloister, to emigrate to Pennsylvania to seek out his community of hermits. Kelpius, like Gichtel, has been connected more prominently to Boehmism and theosophy by historians, but several facts clearly show that Kelpius's thought and contemplative practices borrowed much from the quietism emerging from Catholic countries in the 1680s and 90s. See Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves* (Penn State Press: State College, 2005), 185-6; Willard M. Martin, *Johannes Kelpius and Gottfried Seelig: Mystics and Hymnists on the Wissahickon* (Dissertation: Pennsylvania State University, 1979).

<sup>518</sup> Kelpius, *Kurzer Begriff oder Leichtes Mittel zu Beten* (Philadelphia, Franklin & Armbruester. Mars. Marion Carson copy, 1756). located in the Library Company of Philadelphia 7693.

<sup>519</sup> Kelpius, *Kurzer Begriff*, 6.

trinity, is everywhere present, in all one's actions and in one's soul. Once this sweet, loving presence has permeated the mind, Kelpius teaches that one must perform the "practice of immediate submission" by "desiring with the entire heart" to give over to God your "full interior and exterior" affairs. This practice, properly performed, should light the fire of divine love in the interior after which "the soul has nothing more to do but remain the entire time of the prayer in peace and silence."<sup>520</sup>

Patricia Ward has noted that Kelpius's treatment of such simple meditation leaves out the characteristic 'stages' of mystical experience as found in Teresa of Avila and Guyon and that it affords a positive role to 'active' means of engaging the will, a central question for just how far Protestant authors took the Guyonian rhetoric of self-annihilation.<sup>521</sup> Importantly, Kelpius's text is illuminating for its equation of the 'simple' meditative technique of silently dwelling in God's presence with a 'dark', apophatic path of mystical devotion more efficacious in achieving a continuous attention and interior adherence to God. Kelpius describes this interior prayer as "simple, unsophisticated, general, and dark; such that one does not clearly perceive or differentiate the movements of the mind, words, or what one asks for: and just as nothing can put a limit or goal on this prayer because of its breadth, so can nothing interrupt it, or make it cease."<sup>522</sup>

Kelpius's short booklet speaks to a wider absorption of Quietism among the increasing numbers of Protestant separatists seeking to practice a life of interior and exterior silence in removed and secluded parts of Christendom. Although there is scant evidence for Marsay being aware of Kelpius's booklet, the separatist milieu in which he moved in Berleburg and Schwarzenau suggests a network of awakened Protestants searching for the physical and theological means to put into practice the ideals of 'interiorized' Christianity. Kelpius's hermit community carried on a lively correspondence with the separatists in Berleburg and Schwarzenau where Marsay and many others were living secluded lives in huts leading similar ascetic existences.<sup>523</sup> Many of them would ultimately leave for Pennsylvania in emulation. One of these was an acquaintance of Marsay, Conrad Beissel, an eager and eccentric separatist destined to establish the monastic community of Ephrata in Lancaster Pennsylvania who had first heard of Kelpius in such correspondence and who he credits as sparking his interest in emigrating to Pennsylvania.<sup>524</sup>

But among all the separatists who warmly received Guyon's texts, Marsay was foremost in making her and the Catholic tradition of negative mysticism the center of a coherent devotional system. Building on what individual Protestants recognized and perhaps even practiced in their reading of these Catholic authors, Marsay provides us an example of a communal Protestant experiment to apply the withdrawn, ascetic mysticism of Guyon. In this experiment, it becomes clear what active means and practices were employed, drawing on the monastic tradition, to cultivate a passive disposition of the

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<sup>520</sup> Kelpius, *Kurzer Begriff*, 10-11.

<sup>521</sup> Ward, *Experimental Theology in America*, 67.

<sup>522</sup> Kelpius, *Kurzer Begriff*, 8.

<sup>523</sup> Marsay's autobiography mentions the arrival of letters from one prominent Pietist emigrant, Christopher Sauer describing Pennsylvania as a place where one could enjoy peace and solitude: "There was complete freedom. One could live there as a good Christian in solitude, as one pleased" cited in Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Brethren in Colonial America* (Elgin, Ill.: The Brethren Press, 1974), 33.

<sup>524</sup> See the internal history of Ephrata, *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County*, translated by J. Max Hark (Lancaster, PA: Zahm & Co., 1889), 15.

resigned soul. And fortunately, in Marsay, we have an extensive corpus of writings that elaborate the reception and practice of this simple method of meditation in a communal setting at Schloss Hayn.

### ***Charles Héctor Marquis de Marsay and the Practice of Passive Contemplation***

Charles Héctor de Marsay was born in 1688 in Bretagne, into a noble Protestant family on the run from a rejuvenated and militant Catholicism, much like Justinian von Welz. Born into a time of tumult and unrest with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and Louis XIV's destructive military campaigns, the young Marsay experienced firsthand the expulsions and persecutions as confessionality consolidated along national lines. Originally from the region around La Rochelle, Marsay's family had fled to Paris shortly after Marsay's birth. "In this great city...we were hidden" Marsay wrote, claiming to have been baptized in a Catholic church while in hiding to disguise his Huguenot background. In 1694, the family managed to flee from Paris and went, like so many other French Huguenots, to Holland. Marsay's mother took six of seven children along leaving the sick father and a son behind. In Holland, facing destitution, Marsay's mother first placed the children in caretaker homes before finding a permanent abode near Hanover at the court of Georg Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Lüneberg who had married a French noble Huguenot. The young Charles spent his early adolescence here, eventually enlisting in the Hanoverian military in 1705 to join the Allies in the Spanish War of Succession against his homeland.<sup>525</sup>

In his unpublished autobiography written in the late 1740s, Marsay structured the story of his spiritual development in terms of a gradual progression toward greater inward devotion, away from self-willing and effort, to passivity and abandonment. The autobiography describes a young man whose spiritual intensity was readily apparent at a young age while he was stationed with the Allied forces in the Low Countries in 1705. Marsay records that in this time he avoided the "company of the officers" and "spent the days, as much as his condition allowed, in quiet solitude" praying and trying to make himself worthy for communion.<sup>526</sup> He describes his initial attempts to practice the contemplative life as consisting of an active, strenuous effort to combat distractions, temptations, and doubts through meditation and vocal prayer. "I believed that the zeal and fervour of the love of God must be produced by the efforts of the creature, not having any idea or experimental knowledge of it."<sup>527</sup> Marsay later called this stage of his spiritual journey "the meditative state of prayer"<sup>528</sup>, a state characterized by a "great interior activity and multiplicity" (fort activité et multiplicité intérieure) which was "in no way regimented [reglé]". Not knowing any mystical authors and the "interior ways",

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<sup>525</sup> A good summary of Marsay's family background can be found in Hans Fritzsche, "Zur Familiengeschichte von Charles Hector, Marquis de Marsay (1688-1753)" in: *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes* 47./48. Jahrgang, 1998/1999, S. 528-533. Also used here is Marsay's unpublished autobiography, *La Vie du Monsieur Charl. Hector de St. George de Marsay* was first begun in 1739 and completed in 1745. The original french manuscript is in the BLU, with signature TP 1245, He did not know "that God operates in the souls by the same...and communicates himself to the heart in a manner so intimate and so familiar." 7.

<sup>526</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 3.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid, 7. He did not know "that God operates in the souls by the same...and communicates himself to the heart in a manner so intimate and so familiar.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, 7.



Marsay only had a knowledge of those “books of piety” used in his childhood Reformed faith, whose authors “knew nor taught any other manners of prayer than that of meditation and vocal prayer”.<sup>529</sup> Believing in Paul’s command to ‘pray without ceasing’, Marsay centered his efforts in a naïve pursuit of a literal fulfillment of this commandment, often praying “for three or four days without ceasing”.<sup>530</sup> Sometimes this practice yielded fruits—a ‘sensible taste’ of God’s love and a comforting awareness of his presence. Nevertheless, such experiences were fleeting and ultimately deceptive in that they led Marsay to believe that the “essence of prayer consisted in experiencing these sensible and arduous tastes”.<sup>531</sup> Marsay, in the moment, believed that such distinct, sensual manifestations of God would “last my entire life, but this attention and continual thought of God ceased little by little in its continuousness, and this sensible taste and fervor receded” which caused him to be full of anguish<sup>532</sup>.

Marsay’s ignorance of the “mystical books” changed in 1706 when two fellow Huguenot officers in his regiment, Monsieur Cordier and Barratier, introduced Marsay to the writings of Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680), a celebrated French mystic preaching a message of self-resignation and passivity akin to Molinos or Guyon.<sup>533</sup> Bourignon had in the 1670s and 80s attracted a following of highly educated men, establishing an ‘apostolic’ community in Denmark based on her calls to “renew the evangelical spirit” by “vanquishing the corruption” of the natural man.<sup>534</sup> Initially fearful “of falling into heresy, being strongly attached to the reformed religion”, Marsay nevertheless quickly became a fervent believer and practitioner of Bourignon’s doctrines.<sup>535</sup> In Marsay’s autobiography, where each stage of his early life led up to the pinnacle of Guyon’s Quietism, Bourignon’s teachings constituted what he terms the “first conversion”. This first conversion roughly matches the stage of “purgation” in classical mystical terms and aimed to help free the Christian of his attachment to the world of external, sensual

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid, 3. He had, “in truth the book called ‘The Kempis’ how within which I would have found all the views necessary for my interior path”, 8. The authors he mentions are “Les traités de la devotion et de l’amour Divin de Mr Jurieu, La Communion Devote de W Delaplace”, two devotional texts by prominent Reformed pastorst hat followed traditional meditational practices of vocal prayer and reflections on God’s various perfections to inflame the heart with love and strengthen the will against sin. Jurieu’s text consisted an exposition of the nature of divine love, then God’s characteristics, or “the reasons to love God” upon which one was encouraged to reflect and repeat in vocal prayer to arouse this divine love. Followed traditional meditational practices in which one identified the constitutive parts of God and divinity (chapter IV, “Cinq principaux traits qui composent la beauté divinité”, Chapter V: “La bonté, la douceur, & les bienfaits de Dieu”) The text by de la Placette (1629-1718) focuses on the rigorous self-examination of one’s conscience and other acts that one must perform to prepare oneself for communing with God in the eucharist. See chapter II, “Reflexions qu’on doit faire sur la misericorde de Dieu” for example.

<sup>530</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 3-4.

<sup>531</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 8. “Je croyais que le réel de la devotion et l’essence de la prière consistoit à avoir ces gouts et ardeurs sensibles”.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>533</sup> Marthe van der Does, *Antoinette Bourignon, 1616-1680: La vie et l’oeuvre d’une mystique chrétienne* (Holland University Press, 1974).

<sup>534</sup> Eric Jorink, “Outside God, There is Nothing’: Swammerdam, Spinoza, and the Janus-Face of the Early Dutch Enlightenment” in *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750: Selected Papers of Conference Held at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbùttel 22-23 March 2001*, ed. Wiep van Bunge (Brill: Leiden, 2003), 103-4.

appeasement.<sup>536</sup> Marsay wrote that Bourignon's particular role in the spiritual life is "for instruction concerning the state of the first conversion, and the renouncement of exterior things, and in the mortification of affections of the flesh, the senses, and the corrupt will, and as far as the activity of man accompanied by grace can go."<sup>537</sup>

With his new-found guide to a deeper conversion, Marsay resolved along with Barratier and Cordier to "quit the service and to spend the rest of my life in solitude and to consecrate it as best I could to God, desiring to order all things according to the teachings that Mad. A. Bourignon gives, to lead a life conforming to evangelical poverty".<sup>538</sup> By 1711, the three French officers had settled into a withdrawn life on the land of a German noble, Monsieur Castel<sup>539</sup>, with whom Marsay's family had a distant connection where the men could live in austere simplicity and isolation. The land granted to them lay in the village of Schwarzenau, in the rugged hill country of Hessen that had become the gathering point for innumerable radical Pietist separatists.<sup>540</sup> The threesome structured their days alternating between work, regular readings from Bourignon and the scriptures, and prayer, trying to remain silent throughout.

It was here in his hermitage, under the influence of Bourignon's teachings, that Marsay began to experiment with so-called 'simple' meditative acts and passive devotion, presaging the later practice of a "simple regard" and complete interior passivity of the circle at Hayn. Marsay and his companions were struck by Bourignon's admonitions to maintain a "simple conversation with God" in one's daily activities and "to convert all our actions into prayers, doing them in the presence of God and with the intention of doing them for him".<sup>541</sup> He and his companions thus strove to "do all their work in silence" in order "to remain in all things recollected in the presence of God".<sup>542</sup> This simple interior dialogue with God, Bourignon taught, was preferable to long vigils and meditations because such long-winded prayers only served to feed the exterior ego. "These prayers of such long duration", says Bourignon, "...come only from self-love".<sup>543</sup> In her writings, she described that in the daily activities of the apostolic community that she led, one "can even remain in prayer" in such activities as washing, cooking, and other activities, by seeking to do them "as God has ordained".<sup>544</sup> Marsay told his readers that this doctrine deeply impacted him and that "this was my occupation, to thus do all my little tasks for the love of God and in his presence".<sup>545</sup>

We gain yet more insight into the transition to a simpler, more interiorized meditational practice taking place with Marsay in his hermitage with this mention of a "practice of the presence of God" which he had read about in the writings of a Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614-1691), a lay friar of the decalced carmelites who had a strong influence on Guyon's protector, Bishop Fénelon. Marsay wrote that in the time

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<sup>536</sup> Marsay, *La Vie de Marsay*, 16. See MacEwen, *Antoinette Bourignon, Quietist*, 108.

<sup>537</sup> Marsay, *La Vie de Marsay*, 17.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>539</sup> Hans Fritsche, "Zur Familiengeschichte von Charles Hector, Marquis de Marsay", 532.

<sup>540</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 31. Marsay's remark that "many good, pious souls who...aspired to live at the edge of the world with the same intention as us."

<sup>541</sup> *ibid*, 36-7.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>543</sup> Bourignon, *Traité Admirable de la Vertu Solide*, Deuxieme Parti, (Amsterdam: Pierre Arens, 1676), 45.

<sup>544</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 86; Bourignon, *Traité Admirable de la Vertu Solide*, 321.

<sup>545</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 38.

he had begun practicing the more ‘childlike’ prayer of Bourignon, he also discovered Brother Lawrence:

it pleased God to soften me by many savorings and tastes of the presence which refreshed and fortified me greatly, I was very pleased to be rid of the painful work of meditation, that had so fatigued me the previous year, and this manner of childlike prayer was soft to me, and I could not understand anything besides this simple exercise of the presence of God in the mystical books, which caused me to read a little, and that which Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection wrote of this practice of the presence of God which he practiced in his kitchen...<sup>546</sup>

Known as the ‘kitchen mystic’, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection’s practice aimed to preserve the awareness of God not through distinct and unceasing acts of devotion, but by cultivating a disposition of familiarity and reliance on God in all activities that would become habitual and, in time, a characteristic of the most interior, senseless part of the soul. Working in his kitchen, Brother Lawrence “continued to speak to Him [God] familiarly,” praying that God “receive my labors and possess all my affections.” He wrote that one must “form a habit of thinking of the presence of God by conversing with him continually” and by this means one developed an intimacy with God of a very different nature than the ‘violent’, “labor of meditation”.<sup>547</sup> Lawrence of the Resurrection’s writings became part of the quietist controversy as Fénelon, Guyon, and Protestants like Poiret and Tersteegen noted the similarities between the simple, interior method of prayer he taught as opposed to meditation.<sup>548</sup> Pierre Poiret, who was also Bourignon’s primary link to the French Protestant reading public, had edited a collection of spiritual maxims by Brother Lawrence in 1692, and considering that Marsay mentions reading many other quietist mystics in Poiret’s other editions, it is likely that this is the edition he used for Lawrence.<sup>549</sup> With Marsay, the teachings of Bourignon, followed by the discovery of Lawrence’s “simple exercise of the presence of God” signaled a turn in his prayer practices away from active meditation techniques employing set questions and images to reflect on, and towards a ‘softer’, ‘simpler’ style of prayer. But this prayer nonetheless still clearly consisted of a type of dialogue and use of words, albeit more minimalistic and mental in nature. The more radical ‘prayer of the heart’ came only when Marsay discovered the writings of Madame Guyon, the story of which we turn to now.

### ***Marsay and Madame Guyon***

Marsay’s experiment with his fellow officers to live a solitary, contemplative life in Schwarzenau only lasted a year. Towards the end of 1711, Marsay reports that Cordier married and took off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem while he and Baratier continued their

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<sup>546</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 37.

<sup>547</sup> Laurent de la Résurrection, *La Théologie de la Présence de Dieu, contenant La Vie, les Moeurs, les Entretiens, la Pratique, & les Lettres du Frere Laurent de la Resurrection*, edited by Pierre Poiret (Cologne: Jean de la Pierre, 1710), 125-6.

<sup>548</sup> See Conrad De Meester, “Le Rayonnement International du Frère Laurent”, in *Ecrits et entretiens sur la pratique de la présence de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 36.

<sup>549</sup> Poiret, *Maximes spirituelles fort utiles aux âmes pieuses, pour acquérir la présence de Dieu* (Paris: E. Couterot, 1692). Based on Marsay’s earlier reference to Poiret’s mystical collections, he most likely encountered Brother Lawrence in Poiret’s edited texts as well.

secluded life.<sup>550</sup> In 1712, Marsay himself married, entering a purely “spiritual union” with Clara von Callenberg, a Pietist who had for a time been a follower of the infamous radical Pietist circle around Eva von Buttlar (1670-1721).<sup>551</sup> Over the course of the next 20 years, the couple would lead an itinerant existence, alternating between living alone in a cottage at Christianseck outside of Berleburg or in occasional communion with various radical, separatist communities that populated the region. These included Philadelphian pietists in Berleburg at the court of Count Casimir of Sayn-Wittgenstein, the Inspirationists in Schwarzenau, and, briefly, Zinzendorf’s Moravians. The couple also spent much time in Switzerland visiting Marsay’s mother who pleaded with him to take up a normal, stable vocation.<sup>552</sup> To survive, Marsay initially took up weaving but then settled into a long-term profession as a clock-maker.<sup>553</sup>

It was at this time during Marsay’s travels that he first encountered Madame Guyon’s teachings on achieving total abandonment to God in prayer. While returning from Switzerland in 1715, Marsay spent a winter at an Abbey in Baume-Les-Messieurs in Franche-Comte owned by the Abbé de Watteville, a French cleric. Watteville “placed in our hands the writings of Madame Guyon...but we did not yet comprehend the excellence and the interior spirit which was in there and which it has pleased God to since discover to us”.<sup>554</sup> Despite this lack of initial interest, over the course of the next years, Marsay and his wife began to deepen their study of Guyon’s texts. Returning to their hermitage at Christianseck, Marsay found himself in a period of spiritual “dryness”, brought on by his attempts to practice more extreme ascetic deprivation and characterized by temptations, and the lack of God’s presence. Turning to Guyon’s texts, along with a new companion, a fellow Guyon devotee, Gottfried Koch, the small group began to study how to “abandon themselves” more completely to God:

God used this occasion to unite us tightly with the good child Koch, who he led interiorly in the same paths as us, such that we encouraged each other to abandon ourselves to God for which we used the writings of Mad. Guyon to prevent us from leaving this state of abandonment, despite experiencing great misery and defeats. It pleased him [God] to give us a great taste for these excellent writings, which helped...illuminate our condition and supported us in this abandonment to God.<sup>555</sup>

Marsay’s devotion to Guyon became so great that he even undertook a journey to France in 1717 to meet her, only to find out in Paris that she had died that June.<sup>556</sup> The next years saw Marsay, his wife, and Gottfried Koch attempting to practice the life of interior abandonment in the area around Berleburg, sometimes failing as they fell into external devotions with the radical communities located there. Marsay soon began writing regularly, however, for the radical Pietist publications in Berleburg, spreading his new-

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<sup>550</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 54-6.

<sup>551</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 60-61.

<sup>552</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 65-8.

<sup>553</sup> See Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte der quietistischen Mystik in der katholischen Kirche* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1978), 509.

<sup>554</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 109-110.

<sup>555</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 157.

<sup>556</sup> Hans Schneider, *German Radical Pietism* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 96.

found enthusiasm for Guyon's Quietism. Following the many translations and editions of Spanish Golden Age mystics and Madame Guyon by Poiret and Gottfried Arnold in the first decade of the eighteenth-century, as well as such mysticism's popularity among radical hermits like Gichtel and Kelpius, the quietist themes of 'dark' and 'obscure' faith or contemplation seemed to have found their place in the mainstream of radical Protestant spirituality at Berleburg. Marsay, who discovered Guyon in 1715, may have stood at the center of the Guyon adherents in the radical separatist haven, but he was by no means the only one. Samuel Carl, the publisher behind the radical Pietist journal, *Die Geistliche Fama*, and Johann Haug, editor of the Berleburger Bible translation, both had sympathetic tendencies toward Quietism. In the *Geistliche Fama*, references to Guyon abound such as one from 1741 lamenting the 'abuse' of Guyon and Fénelon in France for teaching "the dark path of faith [...] of the pure and disinterested love without images or sensuality".<sup>557</sup> The Berleburger Bibel itself included numerous commentaries from Guyon on the Pentateuch, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, the Song of Songs, the Psalms, and Matthew, the presence of which the preface to the Bible explains is owing to their "edifying" explanations of the "inward life".<sup>558</sup> It also notes that these commentaries had been translated "by God's providence" by a man of nobility, in all likelihood Marsay himself.<sup>559</sup>

But, after years of practicing his devotions alongside his wife and his work first as a weaver and then a clockmaker, Marsay's situation changed radically in 1733, a shift that would see Marsay become the spiritual head of a small community of Guyon enthusiasts.

### ***The Schloss Hayn Society and the Practice of the Simple Presence***

"It is necessary that...the Children keep themselves here in the obscure faith, and in the abandonment to God and that they remain silent and withdrawn, not going out into the external or interior senses..."<sup>560</sup> These lines by Marsay, written in October 1738, a few years into a short-lived experimental community that Marsay stood at the head of between 1733 and 1741 at Schloss Hayn. Marsay's statement on the passive posture members of this group should adopt in their devotions highlighted the effort to achieve complete external and interior passivity at Schloss Hayn, a passivity that was mirrored in the group's physical isolation and reduced worldly engagement. The circle began to take shape in 1733 when Marsay, then living a quiet existence in Christianseck, just east of Berleburg, came into contact with the young Herr Fleischbein on account of Marsay's work as a clockmaker.<sup>561</sup> Fleischbein, immediately captivated by the older mystic and a

<sup>557</sup> Anonymous, *Geistliche Fama*, ed. Samuel Carl, (Band 3, 27. Sog [Berleburg] 1741), 111.

<sup>558</sup> Johann Haug, in the preface to the Berleburger Bible wrote that "Der geistreichen Madame de Guion ihre Erklärungen [...] die da betreffen das innere Leben [...] mesteintheils an gehörigen Orten beygefüget worden", "nachdem solche erbauliche Schrifften durch die Vorsehung Gottes von einer Hohen Standsperson sind übersetzt und dazu communiciret worden;", Johann Haug, *Die Heilige Schrift Altes und Neues Testaments/nach dem Grund-Text aufs neue übersehen und übersetzt* (Berleburg, 1726), 3-4.

<sup>559</sup> See Klaus vom Orde, "Antoinette Bourignon in der Beurteilung Philipp Jakob Speners und ihre Rezeption in der pietistischen Tradition", *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 26 (2000), 77.

<sup>560</sup> Marsay to Unknown, 10 September 1738, (BLU TP 1246 A 1/9 a Hayn), Folio 3.

<sup>561</sup> *Die Gesellschaft der Kindheit Jesu-Genossen auf Schloß Hayn: aus dem Nachlaß des von Fleischbein und Korrespondenzen von de Marsay, Prueschenck von Lindenhofen und Tersteegen 1734 bis 1742*. Eds Michael Knieriem/Johannes Burkardt (Wehrhahn Verlag: Hannover, 2002), 88.

short text he had written on abandonment to God<sup>562</sup>, urged Marsay and his wife to move to his manor to write and to be his *Seelenführer*. This arrangement greatly pleased Marsay who wrote to a friend that they had been given a “comfortable room so that we can continue living according to our withdrawn manner, and even more silent and solitary than at Berleburg... We live here as if we were out of the world.”<sup>563</sup> There was only a small village near the estate and it was three hours removed from the closest town, Siegen. Soon, more people came, including Fleischbein’s sister and husband, the Prueschens, and they too fell into the spiritual orbit of Marsay. At its height in 1739, the household contained twenty souls all “in the same interior path of the divine spirit.”<sup>564</sup>

The small community took on grandiose, even apocalyptic dimensions at times in Marsay’s mind, as their sufferings and advances in interiority seemed to herald a new spiritual age dawning in Christianity. In a letter to his friend Gottfried Koch on 25 August, 1736, shortly after the establishment of the Hayn circle, Marsay wrote that “it seems the time is here when the sincere souls are to learn to live by God alone and his inward direction and to direct their attention only to this, and to become familiar with the directions and actions of his spirit...”<sup>565</sup>

The daily life and rhythm of the household and the events that took place there can only partially be pieced together from visitor’s accounts like that of Edelmann’s and Marsay’s letters. It is not surprising that the household’s inner workings are difficult to discern as Marsay’s sometimes asked his correspondents to not share what he told them about their household as “our calling is the hidden life.”<sup>566</sup> The activity in the household beyond the evening prayer gatherings (to which we will soon turn) mostly consisted in the inhabitants of the household keeping quietly to themselves. In an English translation of Marsay’s *Discours Spirituel* from 1749, the translator remarked that the inhabitants of the house “live much alone, and assemble only an Hour every Evening and on *Sunday Morning*.”<sup>567</sup> Marsay, who had earlier worked much as a weaver and then a clock-maker, seems to have dropped physical labor almost completely. He commented in one letter from April 1736 that his eyes had deteriorated so much that he could now only do very little on his previous profession of making and repairing clocks.<sup>568</sup> Most of Marsay’s time at this point was taken up by his spiritual exercises, his extensive correspondences, as well as publishing through Samuel Carl’s press in Berleburg. The move to Hayn under the patronage of the Fleischbeins appears to have permitted the aging Marsay to devote his time to disseminating his and Guyon’s ideas on mysticism, the ‘interior life’ and the ‘path of dying’. The series was titled variously as ‘Spiritual Discourses’ or ‘Testimony of an Infant’. The first edition appeared in 1735 with subsequent volumes on magic, on ‘True Inner Devotion’, charismatic worship, and commentaries on Romans, the Old

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<sup>562</sup> Marsay to Gottfried Koch, Berleburg, 23 January 1735 at Schloss Hayn (BLU, TP 1246 2/4).

<sup>563</sup> Marsay to Gottfried Koch in Lindau Schloß Hayn, 2. April 1736, 119.

<sup>564</sup> Marsay to Lalouet an Duval, 1 February, 1739 (BLU, TP 1246 A 1. 10 ) at Hayn.

<sup>565</sup> Marsay to Koch, 25 August 1736 (BLU TP 1246/2/8).

<sup>566</sup> Marsay to Duval, 8 April 1739 (TP 1246 A 1 11).

<sup>567</sup> Marsay, *Discourses on Subjects Relating to the Spiritual Life, translated from the French*. (Edinburgh: Tho. And Wal. Ruddimans, 1749), 41-2.

<sup>568</sup> Marsay to Koch, 2 April 1736 at Hayn (TP 1246/2/7).

Testament all within the space of five years.<sup>569</sup> Marsay would take trips now and then to nearby Berleburg to supervise the printing of his series *Nouveaux Discours Spirituels* and Fleischbein would often translate Marsay's works into German.<sup>570</sup>

The household grew as visitors—often relatives or friends of the Fleischbeins—were overcome with the intensity of the devotions there, and expressed their desire to retreat from the world and join the community. One visitor, a Mme de Rottenhoff, the oldest daughter of the elder Fleischbeins—arrived in late summer 1738 for a visit and “she was not here for even eight days when it pleased God to touch her heart to the degree that she resolved to quit the world...to consecrate the rest of her days to God in solitude.”<sup>571</sup> Asking Marsay to accept her as his “spiritual daughter”, Rottenhoff joined the “family of the divine Infant” permanently the following spring. In the same year, another member was added to the household, Dorothea Fietz, who Marsay called “very serious and strict in the outward denial of self”. But “she stood however in great danger because of certain extraordinary revelations that she believed came from God, which I have then had to cast out from her.”<sup>572</sup> Even the household's domestic staff was infected with the piety of the household. Marsay wrote in 1739 that God “has sent us servants who have sacrificed themselves and submitted themselves to the same direction and subordination” as the rest of the household.”<sup>573</sup> Marsay's satisfaction at seeing the household grow in number is readily apparent as he saw it as a confirmation of God's approval of their devotions: “The number of souls in this house grows ever greater, such that it seems God wants in the end even pious house servants, that all the inhabitants of this house should be souls who sincerely desire God.”<sup>574</sup>

Turning to the household's daily spiritual exercises, Marsay followed closely the rules for devotion set out by the Michelin Order, or ‘Society of the Friends of the Infant Jesus’ founded by Madame de Guyon in the 1680s and carried on by Fénelon.<sup>575</sup> A society that existed initially only in the letters and writings of Guyon and Fénelon, the concept served as a vehicle to spread the practice of wordless prayer and spiritual abandonment as found in the writings of the Spanish Golden Age mystics and early seventeenth-century devotional writings of de Sales and Chantal.<sup>576</sup> The *Règles* of this society were republished in Cologne in French by Poiret in 1705 and in German in 1706 and detailed simple guidelines for entry (all those who “give themselves to Christ...to be led by his spirit”) and a strong emphasis on prayer as an activity that “all mankind is capable of”.<sup>577</sup> Marsay often called his own household after this group, “the members of

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<sup>569</sup> *Die Gesellschaft der Kindheit Jesu-Genossen auf Schloß Hayn: aus dem Nachlaß des von Fleischbein und Korrespondenzen von de Marsay, Prueschenck von Lindenhofen und Tersteegen 1734 bis 1742*. Eds Michael Knieriem/Johannes Burkardt (Wehrhahn Verlag: Hannover, 2002).

<sup>570</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 A / 1/ 1.7 a Hayn ce 15 June 1738. “Nôtre chère frère FLeischbein traduit en allemand, plusieurs Discours.” TP 1246 A 1 11 A M Duval. A Hayn ce 8 Avril 1739.

<sup>571</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 1/8.7 a Hayn ce 10 August 1738

<sup>572</sup> TP 1246/2/15 No. 20 Hayn d 11 Martz 1739

<sup>573</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 A 1 11 A M Duval. A Hayn ce 8 Avril 1739.

<sup>574</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 A 1 11 A M Duval. A Hayn ce 8 Avril 1739.

<sup>575</sup> Guyon, *Regle des Associés a l'enfance de Jesus. Modèle de Perfection pour tous les états*. (Cologne: Jean de la Pierre, 1705), 18. Originally published at Antoine Briasson, Lyon, 1685.

<sup>576</sup> See Dianne Guenin-Lelle and Ronney Mourad in “Introduction” to *Jeanne Guyon: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).

<sup>577</sup> Guyon, *Regle des Associés a l'enfance de Jesus. Modèle de Perfection pour tous les états*. (Cologne: Jean de la Pierre, 1705), 18. Originally published at Antoine Briasson, Lyon, 1685.

the family of the divine infant” who were “characterized by simplicity, innocence, and obedience.”<sup>578</sup> Marsay seems to have benefited mostly from the society’s rules concerning prayer. Prayers offered by members of the group must be ‘passive’ and “without quelling or forcing oneself against God’s will” with the highest state of prayer being one in which “the soul does nothing else but taste and admire a good sovereign”.<sup>579</sup> The ultimate goal was to become as humble and pliant and abandoned to God as the obedient Christ child. Specific directions on how to perform this prayer in Guyon’s *Règle* underscore the similarities to the practice developed by Marsay at Hayn with silence, closed eyes, searching for God’s presence in the soul, and an openness to all further directions from the spirit as one intently turned inward:

Wanting to pray, withdraw yourself to a secluded spot, closing your eyes to the things outside, in order to summon all your forces to your interior. Put yourself in the presence of God, you feel a lively sense that he is everywhere and especially in your heart. Give yourself to Jesus Christ in order that he himself will be your prayer, asking him to teach you to pray; expect everything from him, hoping nothing from yourself: next, abandon to him your prayer, following the spark of his grace in all liberty.<sup>580</sup>

In Marsay’s formulation, this activity is one of “searching for the center” of the soul by “recollection in the tranquility of the spirit, in representing for oneself continually the presence of God in oneself” and must be done by a “respectful silence of all the faculties of sense” without being tempted by those senses’ “external effusions”.<sup>581</sup>

Another witness to just what the Hayn circle’s prayer meetings might have looked like in practice was the novelist Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793) author of the autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *Anton Reiser* (1785). The novel begins with a thinly-veiled description of Moritz’s own childhood experience as a pupil of the strict, and abusive Herr Lobenstein who was a member of Fleischbein’s circle of Quietists in Pymont. Fleischbein had moved there after the Hayn circle’s dissolution in 1745 continuing the exercises taught to him by Marsay. Moritz’s novel included a description of one such meeting which closely mirrored Edelmann’s account with a few added details. Moritz wrote “all of these people had to gather once daily in a large room of the house to a kind of worship service which Herr Fleischbein himself had organized. It consisted in everyone sitting around a table, with closed eyes, with head laid on the table, and waiting a half hour to see if the voice of God or the inner word could be perceived. If someone received anything, they would make it known to the others.”<sup>582</sup>

The end of Guyon’s and Marsay’s mental prayer is for one can to become more receptive to the spirit and the directions of God, abandoning one own’s will to that of God’s completely. One does so by not stipulating any rules for what one does in prayer or specific words, but simply “opens one’s heart” to God. Guyon wrote in the *Règle* that it is “useless to want to give him [the spirit of God] rules, or guide his functioning. Therefore

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<sup>578</sup> Marsay, Schloss Hayn, 1 February, 1739. (BLU TP 1246 A 1. 10.

<sup>579</sup> Guyon, *Règles*, 29.

<sup>580</sup> Guyon, *Règles*, 38.

<sup>581</sup> Marsay, *Discours Spirituel sur diverses Matieres de la vie intérieure*, 104.

<sup>582</sup> Moritz, *Anton Reiser*, 8-9.



one must not constrain in any degree the prayer that one makes, but by opening the heart to the holy spirit, abandon it to him..."<sup>583</sup> But phrased in this negative way, that is, ceasing to do this or that action, or *not* using this or that method or rule, obscures from what one does: that is, the interior, mental prayer directs attention to a different space of consciousness, cultivating a certain type of attention. Put in such positive terms, it is thus easier to identify the specific techniques and methods employed by Marsay and the Quietists to cultivate a 'passive' interiority. What physical gestures or mental 'acts' (what Guyon calls 'interior acts') did they employ to induce such passivity?

To begin describing the meditative techniques employed at Hayn, we return to Marsay's years in the army. Well before the establishment of the circle at Schloss Hayn, we can see that Marsay was already deeply immersed in practices originating in the interiorized spirituality and mystical practices associated with Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross of Golden Age Spain. Marsay mentions that while waiting for his discharge from the military in 1711, he bought books by Jean of the Cross and Theresa of Avila and found a strong correspondence between the "sentiments vif de douceurs de la presence de Dieu" described in her writings and his own experience.<sup>584</sup> Teresa's writings would clearly resonate with Marsay in that they taught that one should cultivate a disposition of humility toward God, like that of a child or "some poor person before some great and rich emperor", asking simply for God's assistance and "remember that it [the soul] is in the presence of God".<sup>585</sup>

The link between the apophatic prayer of silence and the type of familiar, interior conversation described above with Brother Lawrence's prayer is that both are rooted in the carmelite practice of 'recollection', an active meditation technique to 'gather' or focus the soul on God by silencing the senses and the rational faculties. Moshe Sluhovsky defines recollection as a "technique of methodic meditation, whose goal was the gathering of the soul to a union with God by means of abandonment of attention to possible distractions." It was an exercise that led the practitioner to being focused solely on God such that "conscious experience of the physical senses ceases".<sup>586</sup> Avila's description of this practice describes it as a "resolute act of the will" to call in the soul from the external senses in which it is 'dispersed': "Our senses, imagination, and intellect tend spontaneously toward exterior things, on which they are dispersed; therefore, the soul, by a prolonged, resolute act of the will, ought to withdraw them from these exterior things in order to concentrate them on interior things—in this little heaven of the soul where the Blessed Trinity dwells."<sup>587</sup> Brother Lawrence's simple method of awareness of God's presence closely linked him to this recollection, which Teresa also termed the 'prayer of simplicity'. To perform this prayer, one must "keep the understanding from discoursing" but only by gentle means "without violence or noise" and "remember that it [the soul] is in the presence of God".<sup>588</sup> This prayer marked the transition from the intellectually burdensome stage of meditation to that of an affective prayer of the will and love.

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<sup>583</sup> Guyon, *Règle des Associés à l'Enfance*, 30.

<sup>584</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 22.

<sup>585</sup> Marsay discusses the practice of recollection at length in the *Témoignage d'un Enfant* series.

<sup>586</sup> Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 104.

<sup>587</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Translated by Benedictines of Stanbrook (New York: Cosimo, 2007).

<sup>588</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, translated by Rev. John Dalton (London: T. Jones, 1852), 58.

The main contribution of these ‘pre-quietists’, as Sluhovsky terms Osuna, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, was to chart the borders between ‘active’ and ‘infused’ (or passive) recollection in the labyrinthine interior ways. Recollection, in Teresa of Avila’s stages of prayer, is the highest stage of active meditation, in that it still made use of words and human effort. Guyon, in her description of the “prayer of the simple presence of God” insists that while passivity is a component of this stage, in that it is done in silence and helps us to “cease self action”, it is not an utter passivity in which the soul ceases to will at all. To achieve interior silence, one must, like a suckling infant, “move its lips” to make the milk flow. Only when the “milk of grace” is flowing can one rest the will. Simple, ‘exterior’ acts are thus necessary in this final stage of recollection.<sup>589</sup>

Marsay himself explicitly incorporated this understanding of the final stage of active prayer in which the will was still involved. He wrote in 1739 in his *Témoignage* series that recollection “consists in gathering all one’s inclinations to God, giving to him all one’s affections, taking care that they do not distract one from the single object that one desires to be reunited with and concentrated on, which is God.”<sup>590</sup> Marsay explained as well that this gathering of one’s powers and attention to God would not be completely passive initially, but be “mixed” with the “action of the will”: “The recollection of which one is capable in the beginning is mixed with the action of the will which desires to be held gathered and recollected, and concentrated on God to not suffer any complacency, nor desire in any thing, except God himself, withdrawing from all the rest.”<sup>591</sup>

The “action of the will” to maintain one’s attention on God in this recollection consisted in ‘simple acts’ such as short, simple verses of scripture. Simple acts like that an infant would make, or a sailboat unfolding its sails<sup>592</sup>, constitutes much of the imagery employed by this mystical tradition to characterize the active participation of the will in cultivating a receptivity to God. Marsay describes just such a method of active prayer or recollection to lead the soul toward a mortification of the senses and the passive state of abandonment in God. In Marsay’s 1738 *Nouveaux Discours Spirituels sur Diverses Matières*, he summarizes a passage from Guyon’s famous bishop-patron, Fénelon, which reveals the Quietists’ keen interest in a correlation between contemporary recollection techniques and those of the early eremitic Desert Fathers whose example was so highly prized among contemplative Protestants:

The honorable bishop of Cambray, Monsieur de Fenelon has compiled an extract of the method that the holy anchorites used to guide their disciples to the unceasing prayer: He says, after Cassien, that for all means and to guide them there, as with a [lisière], they only gave them a small number of words from Psalms 70:2 to be a prayer formula for them, that they should recite day and night; “My God, come to my aid!” by this they should fill their senses and the force of their imaginations, until so entirely exhausted and weakened, they could remain in rest, only keeping *God alone and his operation*; which essentially is the

<sup>589</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, Chap XII: “L’oraison du simple presence de Dieu”, 51.

<sup>590</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant de la vérité & droiture des voyes de l’Esprit. Ou Explication mystique & literale de l’Épître aux Romains*. (Berlebourg: Christoffle Michel Regelein, 1739), 207.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>592</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, Chap XXII, “Des Actes Intérieures”, 62.

unceasing prayer which is made in the spirit, in the center of the soul; it is separated from the senses, and mortifies them and puts them to death: when therefore they had become capable of adhering to this prayer, in working to maintain a continual attention of the heart to God, they no longer employed these words. This exercise put them quickly in a state to receive in themselves the only and pure operation of God, to arrive at his union, by a complete self-mortification: The admirable Grégoir Lopez chose these words for his formula: your will be done.<sup>593</sup>

What is of interest here is the positive role that Marsay attaches to this minimalistic vocal prayer formula in conditioning the soul for the prayer of silence. Marsay, far from prohibiting beginners from using prayer formulas or external means, recognized that “it is necessary that God accommodates himself to the weakness of man...he gives him means which, pulling him little by little out of his senses, guides him to his spirit”.<sup>594</sup> Although the spoken words are to be done away with once the practicants are able to “maintain a continual attention to the heart of God”, the words chosen and the act of exhaustive repetition play an integral role in focusing the mind on God’s presence. This type of mantra, or ‘centering’ prayer enjoyed a wide use in early monasticism, where it was known as the ‘monologistic’ or ‘Jesus’ prayer.<sup>595</sup> Likewise, in St. Laurent de la Resurrection’s directions on how to put the soul in contact with God, he suggested using short phrases: “...form inwardly a few words like ‘my Lord, I am completely yours; God of love, I love you with all my heart: Lord, make me according to your heart.’”<sup>596</sup> The words chosen by the early anchorites as well as these later mystics served as a primer for higher forms of wordless prayer and constituted an ideal, never quite fully realizable, of continuous prayer to protect against demons and to remain in the presence of God.<sup>597</sup> The continual attention of the heart to God had to be conditioned by a sensible act initially in order to set the soul in motion, after which the soul is left in a rapturous state of perpetual attention that cannot be interrupted even by the bodily senses being elsewhere occupied.

Another piece of evidence of the use of a set formula, akin to the manner Marsay understood practiced by the Desert Fathers, in Marsay’s ‘simple’ practice of the presence of God this is a lost text he wrote on the “dominicale prayer” or “our father”. In a letter dated June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1740, “present oneself to God” simply and continuously. The Pater and Domincal payer: “que votre volonté se fasse sur la terre comme dans le ciel”...<sup>598</sup> Marsay was not against the use of prayer formulas to prime the soul and put it on the path to mental prayer. He mentions several times using Gottfried Arnold’s ‘prayer formula’.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>593</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours d’un Enfant*, 106. The original description of the monologistic prayer by Fénelon appeared in a section of his *Justifications de la doctrine de Madame de la Mothe-Guion* Tome III (Libraires Associés: Paris, 1690) entitled “Examen de la neuvieme et dixieme Conférence de Cassien sur l’état fixe de l’oraison continuelle.”

<sup>594</sup> Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours d’un Enfant*, 117.

<sup>595</sup> Lucien Regnault, *Immerwährendes Gebet bei den Vätern* (Cologne: Luther-Verlag, 1993), 7-8.

<sup>596</sup> Laurent, *La Théologie de la Presence de Dieu*, 122.

<sup>597</sup> Regnault, *Immerwährendes Gebet bei den Vätern*, 12.

<sup>598</sup> Marsay, TP 1246 A 1/16 a Hayn ce 15 Juillet 1740

<sup>599</sup> Marsay, TP 1246/2-31 Godelsheim 29 Aug 1750. Johann Arndt also mentions in his *True Christianity*, Second Book, Chapter 34, Section VI, 1. These and similar meditations may be of use, for the encouragement of those who begin the exercise of prayer; so that they may always have certain sentences of Scripture ready at hand, upon which they may meditate, and which they may apply to themselves, by

The eremitic technique to produce a “continual attention of the heart to God” and the “simple presence” practice had such radical connotations to early modern orthodox thinkers because such techniques presented themselves as direct, unmediated ways of experiencing God in the soul. The early modern technical term to describe this type of unmediated meditation was the “simple vüe”, that is, thinking of God directly and not by means of terrestrial images and ideas. The synthesis of such ‘simple’ carmelite and quietist meditational practices—the presence of God, recollection, and the simple view—is the key to understanding the acts constituting the communal and silent contemplation at Schloss Hayn with which we began this chapter. Marsay characterizes this “look” or “regard” of “God himself” as the “true contemplation” and the “practices of practices.”<sup>600</sup> Francis de Sale (1567-1628), the bishop of Geneva whose mystical writings would inspire Madame de Guyon, Fénelon, and other seventeenth-century French quietists, wrote that “simple view” was done without “distinction”, meaning not breaking the idea of God, his perfections, and acts down into constitutive parts to consider them one by one through discursive interrogation. The simple view regarded God in “general” and “indistinct” manner:

At times as well we are attentive in viewing in God several of his infinite perfections, but with a simple look [vue simple] and without distinction; as one who with a glance, moves his eyes from head to toe of his richly dressed spouse, would attentively see the entirety in general, and nothing in particular, not knowing what necklace, nor dress, or countenance she had....<sup>601</sup>

It is different from from the standard practice of meditation that consisted of “with effort, work, and words, our spirit going from one line of consideration to another, searching in various places...”<sup>602</sup> The simple view produces, rather, a “vibrant and attentive idea of the immensity of God, who is very universally and very truly present to all things.”<sup>603</sup> Similarly to Guyon and Kelpius later, Sales taught that you can put yourself “in the presence of God” by thinking that God is “within you, in the depths of your soul, that he enlivens and animates it, and supports it by his divine presence...it is likewise this thought that will excite in your heart a profound veneration for God, who is so intimately present.”<sup>604</sup> In Molinos’s *Spiritual Guide*, the type of ‘general’, ‘simple’ gazing on God directly is very much aligned with an anti-rational and quietistic rhetoric. Molinos contrasts the simple View with the “other Exercises wherein I am always willing to employ my self a little”. The simple View on the other hand teaches that a “stop should be put to the operations of my Soul” to regard him in silence and love.<sup>605</sup>

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comprising the sense of them in a short prayer. This will be easily understood by those that are exercised herein.

<sup>600</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d'un Enfant de la verité et droiture des voyes de l'esprit, ou explication des trois premieres chapitres de la Genèse* (Berleburg, 1738), 25-6.

<sup>601</sup> Francis de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* VI.6 in *Oeuvres Complètes de Sainte François de Sales* (Pérusse Freres: Paris, 1855), 307.

<sup>602</sup> *ibid*, 527.

<sup>603</sup> Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 76.

<sup>604</sup> Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 77.

<sup>605</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, 51.

The Jesuit response to the new, ‘simple’ devotion emphasized the danger of giving oneself over to such undifferentiated contemplation and the impossibility of actually seeing God as he is. One Jesuit riposte to Malaval’s “simple practice”, that of Desmaret’s 1670 treatise, claimed that he tried the “simple vue” approach but could not make it work since it is only God who can look on himself as he is (Voir et comprendre son être simple”) Sabrina Stroppa’s essay on the Jesuit polemics against the prayer of “simple view” makes clear that both Segneri and Desmaret’s argument that one has to break God down into his component parts of perfections and examine them “les uns après les autres” lays bare the scientific, rational approach of the century opposed to the mystical method.<sup>606</sup>

In Protestant circles, this ‘simple view’ found great acclamation. In 1709, Poiret’s *Practice of the True Mystical Theology* included a treatment of how contemplation differs from meditation that likewise singles out the “simple view” as contemplation’s primary characteristic. The soul has two powers, the first being reason, but the second “is a power of understanding without reasoning, which is done by the unique and simple regard of the object that is presented to it”. He says the mystics call this the higher part of the understanding. Reasoning takes all the parts and examines them one after the other, defines them, unclothes them, and examines them. “But he who views things from a simple view, in the manner that we are speaking of here, considers the entirety of his object simultaneously, without investigating the principal or consequences; and thus one enjoys it without effort by a universal concept of all the particular truths found in the meaning of this object.”<sup>607</sup> This mental gaze is thus not an act of ratiocination but of “intelligence, produced by the lights of faith, affirmed by the continual exercise of the presence of God; purified and perfected by the aid of grace that calls us, establishes us, and conserves us in this wholly luminous and wholly loving view of divinity; where the soul continually considers God”. Gottfried Arnold uses similar language to this ‘simple view’ when describing Teresa of Avila’s Prayer of Silence in his *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie*: “Contemplation or the prayer of rest consists therein/ that one presents oneself for the presence of God with an obscure and loving act of faith/ and also remains completely still and motionless/with out continuing, engaging in or permitting discourse/ or wanting to form any imaginings and thoughts in the mind/ in that it runs against the respectfulness of God/ to repeat, such a pure and simple act of faith , which, meanwhile is yet of such merit and power/ that it contains within it all the merit of all other virtues/ and also exceeds these. And this same [act] lasts the entire lifespan of a man through/ if he does not interrupt this through another act which is against this one.”<sup>608</sup>

Marsay, in dealing with the prayer of simple view, classifies it under that prayer of the spirit mentioned by Paul in Romans 8:26 where the “spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.” Such a prayer under the influence of God is one where

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<sup>606</sup> Stropp, “Une Glace Nette et Polie”, 336.

<sup>607</sup> *Practice of the True Mystical Theology* was a collection of writings by French quietists (Malaval, Berniers, Guyon, etc) with an introduction by Poiret. “Mais celui qui regarde les choses d’une simple veuë, en la maniere que nous l’entendons icy, se propose tout son objet à la fois, sans rechercher ni principe, ni consequence; & ainsi l’on jouit sans peine par un concept universel de toutes les verités particulieres qui se trouvent dans l’étenduë de cet objet.” Poiret, *La Pratique de la Vraye Theologie Mystique, contenue dans quelques Traités, de François Malaval, De Monsieur de Bernieres, & de Sainte Therese*, (Liege: Henry Steiner, 1709), 205.

<sup>608</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Kirchen und Ketzer-Historie*, 173-4.

Christians remain in a “passive state...letting the spirit act in them.” Because it is not a prayer with specific words or requests it is an “indistinct” prayer, one where the soul simply “feels a tug, a tendency toward its God” and “rests in a profound silence, a simple and unique regard, that it fixes in faith on its beloved who has captivated all its desires.”<sup>609</sup>

Persisting in this ‘simple exposition’ of the soul to God and becoming more and more familiar with his presence served to hasten the transition from an active or acquired prayer to one of contemplation where the interior senses are placed in a state of perpetual rest. Sometime in the late 1720s, a few years before Marsay moved into Schloss Hayn to lead a group of souls in the prayer of quiet, Marsay began to formalize this practice of the presence of God, with set hours for meditation in the manner of “simple exposition”. This move came at a time when Marsay and his wife, despite his years of ascetic and withdrawn existence in Christianseck, a village near Berleburg, had begun to socialize more with other pious souls, “making many visits” and engaging in many “useless conversations”. Marsay relates that at this time the book, *Traité de la pratique de la théologie mystique*, a compilation of mystical texts such as François Malaval and Teresa of Avila and edited by Pierre Poiret, fell into his hands.<sup>610</sup> Reading Malaval’s 1670 treatise on “easy practice to elevate the soul to contemplation”, Marsay was “seized with fear” that he had not been practicing “interior prayer” and immediately “made the resolution to take anew regulated times, three times a day to pray in exposing myself in a simple manner to the presence of God, without making any act other than to look at him in a general and indistinct manner in faith...”<sup>611</sup> It is along more or less similar lines that Malaval and Guyon both encourage their readers to organize their silent prayer sessions. In his “easy practice to elevate the soul to contemplation” Malaval encourages his readers to “spend an hour of prayer in the simple presence of God”.<sup>612</sup> This should be done “without idleness and in great tranquility” and is sometimes accompanied by “contrition, sometimes by the tenderness of the love of God, sometimes by tears: sometimes by the desire to suffer”.<sup>613</sup> In Guyon’s *Moyen Court*, in the section on interior silence and how to “occupy oneself with God interiorly”, she teaches that one should daily “recollect oneself for a half-hour or an hour”.<sup>614</sup>

In performing this “way of the search of the center by the recollection in tranquility of the spirit”, Marsay and his household believed they were mortifying “little by little all the imperfections and attachments at their roots”. Marsay’s 1738 *Nouveaux Discours*, written at the height of the circle’s concerted efforts to achieve mystical death, claimed that by “remaining thereby in a respectful silence of all the faculties of the senses, and when at all times one perceived a movement toward the exterior, and is dissipated, one turns anew the interior eye” you will in short awhile, be “possessed of the love of God” and your passions will “fall little by little, and will be overcome, without knowing how.”<sup>615</sup> Another member of the household, Karl Sigismund Prueschenck von

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<sup>609</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant, Epître Aux Romains*, 77.

<sup>610</sup> *La Vie*, 173. See note 120.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>612</sup> Malaval, *Practique facile*, 293.

<sup>613</sup> *ibid*, 88.

<sup>614</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, Chapter XIV, 34-35.

<sup>615</sup> Marsay himself insisted that those who follow the impulse toward silence “in withholding all nourishment to the sensitive part of the body, and the imagination, in order that they do not stop and impede the soul

Lindenhofen, the brother in law of Herr Fleischbein, likewise described these silent exercises as a means of self-mortification and achieving the mystical death: “We do not allow ourselves meanwhile in this silent rest to be led astray, but rather view this all as an instrument to crucify ourselves, in order to achieve more perfectly the mystical death.”<sup>616</sup> This gradual slipping into a state of muted passions by the practice of the simple presence, is how Guyon described the transition from active to an infused prayer of complete passivity: “Thus, following very softly this little path [train] taken in this manner, we will arrive soon at the infused prayer.”<sup>617</sup>

This advancement that the quietist union promised for its practitioners was a ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’ disposition of the soul that could continuously be turned towards God, even if the external, conscious mind is otherwise occupied. Upon recommencing this prayer of ‘simple exposition’ in God’s presence, Marsay noted that he “began to understand that which the mystics said that the distractions which pass through our imaginations despite ourselves, do not impede the prayer of quiet at all” because this prayer “consists in the will to be in the presence of all the time”, a desire that cannot simply be discontinued by a simple errant thought.<sup>618</sup> Guyon wrote that after one begins to practice the simple presence of God, “there is nothing more to do but to remain turned in the direction of God in a continual adherence” and that the “great fruit” of this prayer is that the presence of God becomes “almost continuous”. Fénelon, explained that the now “fixed and habitual disposition of the soul, always turned towards God” is a state that constitutes the ‘continuous prayer’ of the early monastics. The soul rests now in union with God even when sleeping, or doing other things:

It is necessary that it endures, even when the soul does not perceive it, and when the imagination presents to it other objects. It is a hidden and continuous tendency of the will towards God, which is not at all an interrupted movement nor by shaking [par secousse]; but it is an habitual and uniform inclination [pente], which makes the will, by its essence [etat] and its source [fond], no longer desire anything but God, and lets him without cessation work all in the soul.<sup>619</sup>

Likewise, Guyon writes that this state of silent, perpetual attention to God is a “substantial act” where “the soul is completely turned towards its God by a direct action, which it does not renew, less it is interrupted, but which subsists. The soul, being completely turned in this way, is in charity and it abides there. *And he who abides in charity, abides in God.* So, the soul is in seemingly a habitual action (habitude de l’acte), resting in this same action.”<sup>620</sup>

Marsay wrote that when we have sufficiently died to our sensitive nature, God carries us “in to the passive state, or suffering [state], in which only God works, and

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from entering into the ‘obscure faith’”, will experience a great “advancement of the soul”. Marsay, *Nouveaux Discours Spirituels sur Diverses Matières De la vie Interieure et des dogmes de la Religion Chretienne ou Temoignage d’un Enfant de la verité & droiture des voyes de l’Esprit* (Berlebourg: Christoffe Michel Regelein, 1738), 104.

<sup>616</sup> Marsay to Lindenhofen, 21 March 1738.

<sup>617</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, chapitry XII, 30.

<sup>618</sup> Marsay, *La Vie*, 174.

<sup>619</sup> Fénelon, *Les Justifications de Mme. Guion*, vol 3. 1720, 337.

<sup>620</sup> Guyon, *Moyen Court*, chapter XXII, 60.

where the soul does nothing but receive his works, *but in a vitalic manner and full of love.*”<sup>621</sup>

I perceived very soon however, how much benefit one receives in remaining thus constantly, resisting all the assaults of the enemy, of reason, and of the fantasy: I understood, that my love did not desert me, but that it was hidden more deeply, that is, in the depths of my soul, in order to work there in secret in me, to prepare and purify me at my core. Oh what happy discovery! It was made known to me that these distractions of my interior powers do not impede at all the true recollection of the heart, and consequently also do not impede the continual prayer; I was warned meanwhile to not cease voluntarily in any distraction of my imagination, nor to lend myself to any idle occupation or conversation; but to avoid them and distance myself from them as much as possible, and that when I could not perceive his presence in a sensible manner, to remain still before him in faith without sensing, and without becoming bored; of which I found well and saw in this great advantages immediately.”<sup>622</sup>

The final position to which Marsay arrives, through the quietist mystics of seventeenth-century France, is that there exists a ‘secret’ and ‘hidden’ depth of the soul whose condition is one of passive, perpetual attention to God. In one sense, this is an early modern reworking of the monastic ideal of “continual prayer” and one marked in particular by Augustine’s interpretation. Augustine’s comments on the biblical command to ‘pray always’, frames this prayer as something achieved less by a perpetual set of distinct acts of vocal or inward praying—a physical impossibility—but rather an interior disposition of a soul given completely to God.<sup>623</sup> Augustine identified it with a “pure” or “holy” desire or will.<sup>624</sup> We “cannot always be bending the knee, or prostrating the body, or lifting up our hands” but that, more inward than any physical act, we can always be desiring.<sup>625</sup> Apart from Augustine’s positive emphasis on the will and its act of desiring God, quietist interiority postulated that a continual attention to God did not consist in any ‘violent’ or forceful act of active, ascetic meditation, but an altogether different means of mortifying the senses, by a simple act of silent meditation, perhaps introduced by a minimalistic mantra, and omitting any ratiocination or sensual image that could excite the will.

### *Conclusion*

From the moment that the Catholic controversy over the practice of passive contemplation filtered over the confessional divide, those Protestants drawn to the solitary, contemplative life saw in it a practical method and style of prayer for achieving a more intense experience of God’s presence. One of the main features of the radical Protestant reception of French quietism that historians have overlooked is how readers of

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<sup>621</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant*, vol 1. 104.

<sup>622</sup> Marsay, *Nouvelles Discours spirituels*, vol 1 (1738), 141.

<sup>623</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, (New York: New City Press, 2002), 156-7.

<sup>624</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>625</sup> *ibid.*



quietist literature formed a network of Protestant mystics interested in a form of contemplative, solitary separatism distinct from the conventicles and organized sects normally considered the primary form of those who broke from the confessional order.<sup>626</sup> Most, like Johann Gichtel, lived alone or in small house communities, practicing trades like editing or sewing that provided a living with as little human interaction as possible. The head of the Angelic Brethren, Johann Gichtel, liked to quote in his letters a saying of the first hermit, Anthony of Egypt, that “just like a fish dies when it leaves the water, so does an eremite lose its inward conversation with God when living among earthly men.”<sup>627</sup> Even in the middle of bustling Amsterdam, Gichtel committed his followers to “pray in your free time, stay withdrawn, and visit few people.”<sup>628</sup> In silence and isolation the ideal of mystical theology, the *vita contemplativa*, a perpetual enjoyment of God’s presence, could more perfectly be achieved.<sup>629</sup> In the words of this chapter’s leading figure, the Marquis de Marsay, the soul withdrawn from society can be more powerfully “penetrated by the rays of God’s presence...away from the tumult and occupations of this world”.<sup>630</sup> Arnold’s own interest in Quietism coincided with his withdrawal from public life to lead a ‘solitary’ existence in Quedlinburg, as he laid down his professorship of church history at the university of Giessen in disgust over the lack of sincere Christian piety in scholastic academia.<sup>631</sup> In a letter from 1699, Arnold wrote of the contemplative, solitary existence he desired to live saying that he “voriez an einem einsamen ort ganz still und unverworren lebe...hinführo...allein umb die wahre Emendation des Hertzens in mir und meinen anvertrauten Seelen bekümmern.”<sup>632</sup> The name “Die Stillen im Lande” became a common term for this quietistic tendency of many Protestant separatists whose numbers were, by the first decades of the eighteenth-century, heavily concentrated in the

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<sup>626</sup> Ernst Benz, *Die Protestantische Thebais: Zur Nachwirkung Makarios des Ägypters im Protestantismus des 17 und 18. Jahrhunderts in Europa und Amerika* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 10. Benz refers to a „completely ignored movement“, nämlich eines protestantischen Eremiten- und Einsiedlertums, das sich nicht nur im Bereich des radikalen deutschen Pietismus bemerkbar machte, sondern vor allem auf amerikanischen Boden in Pennsylvanien seinen Ausdruck in neuen radikalen Formen protestantischen Eremitentums finden sollte”; Winfried Zeller, “The Protestant Attitude to Monasticism, with Special Reference to Gerhard Tersteegen” in *The Downside Review* 93:312 (July 1975), 178-192.

<sup>627</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol II. the CXVIII. Letter to Schmitz Amst. 18. Nov. 1703. 651. “Wir müssen im Geist immer mit Christo in Conjunctione (Vereinigung) bleiben, und weder links noch rechts abweichen, sonst verfallen wir in die Ecliptic, und werden verfinstert, kalt, träg und untüchtig zum Gebät. So lang ein Eisen im Feuer liget, bleibts glüend, wens aber heraus genommen wird, erkältets, und wird finster.” Marsay could have a quote here too about staying in God’s presence

<sup>628</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol. I, Letter 73, 267.

<sup>629</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book I, Chapter 20. “In silence and quiet the devout soul advances in virtue and learns the hidden truths of Scripture. There she finds a flood of tears with which to bathe and cleanse herself nightly, that she may become the more intimate wih her Creator the farther she withdraws from all the tumult of the world. For God and his holy angels will draw near to him who withdraws from friends and acquaintances.” Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Translated by Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (New York: Dover Publications, 17).

<sup>630</sup> Marsay, *Témoignage d’un Enfant*, 334 see also Marsay to Duval, 7 July 1737 (BLU, TP 1246 A 1.14.1) Die Übung der Gegenwart Gottes lehrt und überzeugt sie durch die Erfahrung. Die körperliche Konversation durch Vermittlung der Sinne hindert oft eher die Wirkung des geistlichen Geschäfts und Verkehrs als daß sie diese fördert.[see also Pour le jour de Noel 1739 where he says God carred them to this place mais pour nous occuper uniquement de Dieu

<sup>631</sup> see Antje Mißfeldt, *Gottfried Arnold, Radikaler Pietist und Gelehrter* (Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 2011), 193-196.

<sup>632</sup> Gottfried Arnold, Gotha Chart A 420 Bl. 413v

separatist-friendly Hessian principalities just north of Frankfurt.<sup>633</sup>

The introduction of Guyon's 'simple' meditation and negative contemplation into radical Protestant circles was thus most receptive in this spiritualist Protestant tradition which criticized mediation in all its forms. Whereas in the early years, that critique was directed at external devotional forms such as the sacraments, penances, and external images, that critique had by, the late seventeenth-century, turned further inward to examine the soul's dependance on the 'interior' faculties of willing, imagination, and reason. They thus turned against the evangelical mediation centered in the Bible and the sermon in favor of what they viewed as an even greater interiority. This 'via negativa' helped to express the experimental, non-confessional worship to which the separatist Protestants were drawn. These 'spiritualists' likewise differed from their sixteenth-century counterparts by their familiarity and willing embrace of the Catholic monastic contemplative tradition as is seen by their love of the solitary, hermitic life. Whereas the sixteenth-century saw the deconstruction of this contemplative tradition in favor of one based on a new hermeneutics of the word, the new spiritualists felt no compunction in constructing a synthetic contemplative interiority composed of monastic and Protestant forms.

Despite its solitary and individualized connotations, this supposed unmediated 'worship in the spirit' likewise constituted a new form of community, not altogether different than the *devotio moderna* circles that had flourished in the late medieval period in the Low Countries, where the ideals of a lay contemplative existence had never quite died out. Marsay's circle was a community of reborn souls whose style of prayer and withdrawn existences were at the heart of their communal identity. Marsay rejected the mainstream Pietist conventicles as well as Zinzendorf's Moravian community and the charismatic Community of True Inspiration precisely because their manner of prayer continued to exist on the level of the senses, either through singing, possession by strange spirits, or a too outward zeal for proselytizing. None of these could produce, Marsay believed, the mortification of the senses and self-emptying in silent prayer that the true interior attention to God required.

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<sup>633</sup> See Horst Weigelt, *Lavater und die Stillen im Lande: Die Beziehungen Lavaters zu Frömmigkeitsbewegungen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1988).

## Chapter Four

### The Ephrata Cloister, Celibacy, and the Communal Hidden Life

“...the cloister-life is older than the Papacy...the Christian church, whilst still in its state of innocence, had within it certain flocks that chose a life of celibacy, and had all things in common.”<sup>634</sup>

#### Introduction: Celibacy and Seduction on the American Frontier

Late in the fall of 1735, the members of a small religious community of German immigrants near Lancaster, Pennsylvania were busily preparing a dedicatory celebration of the community’s first large, communal structure, a three-story building known as “Kedar”. The community’s internal history, the *Chronicon Ephratense* (after the name ‘Ephrata’<sup>635</sup>, adopted by the community in 1738) states that the building’s construction came amidst a period of rapid growth for the community, due to the many converts from other nearby settlements. The joy at the building’s completion was such that messengers were sent to the country roundabout to invite “all friends and well-wishers” to join in the festivities.<sup>636</sup> But judging from a murky and violent incident on the evening before the dedication, it is clear that the growth of the community—along with the unique purpose for which Kedar was built—had also aroused intense anxiety among the neighboring communities. According to Ephrata’s internal history, at around midnight, several unknown men entered the cabin of the community’s founder, a man named Conrad Beissel, and proceeded to “severely belabor [him] with blows”. Using “knotted rope” and “leather thongs” the men continued to pummel the now wide-awake Beissel until he managed to escape out the door to the safety of a neighboring cabin. With the intruders departing undetected, the visibly bruised and beaten Beissel was forced to explain the next day to the assembled community that the ‘Prince of Darkness’ and his ‘invisible powers’ had once again tried to hinder the growth of his people’s sacred work.<sup>637</sup>

Although the historical record is silent on whether the attackers were inspired by the devil or not, it does, however, provide evidence for another explanation of the angry

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<sup>634</sup> Conrad Beissel as quoted in Israel Acrelius, *A History of New Sweden, or the Settlements on the Delaware River*, transl. by Wm. M. Reynolds. *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, XI (1874), 373-401. Cited in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*. Eds. Felix Reichmann, Eugene Edgar Doll (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1952), 68.

<sup>635</sup> The word Ephrata comes from Genesis and means ‘fruitful’. It was at Ephrata where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and Ephrata’s founders may have wanted to highlight the pains of birth through this name.

<sup>636</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 77. Brother Lamech, whose real name was Jacob Gaas had written the fawning *Chronicle* prior to his death in 1764. It was later edited by Peter Miller (‘Brother Agrippa’) and published initially in German in 1786 under the title *Chronicon Ephratense, Enthaltend den Lebens-Lauf des ehrwürdigen Vaters in Christo Friedsam Gottrecht, Weyland Stiffiers und Vorstehers des geistl. Ordens der Einsamen in Ephrata in der Grafschaft Lancaster in Pennsylvania. Zusammen getragen von Br. Lamech u. Agrippa* (Ephrata, 1786). An English translation by J. Max Hark appeared in 1889, *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh-Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County* (Lancaster: S.H. Zahm, 1889).

<sup>637</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 77.

men's motives. Examining the function of the Kedar building and the nature of devotion at Ephrata quickly leads us to what had aggravated the intruders. On the one hand, the spacious, three-story wooden structure served an unassuming function as a meetinghouse for the growing congregation, containing, in its middle floor, a "hall for meetings" and another large hall for holding the *Agapae* or love-feast, the community's festive celebration of the eucharist along the lines of the early Christian church.<sup>638</sup> But the building's most intriguing function becomes clear with the layout of the top and bottom floors. Here, we read that special sleeping cells were built, "after the manner of the old Greek church" whose monasteries contained small cells in which to house orders of monks.<sup>639</sup> Lining one wall of each cell was a thin, wooden bench on which the inhabitant slept. These strange sleeping cells of Kedar would lodge the members of a new religious order established by Beissel which he called the "Order of Spiritual Virgins" with the top floor designated for celibate women and celibate men on the bottom floor.<sup>640</sup> Consisting initially of four women, Kedar<sup>641</sup> (also known as the "Haus der Traurigkeit") was large enough, according to one virgin sister's letter from 1743 to house up to 30 virgins.<sup>642</sup>

The presence of such an order of virgins, housed together under one roof, was starkly at odds with the devotional norms of Ephrata's fellow Protestant settlers even amidst the patchwork of radical sects populating Pennsylvania. Beissel, whose early adult years were spent with radical separatists in Germany, had pursued an isolated, celibate existence upon his arrival in America in 1720. Many women and men had, in the years prior to the erection of Kedar, renounced marriage and sexual relations under the influence of Beissel's preaching and had come to Ephrata to follow his hermit lifestyle, renouncing earthly ties to live lives of prayer and self-denial at the settlement. In 1735, we are told that Beissel had received a "providential leading" to organize these chaste disciples as a communal order for mutual strengthen in their vows of chastity, an order which, at first glance, bore striking similarities to a Catholic convent.

Kedar's construction provided a symbolic tipping point to several years of growing tension between Ephrata and its neighbors owing to Beissel's habit of successfully preaching celibacy to daughters and wives of the nearby settlements. The community's internal history took note of the confrontations that such conversions caused, revealing that Beissel had a long history of provoking angry reactions from jilted suitors and husbands. The Reformed minister John Phillip Boehm (1683-1749) from nearby Falkner's Swamp lamented Beissel's success in breakng up marriages in 1734: "By this pernicious sect an appalling number of people has been misled and even married couples here and there have been separated when one party went over to them."<sup>643</sup> Beissel, who

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<sup>638</sup> *Chronicon*, 77.

<sup>639</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.* Israel Acrelius claimed that the sister's convent was just like the brother's convent which had 100 rooms and whose cells are "four paces long and two broad" with narrow benches on which they sleep. In *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 52.

<sup>641</sup> Kedar comes from Psalms 120:5 that speaks of the "tent of Kedar" and may refer to writings by Kelpius, a German hermit admired by Beissel who identified "Kedar" as our "dark tabernacle of our earthly house which should be dissolved." See Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (State College: Penn State Press: 2005), 117.

<sup>642</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 122; Anna Thoma was the name of the sister.

<sup>643</sup> Report by John Phillip Boehm, in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*. Eds. Felix Reichmann, Eugene Edgar Doll (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1952), 6.

one observer described as “a small, lean man, has gray and bushy hair, [who] is quick in his utterance as well as in his movements”<sup>644</sup> was repeatedly accused of using magic to seduce married women to abandon their husbands and join his community. On one missionary trip around 1732 to the nearby community of Tulpehocken just north of Ephrata, Beissel met a young lady already engaged to a man who was “so overpowered” by his message that “her earthly bridal love fell dead” and “without the bridegroom’s knowledge she followed the visitors, and in the Settlement took her vows of eternal virginity among the original Sisters.”<sup>645</sup> Another woman, by the name of Maria Christina Saur, the wife of the famous printer Christopher Saur, decided to leave her husband and her son Johann in 1730 to live as a celibate in Ephrata. This led to years of denunciations by Saur in Philadelphia’s German-language publications in which he claimed that Beissel used “magic” to seduce his wife.<sup>646</sup>

In yet another dramatic instance, a husband whose wife had begun to spend more time at Beissel’s side and to reject her “husbands rights”, i.e. abstain from sex, intervened first by means of a constable’s restraining order, and then by violence against Beissel. Barging in on a gathering, the injured husband grabbed Beissel by the throat, dragging him toward the door before he was stopped by the horrified congregation.<sup>647</sup> By 1735, the *Ephrata Chronicon* noted that fear of wives and children being seduced by Beissel had gripped the countryside and that neighbors “began everywhere to warn one another against seduction, parents warned their children, and husbands their wives.”<sup>648</sup> With the construction of Kedar in 1735, the new stage in the community’s evolution as a haven for marital refugees seems to have finally spurred the local men into action.

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The foregoing anecdotes of anxiety, violence, and domestic strife surrounding Ephrata’s celibate cloister offers a fitting introduction to the final case study in my story of the rise of an alternative, ascetic Protestant devotion on the margins of Reformation Europe. In the foregoing chapters, we have witnessed the rise and spread of an ascetic, eremitic spirituality among seventeenth-century Protestants in the Old World that emphasized the Christian duty to “die to the world” by seeking solitude, rejecting wealth, and casting off carnal desires, principally sexual relations. Such spirituality, as with Gichtel’s Angelic Brethren and Marsay’s quietist circle at Schloss Hayn, most often took the outward form of individual Lutherans or Calvinists, and small house societies of around 5-10 souls, pursuing what they termed ‘hidden’ lives of prayer and contemplation. The lineage for their theology and way of life can be traced to a love of the ancient desert fathers, the texts of the late medieval lay fraternities of the *Devotio Moderna*, as well as the ‘inward’ spirituality of early modern Catholic and Protestant spiritualists and mystics like Jakob Boehme and John of the Cross and their rejection of confessional Christianity. The chapters on Gichtel and Marsay’s cells of solitary mystics highlighted, in turn, the

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<sup>644</sup> Acrelius, *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 50.

<sup>645</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 69.

<sup>646</sup> Repeated on several occasions, the reference here is to a letter written by Saur to friends back in Germany and published in the radical Pietist journal *Geistliche Fama*, vol. III, xxv, 74-96 published in Berlenburg from 1730-1740.

<sup>647</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 59.

<sup>648</sup> *Chronicon*, 66.

centrality of ascetic solitude and contemplative prayer to this new Protestant lay monasticism.

With this chapter on the Protestant cloister at Ephrata, I will focus on celibacy as a central practice belonging to this flowering of ascetic Protestantism and how sexual abstinence structured the devotional order of this curious new world monastic settlement. From Ephrata's beginnings as a few self-denying hermits following Gichtel, Marsay, and other Protestant ascetics' example, to its zenith in the 1740s as a sprawling, large celibate colony structured along monastic lines, the community demonstrates that the ideal of a celibate, withdrawn life resonated deeply along both sides of the Atlantic, motivating many to transgress entrenched Protestant social norms surrounding domesticity and sexuality. The choice for strictly celibate lives flowed from the ideals of a developing Protestant contemplative life. Celibacy at Ephrata must be understood as a means to achieve the mystical union with God borne of a holy life free from the world. To live a truly holy life, such Protestants argued, one had to subordinate the cares and worries of secular life—and most importantly, the bonds of marriage and kinship—to devotion to God. In the words of the author of the Ephrata sisterhood's chronicle penned in 1745, "where others occupy themselves with running, hurrying around, worries, and toils", the celibate at Ephrata "enjoys the union of love with its most beloved groom whom it daily and hourly receives, weds, and unites with to be one and alone his property and remain so in time and eternity."<sup>649</sup> Although they often termed it the 'secret' of celibacy, it was likewise described as one issuing from very practical reasons. For a woman, without a husband, one could avoid being caught up with tending children, attending to the husband's physical needs, and taking care of a household. As part of a cloister community, with up to eight hours of the day devoted to prayer and contemplation, one could dwell more constantly in the presence of God, the ultimate ideal for these intense Protestants seeking to imitate Christ.

Ephrata offers as well an opportunity to understand the communal potential and outward ritual system within the new ascetic, contemplative theology forming among awakened Protestants. The American frontier offered the space and freedom (for what would otherwise be an underground sect in Europe akin to Gichtel's network) to openly develop and outwardly display Beissel's mystical plans. As was the case with the theosophic mystic and hermit Johannes Kelpius, as well as with the aborted plans of Gichtel's lieutenant, Johann Überfeld, Protestant mystics had long looked to the New World—and specifically Pennsylvania—as the site to retreat most completely from the world.<sup>650</sup>

Ephrata's unique form of devotion, beyond its ostentatious subversion of Protestant sexual norms, was thus the realization of a longstanding radical Protestant desire for a new form of holy community whose members could devote themselves to contemplation, prayer, and worship without distraction from worldly cares. Such desires had to be phrased carefully to avoid comparisons to Catholic monasticism. As one author who stood close to Ephrata described it, it would be a welcome development if within

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<sup>649</sup> The sister's chronicle was entitled *Die Rose, oder der angenehmen Blumen zu Saron geistlichen ehe verlöbnis mit ihrem himmlischen Bräutigam Welchen sie sich als ihrem König Haupt, Herrn und Bräutigam aufs ewig hin verlobt* (1745), 101.

<sup>650</sup> Samuel Whitacker Pennypacker, *The Settlement of Germantown, Pennsylvania, and the Beginning of German* (The Society, 1899), 85-95.

Protestantism there existed greater acceptance for communities of “resolved souls among the Protestants” who wished to remain untouched by the “temporal business” and “vanity” of the world to pursue a withdrawn, celibate existence. “Yes, how much better, peaceful and advantageous would it be, if a few who are completely of the mind of Christ, and thus may only concern themselves with that which belongs to him, and remain holy both in body and in soul, ...when around six, twelve, or more people with such a goal are drawn by God, and joined together outwardly without partisanship, without coercion of their conscience, egoism, and harmful idleness, but live together as brothers [and sisters] humbly and communally.”<sup>651</sup> Phrased in such terms that highlight the freedom of religious conscience in guiding some souls to live apart from society in simplicity and chastely, what Protestant could deny the worthiness of such an endeavor?

Among historians, the meaning of Ephrata’s idiosyncratic style and practices, so sharply divergent from the Protestant mainstream, has long been debated. While its semi-monastic, mystical worship has not been neglected, the significance of the phenomenon has been focused on a forward-looking analysis of what it meant for the religious culture of the emerging American colonies. Early voices, such as E.G. Alderfer, influenced by the protest culture of the 1960s, interpreted Ephrata’s communitarianism and break with the world in a transhistorical tenor as America’s first “communal counterculture” which predated and inspired later American communal experiments.<sup>652</sup> Alderfer therefore focused attention on Ephrata’s anti-institutional rhetoric, pacifistic and vegetarian practices, and viewed its celibate or ascetic dimensions as a manifestation of this anti-materialist impulse. For others, Ephrata’s significance lies in its infusion of the American frontier with eclectic, esoteric and magical mysticism from decidedly non-Puritan sources. Ephrata serves as a central example in Jon Butler’s study of a “Christianization” of colonial America through magical, charismatic elements.<sup>653</sup> Recently, Jeff Bach’s excellent and comprehensive studies of Ephrata have largely focused on this mystical legacy of Ephrata, attempting to trace the European sources and nature of its eclectic and bewildering mystical language. For Bach, radical Pietism is sufficient to explain the novel practices and theology at Ephrata as he argues that “Conrad Beissel and others at Ephrata used familiar elements from German Radical Pietism to create a language and ritual practices to convey a mystical awareness of God.”<sup>654</sup>

This study, however, searches for the meaning of Ephrata by focusing squarely on how its celibate and ascetic devotion emerged from the longer-term tensions inherent in the theological and social consequences of the Protestant Reformation. The story of Ephrata’s Protestant celibates and their semi-monastic lives presents a puzzle to the historian of religion and the Protestant Reformation in particular. Theologically, it raises

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<sup>651</sup> Anonymous, *Ein Spiegel der Eheleute nebst schönen Erinnerungen vor Ledige Personen, Welche willens sind sich in den Stand der Ehe zu begeben*, (Philadelphia: 1756), 21. Although anonymous, there are good reasons to believe this text was authored by Christopher Saur. See Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 111.

<sup>652</sup> E.G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counterculture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).

<sup>653</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also an early study of Ephrata by Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkars* (Philadelphia, 1899).

<sup>654</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 4.

the question of how Ephrata's members, almost all from Protestant backgrounds, managed to reconcile such hallmarks of Catholic monasticism as celibacy and communal cloister life with their Protestant upbringings. Besides the unorthodox position of viewing the unmarried state as more blessed than the married estate, the Ephrata settlement raised eyebrows by putting into practice other aspects of Catholic monastic devotion, as members eventually donned robes, received the tonsure, and followed a strict daily schedule of vigils, fasting, prayer, and work. How such overtly Catholic ritual became the core feature of a radically Protestant community demands an explanation. This is a question that previous historians have not adequately answered, with Jeff Bach dismissing Ephrata's debts to early modern Catholicism.<sup>655</sup> As has been suggested previously in this dissertation, the recourse to the ascetic tradition was not, as these spiritualist Protestants assumed, a return to a ritual-free, 'inward' Christianity where the soul directly communed with God, but rather employed concrete devotional and ritual traditions from the monastic tradition to signify the consecrated soul's death to the world. As laid out in chapter one, these Protestant practitioners of the hidden life strove to create a new ascetic and mystical practice that salvaged the truths of ancient and medieval monasticism, harmonizing them with the Reformation's insights on faith.

At the same time that I seek to set Ephrata's celibacy and asceticism in a deeper story about the Reformation, I hope to also capture the particular and local conditions in which the Ephrata Cloister developed, especially as it relates to the cloister's female inhabitants. In choosing celibacy, the female members of Ephrata opted for a life that ran counter to the sexual and domestic economy of early modern Protestantism and colonial America, and it is in within this domestic economy that I will attempt to contextualize the Ephrata Sister's convent. Why did the women of Ephrata leave their husbands and did economic or demographic factors play a role? Were hopes for greater autonomy outside the confines of the family represented in Ephrata's cloisters? Some have suggested that Ephrata represents a "radical reconstruction of gender" and this chapter will explore how the women of Ephrata described their spirituality and life in a cloister.<sup>656</sup> Although we have few records of a personal nature (especially from women) left over from Ephrata to gain insight on individual reflections, we can attempt to answer the question of why these individuals chose the cloistered life based on a number of printed histories and theological tracts as well as a chronicle penned by the members of the sister's cloister. Through these sources, I will examine show how the theology and rationales employed by the members of Ephrata for embracing celibacy is a culminating example of a Protestant rediscovery and affirmation of monasticism as a valid form of evangelical spirituality.

This chapter will begin by tracing the theology of radical Protestant celibacy around 1700, and finish by exploring the communal and material dimensions of a fully developed celibate Protestant community at Ephrata in the 1730s-1750s.<sup>657</sup> The first part

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<sup>655</sup> Bach, "The Ephrata Community in the Atlantic World" in *Protestant Communalism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, edited by Philip Lockley (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 47. Ann Kirschner likewise does not look much further in her references to "radical Pietism" for an explanation for Ephrata's monasticism. Kirschner, "From Hebron to Saron: The Religious Transformation of an Ephrata Convent" in *Winterthur Portfolio* 32:1 (1997), 41-42.

<sup>656</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 113.

<sup>657</sup> Apart from the primary sources penned by male members of the community (those by Beissel himself, Johannes Hildebrand, Ezekiel Sangmeister, and the *Chronicon* history), the few sources we have from the



will take us back to the milieus and networks of radical German Protestants as explored in our first three chapters to see how large numbers of evangelical Christians sought to fill the ‘cultural vacuum’ in their tradition left by the absence of monastic devotion. They did so by reviving ascetic theologies from medieval and early modern mystical traditions the practice of which had important ramifications for sexuality, devotion, and gender. I will examine the development of Ephrata’s celibate devotion from its humble beginnings as a community of eremitic mystics on the Pennsylvania frontier in the 1720s to that of a large, communalistic cloister settlement replete with an intricate ritual system.

## **CELIBACY AND RADICAL PROTESTANTISM C. 1700: THE ROOTS OF THE EPHRATA CLOISTER**

In 1751, the Philadelphia printer and emerging *philosophe* Benjamin Franklin penned an essay titled “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind” now considered a declaration of youthful American frontier optimism. Among Franklin’s claims about the gainful consequences that an open frontier would affect, was the statement that “marriages in America are general, and more generally early, than in Europe” and that the birthrate was double that of the old continent. This was because of the ‘plenty’ and ‘cheap’ nature of land in America, a fact that removed all anxiety from men seeking marriage and which would lead to the population doubling “every twenty years.”<sup>658</sup> Franklin even suggested a category of laws that he termed “generative laws” that would aim to increase the virility of a nation. Among these included lower taxes, tariffs against luxurious goods, and the banning of slavery (slaves enfeebled and weakened masters).

The only negative, pessimistic note in Franklin’s essay came at the conclusion, where Franklin expressed his deep disdain for the ‘swarthy’ Germans flowing into Pennsylvania, and particularly those Germans from the Palatinate region. Franklin, who had earlier lamented the creeping dominance of the German language in Philadelphia, again disparaged what he considered the ‘non-white’ Germans “who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us”. “Why should the *Palatine Boors*” he continued, “be suffered to swarm into our Settlements?”<sup>659</sup>

As it concerned the reproductive powers of one particular migrant from the Palatinate, Conrad Beissel, Franklin need not have worried. Beissel’s strange, reclusive,

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female convent and its members will play a central role in describing the celibate spirituality on display at Ephrata. Foremost among these sources is a manuscript history of the female convent (renamed “The Order of the Roses of Saron” by Beissel in 1745) titled *Die Rose, oder der angenehmen Blumen zu Saron geistlichen ehe verlöbnüs mit ihrem himmlischen Bräutigam Welchen sie sich als ihrem König Haupt, Herrn und Bräutigam aufs ewig hin verlobt* (1745) The manuscript is found in the Pennsylvania Historical Society. This source, along with the few other female authored sources at Ephrata, will serve as our main reference as we examine the concrete, material practices of the cloister’s celibates and attempt to describe particular communal form on display there.

<sup>658</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Observations concerning the increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1755), 218, 224. For a discussion of American marriage and birth patterns versus European ones, see Richard C. Simmons, *The American Colonies: From Settlement to Independence*, (W.W. Norton and Company, 1981) 179-181.

<sup>659</sup> Franklin, *Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind*, 224.

and esoteric ways, along with his insistence that a Christian “must first be a virgin in body and spirit” before comprehending divinity, would clearly appear out of place to many fellow inhabitants of the New World like Franklin energized at the incredible productivity the new land engendered with its inhabitants.<sup>660</sup> What are the origins of Beissel’s celibate theology and what attraction did it hold for frontier settlers otherwise busy establishing new lives in the Americas?

The story of Conrad Beissel’s early life belongs to the Old World where this odd baker’s son spent a decade riding the waves of one religious awakening after another amidst the separatist theosophic and millenarian exuberance coursing through Germany in the years around 1700. Beissel’s early life, mostly spent as a wanderer in these radical communities, could tell the story of this moment of sectarian creativity by itself. Born in the German Palatinate in 1691 to a baker who died before young Conrad was born, Beissel was brought up initially by older brothers and then later apprenticed to a baker in Mannheim and then in 1715 in Heidelberg. Beissel wrote that as a youth he strove for “utmost purity” despite reports to the contrary depicting Beissel as a rebellious teenager.<sup>661</sup> His first religious conversion came, according to the *Chronicon*, when he came into contact with a Pietist cell in Heidelberg where he acquired “a strange insight into the secrets of nature”. Exiled from Heidelberg for his participation in this underground group, Beissel next went to Schwarzenau in Hessen, a hotbed of religious radicalism. There, Beissel became involved with the Schwarzenau New Baptists, an anabaptist-inspired Pietist group, and the Inspirationists and he “went with them for a time”.<sup>662</sup> The Inspirationists, led by a man named Johann Rock, were famous for their charismatic worship during which members, touched by the spirit, would experience physical spasms and speak in tongues. The *Chronicon*, written after Ephrata’s celibate orders had long been established, explains Beissel’s eventual falling out with this group as a result of his displeasure at the group turning away from celibacy and accepting marriage in its ranks.<sup>663</sup>

As the above suggests, Beissel gravitated toward those Protestant circles preaching an ascetic doctrine, calling for the casting off of all fleshy ties and desires, especially those of a sexual nature.<sup>664</sup> Among separatist Protestants at this time, one could hear many such voices. By 1715, the area around Schwarzenau in which Beissel arrived, was populated by a large number of dissident, mystical Protestants renouncing marriage and eschewing the bourgeois conventions of Protestantism, among whom were counted the young Charles Marsay.<sup>665</sup> Historians have suggested that one important part of the

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<sup>660</sup> Beissel, *Dissertation on Man’s Fall*, 19.

<sup>661</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 3-4.

<sup>662</sup> The best source for Beissel’s biography is the *Chronicon Ephratense*, 5-11.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>664</sup> For a broad overview of Protestant experiments with sexuality in precisely these milieus, see Wolfgang Breuel and Stefania Salvadori, *Geschlechtlichkeit und Ehe im Pietismus*, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014). See also Willi Temme, *Krise der Leiblichkeit: Die Sozietät der Mutter Eva (Buttlarsche Rotte) und Der Radikale Pietismus um 1700* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

<sup>665</sup> One such example is that hermit that the famed preacher Hieronymus Annoni met while traveling through Schwarzenau in 1713. Annonius wrote that he met a man who “ein einsames und asketisches Leben geführt...wie er in Lesung geistlicher Bücher etliche Jahre lang sehr fleißig gewesen, sich einen guten Schatz der Erkenntnis zu sammeln.” Cited in *Dem Rechten Glauben auf der Spur: Bildungsreise durch das Elsaß, die Niederlande, Böhmen und Deutschland. Reisetagebuch des Hieronymus Annoni von*

religious protest movement calling for a greater moral renewal in Protestantism known as ‘Pietism’ involved an unease with Protestantism’s embrace of marriage and more positive stance on the body and human sexuality, a “crisis” of the body as one historian has termed it.<sup>666</sup> Some groups played out this crisis through libertine excess—such as with the infamous ‘Mother Eva Society’—but in most cases a greater asceticism was the form it took. Such ascetic Protestants read and longed to imitate the lives of solitary, ascetic hermits as retold in such popular pietist histories as Gottfried Arnold’s *Die erste Liebe* (1696) or the Angelic Brother Otto Glüsing’s “Das Leben der Altväter” (1720). The *Chronicon* defended Ephrata’s celibacy by noting that the Schwarzenau New Baptists, a group Biessel would continue to associate with in the colonies, held to celibacy for the first eight years of their existence. The *Chronicon* likewise mentions Hochmann von Hochenau (1670-1721), (the “gottselige Hochmann”<sup>667</sup>), who had written in 1702 a short text titled “Concerning Marriage” that viewed marriage as a necessary evil but proper only to carnal, unrebored Christians. Reborn Christians should live either in chaste marriages or alone, “recognizing only Jesus for their true husband.”<sup>668</sup>

Two names in particular stand out as influential for Beissel’s attitude toward, and later practice of, celibacy. In the final pages of the *Chronicon Ephratense*, in a passage praising the achievements of the recently deceased Beissel, the chronicle’s author Ezekiel Sangmeister mentions Johann Gichtel and ‘Godfried Arnold’ as two “precious instruments” predating Beissel whom God had used to introduce the “mystery of eternal virginity in the old countries” to Protestants: “Before him [Beissel] the wisdom of God attempted to reveal the mystery of eternal virginity in the old countries, through many precious instruments, of whom those dear men of God, Godfried Arnold, and George Gichtel and many others may especially be mentioned.”<sup>669</sup>

Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), one of the most famous critics of the German Protestant churches around 1700, had shown, for a short period, a deep interest in Boehme’s theosophy, especially that mystic’s use of the esoteric symbol of Sophia to describe the chaste soul’s divine illumination. In his 1700 book, *The Mystery of the Divine Sophia*, Arnold had seemingly endorsed chastity as a prerequisite for rebirth, a fact which excited Gichtel, already the leader of a sprawling network of ascetic followers of Boehme.<sup>670</sup> Arnold’s books about Sophia and the early Christians were readily available at Ephrata as numerous members’ journals attest.<sup>671</sup>

Of yet greater importance for Beissel were Gichtel’s writings on the virgin Sophia and theosophy. Gichtel’s peculiar relationship with women and zeal for the withdrawn

1736. Eds. Johannes Burkardt, Hildegard Gantner-Schlee, Michael Knieriem (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 87.

<sup>666</sup> See Temme, *Krise der Leiblichkeit*, 15.

<sup>667</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 2.

<sup>668</sup> Hochmann von Hochenau. “Von dem Ehestand”, 20 Detmold, den 29. Nov. 1702. In Heinz Renkewitz, *Hochmann von Hochenau (1670-1721): Quellenstudien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (Wittenberg: Luther Verlag, 1969), 412. 407-412.

<sup>669</sup> *Chronicon*, 286.

<sup>670</sup> See Gottfried Arnold, *Das Geheimniß der Göttlichen Sophia, oder Weißheit*, (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1700), Preface, “when you love something more divine...you must come to despise everything including beastly desires...” In their correspondence, Gichtel treated Arnold as a new initiate into his circle, excited at the prospects of such a high profile convert. He was deeply disappointed when he received news of Arnold’s marriage in 1701 to Anna Maria Sprögel.

<sup>671</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 286; see Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune*, 50.

life, as detailed in chapter two, was often expressed in language taken from Boehme's writings about the mystical figure of a 'heavenly' and 'virginal' Sophia, a feminine symbol of divine wisdom. The mystic's rebirth was described in symbolic terms (or in our case literal) as a 'chaste union' with this Sophia. The language of Sophia and heavenly virginity would dominate the theological and devotional imagery at Ephrata and its origins in Boehme and Gichtel's theosophy is clear. In one passage, Gichtel told a correspondent that "I have learned that he who wishes to be again married to Sophia, or as Paul writes, 'to put on Christ', he must pass by the Cherub who cuts off the wife."<sup>672</sup> In the *Ephrata Chronicle*, Beissel's earliest inclination toward celibacy is couched in the same language used by Gichtel describing the union with the Virgin Sophia, and overcoming the male sexual drive inherited through Adam. The *Chronicon* mentions Beissel's distaste for female companionship as a journeyman in Mannheim in 1715 in the following way:

At the same time the drawings of the Virgin [Sophia] above were so strong within him, that it was deeply impressed upon his heart that a man who intends to devote himself to the service of God must, at the beginning of his conversion, renounce Adam's generative work, for which reason he bade good-night to earthly woman at the very commencement. On this account also the tribes of the earth expelled him from their fellowship.<sup>673</sup>

Beissel's first contact to Gichtel came when he joined his first Pietist circle in 1715 in Mannheim. There, a correspondent of Gichtel's by the name of Haller who the *Chronicon* describes as a "strong suitor of the virgin Sophia" likely first introduced Beissel to Gichtel's writings.<sup>674</sup> The closeness of Beissel to Gichtel in the Americas as he constructed his monastic community is likewise well-attested. The long-term Ephrata hermit Ezekiel Sangmeister wrote that Gichtel's writings were accessible and authoritative at Ephrata and Christopher Saur, the snubbed husband of Ephrata sister Maria Christina Saur, wrote warily that Beissel "in many points he is very close to Gichtel".<sup>675</sup>

This early contact with members of Gichtel's Angelic Brethren network is important. Not only would Beissel adopt much of Boehme's mystical theology through Gichtel, the two abstemious men and the communities they founded clearly shared a similar *modus operandi* in practicing and spreading their ascetic views of sexuality. Mirroring Beissel's trouble with frontier Protestant men, Gichtel's aggressive attempts to win converts—often married women—to celibacy caused a great deal of social and theological alarm across northern Europe in the eighteenth century's early decades. In one scandalous case from 1716 involving a Berlin woman named Frau Wildenau, an investigatory commission determined that members of Gichtel's Angelic Brethren had convinced her to refuse sex with her husband and live chastely. During interrogations,

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<sup>672</sup> Gichtel, *TP*, vol. III, 1519.

<sup>673</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 5

<sup>674</sup> *Chronicon*, 5; See Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 12-13.

<sup>675</sup> Ezekiel Sangmeister, *Das Leben und Wandel des in Gott ruhenden und seligen Br. Ezechieel Sangmeisters* (Ephrata, 1825-1827) German American Collection: Pamphlet AM 180, 7:9 and Julius Friedrich Sachse's *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers*. 2 volumes. Philadelphia (1899), 343.

this Frau Wildenau told the Berlin investigators that she had been reborn into the kingdom of grace and no longer believed in marriage or sexual relations, stating “although in the kingdom of nature it is not sin to marry, as it says in 1 Corinthians 7, in the kingdom of grace, however, it is sin indeed” for which she cited Psalms 51:6.<sup>676</sup> In separate interrogations, Jacob Michelmann, the head of the Berlin Angelic Brethren accused of proselytizing Frau Wildenau, described to the investigators the theosophic theology to their celibate practice, claiming that “all things in the kingdom of law and nature not only have no permanence, but must also be denied” such as “worldly marriage and sexual organs” which had not been a part of God’s original order.<sup>677</sup> Upon Frau Wildenau’s refusal to submit to her “marital duty”, the commission exiled her from Berlin with custody of only her youngest child. Frau Wildenau’s case, along with her belief in a higher spiritual law superceding the teachings of mere earthly churches, is similar to the millenarian spirit expressed by the *Chronicon Ephratense* in explaining Maria Saur’s “desertion” of her husband to Ephrata just 14 years later in 1730. There, the *Chronicon* concedes that it was indeed “against the canons of the New Covenant” to abandon a marriage but was justified by the spirit, since “at that time the Pentecostal winds still blew so strongly that they dissolved all associations and relations save those entered into directly under the cross of Jesus”<sup>678</sup>.

Frau Wildenau is just one of the numerous Protestant women whose contact with Gichtel’s teachings caused a stir.<sup>679</sup> But even beyond Gichtel’s personality-driven asceticism, the late seventeenth-century in fact represents a flowering of Protestant men and women committing to sexual continence, and, on occasion, even taking the step of joining Catholic cloisters.<sup>680</sup> Beissel and Gichtel were just two influential examples of a revived interest in ascetic spirituality. Within a century of their dissolution in the early Reformation, societies of celibate men and women had made a successful comeback. The historian Sarah Apetrei describes how women like Mary Astell and Jane Leade as well as theologians such as Edward Stephens and Richard Astell sought to fill a “cultural vacuum” left by monasticism’s retreat from popular devotion with a new form of ‘lay monasticism’.<sup>681</sup> Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) took as its goal the erection of a society for unmarried women for mutual edification, prayer, and socially beneficial acts of charity. Such a “happy society will be but one Body, whose Soul is love, animating and informing it, and perpetually breathing forth it self in flames of holy

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<sup>676</sup> Jacob Michelmann to Herr Rautenberg, 27 Oct. 1716. This letter appeared in the orthodox Lutheran theologian Valentin Löscher’s journal *Unschuldige Nachrichten* in 1720. “Eines Gichtelianers Jacob Michelmanns Brieff / welcher von unterschiedenen Personen und Principiis der neuen Engels-Brüder Nachricht giebet.” Berlin, 27. Oct. 1716.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid, Michelmann to Rautenberg, 27 Oct. 1716.

<sup>678</sup> *Chronicon*, 50.

<sup>679</sup> See the above case with Arnold and chapter two with the case of the Danish merchant Marcelus against whom Gichtel’s followers raged for having children.

<sup>680</sup> Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries*, Chapter 2, “Female Monasticism Revived: Foundations and Vocations”, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2003), 35.

<sup>681</sup> Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Great Interest* (London: St. Paul’s, 1694), 59, 60, 97-8. See Sarah Apetrei, “Masculine Virgins: Celibacy and Gender in Later Stuart London”, in *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660-1760*. Eds. Sarah Apetrei and Hannah Smith (New York: Ashgate, 2014), 44.

desires after GOD, and acts of Benevolence to each other.”<sup>682</sup> Likewise, the theologian Edward Stephens proposals for a “Religious Society of Single Women” had both practical and spiritual dimensions so as to supply “some Devout Women, with such mean, but convenient Habitation, Work, Wages, and Religion, that they may have Time and Strength for the Worship of GOD, both in Publick and Private, and Freedom of Mind for Meditation, and Religious Exercises.”<sup>683</sup> He noted, in arguing for such a society, the “Antiquity, Divine Approbation, and high Esteem, which hath always been had in the Catholick Church, of a Religious Life Abstracted from the World.”<sup>684</sup>

Historians, in trying to explain such a Protestant rediscovery of celibacy and lay monasticism, have offered various explanations. Some, taking a sociological approach, point to the autonomy and elevated status—especially for women—that a consecrated celibate lifestyle presented, emancipating women from the mundane obligations of family and occupation.<sup>685</sup> As Apetrei points out, *coelibatus*, i.e. ‘being alone’, connotes a special category of sociability with distinct, sacred duties in contrast to those of procreation and social stability represented by marriage.<sup>686</sup> Such societies’ sober spirituality lent a type of authority on its members usually denied to women. Christian celibacy, as Peter Brown makes clear in his magisterial work on the topic, proffered Christians a perpetual vision of a ‘dissenting’, heavenly society where control of the fallen body was an assertion of the freedom of the human will and a protest against the mainstream culture.<sup>687</sup>

Life on the American frontier may have exacerbated some of the conditions that had traditionally led women in the Old World to look beyond marriage and domestic life to other models of adult sociability. On the one hand, partially bearing out Franklin’s observation about marriage and the Americas, Stephanie Grauman Wolf has shown in her study of the German population of Philadelphia, that marriage rates seemed to be much higher in North America than in Europe.<sup>688</sup> Laura Thatcher Ulrich argues the same, stating that in America “almost all females who reached the age of maturity married” in contrast to Europe. Furthermore—or as a consequence of such demographics—the definition of colonial women’s roles, Ulrich states, was “by definition basically domestic.”<sup>689</sup> The universality of marriage could only have served to heighten the oddity of women remaining single, but could as well potentially increase the attraction of a single life. In the Ephrata sister’s own chronicle and writings, to which we will later turn, we hear in their praise of the contemplative life over the married life a possible hint of dissatisfaction at the inevitable destiny of colonial women.<sup>690</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 59, 60, 97-8.

<sup>683</sup> Edward Stephens, *Letter to a Lady*, (London, 1695), 54.

<sup>684</sup> Stephens, *Letter to a Lady*, pp. 2-8.

<sup>685</sup> See Sally Kitch *Chaste Liberation: Celibacy and Female Cultural Status* (UI Press: Urbana-Champagn, 1989).

<sup>686</sup> Apetrei, *Religion and Women*, 51.

<sup>687</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>688</sup> Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown Pennsylvania 1683-1800*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 253-55.

<sup>689</sup> Laura Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 6, 36.

<sup>690</sup> *Ein Angenehmer Geruch der Rosen und Lilien*, “6. Drum ist die Schwester-Lieb so treu, daß sie im Tod nicht bricht entzwey: Sie ist von solchem hohen Staat, woran Gott sein Gefallen hat.” Subtle critiques of the finite nature of marriage abound in the sister’s texts.

At the same time, the diversity of the colonies often experimental religious communities and the lax governmental oversight (especially in Pennsylvania) did offer women alternatives to marriage. The historian Karin A. Wulf, in her study of unmarried colonial Pennsylvanian women, showed that large numbers of Quaker women chose to remain unmarried based on religious ideals. She suggests that many of the unmarried women in Pennsylvania were drawn to the single life through an increasingly important evangelical ideal based on the achievement of spiritual independence and a relationship with God as opposed to a masculine ideal of autonomy based on material independence.<sup>691</sup> Quaker women especially—a radical Protestant sect teaching divine inspiration and that women could be called to religious tasks and a holy life as much as men—felt the tension between the traditional path of domesticity and that of serving God in a more singleminded, consecrated manner.<sup>692</sup>

Within such radical circles among German Protestants, the theology informing this rejection of marriage and sexual relations most often took the form of Boehme's theosophic laden accounts of rebirth and 'chaste' union with the above-mentioned Sophia. Jane Leade (1623-1704), a widowed English Boehme enthusiast and head of the "Philadelphia Society" preached to members that the chaste mystical union between the reborn and the Virgin Sophia would bring with it the "true and right Marriage" and dissolve "all low, amorous entangling loves" in its wake.<sup>693</sup> In another case in Bavaria, that of the Lutheran Pietist, Rosina Dorothea Schilling (1670-1744), her deep yearning for a spiritual life developed through exposure to "mystical texts" such as Thomas à Kempis, Tauler, and Johann Arndt.<sup>694</sup> While still a young woman, Rosina Dorothea had taken the resolute decision to join a nearby convent, and only the determined opposition of her father prevented her from achieving her goal. Her animus to marriage persisted, however, when at the wedding of two of her nieces, she strangely composed a poem denigrating marriage and the corruption of the world: "The world, that old pig, eats only shit and mucuous/her sweetness is known as stench/her lusts as foolishness/her jokes are called deserts of vice/that which Paul forbade..." She later wrote in a letter that the reference to St Paul referred to his thoughts on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, the same text cited by Frau Wildenau.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Karin A. Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). Studies show that Quakers in Pennsylvania had some of the highest levels of celibacy in the colonies but that Germans in Germantown had some of the lowest. Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton, 1986), 254. Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller also focused on single women in her study *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). She argued that such women chose to remain unmarried out of a principled "desire to pursue autonomy, to explore the self, to expand intellectual and personal horizons, and to serve God and the community through the development and application of individual talents and abilities." 1.

<sup>692</sup> Wulf shows that many Quaker women first prayed for a confirmation of the inner light before marrying. Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 66.

<sup>693</sup> Jane Leade, *A Fountain of Gardens* (London: J. Bradford, 1696), 159. "Single Chastity is all, and the chief Dowry which she makes Inquisition for, and therefore of all low amorous entangling Loves we had need to be well aware."

<sup>694</sup> Dietrich Blaufuß, "Rosina Dorothea Schilling-Ruckteschel: Eine Separatistin im Pietismus?" in *Der Radikale Pietismus: Perspektiven der Forschung*. Edited by Wolfgang Breul, Marcus Meier, Lothar Vogel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 113.

<sup>695</sup> See R.D. Ruckteschels, Signatur: H61/VAR 656. And see Dietrich Blaufuß, "Rosina Dorothea Schilling-Ruckteschel: Eine Separatistin im Pietismus?" in *Der Radikale Pietismus: Perspektiven der*

Beissel's earliest writings follow this radical Protestant theosophic imagination to argue for celibacy as key to spiritual rebirth. The Silesian mystic's original anthropology depicted a pre-lapsarian Adam as an androgynous unity, containing both the male and female "qualities". As Gichtel explained to a correspondent in 1697, "God truly created Adam and Eve together and not apart in two bodies. But in one body and two qualities."<sup>696</sup> In this unitive state, the androgynous Adam enjoyed a constant spiritual union with Sophia or wisdom, Boehme's representation of the female aspect of the Godhood. Sexual procreation and genitalia themselves were unnecessary in this state since could "conceive through Paradisaical means through the power of the imagination, like Maria, and procreate without tearing".<sup>697</sup> The fall came with Adam's awakened desire to recreate "like the animals", resulting in the loss of this male-female unity and union with Sophia and the creation of Eve.<sup>698</sup> The strict rejection of sexuality and procreation by these theosophic circles was an important part of restoring this pre-lapsarian Adamic state and union with Sophia. Although there is no evidence that Boehme took his version of a sexless Adam to mean that contemporary Christians should embrace celibacy in this life, Gichtel came to precisely that conclusion: "J. Böhme writes: marriage is, taken at best, only a whoredom before God...For it is against the first order, when God created just one Adam and led him into paradise, so that he should conceive in a spiritual manner and which will seem strange to you, but it is nevertheless the truth."<sup>699</sup>

In Beissel's 1745 *Theosophische Episteln*, he explained how Christ himself represents this androgyny, containing within him the feminine principle of the virgin Sophia and a virginal male element. Christ offers to humankind the required duality to complete their growth to this "new humanity" representing to 'the female gender', a 'virginal man' and to the male gender he offers his "womanly part" as a 'manly virgin':

Now the image of God in Christ is no longer divided in two between man and woman, but is rather both, simultaneously. The pure virgin Sophia, who turned away from Adam, is animating him now [in ihm eingeistet]. Jesus is, according to his masculine part, a virginal man to the female sex, and according to his feminine part a female virgin to the masculine. Here we see the pearl of the new humanity, and how perfect the same is. Thus nothing of the masculine is lacking to the feminine, and with the masculine, nothing feminine. For we are all one in Christ. The old is passed away/everything is become new. For he who is in Christ/ is a new creature.<sup>700</sup>

According to at least one historian, this theosophic innovation implied a "radical reconstruction of gender" based on a hetero-sexually oriented bridal mysticism of the soul."<sup>701</sup> As we will see in Ephrata's sister's chronicle, Ephrata's celibate members clung

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*Forschung* "Die Welt, die alte Sau/frißt lauter Dreck und Zotten./Ihr Süßigkeit heißt Stank; ihr Lust ist Narrethey;/Ihr Scherz heißt Laster=Wust; den Paulus hat Verboten./Und ihre Labsal ist des Unflaths Schand=Gespey."

<sup>696</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 16. Aug 1697 in *TP* Vol. 1, 295.

<sup>697</sup> Gichtel to Pronner, 16 Aug. 1697, in *TP* vol. 1, 295.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>699</sup> Gichtel to Anonymous, 5. July, 1704 in *TP*, vol. IV, 2885.

<sup>700</sup> Beissel, *Theosophische Epistel*, 196.

<sup>701</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 113.



closely to this notion of rebirth into a sexless, heavenly creature to justify their rejection of marriage and the traditional gender roles assigned to them.

In two of the earliest texts published by Beissel, written several years after he emigrated to America, we see the centrality of chastity to the type of millenarian renewal to which his early practice of the solitary life aimed. A 1728 text, *Mysterion Anomias: or The Mystery of Lawlessness* only exists in a later German translation and the 1729 text, *Die Ehe, das Zuchthaus fleischlicher Menschen* is only known through brief mentions from other texts.<sup>702</sup> Both testify to Beissel's theosophic anthropology of an originally asexual Adam and a millenarian hope of restoration of such a state. In *Mysterion Anomias*, we learn that Adam's original state was one of Virginal union with heavenly Wisdom (Sophia) and constant companionship with God: "...in the Beginning of the Creation, inbreathed into one Body, that pure Virginal Man *Adam*, in that pure heavenly Image, together with the pure, godly and heavenly Wisdom, as his Companion, and blessed him with godly Encrease of heavenly Dispositions." The subsequent fall into concupiscence is overcome by Grace in Christ: "In whatever Man now, Christ abolisheth the old carnal or fleshly Nature, and brings it to the Grace, and raiseth a new spiritual Man, that same has Peace with the Law, because he doth and can do what the Law requireth." A later writing by Beissel confirms that the soul who reaches a mystical union can reclaim that which was lost in Adam: "the continuous penetration into God and work of rebirth on the whole body of Jesus/ and thereafter to the full restoration of all that which was lost in Adam."<sup>703</sup> In the text on marriage from 1729, we know only that Beissel states that marriage existed as a "disciplinary ordinance for fallen people" and those wishing to advance beyond this state must enter the "school" of celibacy.<sup>704</sup>

In Ephrata's ecclesiology in both its solitary and communal stages the distinction between the inferior married and the higher celibate estate constituted one of the most prominent features at Ephrata. Throughout its history Ephrata had married members—known as 'householders' and mostly practicing virginal marriages—in addition to the solitary orders. The two communities were kept separate with the celibate orders living in the center of the settlement and householders living around the edges of the central compound with worship services, at least at the height of the community, in separate meetinghouses.<sup>705</sup> Ephrata's strict division of members based on familial and gender criteria echoes other sectarian communities in early Pennsylvania such as the Moravians who organized members into different 'choirs' or orders based on gender, age, and marital status. The glaring difference was, of course, the Moravian's celebration of marriage and sexuality to which unmarried young men should quickly advance.<sup>706</sup>

Members of Ephrata found justification for this division between married and celibates in orthodox and pietist histories of the primitive church. We know that Gottfried Arnold's history, *Die Erste Liebe* (1696) was read at Ephrata, as was the

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<sup>702</sup> Beissel, *Mysterion Anomias: or The Mystery of Lawlessness: or, Lawless Antichrist discover'd and disclosed shewing that all those do belong to that lawless Antichrist, who wilfully reject the commandments of God...* (1729). It is believed to have been printed in Philadelphia by Andrew Bradford.

<sup>703</sup> Beissel, *Urständliche und Erfahrungsvolle Zeugnisse*, 14.

<sup>704</sup> see Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 33.

<sup>705</sup> *ibid.*, 123. Starting in 1740, Beissel separated more strictly the celibate orders from the householder congregation by ordering the householders to build their own meeting house.

<sup>706</sup> See Paul Peucker, *Mystical Marriage and the Crisis of Moravian Piety in the Eighteenth Century* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

Angelic Brother's Otto Glüsing's history of the Egyptian desert hermits, *Das Leben der Altväter* (1720) which the *Chronicon* recommended to get a better idea of the solitary life. Johannes Hildebrand, one of Ephrata's most theologically minded figures besides Beissel, described these histories' depiction of a holy, celibate class of Christians to justify Ephrata's practices in his *Mystisches und Kirchliches Zeuchniß der Bruderschaft in Zion* (1743): "In the Christian church, in contrast, the estates [Stände] divided early and separated into two. There was then found so many holy church fathers and soldiers of Jesus Christ, who esteemed this world's glory for nothing, and chose as their part the taste of Christ, so many God-given matrons and virgins, who finished their lives in angelic discipline and purity."<sup>707</sup>

## FROM HERMITS TO MONKS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNAL CELIBACY AT EPHRATA

But, in 1720, such a developed theology of communal celibacy was not yet on the horizon. It was in pursuit of a much less ambitious ideal of departing a corrupt world and practicing an ascetic, solitary mysticism that Beissel left Europe and set out for the American wilderness in 1720. The *Chronicon* states that Beissel's "goal with this voyage was, in fact, to spend his life with God in solitude."<sup>708</sup> Beissel's decision to leave for America was also likely influenced by positive reports from other Pietist, millenarian, and theosophic groups who had emigrated to the New World—and particularly to the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania. Following missionary journeys to Germany in the 1670s by the Quaker William Penn, German non-conformists from the Rhine region began to flow to the new American colony.<sup>709</sup> In 1683, the first German immigrants founded the creatively-named 'Germantown' outside of Philadelphia under the auspices of a land grant company commissioned by a circle of radical Protestants in Frankfurt am Mayn who had taken interest in William Penn's new colony. Interestingly, the initial investors included Johann Jakob Schütz, a central figure in mystical Lutheran circles, as well as Johann Wilhelm Überfeld, who would later become Johann Gichtel's right-hand man in the Angelic Brethren network.<sup>710</sup> The investors placed Francis David Pastorius (1651-1720) in charge of buying land for German Pietists, Quakers, and Mennonites.<sup>711</sup> Over the course of the next half-century, Germantown and Pennsylvania became the primary destination for German religious separatist and radicals.

One group of radical German migrants in particular seems to have captured Beissel's attention. This group, known as the "Society of the Woman in the Wilderness"

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<sup>707</sup> Hildebrand, *Mystisches und Kirchliches Zeuchniß*, 14. Hildebrand discusses in detail the solitary order on pg. 15 of this text.

<sup>708</sup> *Chronicon*, 10.

<sup>709</sup> For more on the radical German migration networks to the Americas in this period, see Rosalind J. Beiler, "Dissenting Religious Communication Networks and European Migration, 1660-1710" in *Soundings in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 210-236. The historian of Pietism, Donald J. Durnbaugh has also written extensively on these communities. "Pennsylvania's Crazy Quilt of German Religious Groups" in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* vol. 68, No. 1. Part One Pennsylvania Germans Part One (Winter 2001), pp. 8-30.

<sup>710</sup> J. Landes, *London Quakers in the Trans-Atlantic World: The Creation of an Early Modern Community* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2015).

<sup>711</sup> For more on the Frankfort Land Association, see Marion Dexter Learned, *The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius: The Founder of Germantown* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1908).

was led by the mystic Johannes Kelpius (1660-1705?), traced its origins to a Nuremberg mathematician and theologian, Jakob Zimmerman (1642-1693), whose numerological calculations predicted the apocalypse would occur at the “edge of the wilderness” in 1693.<sup>712</sup> When Zimmermann died before the band of migrants he had organized could undertake their voyage to America, Kelpius assumed leadership and led the 40 or so souls to a secluded spot on the Wissahickon creek outside of Philadelphia. There, the community’s members lived alone in caves or huts in contemplative meditation and observed midnight vigils to await the apocalypse.<sup>713</sup> Although the group had disbanded shortly after Kelpius’s death in 1705, several followers maintained their hermit lifestyle in and around the developing German community of Germantown next to the original site on the Wissahickon. Beissel frequently spoke and received guidance from one of these hermits, Conrad Matthaï, in the years following his arrival in Pennsylvania.<sup>714</sup>

Upon learning that Kelpius had died and that his followers had scattered, Beissel became apprenticed for a short time to the weaver Peter Becker, a Schwarzenau Baptist in Germantown.<sup>715</sup> The *Chronicon* tells us that Beissel had not given up his spiritual mission of renunciation but “kept very quiet as to his projects for a solitary life” because of a perceived lack of appreciation for such devotion among his fellow German immigrants.<sup>716</sup> In 1721, however, Beissel left his apprenticeship and, after consultation with the survivors of Kelpius’s society, including Matthaï, struck out to the Pennsylvania interior to live as a hermit with one other companion, Jakob Stuntz who had come with him from Germany. Eventually, two others joined, Isaac von Bebern, a young Dutch man, and George Stiefel, another one of Beissel’s original traveling companions from Germany.<sup>717</sup> This began a decade-long phase in which Beissel found himself moving occasionally between life alone or in a small circle of fellow hermits in the Pennsylvania wilderness and in communion with various Pietist communities on the frontier, but never fully abandoning the ideal of solitary withdrawal he had absorbed from Gichtel.

Beissel and Stuntz chose as their first location for their hermit life a spot on the Mühlbach Creek in Conestoga, just south of modern day Lancaster. There they constructed a “lonely home” with few amenities, surviving on very little, and sleeping on hard, wooden planks. From time to time, the men ventured forth to preach to the nearby settlers, and also undertook work as tutors for frontier children.<sup>718</sup> The *Chronicon* describes Beissel’s lifestyle as extremely austere and chaste along the lines of the early Christian desert hermits: “In his moderation and abstinence which he then practiced he must be reckoned along with the most approved fathers of the Egyptian wilderness. Frequently, on his visits, he did not eat anything for three days, whereat people took great

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<sup>712</sup> Writing on Kelpius is spotty; he is mentioned in many works as an important early representative of esoteric spirituality in the Americas and features prominently in Patricia Ward’s *Experimental Theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fénelon, and their Readers* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 120-140.

<sup>713</sup> See Oswald Seidensticker, “The Hermits of the Wissahickon” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 11, No 4 (Jan., 1888), 427-441.

<sup>714</sup> See Hans Leaman’s article on “Johann Christoph Saur” in the *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*. (February 28, 2014). Accessed April 20, 2018: <https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=195>

<sup>715</sup> *Chronicon*, 15.

<sup>716</sup> *Chronicon*, 15.

<sup>717</sup> see Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 18-19.

<sup>718</sup> *Chronicon*, 16. See also Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania*, 56.

offence.”<sup>719</sup> This eremitic asceticism, which included celibacy, relied on a theosophic idea that rebirth involved an elemental transformation of the soul from its base, natural condition to a sanctified one. Beissel’s early writings on the “way of the cross” and self-denial from his first published texts in 1728 and through to his mature writings in the 1740s and 1750s contain the basic argument that ‘true solitude’ is how the soul could practice the “communion with God” for an ever-deepening conversion: “Above all else, I must devote myself to the true solitude/ and let the separation from all creatures be my only rest and safety.”<sup>720</sup> True solitude included separating oneself physically at times from civilization and other humans, but this was in service to the higher goal of inward mortifying the ego along with its worldly attachments. This ego-death constituted what Beissel termed a “receding from the self.”<sup>721</sup>

Self-renunciation continued to be at the heart of the Ephrata experiment even in its later, communalistic phase. One visitor to Ephrata in 1734, just as it was beginning its communalistic development, wrote of their ascetic theology in the following terms: “In July, 1734, I came to the *Beisselianer*, on the Cocalico, and spoke to them [about the way to Grace]. They answered that by a strict life and bodily denial one may grow and increase in sanctification, and the Eckerlings offered to practice therein with me, and described the rite and observance as we would have to pass through it, if I concluded to enter in to the matter.”<sup>722</sup>

Beissel’s early attempts at solitude as a hermit would not last long as the ebb and flow of awakenings and his own penchant for preaching and attracting followers picked up speed in the late 1720s. The decade between 1721 until the early 1730s would be a constant back and forth between Beissel’s avowed longing for the solitary life and his increasing involvement in communal experiments. The two ideals of ascetic existence—the solitary and the communal—would continue to be fluid and exist side by side at Ephrata well into the 1750s as members of Ephrata often withdrew to live alone for a period before rejoining the communal orders. Beissel describes his own oscillations between the eremitic and cenobitic life as dependent upon divine inspiration as to what was needed of him at the moment; if his inward eradication of the ego was not sufficient, he would withdraw into solitude.<sup>723</sup>

In 1724, Beissel’s first solitary experiment ended as he joined a revival of the Schwarzenau *Neu-Täufer* or ‘Dunkards’ in Pennsylvania, one of the same groups Beissel had come across in Germany years before. This revival had begun in 1722 when Peter Becker, Beissel’s old master in Germantown, set out to gather and reorganize the Schwarzenau Baptist Brethren who had scattered upon arrival in America.<sup>724</sup> Becker and his companions went from settlement to settlement, rebaptizing old members, converting new ones, and holding Love-Feasts, one of the first of many “awakenings” among the

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<sup>719</sup> *Chronicon*, 19.

<sup>720</sup> Beissel, *Urständliche und Erfahrungsvolle Zeugnisse Wie man zum geistlichen Leben und dessen Vollkommenheit erlangen möge*, Vorbericht. (Ephrata: Drucks der Brüderschafft, 1745), 51.

<sup>721</sup> Beissel, *Erfahrungsvolle Zeugnisse*, 14. See also, Beissel, *Theosophischen Lektionen*, 4.

<sup>722</sup> Jean François Regnier, “Das Geheimnis der Zinzendorfschen Sekte” (1735), as cited in *Ephrata As Seen by Contemporaries*, 10. Regnier’s short and strange visit to Ephrata involved him convincing many at Ephrata to intensify their ascetic practices to the point of replacing bread with ground acorns. Ultimately, due to sickness, the experiment failed and the settlement expelled Regnier considering him mad.

<sup>723</sup> Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 18-19.

<sup>724</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 18-19.

German settlers in Pennsylvania.<sup>725</sup> Beissel, who had briefly associated with the Brethren in Germany, was himself baptized on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1724, and quickly rose to the leadership of the newly established Conestoga Brethren Congregation, “sacrificing...his beloved solitude” to serve his fellow man.<sup>726</sup> Beissel’s leadership quickly led to tension with the Germantown leadership as Beissel began to vigorously preach and practice his two most important doctrines, that of the seventh-day sabbath and strict chastity.<sup>727</sup> Already in 1726, two daughters of a member of the congregation, Anna and Maria Eicher “fled their father’s home...and delivered themselves under [Beissel’s] guidance” to become the earliest female virgins wooed by Beissel.<sup>728</sup>

These and other rumblings related to Beissel’s extreme positions ultimately led to the congregation splitting in two in 1728, with Beissel’s followers holding to seventh-day worship and many men and women practicing chastity either as hermits or in chaste marriages.<sup>729</sup> Then, suddenly, in 1732, Beissel was prompted him to again take up the hermit life, announcing his intentions at a meeting and leaving shortly thereafter to a spot eight miles north at the current site of Ephrata.<sup>730</sup> The Chronicon states only that Beissel was “driven in upon himself” and that he may have felt himself beset anew with temptation after living among men for the previous seven years.<sup>731</sup> His isolation lasted only seven months as shortly thereafter, in September, 1732, some of his old flock in Conestoga decided to follow him, building cabins not far from Biessel’s own. Shortly thereafter, Anna and Maria Eicher arrived, with a spot on the opposite bank of the Cocalico creek designated for female celibates.<sup>732</sup>

Now, with the community firmly established at the Cocalico Creek settlement and with an ever-expanding core of followers committed to the celibate, withdrawn life, two important conditions were set for a communal form of celibate devotion to flourish. Up to this point, Beissel had held to the ideal of the solitary life. Beissel and his small group of fellow hermits lived alone in cabins, or in pairs scattered along the Cocalico creek’s banks up until the early 1730s. The few female hermits lived in a similar fashion but on the eastern bank of the creek. In Ephrata’s history, we’re told that the settlement initially resembled “an edifying picture of the huts of the holy Fathers in the Egyptian wilderness”, a reference to the earliest solitary monastics from ancient Christianity.<sup>733</sup>

But rapid growth in the number of celibate converts seems to have played an important role in the transition from an anchoritic to a communal model at Ephrata. As mentioned above, the Order of Spiritual Virgins first came into existence in 1735 with the construction of Kedar and the arrival of several new sisters who wished to quarter together, a move which Beissel took credit for facilitating under divine inspiration.<sup>734</sup> In

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid.

<sup>726</sup> *Chronicon*, 21, 27.

<sup>727</sup> Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counter-Culture*, 44-47.

<sup>728</sup> *Chronicon*, 34.

<sup>729</sup> See the letter from Johann Adam Gruber, “Letter from Germantown Oct 28 1730” which was published in *Geistliche Fama*, No. 3 (1731), 51. I cite it here from *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 3-4.

<sup>730</sup> *Chronicon*, 19.

<sup>731</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 63.

<sup>732</sup> Sangmeister, *Leben und Wandel, Journal of the Historical Society of Cocalico Valley*, vol. 4 (1979), pp. 26-9.

<sup>733</sup> *Chronicon*, 33-4.

<sup>734</sup> *Chronicon*, 76.

1738, the *Chronicon* describes how a new influx led to yet another lurch toward communal orders:

As now so many woovers of the Virgin continually announced themselves at the Settlement, the Superintendent was at a loss what should be done with these numerous young people, and whether it were not better to teach them to renounce their self-will in convents under spiritual authority, than to let them raise up their own altars of selfhood in corners.<sup>735</sup>

The comment marks an important shift in the spirituality and thinking with not only Beissel but also our Protestant ascetics more generally. The notion that a communal life of suffering was perhaps of higher spiritual value than the solitary worship characterizing Gichtel and Marsay's devotions opened the door to a much more developed Protestant monasticism. In the following account of one of Ephrata's members on why he gave up the hermit's solitary life for the 'monastic life', we hear the echoes of other Protestant writers like Pierre Moulins that the withdrawn life is more egotistical in its focus on the self:

There did I lay the foundation to solitary life, *but the melancholy temptations, which did trouble me every day, did prognosticate to me misery and afflictions:* [However] I had not lived there half a year, when a great change happened: for a camp was laid out for all solitary persons at the very spot, where now Ephrata stands, and where at that time the president [Beissel] lived with some hermits. And now, when all hermits were called in, I also quitted my solitude, and exchanged the same [for] a monastic life: which was judged to be more inservient to Sanctification than the life of a hermit, where many under a pretense of holiness did nothing but n[o]urish their own selfishness.<sup>736</sup>

For Beissel and others, the meaning of this transition in the face of criticism that such an organization was too worldly<sup>737</sup>, was that communal monastic life represented the highest stage of self-annihilation where one learned to practice charity, obedience, and sacrifice for others instead of the egocentric solitary lifestyle focused on individual sanctification. The individualistic hermit existence—or the “seraphic” ‘angelic’ life—did serve an integral purpose as a preparatory stage in purifying the individual and ushering him into the esoteric union with Wisdom.<sup>738</sup> The “hidden compartment and communion with God” (verborgenen Wandel und Umgang mit Gott<sup>739</sup>) and “Contemplative life in

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<sup>735</sup> *Chronicon*, 106.

<sup>736</sup> S.A. Feite, “The Awakening of Conrad Weiser: Radical Pietism on the Pennsylvania Frontier” in *Der Reggeboge, Journal of the Pennsylvania German Society*, vol 48 (1): 2014, 69.

<sup>737</sup> Ezekiel Sangmeister, *Leben und Wandel des in GOTT ruhenten Ezekiel Sangmeisters; Weiland Einwohner von Ephrata* (Ephrata: Joseph Brauman, 1825-7), 62. Sangmeister, a unique figure at Ephrata, persevered in his solitary form of devotion even as the community transitioned to collective living. In contrast to Beissel's primarily theosophic language, Sangmeister was a great lover of the Quietist authors like Molinos, Guyon, and Tersteegen. See *Leben und Wandel*, 63-64; 68.

<sup>738</sup> In other passages, the narrative explains that, unlike in ancient monasticism, God first sends his servants to the wilderness for “higher schooling” and then to learn “obedience in convents”, *Chronicon* 110.

<sup>739</sup> Beissel, *Deliciae Ephratense, pars I: oder des ehrwürdigen Vaters: Friedsam Gottrecht Die VI Rede*,

God” (Gott-Beschaulichen Leben”<sup>740</sup>) of the Desert Fathers, as writers at Ephrata described it, fortified and practiced the soul in familiarity with God’s presence. But the *Chronicon*, in trying to explain Beissel’s and the other hermits move toward a visible community and hierarchy, now explained that the hermit life was but a prelude to a higher order of self-surrender: “God first practices his saints in a separate and solitary life ere he hires them for his vineyard for he clearly saw that the hermit life, however innocent it be, could yet contribute nothing to the fruitfulness of the house of God, because as he says in his discourses, no hermit enters the kingdom of God.”<sup>741</sup> The *Chronicon*’s author gave a similar rationale when describing the end of Beissel’s first period as a hermit in 1724 to join the Brethren’s congregation in Conestoga:

Why God obliged him to again renounce this seraphic life and to enter into a communion with others. According to this the life of a hermit is only something granted for a time, but not at all the end itself; since no solitary person can be fruitful. Accordingly, however innocent his walk before God and man at that time was, it was yet not right in itself; for with all his renunciations he still had not renounced himself. What was needed was a soil into which he might sow his grain of wheat to die, so that it should spring forth and bear fruit to the glory of God.<sup>742</sup>

The community in Ephrata, we are told at this point in 1735, now “began to order their life in every respect in monastic wise.” Common ownership was introduced as “property was declared sinful” and a common fund for the sister and brethren’s orders were established.<sup>743</sup> Monastic hierarchies were introduced with an Abbot (‘Brother Onesimus’—Israel Eckerlin) and an abbess (‘Sister Maria’—Maria Eicher) appointed to lead each order. The first building dedicated specifically to just such a communal order was erected in 1738 with the initiative of a new Swiss member who asked Beissel for permission to build a convent at the settlement, Benedict Yuchly. This new order was known as the “Zionitic Brotherhood”.<sup>744</sup> The *Chronicon* records that in August of 1740, the last of the solitary hermits “left their solitary dwellings and moved into the convent Zion”.<sup>745</sup> It further lists 35 men and 34 women as the number of celibates living in communal orders at Ephrata. By 1745, Ann Kirschner gives the number of celibate women as 39. At its height, the celibate orders never numbered more than a hundred, with the married ‘householders’ consisting of several hundred.<sup>746</sup>

The spiritual flowering of Ephrata was accompanied by a simultaneous economic boom, a development which would eventually lead to deep tensions in the community.

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(Ephrata, 1773), 87-88.

<sup>740</sup> Beissel, *Urständliche und Erfahrungsvolle Zeugnisse Wie man zum Geistlichen Leben Und dessen Vollkommenheit gelangen möge* (Ephrata in Pennsylvania, Drucks der Brüderschafft/1745), 25.

<sup>741</sup> This was in part due to the conflict with the Eckerlins who left to be hermits and criticized Beissel for the “luxury” and pomp that Ephrata had embraced.

<sup>742</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 20.

<sup>743</sup> *Chronicon* 122.

<sup>744</sup> *Chronicon*, 107.

<sup>745</sup> *Chronicon Ephratense*, 120.

<sup>746</sup> Saur also says that in 1751 there were 40 single sisters and 40 single brethren (*Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 48). Ann Kirschner, “From Hebron to Saron”, 61.

By the early 1740s, Ephrata had become an economic powerhouse in the county despite its ascetic ambitions. Israel Eckerlin (1705-), a native of Strasburg Germany whose father had converted from Catholicism to the Dunkard sect, led Ephrata's economic expansion. He and his brothers supervised the planting of orchards, the purchase of horses and oxen, and the construction of a number of mills along the colony's several streams and rivers. The mills, in particular, seem to have brought the settlement great wealth. Their quality and productivity made Ephrata's mills the desired location for nearby communities to grind their wheat, press their oil, cut their timber, full their cloth, and procure paper. One visitor to the settlement in 1753, Israel Acrelius, praised the mills in the following terms:

The mills which belong to the convent are both a useful and an ingenious work. There are flour-, saw-, and paper-mills, a fulling-mill, and a flaxseed-oil press at the same place, and operated with the same water-power. The greater part of their support is derived from the oil-press. The flour-mill makes good flour, so that in view of this, and also because the toll is moderate, the people pass by other mills to come to this one. The saw-mill is also in a good condition. The paper-mill makes the best kind of card-paper. The fulling-mill was burnt down.<sup>747</sup>

Another visitor claimed that the mills brought the settlement "considerable profit" with the Eckerlins shrewdly moving beyond self-sufficiency to marketing Ephrata's resources for profit.<sup>748</sup> Apart from the operation of the mills, Ephrata's cloistered inhabitants busied themselves with a wide-range of craftwork that the above-mentioned Acrelius listed as "shoemaking, tailoring, weaving cloth and stockings, and the like, partly for the use of the cloisters and partly for sale, and so as to enable them to purchase other necessaries."<sup>749</sup> The operation of the mills and the settlement's craftworks went hand in hand as evidenced not only by the impressive architecture and wood-cut art found there, but also by Ephrata's importance for colonial paper production and printing. Ephrata's paper mill, combined with its possession of only the second German printing press in the Americas, made it a center for German-language publishing. In addition to Beissel's own texts and many novel Hymnals, the largest book printed in the pre-Revolutionary North America, *Martyr's Mirror*, was printed at Ephrata and the paper for the famed Sauer Bible, the first Bible printed in the Americas, came from the Ephrata paper mill.<sup>750</sup> Ephrata's industriousness and growth by the 1740s led one historian, perhaps hyperbolically, to claim that "at full tide, then, Ephrata may have been the single most comprehensive economic-industrial system in the colonies prior to the revolution."<sup>751</sup>

The speed at which the settlement constructed large dwelling and communal structures in the period 1734-1750 also gives one a sense of Ephrata's size and ambition. In 1734, a storehouse or "*magazin*" was built along with Berghaus, housing a number of

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<sup>747</sup> Israel Acrelius, *A History of New Sweden, or the Settlements on the Delaware River*, transl. by Wm. M. Reynolds. Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, XI (1874), 373-401. Quoted in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 76.

<sup>748</sup> William Douglass, *Summary, Historical and Political...of the British Settlements in North America*. Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1749-1753, pp. 150, 335 quoted in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 48.

<sup>749</sup> *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 76.

<sup>750</sup> *Der Blutige Schau-Platz oder Martyrer Spiegel der Tauffs Gesinntten*. Julius Friedrich Sachse, "The Ephrata Paper Mill", *Lancaster Historical Society* (Lancaster, 1897), 331.

<sup>751</sup> Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune*, 93.



celibate men. In 1735, the three story Kedar, with which we began this chapter, was built with a meeting-house or *bäthaus* attached. Kedar would ultimately be the primary residence for the Sisterhood. In the late 1730s, the community was preoccupied with the building of a large cloister for the “Zionitic” brotherhood as the men’s order was now called. The building stood three stories tall, with a large hall in the middle floor for over a 100 congregants. In 1741, in a move meant to separate the meetings of the married members of Ephrata from that of the celibate orders, Beissel ordered the construction of a large prayer house connected at an angle to the sister’s convent, Kedar.<sup>752</sup> Jeff Bach, in surveying this building spree, notes that “Ephrata built on a scale and at a rate unsurpassed by any other segment of the colonial German population except the Moravians.”<sup>753</sup>

Indeed, these construction projects, beginning with the completion of Kedar in 1735, testified to the institutionalization and communalization of celibacy. Alarming to outsiders, the settlement adopted distinctively monastic practices and ceremonies to accompany the solidification of the celibate order’s as distinct devotional bodies. Beissel went far further than his predecessors in creating a self-consciously monastic devotional form within the communities surveyed in this dissertation. Kedar’s construction was followed by a bevy of innovations such as the adoption of monastic clothing, tonsuring (the distinctively monk hair shaving) and a rigorous daily regimen of vigils, singing (for which they are still famous), physical labor and manuscript illumination.<sup>754</sup> One English visitor by the name of William Douglass, described the community in 1752, at the height of its monastic practices, in the following way: “The Dumpers are a small Body of Germans about 50 miles from Philadelphia, Men and Women professing Continency, live in separate Apartments. The men wear a monkish Habit, without Breeches like Capuchins, but lighter Cloth; as to Oaths they are the same with the Quakers and Moravians”.<sup>755</sup> The transition which took place at Ephrata from the ideal of solitary, mystical asceticism in the mould of Gichtel and Marsay and into one of an outwardly and communal monastic nature required an articulate defense of the communal, celibate life in spiritualistic, theosophic terms. The rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic practices that Beissel and others borrowed from earlier monastic traditions served, like those before them, to demarcate their practitioners as separated from the world, but further by means of a uniquely Protestant perfectionist theology of spiritual rebirth.

In a few short years, Beissel’s band of hermits who followed the model of other early modern Protestant mystical hermitages, had blossomed into a very different kind of community. External ritual and church ordinances were highly contested among awakened Protestants as potentially superficial, external symbols that provided the

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<sup>752</sup> An overview of Ephrata’s structures and their descriptions can be found in Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 115-139.

<sup>753</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 139.

<sup>754</sup> The most complete overview of the practices and theology at Ephrata is Jeff Bach’s *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (see above citation); prior important histories of the cloister include Julius Friedrich Sachse’s *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers*. 2 volumes. Philadelphia (1899) and E.G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counter-Culture*.

<sup>755</sup> William Douglass, *Summary, Historical and Political*, cited in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, 48.

worshipper a false sense of righteousness.<sup>756</sup> Although the anti-institutional language of Ephrata professed a skepticism toward ‘outward ritual’—like that of Gichtel and Marsay—the implications of their mystical asceticism often implied a greater openness to ‘external’ devotional practices thought to assist in self-mortification. Gichtel and Beissel’s writings possess in particular a large amount of imagery relating to the rituals and external devotion belonging to temple purity such as unctions, temple clothing, sacrifices, and so forth.<sup>757</sup> The question at Ephrata, as it progressed into a community embracing externalized forms of devotion, seems not to have been the mere presence of ritual, but rather to what degree its symbolism corresponded and represented the spiritual ideal of self-mortification, chastity, and a life apart from the world.

### ***Sisterly Love and the Communal Celibate Sisters at Ephrata***

How did the community go about crafting these external rituals of the dying, ascetic life (and specifically the ideal of celibacy) through their monastic practices? What did this transition to social life and institutionalized communion mean in terms of the radical self-denial and otherworldliness that had been so staunchly maintained as the merits of the solitary life?

One source that gives us insight into the monastic spirituality reigning in the wake of Ephrata’s transformation is that of the sister convent’s rules, “The Rose of Saron” written in 1745. In addition to containing a history that traces the development of the sister’s convent, the beautifully hand-written Fraktur manuscript also describes the structure of the community and its strict daily regiment of vigils, fasting, worship, and work practiced by the sisters, revealing in turn the outward structure and theological imagination of a female Protestant cloister. It is one of the few texts to give us the words and perspective of the many women who joined the society and embraced celibacy, the scandal that frames this chapter. What comes through upon a closer reading of this source and other sources emerging from the sisters at Ephrata is a profound re-working of the symbolic and theological terms on which Protestant women ordered their lives. We find here veneration of the virgin mary, odes to sisterly-love, and the denigration of earthly duties such as marriage and child-rearing. Some have suggested that Ephrata represents well one necessary stage to the modern feminist consciousness, that of groups of self-supporting, economically independent women.<sup>758</sup> An analysis of the sister’s convent complements what we know from our other sources about the emergence of a contemplative ideal in Protestantism, but also shows us what it meant to its female practitioners.

The text’s full title, “*The Rose, or the pleasant flowers of Saron’s spiritual marriage vow with her heavenly groom, with whom she is for eternity engaged as her king, head, husband, and Lord*” introduces the sister’s chaste unions to Christ in terms of a vow, a term with charged connotations in Protestantism, evoking the monastic tradition. But it is a suitable title as the text very much depicts a community of sisters striving to

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<sup>756</sup> Beissel, *Das Gesang der Einsamen und verlassenen Turtel-Taube, nemlich der Christlichen Kirche* (Ephrata, 1747), 14. Beissel attempts to defend singing against those who think that it is a manifestation of the “Geist dieser Welt”

<sup>757</sup> Beissel, *Deliciae Ephratense*, Die I Rede, 62-3.

<sup>758</sup> See Bach’s discussion of Gerda Lerner’s thesis in *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 105. See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

live a higher spiritual life rule as Protestant nuns all the way to their clothing and sleeping routines. The term “rose” refers to their status as chaste women among a field of thorns.<sup>759</sup> The unknown author declares at the beginning that the text seeks to highlight the members’ “virtues, solitude, sobriety, continence, and despidal of all visible things found outside of the christian and ecclesial discipline.”<sup>760</sup> After a short history of the Eicher sisters who were the first to follow Beissel to Ephrata, the record describes the society’s structure, daily routine, and ascetic rules governing their lives. The text divides the women into seven “classes”, according to seniority of membership in the society, the whole being led by a prioress, the first of whom was Maria Eicher.<sup>761</sup>

The varioius treatises and chronicles, although few and fragmentary, allows us some idea of the women living at Ephrata and their backgrounds. The *Chronicon Ephratense* gives the number of sister’s living in Kedar in 1740 as 33 with the number of brethren in Zion at 36. The sister’s chronicle, written in 1745, lists 27 sisters in the seven classes indicating some desertions and deaths.<sup>762</sup> Numbers at the convent fluctuated considerably as older members died, new members from the ‘householder’ portion of the community joined either as widows or celibates, and new converts from the surrounding settlements and Philadelphia arrived. Threee sisters stood out from the others for their longevity and seniority, the Eicher sisters and a Sister Jael (Barbara Mayer). The Eicher’s, Maria and Anna, had met Beissel in 1725 while he was living in Conestoga, showing great enthusiasm for the solitary life, with *Die Rose* saying that they were “driven into exile from their father’s house for the sake of the hope of eternal life”.<sup>763</sup> They both eventually joined Beissel at the settlement at Ephrata laying the foundation for the sister’s convent. Maria would become the first Prioress of the female convent in 1738. Sister Jael, who became Prioress in 1764, had been “enamored” of Beissel as a child, we are told, and remained in the community for sixty years until her death in 1786. The *Chronicon* also mentions a Maria Heidt, the daughter of a Leonard Heidt for whom Beissel’s preaching on the “the spiritual solitary life” so impressed her that she joined immediately along with a Sister Berenice, the above-mentioned sister who left a fiancé behind. These women joined Ephrata, most often not as individual women ‘seduced’ by Beissel as his detractors would have it, but rather as so many other frontier settlers joined movements preached by charismatic itinerant men, as part of a religious awakening that drove them to intentional communities and new expressions of intensified belief. Sister Drusiana and Basila both joined along with a rush of other settlers when Beissel preached to a group of Dunkards in Germantown.<sup>764</sup> Beissel’s charisma was of course a factor in this decision to devote themselves to a life of celibacy but it should not be given priority over what these women themselves stated about their beliefs in the path of suffering, purification, and undistracted worship of God. For others, Ephrata constituted a temporary stay amidst the energy of a religious awakening, like with the above-mentioned Maria Saur of Germantown, who left after 10 years to return to her husband.

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<sup>759</sup> *Die Rose*, 46-7. Schwester Sophia: “Bist du mir dan nicht worden wie eine Rose unter den Dornen”.

<sup>760</sup> *Die Rose*, 3.

<sup>761</sup> Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 85.

<sup>762</sup> See page 120-1 of the *Chronicon Ephratense* and pgs 20-47 of the *Die Rose*. Jeff Bach estimates that altogether, at the height of the community’s existence there lived 300-500 souls at Ephrata including the married householder community living at the edges. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 4.

<sup>763</sup> *Die Rose*, 6.

<sup>764</sup> *Chronicon*, 67.

Other women had husbands at Ephrata with whom they agreed to live chastely like Christina Höhn, moving in between residency at the sister's convent and the householders.<sup>765</sup>

Although the texts do not permit us a deep analysis of individual motivations for leaving the mainstream Protestant devotional culture, we can examine the way the sisters' texts describe the cloistered and celibate life to understand what value and significance they attached to it. First and foremost, life at the convent, as described by the sister's chronicle, sought to put into practice the theology of suffering and 'rejecting the world' peached by Beissel. Daily life was strictly regulated between periods devoted to prayer, work, and sleep. Meals were limited to one substantive meal per day with some a "bit of bread" for weaker souls.<sup>766</sup> Sleeping was also limited to two, three hour periods, one on each side of a two-hour midnight prayer service (the *Nachmette* or midnight mass).<sup>767</sup> 45 minutes to an hour were set aside for prayer and devotions before going to meals. The day began at five with private prayer and then work in the morning which encompassed a variety of tasks ranging from tending crops, livestock, weaving, and tailoring. The sister's chronicle stated that these activities should be carried out in a "modest, still, quiet, and withdrawn manner, so that one is an example to each other, or shows the hidden conduct with God, and not to mention a frivolity in unnecessary conversation or light laughter with each other should not come up in this spiritual society."<sup>768</sup> The sister's chronicle states that such strict rules aimed first and foremost to be a "daily exercise and work before God that we in all seriousness are struggling to properly bring our bodies to purity" (gebürliche Zucht) and thereby "subdue the body under the spirit, and place on it a bit and bridle so that we can control it well and make it useful for the spirit."<sup>769</sup> Their lifestyle is compared to "suffering pilgrims" who have "separated completely from the habits and ways of this world, and learn daily and hourly...to deny ourselves and take upon us the cross and follow him..."<sup>770</sup> As sister Jael states, and in language similar to that used by Gichtel and Marsay describing their ascetic communities, Ephrata is a "school" where they are learning self-denial and to be Christ's followers or imitators.<sup>771</sup>

In the *Die Rose* and other texts penned by the sisters at the convent, we gain insight to their ideal of the communal celibate life as a heavenly community focused on offering the sister's a contemplative existence, one that is more pure and which ushers in a millenarian new order to nature. The text repeatedly gestures to the afterlife of heavenly virginity awaiting them after this life of suffering, but even here on earth, the sister's efforts provides a foretaste of the virginal order reigning beyond the veil. This restoration of the original pre-lapsarian unity of nature begins with the sister's themselves and their striving for the 'heavenly virginity'. *Die Rose* speaks of Ephrata offering them the "means and ways that our hardness of nature is broken so that we finally return again to our lost part upon which all unrest and divisions will have an end and everything again

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<sup>765</sup> *Chronicon*, 53.

<sup>766</sup> See Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 87.

<sup>767</sup> *Die Rose*, 11. This section contains a description of the sister's daily routine.

<sup>768</sup> *Die Rose*, 75.

<sup>769</sup> *Die Rose*, 71.

<sup>770</sup> *Die Rose*, 72.

<sup>771</sup> *Die Rose*, 124.

will be brought into one.”<sup>772</sup> They do not await betrothal to any earthly man but with her “heavenly groom” Jesus and “to be made fruitful and fertilized [besamet] through the holy ghost with him.”<sup>773</sup> In a sign of the way Ephrata’s ascetic beliefs turned confessional norms on their heads, the cult of the virgin Mary was particularly strong in the settlement, with *Die Rose* concluding by praising Sophia’s work in spiritually begetting the world through the virgin mother.<sup>774</sup> In addition to *Die Rose*, a text written by the sisters at the convent contains a collection of rhymed sayings of which the dominant theme is an ode to ‘sisterly love’ as a more pure and beautiful love than that between a man and woman.<sup>775</sup> The sustaining, constant warmth of this new divine community of sisters is presented as the superior replacement for the baser earthly ties of marriage. Sisterly love is an act of the higher faculties and of ‘free-grace’ as opposed to the unreflective impulses driving sexual love. And where sexual love will die with death, sister love will continue in heaven.<sup>776</sup> It is far removed from the world of the practical morality often invoked by Protestants to explain the necessary evils of worldly institutions like government, marriage, and punishment.

This idealization of a feminized notion of community follows a pattern of other unmarried colonial women. Karin Wulff argues in her study of single women in colonial Pennsylvania, that unmarried cultivated communities of kin and other women to alleviate the particular economic and social vulnerabilities facing single women.<sup>777</sup> Although the Ephrata community, in its ideological commitment to celibacy and communitarianism relieved such pressures, Ephrata’s women found ample foundations in scripture and Boehme’s theosophy for reconceptualizing the ideal community as feminine in nature.

Closely related to this idealization of the celibate life as a place for sisterly love, divine and healing suffering, and the reclamation of a fallen nature, is the sisterhood’s description of their cloistered life as the ‘better’ part, i.e. the superior contemplative life that they have chosen above the ‘active’ life of domesticity. We are told in the sister’s chronicle that Maria, the historical symbol of the contemplative life, ‘was the beautiful image from which the sister-love flows’. They also donned special, robes symbolizing their detachment from the normal world and its intercourse (see below). The language of choice and self-determination is particularly prominent among the texts penned by Ephrata’s female members. In *Die Rose* as well as a collection of poetry from the Sister’s Convent, *Ein Angenehmer Geruch Schwesterlichen Gesellschaft*, the authorial voice asserts repeatedly that I have “chosen myself” the yoke of “virginity” with its trials and sufferings. One sister is given the words: “Dieselbe hab ich mir erwählt, sie mich zur Jungfraun-Zahl gezählt: Ihr Lust-Spiel ist mein größte Freud, die ich genieß in dieser Zeit.”<sup>778</sup> That the language of spiritual self-determination should be employed by Ephrata’s women is unsurprising. As we have seen, many of the women at Ephrata who left husbands or suitors were accused of being seduced by Beissel, delegitimizing thereby their spiritual impulse to a holy, consecrated life by reducing it to a baser, illusionary

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<sup>772</sup> *Die Rose*, 123.

<sup>773</sup> *Die Rose*, 128.

<sup>774</sup> *Die Rose*, 150-151.

<sup>775</sup> The text is entitled, *Ein Angenehmer Geruch der Rosen und Lilien die im Thal der Demuth unter den Dornen hervor gewachsen. Alles aus der Schwesterlichen Gesellschaftin Saron* (Ephrata, 1756).

<sup>776</sup> *Ein Angenehmer Geruch*, 2.

<sup>777</sup> Karin Wulff, *Not All Wives*, 9.

<sup>778</sup> *Ein Angenehmer Geruch*, 76.

motive. In making an uncommon and unpopular decision a result of their own choice, they also cast their celibacy as no mere outward ritual, but a difficult, deeply personalized calling to which they responded. The Sister's Chronicle praises Sister Rahel, in such terms, saying, "Oh, how well have you chosen, that you preferred the unfading godliness to the temporal and worthless things of this world."<sup>779</sup>

In fact, the language of spiritual self-determination at Ephrata continued the long tradition of Protestant attacks on Catholic monastic vows such as celibacy as a despotic institution ruled by coercion and force. Ephrata celibates continued this Protestant view of celibacy as a free practice to choose or to leave it, an adiaphora, to distinguish themselves from Catholics even as they doubled-down on their lifestyle as a higher-calling, superior to their fellow Protestants. For Luther, ascetic life rules like celibacy, when understood as necessary for holiness and enforced by lifelong vows, perverted the Gospel message of free grace from Christ. His writings, followed in form by later Protestants, emphasized celibacy as a 'matter of free choice': "If you obey the Gospel, you ought to regard celibacy as a matter of free choice."<sup>780</sup> The only means by which ascetic rules could be of value to the practitioner is if they were understood not as necessary works, but rather as free acts of which the practitioner could make use if his or her conscience called for it. Luther argued that St. Anthony, "willingly chose to live as a hermit, and of his own will chose to live unmarried, after the pattern of the gospel."<sup>781</sup> For Ephrata's residents, this choice of celibacy was understood as part of a much larger choice for a life of suffering, one that was difficult to endure, but nevertheless embraced with a passionate willing. As Beissel himself wrote in his *Theosophic Lessons*, "...I know of no other salvation, than that which is acquired through the cross and through suffering. And I live accordingly now to this, and am comforted, for I have found that which my soul loves: no pain or suffering can separate me from that which I have chosen above all else."<sup>782</sup>

Complicating the Protestant emphasis on voluntarism and freedom in the choice for celibacy, however, was their equal respect and use of a scriptural tradition framing lifelong chastity as a spiritual 'gift' that some possessed (suggesting a duty to follow) but which the majority did not. In the debates between the Angelic Brethren and their orthodox opponents, this interpretive tradition came to the fore as the orthodox Protestants argued that such a gift of continence was extremely seldom and not open to all mankind to ask for and receive. As one commentator framed the issue against Gichtel's desire to see celibacy spread among Protestants,

We understand by this gift the heroic chastity when a single young man and a woman, outside and within marriage, feel absolutely no desire or inclination to sex with the other gender, as well as experiencing no wish or interest for that. Or if one does feel such desires from time to time, he/she immediately suppresses it, so that his conscience is not violated and his body polluted by the developing

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<sup>779</sup> *Die Rose*, 33-4

<sup>780</sup> Luther, *De votis monasticis*, 262.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

<sup>782</sup> Beissel, *Theosophische Lektionen*, Die LXX Lection. 144

desires. That such a gift is general and is given to everyone that asks, to that we say NO!<sup>783</sup>

For Gichtel's part, despite his insistence that they were not against marriage, the tradition of viewing chastity as a spiritual gift was understood very differently. Seeing as how sexual desire was an unnatural outgrowth of human sin and the fall, all Christians could and should pray for the gift. Quoting Paul, Gichtel wrote to one correspondent that a wife who seeks to live chastely could pray for her husband to receive the gift of chastity: "If she has more of the gift of continence than her husband, she should call upon God for her husband to have the same gift, and not walk alone."<sup>784</sup> The sister's Chronicle and Beissel's writings intermittently switch between describing chastity as a heroic act of the will, to which all can be called and are capable of, and that of a spiritual gift and calling with more restricted application. The sister's speak of their celibate life as a "heavenly calling" (*himmlischer Beruf*) and a "lot" that they had "chosen" themselves (*Ich mir hat diß Loos erwählt*).<sup>785</sup> Beissel as well speaks of their life as a 'calling' and says that they have been "made members of the lot and suffering of the solitary".<sup>786</sup>

In Ephrata, the language of celibacy as a special, particular calling for a few and the virgin state as a condition of grace for which one must struggle do not seem, therefore to be in tension with one another. The writings of the sisters and Beissel underline clearly their conviction that they were following a divine impulse and calling to lead the life of a virgin, but that this calling required a long, vigilant struggle against the self and the natural man. Far from being a path they were inclined to and effortlessly follow, the 'free grace' of God only followed 'strict and exact behavior: "...we see what a strict and exact behaviour it requires before we are again completely able to be brought within the free grace and love of God."<sup>787</sup> That this life was holy and that more Protestants should pursue it is more than clear from Beissel's proselytizing activities and zeal in advocating this life. At the same time, it is likewise clear that Ephrata's inhabitants did not assume all should be called to this life as among their own there existed many married householders.

Beyond their writings, there also exists a wealth of material artifacts and ritual practices that reveal the sister's self-conceptualization as a Protestant contemplative order. Of all the monastic practices described in *Die Rose*, the creation of monastic clothing perhaps best reflects the sister's efforts to outwardly represent their status as 'apart' from the world and celibacy. These habits had the stated purpose of reflecting how the sisters had overcome their fallen nature, including gender distinctions. In the description of the habits, we also see the influence of Catholic monasticism. The sister's common rules and practices, as exemplified here by the nature and purpose behind their adoption of monastic dress, provide insight into the material and collective practices of ascetic self-denial that helped mark their separation from the world.

The first mention of a special dress for the sister's or men's orders appears with Maria Eicher's (one of the very first women to follow Beissel) "heftigen Trieb" to "make

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<sup>783</sup> Reinhard, *Schriftmässige Prüfung des Geistes*, 96.

<sup>784</sup> Gichtel, 6 Mai, 1704, in *TP* vol. IV, 2827.

<sup>785</sup> *Die Rose*, 78; *Ein Angenehmer Geruch*, line 34.

<sup>786</sup> Beissel, *Irenici Theodici*, Preface.

<sup>787</sup> *Die Rose*, 81.

[her]self a nun's dress" for which she asked Biessel's permission.<sup>788</sup> Maria Eicher had earlier been described in *Die Rose* as being "all too much in love with God" which drove her to excessive acts of self-denial and "casteyen ihres Leibes".<sup>789</sup> About the same time, the *Chronicon* mentions that the Holy Spirit drove the men's brotherhood to take up this "instrument" of "spiritual martyrdom" as well as a means to "restore, even externally, that unity in all things, which was destroyed by the fall of man, and transformed into diversity", a reference to Boehme's androgynous pre-lapsarian Adam.<sup>790</sup> The particular of the dress was thus designed with two aims in mind: first, to cover as much of the body as possible to "muffle the mortal body" to suppress any sexual desire and second, to create a uniformity so that all "appear as one person".<sup>791</sup> The sister's account describes the dress as a "long dress with very thin arms without frills" that resembled a "Buß-Kleid" by which to "repel all worldly pomp". In order to "better cover the face and body", a veil hung down from the back and front "as long as the dress". In addition, there was attached to the veil a "covering or a cape which front and back extended a bit past the waist" which helped to provide additional cover for the shoulders and face. Thus the entire dress, *die Rose* proclaims, had the effect that the "entire body, from top to the very bottom is wrapped and covered."<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> *Chronicon*, (9-10). Prior to the cloisters, it is reported that the Eckerlins persuaded Beissel to adopt the plain dress of the Quakers and that in 1732, the hermit brethren were wearing "cowls and hoods". See Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 89.

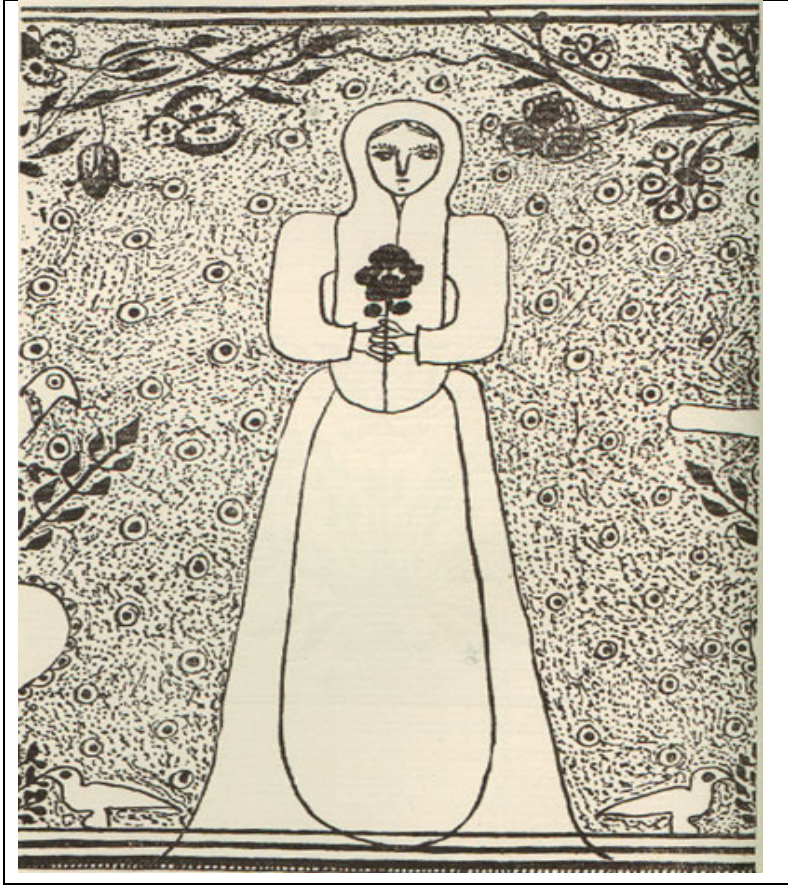
<sup>789</sup> *Die Rose*, 8.

<sup>790</sup> *Chronicon*, 89.

<sup>791</sup> *Chronicon*, 89; *Die Rose*, 65.

<sup>792</sup> *Die Rose*, 63.





The initial color was black, but after seeing how this color faded, white was adopted.<sup>793</sup> The men's garb is described as following a similar style with the same goal to cover as much of the body as possible: "It consisted of a *Thalar* [surplice] reaching down to the feet; over this was a garment having an apron in front and a veil behind which covered the back, and to which was fastened a pointed monk's hood, which could be put on or allowed to hang down the back as one pleased; the whole was provided with a girdle around the waist. During services they wore a cloak besides, reaching down to the girdels, to which also a hood was fastened."<sup>794</sup> The veils, the *Chronicon* states, was a symbol of their "spiritual betrothal" to Sophia. Various versions of the dresses existed for different conditions and purposes such as working outside, winter, and for worship.

Of particular interest as well is how closely the residents at Ephrata modeled their monastic garbs on those of contemporary Catholic monastic dress, particularly the Capuchin dress. The *Chronicon* portrays this as a coincidence: Upon contemplating this garb it was found that they who had designed it for the Order had, without knowing it, borrowed the style from the Order of the Capuchins". The resemblance was justified by arguing that the Capuchins most closely followed the habits of the first christians and thus the "Solitary at Ephrata felt flattered that they should have the honor to dip water from the same well with so venerable, famous and ancient an Order."<sup>795</sup> (89) Again we

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<sup>793</sup> *Die Rose*, 63.

<sup>794</sup> *Chronicon*, 89.

<sup>795</sup> *Chronicon*, 89.

see the contention that monasticism in itself—even Catholic ones—was not categorically rejected. A pure monasticism like that of the early church was an essential order. We are also told that “members of orders of the Roman church who visited the community said that they called such veils a scapular.”<sup>796</sup>

For residents at Ephrata, this garb sharply distinguished the married householders from the celibate congregation and, of course, the world beyond. With the suggestions made about suppressing all hints of gender, the goal was clearly to set the celibate sisters apart from the normal world, to pursue a more heavenly conduct and life consisting in an uninterrupted devotion to God. The sister’s chronicle ends the discussion on its clothing by saying that God has blessed them with this “Lebensart” so that they can “honor and worship him without ceasing day and night in his holy temple. We therefore continue to walk our path of self-denial and rejection of the world...so we can show that our kingdom is not of this world, but rather await a new heaven and earth...”<sup>797</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The austere monastic habits of Ephrata’s sisters and brethren encapsulate well the otherworldly spirituality and the striving to establish a utopian order at odds with Protestant bourgeois culture. The adoption of such a literally ‘outward’ symbol to signify an ascetic outlook also provides a telling endpoint for the story of ascetic community formation in our dissertation. For these Protestants convinced that Christianity had become hollowed out by an obsession with external ritual while allowing interior morality and spirituality to rot, the quiet hermit life of prayer and self-denial offered the means to renewal. But, as has been shown throughout this study, the acts of self-denial and spiritual traditions from which they drew upon brought with them their own external symbols to communicate the spiritual intent at the heart of this ascetic awakening in Protestantism.

In 1753, a Swedish minister came to Ephrata and made the following observation about Ephrata’s unique worship style:

With the Papists, also, they have much in common, although they call themselves Protestants; they follow the same cloistered life, and have a cloister dress, and also rules for their meals; they seek their justification by a severe life, and perfection in a life of celibacy; they believe in a purgatory, or purifying fire after death; on which account, also, Father Friedsam at certain times offers prayers for the dead. Many Roman Catholics from Germany have been received into their Society, and live among them.<sup>798</sup>

In Jeff Bach’s articles and books on Ephrata, he argues that Ephrata’s ascetic mysticism has very little to do with Catholicism and everything to do with radical Pietism, a conclusion he reaches despite his overall interest to place Ephrata in its deeper, European context. But Bach’s conclusion is indebted to a two-dimensional understanding of early modern confessional devotion. It underestimates the degree to which mysticism and monasticism were interlinked in early modern Europe, be it the theosophic mysticism of

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<sup>796</sup> *Chronicon*, 73.

<sup>797</sup> *Die Rose*, 70.

<sup>798</sup> *Ephrata as seen by Contemporaries*, 398.

the Protestant Jakob Boehme or the more obviously monastic roots of ascetic baroque mysticism of Spanish Carmelites such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. As I have attempted to show in the previous chapters, beginning in the early seventeenth-century, a wide cross-spectrum of German Protestants expressed dissatisfaction with what they considered the superficial devotional options available to evangelicals by reviving the late medieval tradition of *theologia mystica* with its call for self-denial, chastity, and *imitatio christi*. Evangelicals should, in these Protestants' view, engage in practices long associated with the exclusive vocation and 'religious' life of the monastic life such as continuous prayer, chastity, and voluntary poverty, without the smear of 'papism'. The interest shown to the writings *and lives* of pre-Reformation authors and saints from the monastic tradition such as the early desert fathers, Bernhard of Clairvaux, Thomas à Kempis, Tauler, and so forth, existed harmoniously alongside the theosophy and radical Protestant spiritualism likewise popular in these circles. While theosophic imagery, symbols, and concepts saturated Ephrata and Gichtel's texts, many of their practical innovations and devotional techniques took saintly monastics like Anthony the hermit, Angela of Foligno, or Laurent de la Résurrection. Indeed, without the widespread interest in and mirroring of monasticism in these groups' devotion, it is hard to explain the development of practices like chastity and poverty solely on the basis of theosophic radical Pietism. Jacob Boehme, despite speaking of the chaste union of the soul and heavenly Sophia, made it clear this was meant spiritually and he himself had a wife and children.

## Epilogue

### Romantic Solitude and Contemplation: Echoes of a Reformation Debate

In late 1796, a text titled “Effusions of an Art-Loving Monk” appeared in Berlin, authored by Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, a law student with artistic aspirations and a close friend of the poet Ludwig Tieck. The text is widely seen as the initial declaration of a romantic turn away from classicism, and often draws comparisons to William Wordsworth’s 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* for the role it affords spontaneous emotion and feeling in art and its open disdain for aesthetic theories marked by ‘systematizing’ and rationalism.<sup>799</sup> The primary argument of the work is that the greatest artistic masters have always only produced their masterpieces through a mysterious and ineffable “divine inspiration”, relying on faith and piety, and that such inspiration cannot “be grasped in words”.<sup>800</sup> The work consists of fictional autobiographies, theoretical aesthetic essays, and poetry that were supposedly assembled by the fictitious narrator, a Catholic monk. Throughout, we are provided examples of the supernatural inspiration accompanying the lives of early Renaissance artists, which, the monk contends, was a ‘heroic’ and ‘religious’ age of art. There is, for example, an account of Raphael being inspired by a visit from the Virgin Mary, an essay on artists as “God’s chosen ones” who speak a divine language, and the life of a fictional musician, Joseph Berglinger whose character and art was marked by a particularly intense degree of ‘ethereal enthusiasm’.<sup>801</sup> By means of such great capacity and sensitivity to divine inspiration and heavenly visions, the artist herself is set apart from the rest of humanity, reaching her “ideals” through an “extraordinary manner, beyond the path of common nature and experience.”<sup>802</sup>

Of particular interest, is how the text consistently reinforces the connection between the inspiration granted the artist, and a pious, and specifically austere, solitary life. Introducing his thoughts on “the ecstasies of the poets and artists”, the monk tells us that his own thoughts on art were written “in the solitude of a cloistered life” from which he “only occasionally and dimly thinks back on the distant world.” Later on, we are told that many of history’s great artists were “themselves clerics and monks” who “brought a serious and humble simplicity to their works” and made the art of painting “the true servant of religion.” One of these, a Father Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole, was famous for his “strict and god-fearing life”. He prayed before painting, cared little for the world, refusing its honors, and always lived “silently, calmly, humbly and in solitude.” Such devout artists possessed a higher degree of sensitivity to their interior lives along with active imaginations, nurtured by their silent, withdrawn lives. The story of the musician Joseph Berglinger describes him as a “virginal sappling” who lived “always solitary, and quiet by himself” and who prized his “inwardness more than anything else.”<sup>803</sup> He felt a great unease in social gatherings, longing to withdraw into solitude. Such anecdotes read

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<sup>799</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Herzenergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, (Berlin: J.F. Unger, 1796-7).

<sup>800</sup> Wackenroder, *Herzenergiessungen*, 2.

<sup>801</sup> Wackenroder, 238, 224.

<sup>802</sup> See Albrecht Beutel, “Kunst als Manifestation des Unendlichen: Wackenroders ‘Herzenergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders,’ (1796/97).” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 97 (2000): 210-237.

<sup>803</sup> Wackenroder, 233.

very much like hagiographies, with the artist and his miraculous works and divine insights presented in the same manner as the lives of medieval saints. The text's overt argument that the Christian religion—and not pagan antiquity—should provide the foundation for art raised eyebrows, most notably those of Goethe. In 1802 Goethe, without mentioning Wackenroder or the *Outpourings* by name but clearly with it in mind, wrote dismissively of the logic that because ““some monks were artists, therefore all artists should be monks.”<sup>804</sup> And later, he would warn of the ‘monasticizing’ tendency of romantic art —using the word ‘Klosterbruderisierend’ taken from the title of Wackenroder’s text.<sup>805</sup>

The logic of the artist as a monk or a mystic whose austere piety and inwardness connected it with the divine was a logic Goethe would have to contend with often amidst the Romantic uprising in northern Germany.<sup>806</sup> Caspar David Friedrich depicted himself as a monk in self-portraits, Ludwig Tieck wrote poems on holy ‘Solitude’, and Novalis counseled the artist to train the soul in “solitude and silence”.<sup>807</sup> Goethe would soon likewise express his distaste for the so-called ‘Nazarene’ movement that consisted of a number of north German artists, led by Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), who fled Germany to live a semi-monastic existence in an abandoned monastery outside of Rome.<sup>808</sup> The artists strove there to live in simplicity and purity, spending time alone in their cells. Overbeck, who converted to Catholicism while in Italy, wrote to his father upon arriving that ‘now we thus become monks’. He later wrote of the need of the artist to remain ‘pure’ and ‘full of divine feeling’.<sup>809</sup> Their austere lifestyle and experiment in holy living flowed from these painters desire to re-infuse Christian ideals into European art in a return to the style of the early Renaissance and medieval era and close the distance between the human artist and the divine work of art. An unsurprising corollary to the romantic notion that art is a divine medium spoken to the artist, was that artists play an intercessory or priest-like role in society. The theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher’s declared that poets and artists “serve as true priests of the Most High” who devote their time to contemplating the ‘eternal’ and infinite and transmitting this to the rest of humanity. Their office consists, Schleiermacher writes, in “[striving] to awaken the slumbering kernel of a better humanity, to inflame a love for higher things, to transform a common life into a higher one... They are the higher priesthood who transmit the most inner spiritual secrets, and speak from the kingdom of God.”<sup>810</sup>

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<sup>804</sup> Johann Goethe, *Annalen oder Tag- und Jahreshefte von 1749 bis 1822*, in *Goethe: Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag: 1802), 613-614.

<sup>805</sup> Goethe, “Neudeutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst” in *Über Kunst und Altertum*, (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag, 1817), 42. See Frank Büttner, “Der Streit um die “Neudeutsche religios-patriotische Kunst” in *Aurora: Jahrbuch der Eichendorff-Gesellschaft*, 43 (1983), pp. 55-76.

<sup>806</sup> Marsha Morton, “German Romanticism: The Search for a Quiet Place.” In *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 28:1 (2002) Discusses Friedrich’s tutelage under the pietist preacher Gotthard Ludwig Kosegarten, 12.

<sup>807</sup> Novalis, *Hymne an die Nacht in Schriften, vol. II*, edited by Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel, (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1837), 103.

<sup>808</sup> Goethe, “Neudeutsche religiös-patriotische Kunst”, 1817.

<sup>809</sup> See Mitchell Benjamin Frank, *German Romantic Paintings Redefined: Nazarene Tradition and narratives of Romanticism*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 12, 62. Overbeck also painted monks in devotional positions regularly.

<sup>810</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, in *Schleiermacher, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 1.2:193-94. Translation by Robert J. Richards in *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age*

The ubiquity of the theme of solitude as a source of inspiration for the thinker and artist in Romantic writing is well-attested by its prominence in the writers above as well as in the works of Henry David Thoreau, Wordsworth, and Rousseau to name a few. Most obviously, its use has most often been seen as an assertion of a particular Romantic subjectivity, sentimental and affective in nature, at times alienated, in revolt against the universal demands of reason and classicism, and industrialization. Steeped in classical and humanist tropes, the artist's removal from the world and common company, more clearly perceives the subtle impressions from creation and the native genius residing in his soul away from the world. Wordsworth's 'the world is too much with us' exemplifies this Rousseauian strand of an autonomous subject who stands out from society to commune with a sublime, non-rational nature with which he has a privileged connection. But the solitude as described in Wackenroder and the Nazarene movement, while clearly evoking this broader literary tradition of solitude, is cast in specifically ascetic, mystical and Catholic forms that, judging from Goethe's responses, veered from classical norms. In other words, the surprising penchant of many Protestant romantics to celebrate elements of a medieval Catholic heritage over their more familiar bourgeois Protestant background should also surprise us and demand an historical explanation. By no means ignored, the romantic fascination with Catholicism has, however, often been framed in terms of a reactionary, knee-jerk response to the dry rationalism of the Enlightenment in favor of the alternative political and aesthetic attraction of Catholic community and miraculous piety.

In conclusion to this dissertation on the early modern Protestant engagement with asceticism, I want to suggest a different genealogy, or at least provide a deeper context to the early Romantic interest in solitude, monasticism, and the artist's divine function. Did the unsettled theological tensions inherent in the Reformation, including the long-running debate among Protestants of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century on the value of solitude, ascetic, and other monastic forms of devotion still hold sway at the end of the eighteenth-century?<sup>811</sup> Drawing from the influential afterlives of the case studies in the foregoing study, I want to suggest that at least in part, the themes of solitude and Catholic monastic piety employed by many Romantic writers and thinkers should be considered in the light of the network of radical Protestants at the center of this dissertation who argued for, and practiced solitary withdrawal. In so doing, I hope to add a bit more specificity to the ubiquitous but often vague references to the "Pietist background" attributed to so many eighteenth and nineteenth-century German artists and thinkers that contributed to their religious aesthetics.

As we have seen, this revival of monastic practice and asceticism involved the formation of several heterodox communities and networks of Protestants who strove to reintroduce solitary withdrawal, celibacy, voluntary poverty, and contemplation into Protestant devotion. These stories have taken us from the network of reclusive hermits led by Johann Gichtel in Amsterdam, devoted to the theosophy of Jacob Boehme and the example of the early Christian desert hermits, to the quietists of Charles Marsay, who

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*of Goethe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 101. See also Kristina van Prooyen, "The Realm of the Spirit: Caspar David Friedrich's Artwork in the Context of Romantic Theology, with special reference to Friedrich Schleiermacher" in *Journal of the Oxford University History Society* 1 (2004).

<sup>811</sup> Robert G. Ingram, *Reformation without End: Religion, Politics, and the Past in Post-Revolutionary England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

took as their guide the teachings of the Catholic quietist Madame Guyon, and, finally, to the celibate ascetics of the Protestant monastery at Ephrata in colonial Pennsylvania. Each case represents a fascinating fusion of early modern mysticism and Catholic monasticism. These mystically-inclined Protestants lived secluded lives, shunning society, in their pursuit of a mystical union and esoteric knowledge given to those who ‘die to themselves’. The figures in my case studies, I argue, were responding to a fundamental problem in Protestant religion created by the suppression of monasticism: how could one outwardly express intense religious fervor when the outward markers of the holy life, so long associated with the monastic tradition and self-denial, no longer found acceptance in Lutheran or Calvinist worship? For these Protestants, the essence of the Gospel lay in Christ’s command to ‘deny oneself’, and to imitate Christ’s unworldly life, a message woefully neglected by mainstream Protestant clergy. In the words of one such Protestant ascetic who figures prominently in my study, Johann Gichtel, “among the Protestants, not a trace of self-denial and the imitation of Christ is to be found.”<sup>812</sup> These groups’ efforts to create a Protestant monastic devotion focused on convincing fellow Protestants to rethink certain long-held prejudices against the contemplative life as idle, and the danger of ascetic acts of devotion. Long thought of as a nineteenth-century phenomenon, the project shows that Protestant nostalgia for monastic worship was a robust and widespread feature of early modernity.

Importantly, these small, seemingly marginal networks and communities of Protestant ascetics proved to be effective missionaries for two early modern ascetic mystical traditions—the theosophy of Jakob Boehme and the Quietism of Madame Guyon—that became particularly popular within the early German Romantic circles. Ludwig Tieck, whose well-known discovery of Boehme shaped his view of religious poetry, came to Boehme through the above-mentioned Gichtel whose complete editions of Boehme’s texts was the most widespread source for Boehme in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>813</sup> Even more fascinating, the early lives of a surprising number of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century German literary figures seem to have been shaped by direct involvement in the communities of ascetic Protestant mystics in my dissertation. Foremost among these was the novelist and aesthetic theorist Karl Phillip Moritz (1756-1793). As a child, Moritz spent several years living with, and being educated by the remnants of Marsay’s circle of Quietists, an encounter that left a deep impression on him and may be a less well-known source for Moritz’s affective aesthetic theory. It was the lectures of Karl Philipp Moritz at the Berlin Academy in which Moritz argued that art was not a matter of reason but of the heart and feelings that so impressed Wackenroder and Tieck shortly before they authored the *Herzensergiessungen*.<sup>814</sup> Moritz’s semi-autobiographical *Anton Reiser*, begins with a lengthy and intimate account of the young Anton’s upbringing in a small circle of Quietists who religiously read Guyon and followed her admonitions to remain in solitude, probing for the voice of God in silent prayer. He describes the young Anton as taken with the reading of early Christian desert

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<sup>812</sup> Johann Gichtel, *Theosophia Practica* vol. VII, “Der Wunder-volle und heilig-geführte Lebenslauf des Auserwehlten Rüstzeugs und hochseligen Mannes Gottes Johann Georg Gichtels”, (Amsterdam, 1722), 13.

<sup>813</sup> Cecilia Muratori, *The First German Philosopher: The Mysticism of Jakob Böhme as Interpreted by Hegel*. Translated by Richard Dixon and Raphaëlle Burns. (New York: Springer, 2016), 10.

<sup>814</sup> *Romantic Prose Fiction*. Edited by Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, Bernard Dieterle. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2008), 45.

hermits, and having no greater desire “than to be like the holy Anthony, with whom he shared a name, and like him leave father and mother and flee into the desert...”<sup>815</sup> A very similar account comes from the autobiography of the novelist Johann Heinrich Jung known as Stilling (1740-1817) where his father’s love for the ascetic Pietists, and especially Gottfried Arnold’s *The Life of the Desert Fathers* is depicted. Stilling, who regularly moved in and out of mystical Pietistic sects, became wrapped up as a child in the fantasy of living a withdrawn, miraculous life like the hermit Anthony: he imagined his childhood farm as “an egyptian desert” where he “prayed with enthusiasm” and his “spirit flowed out” in poetic inspiration.<sup>816</sup> His 1784 *Theobald Schwärmer*, contains long passages describing the great awakening of ascetic teachings in Germany through Boehme and Guyon’s Quietism.<sup>817</sup> Stilling and Moritz’s fascination with the strict asceticism and miraculous lives of the ancient desert fathers in eighteenth-century Germany could be nourished because of the ascetic Protestants, as has been described above, who edited and published German-language translations of the ancient desert hermits, especially the 1700 edition of the *Lives of the Desert Fathers* by Gottfried Arnold, and the Angelic Brother Johann Otto Glüsing’s *Der erste Tempel in Christo, oder das keusche Leben der Alt-Väter* in 1720.

Besides these figures mentioned here, many other late eighteenth-century literary figures engaged with this ascetic and mystical Protestantism whose esoteric character is now being recognized as a major feature of enlightenment culture.<sup>818</sup> From Christoph Wieland’s flirtation with Quietism, Schopenhauer’s deep borrowings from Quietist and Theosophic teachings on the will, to William Cowper and William Blake’s fascination for Guyon and Boehme.<sup>819</sup> The presence of these mystical attachments in Germany’s cultured elite provides perhaps an explanation for the urgency of the Berlin circle of enlightenment’s campaign against ‘fanaticism’, ‘enthusiasm’, and superstitions where theosophy and quietism came under constant attack. But what is clear is that the affective interiority of Guyon’s ‘heart religion’ and the individual’s capacity for transcendence found in Christian mysticism played an important role in shaping Romantic sentimentality and idealism. As Cecilia Muratori points out in her study of the Romantic reception of Jacob Boehme, Romantics like Tieck identified mysticism with the leap into a “marvelous” realm “beyond thought and conceptuality”, i.e. the realm of feeling and sentimentalism.<sup>820</sup> The language of mystical illumination offered a framework to

<sup>815</sup> Karl Phillip Moritz, *Anton Reiser: ein Psychologischer Roman* (Berlin: Rutten & Loening, 1952), 18.

<sup>816</sup> Johann Heinrich Jung’s (genannt Stilling) *Legensgeschichte*, in *sämmtliche Werke*, vol. I, (Stuttgart: Rieger’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1857), 89. “Der *Anton Reiser* ist beeinflusst durch den kritischen Tonfall der Berliner Aufklärung, die religiöse Schwärmerei für Melancholie und Seelenkrankheit verantwortlich machte.” Christof Wingerts Zahn, *Anton Reiser und die “Michaelen”*: *Neue Funde zum Quietists im 18. Jahrhundert*. (Hannover: Werhahn Verlag, 2002), 33.

<sup>817</sup> Johann Friedrich Jung-Stilling, *Theobald oder die Schwärmer, eine wahre Geschichte*, vol. II, (Leipzig: Weygand Publishing, 1828), 90. See also Stilling, *Lebensgeschichte*, 39.

<sup>818</sup> Christoph Wieland who spoke of at one point of being an ‘enthusiast’, ‘hexametrist’ ‘ascetic, Prophet or mystic’ Letter to Johann Zimmermann from November 8, 1762. In *Ausgewählte Briefe von C.M. Wieland an verschiedene Freunde in den Jahren 1751. Bis 1810.* vol 2. (Zurich: Gessner, 1815), 194.

<sup>819</sup> David E. Cartwright, “Becoming the Author of *World as Will and Representation*: Schopenhauer’s Life and Education 1788-1818 in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*. Edited by Sandra Shapshay, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 33. See the letter from Friedrich Schlegel letter to Schleiermacher about the excellence of Guyon.

<sup>820</sup> Cecilia Muratori, *The First German Philosopher*, 149.



articulate the inspiration and miracle of artistic genius. Poet mystics like Boehme possessed a clairvoyance and depth of feeling whose pious lives could also serve as a model for artists looking for alternatives to classical models.

What is clear from the foregoing is that well into the late eighteenth-century, a primary, if not predominant source of Protestant references to eremitic, monastic and Catholic piety are in connection to the networks of Protestant mystics convinced that true religion consisted in recovering ascetic devotion. From observing the many enlightenment and romantic authors or artists whose earlier lives intersected with these mystical circles, can we glimpse a more specific connection that might exist between such group's idealization of monastic solitude and the Romantic's stylization of themselves as monks whose ascetic piety portended genius and a privileged source of inspiration? To make an attempt at forging such a connection on this point, I will explore one case in more detail, that of a debate over the value and utility of solitude in the 1770s and 80s between two physician philosophers, Jakob Hermann Obereit, a representative of Protestant ascetic mysticism and Johann Zimmermann, an enlightened critic of mysticism and monasticism. This debate over solitude, closely watched and commented on by the leading luminaries of the German public, involved a discussion on the connections between solitude, religious enthusiasm, and the origins of human genius, in both artistic, moral, and political terms. And it represents a case, which, with more research, can more concretely link the eighteenth-century radical Protestant practice of mystical solitude with Romantic religious aesthetics.

The decade-long debate involved two nearly exact contemporaries whose biographies bear striking similarities, but whose diagnoses of the essence of Christianity differed radically: Johann Zimmermann, born in 1728 in Brugg, Switzerland, studied philosophy and medicine in Göttingen, Leiden, and Paris, before returning to Switzerland and working as the city physician in his hometown. His philosophical interests and ambitions to participate in the burgeoning Enlightened public sphere inspired him to pen a number of popular philosophical texts exploring psychological phenomena in the 1750s that brought him honors and recognition among Germany's literary elite. Among these were his essays on the origins of patriotism, *Vom Nationalstolz* (1758), on the nervous system, and a first short essay on Solitude (1756). He was soon voted a member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, the Prussian Academy, and, in 1768, he became the head physician at the Hannoverian court, and likewise attended to Frederick the Great in his final illness. Zimmermann's growing fame also led to meetings with Goethe and Schiller, and close collaboration with what was known as the 'Berlin circle' of enlightenment, Friedrich Nicolai, Moses Mendelssohn, Erik Biester, Friedrich Gedike. In all his work, Zimmermann represented a specifically Protestant form of optimistic, enlightenment pedagogy that saw the key to human flourishing in dispelling superstitions, especially backward, pathological forms of religion like monastic asceticism. His fame peaked in 1785 with the publication of his masterpiece, *On Solitude*, which earned him an invitation to Catherine the Great's court in St. Petersburg.<sup>821</sup>

But, shortly after the publication of his second essay on Solitude in 1773, Zimmermann's bourgeois perspective on solitude would be challenged by the contrarian voice of a fellow Swiss physician. That voice belonged to Jakob Hermann Obereit (1725-

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<sup>821</sup> Johann Georg Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit*, in three volumes. (Leipzig, 1784-1785.)

1798) who Nicholas Boyle has termed a ‘harmless eccentric’.<sup>822</sup> Obereit’s lifelong defense of a non-rational “religion of the heart” and mystical contemplation, would invite contemporary comparisons to Johann Georg Hamann and other figures of a so-called ‘counter-enlightenment’. Trained, like Zimmermann, as a physician, Obereit’s lasting significance lies in his efforts later in life to reconcile esoteric, mystical Christianity with mainstream philosophy.<sup>823</sup> Such interests stemmed from Obereit’s upbringing within precisely those networks of ascetic Pietists described above. Obereit’s parents, Ludwig and Ursula, eagerly read the works of Pierre Poiret, the Protestant popularizer of Madame Guyon and carried on extensive communications with the Charles Marsay who led the circle of Guyon enthusiasts whom Mortiz would later join as a child. Obereit himself would later visit Marsay personally and his writings bear the clear trace of quietist mysticism. It may have been this shared past in the German circles of Guyon adherents that led to Obereit’s collaborations with Moritz in 1781 in his investigations into empirical psychology. Obereit would spend his later years writing against Kant and relying upon the patronage of his old friend, Christoph Wieland and Goethe, to whom he appeared an eccentric philosophical misfit.

Turning to Obereit’s conflict with Zimmermann over solitude, I will first describe Zimmermann’s enlightened approach that praised the benefits of a moderate, occasional solitude, and dismissed the “enthusiastic” solitude of mystics borne of religious fanaticism. In Zimmermann’s 1785 treatise on solitude, his account importantly begins with man’s “inclination to sociability”, with the desire for solitude arising as a consequence of his social nature. It is thus first and foremost from this enlightenment perspective of man as predominantly a social creature that Zimmermann approaches solitude.<sup>824</sup> Within the moderate boundaries he sets, the desire to withdraw from society and seek periodic solitude can have a beneficial, enriching effect on society. Solitude, he defines as a “condition of the soul, in which the soul is given over to its own thoughts”; it is a type of freedom that the mind strives for, a freedom from anything that “smothers” or “impedes” us in freely enjoying ourselves.<sup>825</sup> Solitude thus represents a necessary, useful tool for artists, leaders, and thinkers to unlock their creativity and genius. Removed from distraction, the mind is able to refresh itself and see beyond the ‘common’ opinions of men: “Mind and heart are enlarged, enlivened, sharpened, and strengthened in solitude. Philosophers, Poets, Rhetoricians, and Heroes who wished to expand and exalt their knowledge beyond the common opinions, therefore always sought and loved solitude.” (92) Zimmermann emphasized especially the utility of occasional solitude, short periods of retreat to commune and refresh the mind.

On the benefits of withdrawal, Zimmermann and Obereit were not so much in contention. Rather, the vast majority of Zimmermann’s text is devoted to exploring the *misuses* of solitude and the various pathologies that drove monks, mystics, and fanatics to extreme forms of solitude and unnatural ascetic acts. Zimmermann’s unflattering portrayal of the ancient Christian ascetes and visionary female mystics characterizes them primarily as melancholic “misanthropic” and “fanatics” given to all too active

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<sup>822</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. II, *Revolution and Renunciation (1790-1803)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 208.

<sup>823</sup> See Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, *Hegel-Jacobi-Obereit* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008)

<sup>824</sup> Obereit also sees sociability as a natural impulse arising from man’s need for “Regsamkeit”, excitement.

<sup>825</sup> Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit*, 3, 43.

imaginations. He described in vivid detail their “unnatural” practices such as castration, covering themselves in filth and vomit, and years of silence in an effort to ‘purify the soul’: “The Egyptian ascetics were wild fanatics, who brought forth ever more novelties, with good intentions, but little thought.”<sup>826</sup> One of the chief points of contention between Zimmermann and Obereit were the materialistic and physiological explanations that Zimmermann offered as the primary cause to the Egyptian hermits and ascetic’s strange lifestyles. The “inclination” to solitude was a “matter of temperament” whose roots were physiological and which certain climates exacerbated. Those with the most intense and extreme urges to solitude clearly suffered from melancholy, hypochondria, and hysteria. Melancholic individuals had excesses of black bile and what Zimmermann described as “pinched or aroused nerves” and “thick blood” that in turn influenced the soul and “manner of thinking”.<sup>827</sup> In the hot climates of Egypt and the Near East, where the body is lethargic and inclined toward rest, conditions were perfect for such melancholics to create whole cities of solitaries. The heat, the lack of nourishment and sleep “burnt out” the brains of these individuals to imagine they would be saved through their strict lifestyles.<sup>828</sup> In what must have been a clear attempt to provoke Obereit, the defender of the mystical tradition, Zimmermann wrote that the Egyptian heat, along with the spread of pagan Greek dualism and anti-material philosophy created mysticism: “And thus Pythagoras, and Plato, and Thilo, and Egypt’s burning heat and dry sky brought forth mysticism, and mysticism brought forth monks.”<sup>829</sup>

That this unflattering portrayal was influenced by contemporary Protestants and their new-found love of self-denial and solitude emerges clearly from the following excerpt from the introduction to the first volume of the 1784 edition of *On Solitude*:

Many a monk loves his cloister because he believes God loves to hear and see nothing in this world more than him singing his hours, and muttering his intercessionary prayers. An eremite defies the world and man in the gentle company of snakes and wild animals. The European theosopher believes that he has accomplished the utmost on earth when he transforms all of religion into idle, playful, and novel-like sensibility, and in his ecstasies believes himself to be most inwardly united with divinity, of which his dreams are the proof. His brother sits in Hindustan with similar convictions, naked in a pile of ashes, twists hands and feet around each other, contorts the eyes, and lies about in the horrible heat waiting for inward enlightenment. Carefree and happy, as if in a Flemish tavern, many German mystics might think of themselves, with a good glass of rhenish wine in their hands, like the anchorites of Egypt and see in the Thebean desert, the New Jerusalem...<sup>830</sup>

Zimmermann’s comments here about “European Theosophers” and German mystics who practice a feeling-based, ecstatic form of religion and who take the anachorites or hermits of ancient Egypt as models, are clearly a direct reference to the many circles and

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<sup>826</sup> Ibid, 131, 129.

<sup>827</sup> Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit*, 119, 144.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid, 310, 311.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>830</sup> Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit*, 12.

followers of the mystic Jakob Böhme proliferating in eighteenth-century Germany and specifically those groups whose interpretation of Boehme had a particularly ascetic bent, chief among whom was Johann Gichtel and his Angelic Brethren network of urban hermits. In a different passage, Zimmermann, mentions Gichtel by name along with his “Bohemian nonsense”, calling such “fanaticism” and enthusiasm, the “most widespread sickness of our age”.<sup>831</sup> It goes without saying, therefore, that the type of solitude borne from such mystical zeal could not bring forth any meaningful knowledge, virtue, or creative inspiration of use for the rest of mankind.

For Obereit, working in his own, hermetic corner of the enlightenment, Zimmermann’s account of the desert fathers and ‘theosophic’ religious solitaries like himself was marked by inaccuracies and exhibited a characteristically shallow enlightenment rationalism and condescension toward religion. In his numerous writings against Zimmermann, the first in 1776, titled *Defense of Mysticism and the Solitary Life*, and a second in 1781 titled *The Solitude of the Ascetic*<sup>832</sup>, Obereit set out to defend the mystical tradition and its central practices of solitude, asceticism, and contemplation as not born from physical pathologies, but rather constituted a basic impulse of the soul and an essential means of developing human virtue beneficial to all of society. In so doing, also developed a view of the creative powers of the solitary mystic that bears provocative similarities to the Romantic artist-monk.<sup>833</sup>

Obereit’s first observation in his 1781 text is that all societies appear to possess a class of solitary, contemplative souls and that this must mean there is a “general cause” driving mankind to solitude that “lies in the nature of the soul itself”. Obereit next introduces a key point: the impulse to solitude is a result of what he terms a drive to ‘perfection’ or ‘excellence’. This drive to perfection, Obereit explains further, is “an attraction, a drive, an impulse to something extra-ordinary (Ungemein) that these individuals cannot find in society, and that must necessarily be sought in solitude.”<sup>834</sup> Continuing, these solitaries “...feel within themselves an infinite emptiness, which cannot be filled in society.” What they seek in solitude is the “greatest power to self-gathering and expansion to something beyond this earth”. Obereit hereby upends the enlightenment primacy of man as a social animal by emphasizing an individualistic streak, and the equally powerful and natural drive for the individual to unite with something divine, beyond an imperfect earthly existence. Social existence is at its base corrupting, and in this Obereit echoes the Rousseau and Hamann. But the call to perfection, entailing a complete, absolute form of solitude unlike Zimmermann’s occasional solitude, is only felt by an elite few. Obereit states that “Among a nation of a hundred thousand, there is often only a pair who are suited to complete solitude.”<sup>835</sup> Such souls are different from most others in that they feel more acutely the degradation and

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<sup>831</sup> Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit*, 12,

<sup>832</sup> Obereit, *Die Einsamkeit der Weltüberwinder nach innern Gründen erwogen von einem lakonischen Philanthropen* (Leipzig: Adam Friedrich Böhme, 1781).

<sup>833</sup> “Allein, lasse man auch die verschiedene Dauung selbst auf die Seele einigen verschiedenen Einfluß machen: so kann sie doch die Freyheit des menschlichen Geistes nicht verdrängen noch aufheben. Sonst wären die Menschen, die Seelen selbst, bloße Maschinen ihres Leibes. Und wo mag wohl ein größerer Streit, eine stärkere Wirksamkeit der Freyheit des Geistes seyn, als wo er Herr über seinen Leib werden soll?” Obereit, *Einsamkeit*, 62.

<sup>834</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 73-75. Precedents to this search for perfection

<sup>835</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 64.

imperfection that exists in social existence. They are already inclined by nature to raise themselves above the common existence of man.”<sup>836</sup>

Although Obereit mostly focuses on refuting Zimmermann’s characterization of the Christian desert hermits, Obereit follows Zimmermann in seeing all forms of genius and extraordinary human qualities as being fostered by solitude. It is from the small percentage of mankind who live withdrawn lives from whom also emerge the great thinkers and leaders of most societies.<sup>837</sup> And this serves as greater proof for Obereit that solitude “raises the soul beyond the body and above all common ways of thinking.”<sup>838</sup> In Obereit’s explanation of how solitude enhances the soul’s powers, he displays his characteristic fusing of classical mystical terminology with enlightenment philosophical language, borrowed itself from Poiret. Obereit speaks of solitude as allowing the soul to ‘gather’ its ‘faculties’ and ‘awaken hidden powers’: “Solitude is only an occasion, an opportunity to gather all of one’s faculties, and chiefly to awaken the deepest, hidden powers which may be in man.”<sup>839</sup> The ‘gathering’ of the soul through stages of passive, silent meditation constituted a central feature of the *recogimiento* school of Spanish mysticism that strongly influenced Guyon and the German pietists. Renouncing societal pleasures and base impulses allow solitaries to strip themselves of animalistic desires, focus solely on God and his love for mankind, and become an example of how noble human nature can become.<sup>840</sup>

Another important contrast to Zimmermann is that Obereit’s ideal type of solitude is not the occasional retreat from company, or moments of inward calm that allows an artist to gather his thoughts, but rather the religious virtuoso who for years lives in utmost physical and spiritual isolation. Much of Obereit’s account is a defense of this figure, and religious zeal and mystical experience in general, especially the early Christian desert fathers and ascetes. Whereas Zimmermann portrayed these figures as fundamentally unstable, sickly, and ‘fanatical’, Obereit goes to great lengths to describe their temperaments as lively and good-natured, their physical condition as excellent, characterized by great longevity to dispel any notion that melancholy and mental sickness drove them to the desert. The desert fathers, Obereit claims, were “very pleasant, happy, and active, loving solitaries, with their joyful leaders. They were, especially the leaders, in complete solitude and nevertheless the precise opposite of depressed and misanthropes.”<sup>841</sup> The cause of such health and wisdom, had to do precisely with their austere practices, that trained the human spirit to connect with the “deepest faculty” of man, that of the desire for perfection. Their practices of self-denial allowed them to strip themselves of animalistic desires, focus solely on God and his love for mankind, and become an example of how noble human nature can become. In all of this, Obereit is describing the essence of the mystical tradition—he writes about ‘union with God’, the ‘innermost real ground of the soul’, ‘annihilation’, and gives defenses of irrationality.

Furthermore, Obereit’s solitary virtuosos, similar to the divinely inspired romantic artist, serve an important utilitarian function for the rest of mankind. The heights of

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<sup>836</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 75.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>838</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 71.

<sup>839</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 158.

<sup>840</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 78,

<sup>841</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 17.

virtue, insights and revelations that the solitary ascetic is privileged to can then be shared with mankind, a humanitarian mission which is the main occupation of these religious virtuosos. Obereit writes: “What else does the righteous solitary do, but seek out these original, deepest faculties of man, truly develop them, and make them their main preoccupation so that they can then serve others in the most noble and best way?”<sup>842</sup> In one passage, Obereit likens those spiritually sensitive souls drawn to ascetic self-denial and solitude to the Old Testament Levites who were set apart to serve as priests and intercessors for all the people of Israel: “how would it be” he asked, “if God claimed a tenth of all mankind only for himself, as in the Old Covenant the first born of the people of Israel [went] to the priesthood, to which end the entire tribe of Levi had to be separated just for God?”<sup>843</sup> And shortly thereafter, Obereit describes the mystic’s renunciation of ‘common’ worldly pleasures as a “sacrifice of society”, a sacrifice that allows the mystic to “that much more shine forth from solitude and be useful.”<sup>844</sup> Obereit’s discussion here of the beneficial and useful priest-like function of the ascetic virtuoso—which points forward to the pious, ascetic artist of the Romantics—is directly drawn from the theosophic and Quietist ascetic Protestants who strove to make the case to fellow Protestants that the solitary life was by no means parasitic and idle. The Quietist Marsay and Gichtel both of whom Obereit read carefully, both spoke of solitaries as members of a ‘higher’ melchizedek priesthood, and a Levitical priesthood who “sacrificed” their bodies and lives to advance humanity spiritually and morally.

#### *Conclusion*

In a letter from May, 1786 to a dear friend, the literary and philosophical giant Johann Gottfried Herder spoke at length about the time he had just spent with the curious and eccentric mystic Obereit. For several years, Obereit had been in Weimar at the invitation of his old friend, Christoph Wieland. To Herder, Obereit came across as a well-meaning, but superstitious and confused individual. Herder wrote that Obereit is a “poor, good-hearted man, but he mixes all together the best with the most ridiculous. Jacob Böhme, the New Testament, speaking with ghosts, all has made his head crazy.” Herder described Obereit’s belief that he still spoke daily with his deceased wife. Commenting upon the conflict with Zimmermann, Herder found it ‘inconceivable’ that Zimmermann had become so worked up about Herder—Zimmermann had mistaken a “windmill for a giant.” In a final anecdote, Herder described how Obereit had given Lavater advice on how to pray for a miracle: “everything must proceed very, silently, silently, in the Central Point, you must therefore not pray aloud, but silently.”<sup>845</sup>

Without the benefit of a historian’s hindsight, it is forgivable that Herder may not have seen much significance in one eccentric fellow Protestant’s defense of asceticism and solitude against Zimmermann, But Obereit’s and Zimmermann’s debate on solitude is important for several reasons. First, as I hope is clear from the foregoing, these two men’s debate on solitude and the nature of the religious or artistic inspiration it induces, clearly bears the imprint of the century-long debate among Protestants over asceticism and mysticism. Zimmermann’s unflattering depiction of monastic solitude as an idle, and

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<sup>842</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 77-8.

<sup>843</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 65.

<sup>844</sup> *Einsamkeit*, 74.

<sup>845</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder to Johanne Henriette Schleiermacher-Hesse, 8 May 1786 in *Johann Gottfried Herder. Briefe*. (Klassik Stiftung Weimar, 2014).

‘fanatical’ form of devotion and Obereit’s defense of mystical devotion carried on a debate about how to understand genius that would become a central issue of romantic aesthetic theory. Centrally, the idea that feelings are divine and have a heavenly source, that requires an attention and devotion of a non-verbal nature, must be understood as an important connection between the silent practices of mystical and theosophic mysticism and romantic theory.<sup>846</sup> With Zimmermann, his advocacy of a moderate, “sociable” solitude maps very directly onto an orthodox Protestant perspective of an ‘inward’ asceticism, that rejects the ‘fanatical’ nature of monastic asceticism.

Second, despite this Reformation backdrop, the fact that Obereit and Zimmermann both use a more secular, anthropological framework to think of solitude as not just a religious phenomenon but also something that pertains to art, government, and philosophy, is an important pre-condition for the Romantic’s appropriation of solitude. The burdens of proving direct influence, always an elusive goal, is far from met in this short discussion of the legacy left by these radical religious networks. But the broader implications concerning a connection between this Reformation debate on ascetic withdrawal and mystical inspiration the romantic re-discovery of such mysticism warrants more research and reflection.

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<sup>846</sup> Alexandra, Kertz-Welzel. *Die Transzendenz der Gefühle. Beziehungen zwischen Musik und Gefühl bei Wackenroder/Tieck und die Musikästhetik der Romantik*. Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft, no. 71. Ph.D. Dissertation (Saarbrücken, Germany: Universität des Saarlandes, 2000). St. Ingbert, Germany: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2001).

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