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Title:	Mysticism & Confessional Conflict in Post-Reformation Germany: The Mystical Theology of Valentin Weigel (1533-1588)
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Abstract:	<p>This dissertation investigates the writings of the 16th century Protestant theologian Valentin Weigel, focusing on the relationship of this early modern writer to his pre-modern sources, Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart. The prevailing reception history for these two authors claims that, though they were influential in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, they fell out of favour in the early modern era. Instead, I find that, although these two are pushed out of the mainstream of Western theology, they continue to be read outside the centre. That is, I argue against a periodization that posits a clean break between medieval and modern thought. Asserting that Weigel did draw substantively on Eckhart and Dionysius corrects an imbalance in modern scholarship on Weigel that does not credit the crucial role that Weigel's pre-modern sources play in his oeuvre. Weigel was keenly interested in what these texts had to say about what I term indifference, manifested in Eckhart's work as Gelassenheit, and in Dionysius' as apophysis. Indifference is the key element of Weigel's response to the theological and ecclesiological challenges of his time. In the sixteenth century, Luther's reform movement transformed not only doctrine but also the configuration of religious leadership and secular government (i.e. confessionalization), leading to a lack of consensus about fundamental issues of church governance: how should decisions about religious life be made, on what basis, and by whom? In observing how confessionalization reshaped the Lutheran Church in Saxony for the worse, Weigel concluded that fighting against it was fruitless, and that the most principled response was to cultivate an attitude of indifference. His explicitly stated conviction is that true faith resides solely in the heart, and that this true faith need not find expression in a material religious practice. Weigel argued that he would not achieve meaningful institutional reform by taking action and defending his beliefs to the death as a martyr, but instead advocated radical inaction, choosing to keep silent about his true beliefs even while holding an office in the Lutheran church whose theology he disagreed with and whose methods of generating consensus he found oppressive.</p>
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