

Polarities in Conflict

The Late Medieval Roots of the Disputes between the Reformers and their Opponents

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With the image of the different workers in the vineyard of the Lord,¹ Scott Hendrix made the commonalities and differences of the early modern confessions clear in a memorable way. They all make an effort to cultivate the vineyard of the Lord; indeed, here their effort to find new ways to carry out reform is what is common to them all, and yet precisely those various efforts lead to division. The epitaph of Paul Eber in Wittenberg portrayed this pointedly and polemically. Only the work of the reformers was fruitful, or so it appears in the image, while on the Roman Catholic terrain all tending of the ground led only to decline. Even a confessionally-bound historiography² would no longer share this unequivocal assessment. The image's fruitfulness lies not in the devaluation of other groups, but rather in the discovery of commonality. This commonality has its deepest roots in New Testament message of Jesus Christ, but also in the traditions of the late Middle Ages,³ from which the early modern confessions

¹ Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

² On the debate over post-confessional Reformation research (which is still underdeveloped in Europe), see the contributions of Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Anne Jacobsen Schutte, Philip Benedict, Scott Hendrix, Lyndal Roper, and Ethan H. Shogan in *Archive for Reformation History* 97 (2006): 276–306. In the German-language discussion, an effort to define a new theoretical position for church history has flared up in the last several years. On this, see especially Albrecht Beutel, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Kirchengeschichte: Begriff und Funktion einer theologischen Kerndisziplin," in idem, *Protestantische Konkretionen: Studien zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1–27 (here 20–22); Wolfram Kinzig, Volker Leppin, and Günther Wartenberg, eds., *Historiographie und Theologie: Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte im Spannungsfeld von geschichtswissenschaftlicher Methode und theologischem Anspruch*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte* 15 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004); Christoph Marksches, "Kirchengeschichte theologisch – einige vorläufige Bemerkungen," in *Eine Wissenschaft oder viele? Die Einheit evangelischer Theologie in der Sicht ihrer Disziplinen*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung* 17 (Leipzig: Evang. Verl.-Anst., 2006), 47–75.

³ On the concept of tradition see Volker Leppin, "Tradition und Traditionskritik bei

developed. They all go beyond the Middle Ages, but they also have their roots in this period. The question of continuity or discontinuity cannot be grasped by invoking the “break” (*Bruch*) by the churches of the Reformation.⁴ Equally insufficient is the obvious assumption that there is an unbroken continuity in the Roman Catholic Church, which differs from the church of the late Middle Ages only in that it has purged the contaminations that occurred from true Catholicism and has found the way back to the true Catholic church.⁵ The late Middle Ages are too diverse to be understood with such simple schemata. Likewise, the growth of the confessions from the Middle Ages cannot be described in linear terms, as if the Protestant confessions were modern phenomena as opposed to “medieval” Catholicism.

1. The Late Middle Ages between Centrality and Decentrality, between Immediacy and Mediation of Salvation

The religiosity of the Middle Ages was marked by a high degree of heterogeneity: One who looks at the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries will find the deepest internal piety of the *Theologia deutsch* as much as an increasingly varied supply of quantifiable piety. Committed laity dominate the picture in some sense, but at the same time, an unbroken and even increased demand on the clerics to manage salvation remained. While someone like Torquemada could develop an image of the church that orbited completely around the position of the pope,⁶ even occasionally inciting a debate about papal infallibility,⁷ it was also possible

Luther,” in *Gebundene Freiheit? Bekenntnistradition und theologische Lehre im Luthertum*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt and Bernd Oberdorfer, *Die Lutherische Kirche-Geschichte und Gestalten* 25 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 15–30.

⁴ See the claim of Thomas Kaufmann, “Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche und Gesellschaft: Sammelbericht über eine Forschungsdebatte,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 121 (1996): 1008–25, 1112–21, 1118: “Aus kirchenhistorischer Perspektive ist jedenfalls mit Nachdruck auf dem epochalen Umbruchcharakter der Reformation ... zu beharren.” In this matter, Kaufmann has since distanced himself from this slightly militant rhetoric without making it explicit. Cf. Thomas Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Reformation* (Frankfurt: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 21.

⁵ See Erwin Iserloh, “Martin Luther und der Aufbruch der Reformation (1517–1525),” in *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*. Bd. 4: Reformation, Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation, ed. Erwin Iserloh, Josef Glazik, and Hubert Jedin (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1967), 3–114, esp. 3–10. Iserloh bases his work largely on Lortz’s image of the established modern Roman Catholic Church in Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1941).

⁶ See Karl Binder, *Konzilsgedanken bei Kardinal Juan de Torquemada, O. P.* (Wien: Wiener Dom-Verlag, 1976); Heribert Smolinsky, “Successio apostolica im späten Mittelalter und im 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge*. Bd. 1: *Grundlagen und Grundfragen*, ed. Gunther Wenz and Theo Schneider, *Dialog der Kirchen* 12–14 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder; and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 357–75, 361–63.

⁷ Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility, 1150–1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibil-*

that local dioceses in Saxony were mostly in the hands of the local prince,⁸ and that the French church became an institution that was largely led by the king via the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges. Tensions like these may be observed even in one single person: even Nicolas of Cusa, whose thought developed in the path of Meister Eckhart⁹ and who integrated a deeply internalized concept of the mystical vision,¹⁰ was an eager indulgence preacher during his legation trips through Germany.¹¹

This abundance of facets of the late Middle Ages means that it is inappropriate to summarize it with one term. In view of the late Middle Ages, one cannot explain Luther by invoking that he wrestled “a Catholicism within himself ... which was not Catholic,”¹² nor is it appropriate to sketch the late Middle Ages simply as the height of piety.¹³ It is not the amount of piety that is important, but instead one has to pay careful attention to the kind of piety, the different mentalities of piety (*Frömmigkeitswelten*), whose differences could escalate to almost

ity, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 6 (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1988 [1972]).

⁸ Enno Bünz and Christoph Volkmar, “Das landesherrliche Kirchenregiment in Sachsen vor der Reformation,” in *Glaube und Macht: Theologie, Politik und Kunst im Jahrhundert der Reformation*, ed. Enno Bünz, Stefan Rhein, and Günther Wartenberg, Schriften der Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt 5 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 89–109, 97–100; cf. Karlheinz Blaschke, “Sächsische Landesgeschichte und Reformation: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Wirkungen,” in *Glaube und Macht*, 111–32, esp. 125.

⁹ Herbert Wackerzapp, *Der Einfluß Meister Eckharts auf die ersten philosophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues (1440–1450)* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1962); Stefanie Frost, “Die Meister-Eckhart-Rezeption des Nikolaus von Kues,” in *Nicolaus Cusanus: Perspektiven seiner Geistphilosophie*, ed. Harald Schwaetzer (Regensburg: Roderer, 2003), 149–62; idem, *Nikolaus von Kues und Meister Eckhart: Rezeption im Spiegel der Marginalien zum Opus tripartitum Meister Eckharts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006).

¹⁰ Nicolaus de Cusa, *Opera Omnia* I:11.12–18; XI:19.1–4. On Nicolas of Cusa’s mysticism, see Johannes Hoff, *Kontingenz, Berührung, Überschreitung: Zur philosophischen Propädeutik christlicher Mystik nach Nikolaus von Kues*, (München: Karl Alber, 2007); Alois Maria Haas, “... das Letzte unserer Sehnsüchte erlangen”: *Nikolaus von Kues als Mystiker*, Trierer Cusanus lecture 14 (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 2008).

¹¹ See the summary of his message as a preacher on indulgences and the ban on usury for the Jews during the Nuremberg Council of 1451 (*Acta Cusana* I/3a:880 [No. 1293]); it is also summarized in Erich Meuthen, “Die deutsche Legationsreise des Nikolaus von Kues 1451/1452,” in *Lebenslehren und Weltentwürfe im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit: Politik – Bildung – Naturkunde – Theologie*, ed. Helmut Boockmann, et al., *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Phil.-hist. Klasse. Dritte Folge* 179 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 421–99, 426.

¹² “... in sich selbst einen Katholizismus ... der nicht katholisch war.” Lortz, *Reformation*, 176. Lortz focuses mainly on the *via moderna*, which he qualifies as “uncatholic at its root” (“wurzelhaft unkatholisch”) (p. 173), but in general this view tends to dominate his view of the heterogeneous late Middle Ages as a whole, especially in its adaptation by his student, Iserloh.

¹³ Bernd Moeller, “Frömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500,” in *Die Reformation und das Mittelalter. Kirchenhistorische Aufsätze*, ed. Johannes Schilling (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 73–85, 74.

polarities, which tensely opposed each other in their different orientations.¹⁴ A careful look at these polarities will help to grasp the development of the Reformation period in a more nuanced way than the common constructs, which are often oriented towards legitimizing one or the other confession. Two important polarities for this are centrality and decentrality on the one hand, and immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*) and mediation (*Vermittlung*) on the other.

The contrast of centrality and decentrality is tied to the question of papal leadership of the church. The increasing claim of the popes for central leadership of the church can be seen already in early events like the rejection of regional synodal decisions by Nikolaus I;¹⁵ one of the first culminations of this is found in the *Dictatus papae* of Gregory VII.¹⁶ There was, however, a marked increase in papal claims in theory and law around 1300, when Aegidius Romanus developed the theory of the direct leadership of the church by the pope.¹⁷ The bull *Unam Sanctam* did not take up the concept verbatim, but it was so influenced by Aegidius's theories that it can be seen as an early form of legal language for the bull. Admittedly, this was only a signal for a development that was visible in many events. The period around 1300 is also the phase when the heresy trials were increasingly moved to the papal court and thus were moved from the decentralized competence of the bishops to the central control of the pope.¹⁸ The trials against Meister Eckhart and William of Ockham, which were moved to Avignon for different reasons,¹⁹ are further circumstantial evidence for this

¹⁴ See Berndt Hamm, "Theologie und Frömmigkeit im ausgehenden Mittelalter," in *Handbuch der Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Bayern*. Bd. 1: *Von den Anfängen des Christentums bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gerhard Müller et al. (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2002), 159–211, esp. 188–90; Volker Leppin, "Von der Polarität zur Vereindeutigung: Zu den Wandlungen in Kirche und Frömmigkeit zwischen spätem Mittelalter und Reformation," in *Frömmigkeit – Theologie – Frömmigkeitstheologie. Contributions to European Church History. Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert, and Roland Liebenberg, *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions* 124 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 299–315; and Volker Leppin, *Die Wittenberger Reformation und der Prozess der Transformation kultureller zu institutionellen Polaritäten*, *Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 140/4 (Stuttgart; Leipzig: Verlag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

¹⁵ On his intervention in the marital dispute of Lothar II, see Arnold Angenendt, *Das Frühmittelalter: Die Abendländische Christenheit von 400 bis 900* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1990), 387–88.

¹⁶ An overview of the rich discussion on *Dictatus papae* is found in Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *Gregor VII: Papst zwischen Canossa und Kirchenreform* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2001), 9–11, in the footnotes.

¹⁷ Eckard Homann, *Totum posse, quod est in ecclesia, reservatur in summo pontifice: Studien zur politischen Theorie bei Aegidius Romanus*, *Contradictio* 2 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004); Elmar Krüger, *Der Traktat "De ecclesiastica potestate" des Aegidius Romanus: Eine spätmittelalterliche Herrschaftskonzeption des päpstlichen Universalismus*, *Forschungen zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte und zum Kirchenrecht* 30 (Köln: Böhlau, 2007).

¹⁸ William J. Courtenay, "Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities," in *Church History* 58 (1989): 168–81.

¹⁹ On Eckhart's trial, see Winfried Trusen, *Der Prozeß gegen Meister Eckhart: Vorgeschichte*,

increase of central control in matters of belief. Even more strongly notable and more repeatedly adjusted were the proceedings of canon law. The fiscalization of the ecclesiastical economy led to a notable increase in the direct control of the church by the pope. It became necessary due to the special situation of the papacy in Avignon, which was far more than the traditional possessions of the *Patrimonium Petri*. The often denounced system of *Annaten*, *Servitien*, and (most of all) *Reservationen*,²⁰ was, aside from the notable longing for sources of income for the pope, also an expression of his universal determination of control: each position that was reserved for him increased the influence of the central control of the church and meant less importance for local authorities. The many legal processes which were moved to Rome must be interpreted similarly. If attention is paid to the processes of ecclesiastical centralization, it becomes clear that the *Gravamina nationis Germanicae* could be read as a description of this centralization: Nearly everything that is listed there is an expression of what the pope and the papal curia gained in possibilities of access to the universal church, and in alarming ways. In fact, in some ways the universal church can be experienced only at this point precisely because of this central control. The statement by Torquemada that I mentioned earlier, which propagated an unexpected increase in papal control, is nothing more than a theoretical expression of this tendency for centralization.

It is obvious that these aspects paint a picture of the church that contrasts the Reformation to such an extent that the Reformation must appear to be a "break" (*Bruch*). But it is only a break of a certain tendency of centralization within the medieval church, not a total break, because within this tendency for centralization there were strong forces that pushed for a decentralization of the church. Perhaps the strongest theoretical impulse in this direction is the concept of a remnant church (*Restkirche*), which was developed in canonical jurisprudence and brought into the political debate by William of Ockham.²¹ According to this theory it is possible that not only the pope but also whole councils can err, that even all clerics could err; and thus the possibility appears on the horizon

Verlauf und Folgen, Rechts- und Staatswissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Görres-Gesellschaft, N. F. 54 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988); On Ockham's trial, see Josef Koch, "Neue Aktenstücke zu dem gegen Wilhelm Ockham in Avignon geführten Prozeß," in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 7 (1935): 353–80; 8 (1936): 79–93, 168–97; and *Die Schriften des Oxforder Kanzlers Johannes Lutterell. Texte zur Theologie des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Fritz Hoffmann, *Erfurter theologische Studien* 6 (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1959).

²⁰ See Bernard Guillemain, *Les papes d'Avignon 1309–1376* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 49–59.

²¹ Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, new ser. 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 44–45; Scott H. Hendrix, "In Quest of the *vera ecclesia*: The Crisis of Late Medieval Ecclesiology," *Viator* 7 (1976): 347–78, esp. 359; Volker Leppin, *Geglaubte Wahrheit: Das Theologieverständnis Wilhelms von Ockham*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 63 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 284–92.

that the church may be present only in lay people, and if necessary, only in women or children. Admittedly these theories were received less commonly in this radical conclusion than in their importance for another central authority: the councils.²² Nonetheless, these theories, together with the real developments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, undermined the concept of the central authority of the church. The great Western Schism was disastrous in this regard: The fact that the pope's legal spheres of influence in Europe were divided, and that in the end it was the decision of each prince whom they accepted as the head of the church, brought the rival popes into a dependence on these decentralized authorities. Even the resolution of the schismatic situation at the Council of Constance did not really lead to a protection or tightening of the central control of the church. Another event at Constance that is more often connected to it – the execution of Jan Hus – led to the emergence of an independent church organization in Bohemia, which was recognized by Rome after long battles and which scholars occasionally classify as a confession.²³ Even if one does not want to use this term in relation to the late Middle Ages, it is clear that the religious situation was in such a condition that it was possible not only to imagine a nationally oriented church without the central authority of the pope, but also to convert this idea into reality. That this was not a singular event is demonstrated by manifold processes in which ecclesiastical authorities increasingly acquired rights that really belonged to the pope. Even where this did not lead to an official break with the papacy, it meant an increase of decentralized forces.

The most notable case is France, where the developing Gallicanism in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges used the council's decisions that mentioned independence from the pope and transferred far-reaching authority to the French king.²⁴ Even the above-mentioned *Gravamina nationis Germanicae*²⁵ are expressions of such a mentality of independence in relation to the pope – even if independence never developed on the level of the Holy Roman Empire as it did in France. Nevertheless one can observe remarkable developments within the empire that demonstrate the increasingly decentralized powers in the late Middle

²² Jürgen Miethke, "Zur Bedeutung von Ockhams politischer Philosophie für Zeitgenossen und Nachwelt," in *Die Gegenwart Ockhams*, ed. Wilhelm Vossenkuhl and Rolf Schönberger (Weinheim: VCH-Verlagsgesellschaft, Acta humaniora, 1990), 305–24.

²³ Winfried Eberhard, *Konfessionsbildung und Stände in Böhmen 1478–1530*, Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum 38 (München: Oldenbourg, 1981), 29–30.

²⁴ Heribert Müller, *Die Franzosen, Frankreich und das Basler Konzil (1431–1449)*. Teil 2 (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1990), 823–28.

²⁵ On this, see Heinz Scheible, "Die Gravamina, Luther und der Wormser Reichstag 1521," in idem, *Melanchthon und die Reformation. Forschungsbeiträge*, ed. Rudolf May and Rolf Decot, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 41 (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1996), 393–409; Eike Wolgast, "Art. Gravamina nationis germanicae," in *TRE* 14:131–34.

Ages. The most notable case was in Saxony, where the dioceses developed a far-reaching adjustment of territorial rule and diocesan organization. Most importantly, the power to select clergy was executed by the adjacent princes. It was the late medieval process of territorial consolidation²⁶ that influenced church politics and church organization. The church could be locally experienced and locally formed; the pope was far away. A similar tendency towards decentralization could be observed in the imperial cities, which increasingly earned the right to fill municipal ecclesiastical positions.²⁷

Taken together, these various observations and tendencies present good reasons to talk about a polarization between centralization and decentralization concerning the understanding of church in the late Middle Ages. That the church should be led centrally from Rome was a Roman claim, but it was anything but a consensus in theory or practice.

This, however, was not the only polarity that shaped the late Middle Ages. Related to it was a different polarity that can be described as the opposition of mediation and immediacy (*Mittelbarkeit and Unmittelbarkeit*). This tension between polar opposites can be seen in many different contexts. One tendency toward increased immediacy (*Immediatisierung*) within Scholastic theology, primarily in the concepts of the *via moderna*, put an unmediated (*unmittelbar*) *acceptatio* of the sinner by God in the center of its thought.²⁸ This might have played a role in the development of the doctrine of justification in the Reformation;²⁹ however, two other aspects of immediacy became more important for the Protestant doctrine of justification. The first was the increasingly internalized (*verinnerlichte*) piety, which questioned the sacramental mediation of salvation by the clerics. Secondly, as a social counterpart, there was the increasing participation of laity in the life of the church, which in another way questioned the centralized authority in the mediation of salvation within the medieval church via the priest.

²⁶ Peter Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung: Das Reich im späten Mittelalter 1250 bis 1490*, Propyläen Geschichte Deutschlands 3 (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Propyläen, 1989).

²⁷ Bernd Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, rev. ed. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1987), 12–13; idem, *Deutschland im Zeitalter der Reformation*, 3rd rev. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 43; Peter Blickle, *Die Reformation im Reich*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 2000), 109–10; Gottfried Seebaß, *Geschichte des Christentums*. Bd. 3: *Spätmittelalter – Reformation – Konfessionalisierung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 126–27.

²⁸ Werner Dettloff, *Die Entwicklung der Akzeptations- und Verdienstlehre von Duns Scotus bis Luther*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen 40/2 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963); Volker Leppin, *Theologie im Mittelalter*, Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen 1/11 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 128–51.

²⁹ Volker Leppin, “Transformationen spätmittelalterlicher Mystik bei Luther,” in *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren: Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther*, ed. Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin, Spätmittelalter und Reformation, Neue Reihe 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 165–85, esp. 179–83.

An increased immediacy in the relationship with God is found most often in various forms of piety marked by mysticism, and in examining this piety we can see how highly-charged and dangerous this increased immediacy was perceived to be by the church hierarchy. An apparent indication of this is the condemnation of the Rhineland Beguines at the Council of Vienne in 1312 in the constitution *Ad nostrum qui*, which contained this accusation, among others:

When the body of Christ is lifted up, they are not allowed to stand up nor to show him their reverence: for they claim that would be a sign of imperfection for them if they ever descended so far from the purity and magnitude of their contemplation that they might reflect on the administration of the sacrament of the Eucharist or on the suffering of Christ's humanity.³⁰

The imagined and feared piety was indeed found in the milieu of the Beguines. This piety was prepared to do without the church's sacramental means of salvation, based on an immediate encounter with God himself. Marguerite Porete, for example, wrote that the soul that is mystically united with God and therefore free must not search for God in the sacraments.³¹ The background for this understanding includes different varieties of mystical theology, and thus it is not surprising that there are also comments among the authors of Rhenish mysticism that minimized the importance of sacramental acts based on the idea of direct contact with God. Johannes Tauler, in his sermon about the three-step way to God, explained that the sacraments are a useful aid on the first two steps, but on the third step everything that might help actually stood in the way.³² As an aid the sacraments may be useful, but the direct encounter with God happens without any means, i.e., directly. This devaluation of sacramental events was applied to particular sacraments, most often penance, and more precisely the external acts of penance. While mystical sermons urged listeners to *contritio*, the internalized repentance, mystical theologians repeatedly qualified the importance of the *confessio*, the confession, and the *satisfactio* that followed it. In a sermon for Corpus Christi, Tauler advised that one should not avoid true contrition by "running directly to the confessor." Instead, he advised, "No, confess

³⁰ DS 898: "Quod in elevatione corporis Iesu Christi non debent assurgere nec eidem reverentiam exhibere: asserentes, quod esset imperfectionis eisdem, si a puritate et altitudine suae contemplationis tantum descenderent, quod circa ministerium seu sacramentum Eucharistiae aut circa passionem humanitatis Christi aliqua cogitent."

³¹ *Margaretae Porete Speculum simplicium animarum* / cura et studio, ed. Paul Verdeyen. Corpus Christianorum, continuatio medievalis 69 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1986), 242.20–21: "Ceste, qui telle est, ne quiert plus Dieu par penitance ne par sacrement nul de Sainte Eglise." On the connection between Porete and the Brethren of the Free Spirit, see Raoul Manselli, "Brüder des freien Geistes," in *TRE* 7: 218–20, here 219.

³² "in diesem so hindert alles, daz behelffen mag." *Die Predigten Taulers aus der Engelberger und der Freiburger Handschrift sowie aus Schmidts Abschriften der ehemaligen Straßburger Handschriften*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters 11 (Berlin, 1910; Dublin, 1968), 316.2–3.

first to God.”³³ This devaluation of the external in favor of the internal was deeply rooted within the Rhenish mysticism. Almost as polemical was Meister Eckhart:

Many people think they must do great works in external things, such as fasting, going barefoot, and so forth of what is called works of contrition. The true and highest contrition, however, with which one becomes strong and makes the most improvement, consists in one turning completely away from everything that is not entirely of God and divine in himself and in all creatures, and turning completely and totally to his dear God.³⁴

For Tauler, this critique could even lead to the interpretation that there were people who went to confession for twenty or thirty years without ever receiving real absolution.³⁵ What is emerging here is the ever stronger idea that there are unmediated means to have contact with God. These means were no less intensive than the sacramental encounter and in some ways could replace it. The condemnation of the Beguines in Vienne or Marguerite Porete showed that the danger to the medieval church that stemmed from these ideas was noted and that there was a reaction to them. It is possible that Eckhart’s conviction also can be seen in this line of developments, particularly since John XXII, who was pope during Eckhart’s trial, showed a great fear of this lack of mediation in the relationship with God in other contexts as well. And yet, as Johannes Tauler demonstrates, there was apparently the possibility to teach this unmediated access to God within the framework of the church, even with Tauler’s obvious attempt to connect his teaching with the cultivation of Meister Eckhart’s legacy in a way that was in conformity with the church.

The insidious undermining of clerical status that is shown in these ideas was paralleled by the social-historical development of an increasing participation of laity in the church. Through Bernd Moeller’s research, lay participation in urban reforms was thrust into the focal point in historical theories of the Reformation. Yet a purely social-historical and church-organizational focus would be incomplete, for the participation of laity is also a moment in the history of piety, as seen in the push of the laity for religious literature in the vernacular. Zerbold

³³ “das du ze hant us louffest zuo dem bichter”; “Nein, bichte Gotte zem ersten.” *Die Predigten Taulers*, 294.33–250.1.

³⁴ “Vil liute dünkent, daz sie grôziu werk sülñ tuon von ûzern dingen, als vasten, barvuoz gân und ander dinc des glîche, daz pênitencie heizet. Wâriu und diu aller beste pênitencie ist dâ mite man groezliche und ûf daz hoehste bezzert, daz ist: daz der mensche habe en grôz und volkomen abekêren von allem dem, daz niht zemâle got und götlich ist an im und an allen crêatûren, und habe ein grôz und ein volkomen und ein ganz zuokêren ze sînem lieben gotte.” Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963), 244.5–245.2.

³⁵ *Die Predigten Taulers*, 282.7–9.

von Zutphen's treatise *De libris teutonicalibus* mirrors this clearly;³⁶ the abundance of late medieval Bible translations evidences this trend in another way.³⁷

This spiritual interest is also expressed in the formation of brotherhoods.³⁸ Even if these connections "were never far from official supervision,"³⁹ as Robert Scribner emphasized, they demonstrated the extent to which the laity wanted to take part in shaping their own religious life. Even more important for the shaping of the late medieval church was the large number of positions for preachers at urban churches, which were meant to meet the increased religious needs.⁴⁰ These positions were a particularly important point of departure for urban politics because the town council could generally influence the filling of the position. That this was not the only form of lay influence in choosing clergy within the church has been missed for a long time due to the focus of research in the urban Reformation. In reality, of course, the filling of bishops' seats by princes as mentioned above is not only an expression of tendencies for decentralization, but at the same time also an intervention of laity in the form of the church.

As in the question of centrality and decentralization, it is also true with this element of increased immediacy that a simple look at merely this increase of immediacy between God and the believer would oversimplify the religious world of the Middle Ages. This polarity is shown in the smallest arenas, particularly the brotherhoods, which, as places of lay participation, demonstrated a bit more lay independence as well as more immediate access to God. But at the same time, the brotherhoods show (and also express) that a person in the late Middle Ages was generally dependent on the services of a cleric, because the

³⁶ Albert Hyma, ed., "The *De libris teutonicalibus* by Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 17 (1924): 42–70. On newer discussions of this treatise, which was once classified as a one-sided apology, see Volker Honemann, "Zur Interpretation und Überlieferung des Traktats *De libris teutonicalibus*," in *Miscellanea Neerlandica*, Bd. 3, ed. Elly Cockx-Indestege and Frans Hendrickx (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 113–24; idem, "Der Laie als Leser," in *Laienfrömmigkeit im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Klaus Schreiner, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien 20 (München: Oldenbourg, 1992), 241–51; Nikolaus Staubach, "Gerhard Zerbolt von Zutphen und die Apologie der Laienlektüre in der *Devotio moderna*," in *Laienlektüre und Buchmarkt im späten Mittel Alter*, ed. Thomas Kock and Rita Schlusemann, Gesellschaft, Kultur und Schrift. Mediävistische Beiträge 5 (Frankfurt: 1997), 221–89; Volker Leppin, "Zerbolt, Gerhard," in *TRE* 36:658–60.

³⁷ Rudolf Bentzinger, "Zur spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Bibelübersetzung. Versuch eines Überblicks," in *"Ik lerde kunst dor lust": Ältere Sprache und Literatur in Forschung und Lehre*, ed. Irmtraud Rösler, Rostocker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 7 (Rostock: Universität Rostock, 1999), 29–41.

³⁸ On this, see the instructive overview by Angelika Dörfler-Dierken, "Bruderschaften. II. Kirchengeschichtlich. 1. Abendland," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 1, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1784–85.

³⁹ "... nie weit von offizieller Aufsicht entfernt." Robert W. Scribner, "Elemente des Volksglaubens," in *Religion und Kultur in Deutschland 1400–1800*, ed. Lyndal Roper, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 175 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 81.

⁴⁰ Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, 13.

brotherhoods were particularly involved in the donation of altars and they provided for the altarists. The increase in the number of altars and altarists in the late Middle Ages⁴¹ is thus also an expression of the tendency towards clericalization, which seems to contradict the double tendency – spiritual and social-historical – toward increased immediacy as described above.

Thus from both perspectives presented here, we can observe the above-mentioned polarity of the religious world of the late Middle Ages: Centrality and decentrality, mediation of salvation and increased immediacy – both poles are equally part of the religious world of the late Middle Ages. They create variety but also tension. And they help at least partially to understand the conflicts that will burst open.

2. Centrality versus Immediacy: The Shifting of Polarities

With the help of the above concepts, i.e., the polarities of the late Middle Ages, the beginnings of the conflicts of the Reformation era can be described relatively simply as a collision of the insistence on the centrality of the church with a critique of the outward form of the church and its sacramental transactions, which developed out of a tendency toward increased immediacy. In other words, different polarities came into play; more precisely, they came into conflict. Thus, both Luther's and Zwingli's beginnings as reformers illustrate different aspects of immediacy. For Luther the internalization of the relationship to God stood in the foreground; for Zwingli the responsibilities of laity in relation to the clergy. These different emphases clarify that these two reformers are not related to each other like student and teacher, but instead show that each had his own path to the Reformation.⁴²

For Luther, recent research has made clear that a majority of his impulses came from mysticism.⁴³ The systematic-theological fixation on the question of justifi-

⁴¹ Moeller, *Spätmittelalter*, 39.

⁴² The classic work in the interpretation of Zwingli as Luther's student is Martin Brecht, "Zwingli als Schüler Luthers: Zu seiner theologischen Entwicklung 1518–1522," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 96 (1985): 301–19 (Reprinted in idem, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*. Bd. A: *Reformation* [Stuttgart, 1995], 217–36). A substantial dependence on Luther in Zwingli's theological development is also reflected in Wilhelm H. Neuser, *Die reformatorische Wende bei Zwingli* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977); for a critique of this, see Volker Leppin, "Zwingli, Ulrich," in *TRE* 36:793–809, esp. 794–95.

⁴³ Steven E. Ozment, *Homo spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509–1516) in the Context of Their Theological Thought*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1969); Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen, *Nos Extra Nos: Luthers Theologie zwischen Mystik und Scholastik*, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* 46 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972); Theo Bell, *Divus Bernhardus. Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften*, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz* 148 (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1993); Ulrich Köpf, "Martin Luther als Mönch,"

cation, which has had a dominating grasp on Luther research since Karl Holl, has long overlooked the fact that Luther himself in an earlier memory did not describe his reformatory development primarily in the terminology of the *iustificatio* teaching as an exegetical clarification of Romans 1:17. Instead, he initially described it primarily as a new understanding of penance (quite obviously based on the subject of the Ninety-five Theses), and indeed, as the understanding to which his confessor Johannes Staupitz led him.⁴⁴ A deeper root for this understanding was his occupation with Johannes Tauler⁴⁵ and Tauler's understanding of penance. With this, we see in Luther's beginnings the effects of an internalized school of increased immediacy that can be identified in the late Middle Ages. On various points, Luther's theology can be described as a transformation of late medieval mysticism,⁴⁶ most clearly in his association with the doctrine of law and gospel. This doctrine reflects the humiliation of Christians through the realization of their distance from God and their suddenly-regained proximity to God, a process that is also found in late medieval mysticism. The famous image of the soul as the bride of Christ in *The Freedom of a Christian* of 1520 also speaks strongly for the continuous influence of mysticism,⁴⁷ since the origin of this image is quite clearly Bernhard of Clairvaux⁴⁸ and Johannes Staupitz.⁴⁹

in *Luther* 55 (1984): 66–84; idem, "Monastische Traditionen bei Martin Luther," in *Luther – zwischen den Zeiten. Eine Jenaer Ringvorlesung*, ed. Christoph Marksches and Michael Trowitzsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 17–35; Volker Leppin, "'omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit.' Zur Aufnahme mystischer Traditionen in Luthers erster Ablassthese," *Archive for Reformation History* 93 (2002): 7–25; Henrik Otto, *Vor- und frühreformatorische Tauler-Rezeption. Annotationen in Drucken des späten 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 75 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003); Markus Wriedt, "Mystik und Protestantismus – ein Widerspruch?" in *Mystik, Religion der Zukunft – Zukunft der Religion?*, ed. Johannes Schilling (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 67–87; Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin, eds., *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren: Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther, Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, Neue Reihe 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), especially the contributions by Berndt Hamm, Sven Grosse, and myself.

⁴⁴ WA 1:525–27; cf. Leppin, "omnem vitam."

⁴⁵ Alphons Victor Müller, *Luther und Tauler auf ihren theologischen Zusammenhang neu untersucht* (Bern: Ferd. Wyss, 1918); Leppin, "omnem vitam"; Otto, *Vor- und frühreformatorische Tauler-Rezeption*.

⁴⁶ See my attempt to do this in Leppin, *Transformationen spätmittelalterlicher Mystik*.

⁴⁷ WA 7:25.26–34.

⁴⁸ The image is so common in Bernhard's mysticism on the Song of Songs that we can only give an overview of the relevant literature here: Ulrich Köpf, *Religiöse Erfahrung in der Theologie Bernhards von Clairvaux*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 61 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980); Dagmar Heller, *Schriftauslegung und geistliche Erfahrung bei Bernhard von Clairvaux*, Studien zur systematischen und spirituellen Theologie 2 (Würzburg: Echter, 1990); Jean Leclercq, *Bernhard von Clairvaux: Ein Mann prägt seine Zeit* (München: Verlag Neue Stadt, 1990); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux: Leben und Werk des berühmten Zisterziensers* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1998); Gillian R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Pierre Aubé, *Saint Bernard de Clairvaux* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

⁴⁹ See Johann von Staupitz, *Sämtliche Schriften, 2. Lateinische Schriften: Libellus de executione aeternae praedestinationis*, ed. Lothar Graf zu Dohna and Richard Wetzel, Spätmittelalter und

Indeed, Luther's rootedness in mystical piety gave rise to his first protest, namely the Ninety-five Theses, and this protest is also related to a distance to sacramental mediation of salvation. It is no coincidence that Luther's first, foundational thesis, which offensively propagates an understanding of penance that is influenced by mysticism, is followed by the second thesis, which expressly stresses that this understanding of penance as an interpretation of Matthew 4:17 is not related to sacramental penance. Such a vis-à-vis of an internalized understanding of penance and the ecclesial administration of sacraments is familiar to the late medieval world and can be found in specific ways in that mystical stream that Luther inherited. Thus the protest against indulgences still can be understood within the framework of the polarities of internalization/externalization or immediacy/mediation of salvation, independently of the question whether Luther's immediacy at this point can or cannot be connected with a developed idea of justification.⁵⁰

Reformation 14 (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 145–47: “Die verbindung Christi und der kirchen ist volkumen, dergestalt: ‘Ich nim dich zu der meinen, ich nim dich mir, ich nim dich in mich’; und herwiderumb spricht die kirche oder die seel zu Christo: ‘Ich nim dich zu dem meinen, ich nim dich mir, ich nim dich in mich’; domit Christus also sprech: ‘Der christen ist mein, der christen ist mir, der christen ist ich’; und die braut: ‘Christus ist mein, Christus ist mir, Christus ist ich.’”

⁵⁰ On the almost overflowing debate on the content and timing of Luther's Reformation discovery, see both volumes of collected essays edited by Bernhard Lohse, *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther, Wege der Forschung* 123 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); and idem, ed., *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther. Neuere Untersuchungen, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz* 25 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1988). Recently Berndt Hamm interpreted the Ninety-five Theses as a Reformation text and thereby at least began to appeal for an earlier dating of the Reformation Discovery. Berndt Hamm, “Die 95 Thesen – ein reformatorischer Text im Zusammenhang der frühen Bußtheologie Martin Luthers,” in idem, *Der frühe Luther: Etappen reformatorischer Neuorientierung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 90–114. This is unproblematic as long as one “integrates the period from 1505 to 1511 into the biographical arch of a Reformation process of change and development” (“den Zeitraum von 1505 bis 1511 in den Lebensbogen des reformatorischen Wende- und Werdeprozesses Luthers integrieren”); idem, “Naher Zorn und nahe Gnade: Luthers frühe Klosterjahre als Beginn seiner reformatorischen Neuorientierung,” in *Martin Luther und das monastische Erbe*, ed. Christoph Bultmann et al., *Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation* 39 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 117. With this justified and necessary renunciation of the model of a turning point (*Wende-Konstrukt*) (113), Luther's development can indeed be understood complementarily as a late medieval development or continuation, or in the sense of Hamm's *ex post*, as “reformatory” (*reformatorisch*). The latter, however, is an interpretive concept that is an anachronism, at least as long as Luther considers himself part of a medieval fabric of meaning and norms. This may be debatable for 1517, but for 1505, to which Hamm dates the beginning of the reformatory process of change, it is doubtlessly true. Thus, what Hamm refers to as “reformatory” is, for Luther, in no way a binding or consummated initiative in opposition to the church of his origin. Once one has entered into this debate, there remain only shades of a gradual development instead of the rhetoric of a sudden break (*Bruch*).

In a different way, Zwingli can be understood along these lines, with a different emphasis. It is likely that he came to his first reformatory convictions independently of Luther. It was not the theological impulses of the Wittenberg reformer that were decisive for him, but rather the inheritance of late medieval Scotism, primarily as it had been conveyed to him by Stephan Brulefer.⁵¹ Through Brulefer, Zwingli had learned one thing in particular: there is an infinite difference between God and creation, including humankind. This infinite difference established the foundation for Zwingli's belief that all worldly (i.e., of creation) intermediary authorities lost value, strength, and power. This perspective was already outlined in his first reformatory sermons, which we know primarily from the written complaint of Canon Hofmann. Some of Hofmann's accusations raise themes that are similar to the Leipzig Disputation, namely the disregard of central supervisory authorities in the church and of clerical models altogether:

Furthermore, it is true that human judgments, verdicts, statutes, and regulations can be lawfully and beneficially changed, limited, or strengthened due to the circumstances and conditions of humans and of particular matters. This may be done by those who have the insight and authority to do so as long as they do not base their impact and validity on the Holy Scriptures or divine statutes and regulations. And, under the current circumstances, it would probably be useful, necessary, and good to change or abolish many of them. Nevertheless, I am of the firm opinion that no one, and least of all the clergy, should be allowed to state this publicly in front of the people or to express opinions through which the verdicts, judgments, statutes, and regulations in parishes could fall into disrepute so that they could be considered useless, foolish, unreliable, or ineffective. As a consequence, then, the holy Christian church, the holy fathers, the pope, the cardinals, the bishops and all respectable Christian authorities from whom these judgments, statutes, and regulations originate and are disseminated would be mocked, despised, and destroyed.⁵²

⁵¹ Daniel Bolliger, *"Infiniti Contemplatio": Grundzüge der Scotus- und Scotismusrezeption im Werk Huldrych Zwinglis. Mit ausführlicher Edition bisher unpublizierter Annotations Zwinglis, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 107* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003).

⁵² Item wie wol es ist / das menschlich urteil und ußspruch satzung und ordnung / so verr die selben nit influß und krafft habend / von der heiligen geschriff oder göttlicher satzung und ordnung nach umbstenden und gelegenheiten der menschen und der sachen zimlich und nutzlich mögent geenderet / geminderet oder gemeret werden / von dänen die des verstand und gewalt habend / und villichtter yetz / nach gelegenheit der menschen und der sachen / vast nütz / not und guot wäre / das vil der selben geenderet oder abgethon wurdent // Nüt destminder bin ich stark in der meinung / das nieman zimme / und sonderlich den geistlichen aller minßt offenlich vor dem volck / sömliche wort ze bruchen / oder us zu lasßen / durch die semlich urteil / ussprüch / satzung und ordnung glouplich in einer gemein möchtend für unnitz / thorlich / gloubloß / unnd krafftloß geachtet werden // dar durch dann och nachvölgenglich die heilig Christenlich kilch, die heiligen Altväter / die CONcilia / der Bapst / Cardinel / Bischoff / und alle ordenliche christenliche oberkeit / von denen sömlich ussprüch / satzung und ordnung / endtsprungen und geflosßen sind / verspottet / verachtet du vernüttet wurden. Alfred Schindler, ed., "Die Klagschrift des Chorherrn Hofmann gegen Zwingli," *Zwingliana* 19, no.1 (1992): 325–59, 339.14–340.5.

Based on this, we can draw a picture of an intensively reform-oriented preacher, who increasingly criticized the usual structure and forms of assistance that the church proffered as aids for believers. Given this background, it is more than just a coincidence that Zwingli, like Luther, participated in the protest against indulgences, even though he protested them on a different theological basis. Most of all, though, this opposition explains the form of normative centering (*normativer Zentrierung*)⁵³ that Reformation theology took on for him.

This normative centering for Zwingli is not in the doctrine of justification, as with Luther. Its real impulse is the new understanding of Scripture, which sets the Bible against tradition. This is externally recognizable above all in the first act of protest that was observed in Zurich: The breaking of the fast by the communal eating of sausages in Froschauer's workshop, which Zwingli legitimizes through his presence, as is well-known.⁵⁴ This action becomes sensible against the background of a piety that grants validity only to the divine Word but not to human rules. Where both – Creator and creation, the Word of God and of humanity – come into an infinite opposition, the human regulation cannot be merely less valuable in relation to the biblical but instead loses every claim to value. This in turn meant a radical skepticism of any human authority that established norms – and as a result, the abolition of mediation between the believer and the rules of God. Neither the priest nor the bishop could say what had to be done or not, but instead God commanded it directly through his Word. The intellectual context outlined here makes it clear that, for Zwingli in the horizon of late medieval religiosity, the polarity of mediation and immediacy was decisive. Of course, for Zwingli the socially-pointed interpretation of this polarity as opposition between laity and clerics was more prominent than for Luther, whose version was more focused on spiritual, internal piety. The model suggested here to describe the religious world of the late Middle Ages thus explicates both the commonalities and the differences between the two reformers.

From this point of view, one does not need to assent to the generalized conclusion that, in the end, the unity of the Reformation came from Rome,⁵⁵ for

⁵³ Berndt Hamm, "Reformation als normative Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 7 (1992): 241–79; idem, "Normative Centering in the 15th and 16th Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," in idem, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Bast, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1–49.

⁵⁴ Cf. the report by Emil Egli, ed., *Actensammlung zur Gesch. der Zürcher Reformation in den Jahren 1519–1533* (Zürich, 1879; Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1973), 72–77 (Nos. 233–236).

⁵⁵ Dorothea Wendebourg, "Die Einheit der Reformation als historisches Problem," in *Reformationstheorien: Ein kirchenhistorischer Disput über Einheit und Vielfalt der Reformation*, ed. Berndt Hamm, Bernd Moeller, and Dorothea Wendebourg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 31–51, 34. Cf. my treatment of this general theme in Volker Leppin, "Wie reformatorisch war die Reformation?" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 99 (2002): 162–76, esp. 175.

there are thoroughly unifying themes within the heterogeneous Reformation movements. One can, however, maintain this interpretation in a modified version, inasmuch as the reaction of the Roman administration was an important contribution to the formation of a unified party out of different impulses. One can be even more precise: The way in which Zwingli continued the tendency of the late Middle Ages toward increased immediacy had an aspect that was critical of clergy, and therefore of the church, and tended to undermine established norms. In Luther's case, his foes decisively influenced his polemicization of the initial proposals for reform to be more critical of the church – and the reaction of the church in turn created the pattern with which the church reacted to the reform movement in general. It is undeniable that Luther's Ninety-five Theses undermined the function of the clergy through its criticism of the sacramental understanding of penance. It is also undeniable that, inasmuch as the theses criticized the pope, a general ecclesiological dimension of the conflict became obvious. Yet the theses against indulgences were not a text that aimed at changing the church.⁵⁶ Their goal was spiritual correction, not systemic change. In thesis seven, Luther explicitly urged submission to the priest⁵⁷ and thus stabilized the late medieval system of sacramental mediation of salvation.

There were, however, individual signs of criticism of the pope that alarmed Luther's opponents: Sylvester Prierias, who was commissioned to give an expert opinion on Luther in Rome, as well as the one who was likely his sharpest opponent in debate, Johannes Eck. Both came from the lineage of increasing centrality in the church in the late Middle Ages as described above, although Prierias more clearly stressed the monarchy of the pope than did Eck.⁵⁸ How Prierias's opinion on Luther looked in detail cannot be verified directly anymore, but it can be concluded from his writing in connection with this matter from 1518, *De potestate papae dialogus*, which contains a radically papalist statement:

Whoever does not hold to the teaching of the Roman church and the pope as the infallible rule of faith, from which even the Holy Scriptures draw their power and their authority, is a heretic.⁵⁹

The belief that the church and the pope were the rule of faith and source of authority even of Holy Scripture was a position that was anything but a consen-

⁵⁶ Interestingly, the classification of the theses as "reformatory" (*reformatorisch*), as Hamm recently proposed (Hamm, "95 Thesen"), is not based on an emphasis of elements that were critical of the church.

⁵⁷ WA 1:23–24: "Nulli prorsus remittit deus culpam, quin simul eum subiicat humiliatum in omnibus sacerdoti suo vicario."

⁵⁸ See Heiko Augustinus Oberman, "Wittenbergs Zweifrontenkrieg gegen Prierias und Eck: Hintergrund und Entscheidungen des Jahres 1518," in idem, *Die Reformation: Von Wittenberg nach Genf* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 113–42, esp. 125–29.

⁵⁹ Peter Fabisch and Erwin Iserloh, eds., *Dokumente zur Causa Lutheri*. 1. Teil, *Corpus Catholicorum* 41 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1988), 55.

sus in the late Middle Ages. Within late medieval religiosity, this view can be more precisely positioned on the polarity of centralization and decentralization, and there it clearly opts for the absolute priority of centrality in the person of the pope. Already in this beginning phase of the trial there was a decisive event for the development of the Reformation: Martin Luther's impulse, which could be understood to lie within the polarity of interiority and exteriority (*Innerlichkeit und Äußerlichkeit*), met a reaction with a completely different model, namely the opposition of central and decentral in the church, interpreted authoritatively. This moved the *status quaestionis* from Martin Luther's quest for spiritual reform to a highly relevant question of church law.

Johannes Eck, however, was the person who made this shift of discourse appear in Martin Luther's intellectual biography. In spring of 1517 there seemed to be a friendly alliance between Eck and the people of Wittenberg, but now he reacted very sharply to the Ninety-five Theses, though his reaction was initially unpublished (in what Luther later called the *Obelisci*).⁶⁰ Soon Andreas Karlstadt turned against Eck in his theses of May 1518,⁶¹ in which the classification of papal and biblical authority was now unmistakably the subject of discussion. The twelfth thesis clearly set the Bible before the authority of the church.⁶² It was not yet the *sola scriptura* that would shape the theology of the Reformation,⁶³ but it was a clear and recognizably different position than what Sylvester Prierias formulated against Luther at the same time in Rome. In Germany it was now Eck who pushed the discussion ahead in such a way that the differences became immense – and in the end, irreconcilable. The occasion for this push was afforded by Luther's explanation to thesis twenty-two in the *Resolutiones*; in that context he explained:

Consider the Roman church as it was at the time of St. Gregory, when it had no jurisdiction over other churches, at least not over the Greek church.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., 397.

⁶¹ D. Andree Carolstatini docto-| RIS ET ARCHIDIACONI VVITTEN-| BVRGEN-
SIS:CCCLXX: ET APOLOGE-| ticae Conclusiones pro sacris literis ... Wittenberg: Rau-
Grunenburg 1518; On this, cf. Hermann Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Bd. 1: Karl-
stadt und die Anfänge der Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1968), 117–26; Jens-
Martin Kruse, *Universitätstheologie und Kirchenreform: Die Anfänge der Reformation in Wittenberg*,
Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 187 (Mainz: Von Za-
bern, 2002), 153–59.

⁶² Thesis 1: "Textus Bibliae per ecclesiasticum doctorem allegatus / plus valet / ac vehe-
mentius vrget / quam dictum allegantis." Thesis 12: "Textus Biblie non modo vni / pluri-
busque ecclesiae doctoribus / sed etiam tocuis ecclesiae auctoritati / prefertur" (Karlstadt,
Apologeticae conclusiones); Kruse, *Universitätstheologie*, 157.

⁶³ Cf. the comments of Ulrich Bubenheimer on the canonical passages for comparison:
idem, *Consonantia Theologiae et Iurisprudentiae. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt als Theologe und
Jurist zwischen Scholastik und Reformation, Jus ecclesiasticum 24* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 81–
116.

⁶⁴ LW 31:152; WA 1:571.16–18: "finge ut latius suadeamus, Romanam ecclesiam esse,

The sentence implied the historical theory⁶⁵ that there was a time when the primacy of Rome did not exist. Against this position, Eck stressed that the public representative of Christ and occupant of the chair of Peter has been in existence from time immemorial.⁶⁶ This forced Luther to a new statement in the *Resolutio super propositione sua decima tertia de potestate papae*, which was published just before the Disputation of Leipzig.⁶⁷ In this writing, he formulated a thesis that was skeptical of the papacy but did not fundamentally contest it:

Thus, the pope is not above the bishops according to divine law, nor the bishops above the priests. This conclusion holds because the divine law is constant in life as in death.⁶⁸

The ecclesiological and criteriological conclusions of the fight over indulgences were thus already considerably more acute within two years after the distribution of the Ninety-five Theses by Martin Luther, but a clear break with the official church and its principles had not yet been executed. Eck, however, was able to sharpen the conflict at the Leipzig Disputation in such a way that the discrepancy between the position of the Wittenberger and what had been obligatory in the church became obvious. Nonetheless, they reached the consensus that the Bible as *auctoritas maior* had higher weight than the pope, an *auctoritas minor*,⁶⁹ and here it seemed that Eck was closer to the Wittenbergers than the Roman prosecutor Prierias. But he made the point of contention clear on a different issue, namely that of conciliar authority. By submitting to Luther the condemned teachings of Hus in Constance, which contained the idea that Peter was not and had never been the head of the Holy Catholic Church,⁷⁰ Eck brought Luther to acknowledge these articles as Christian and evangelical, notwithstanding their ecclesiastical condemnation.⁷¹ The back-and-forth that developed from this culminated in Luther's clear confession:

qualis erat etiam adhuc tempore B. Gregorii, quando non erat super alias ecclesias, saltem Graeciae."

⁶⁵ Luther immersed himself intensively in questions of church history in preparation for the Leipzig Disputation; on this, see Ernst Schäfer, *Luther als Kirchenhistoriker: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Wissenschaft* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1897), 24–69.

⁶⁶ WA 9:209.42–210.2.

⁶⁷ WA 2:181.

⁶⁸ WA 2:240.2–4: "Ergo nec Papa est Episcopis, nec Episcopus est superior presbyteris iure divino: tenet consequentia, quia ius divinum est immutabile tam in vita quam in morte."

⁶⁹ WA 59:450.566–568.

⁷⁰ WA 59:461.883–884: "Petrus non est nec fuit caput ecclesiae sanctae catholicae."

⁷¹ WA 59:466.1049. On the meaning of this incident for Luther, see Scott H. Hendrix, "We Are All Hussites? Hus and Luther Revisited," *Archive for Reformation History* 65 (1974): 134–61, esp. 138–39. Thomas Kaufmann has recently tried to play down this interpretation of the Leipzig Disputation with reference to WA 2:159.16–19, saying that Luther professed an "unambiguously positive" ("eindeutig positiv") opinion of Hus. However, the Latin text that Kaufmann quotes shows no loyalty to Hus but instead a distancing from him, i.e., the opposite of what Kaufmann claims to be able to infer from it. See Thomas Kaufmann, "Jan Hus

That alone I reserve for myself, and it is that which one must reserve for himself, namely [to say] that a council has erred once and can err, especially in questions that do not concern the faith. And a council does not have the authority to determine new articles of faith.⁷²

What the council taught was not part of the *ius divinum*.⁷³ Thus Luther was forced by Eck to make common cause with heretics.⁷⁴ He summed up the process himself to his princes:

They put something in our mouth so that we have to say it whether we want to or not: the council has erred.⁷⁵

With this move Eck reached his goal: Luther's heresy could not be overlooked anymore – and heresy was measured from then on by agreement with Luther, even where it was only modified as with Zwingli. This was done most of all through the bull threatening excommunication,⁷⁶ which Eck designed largely himself. In the larger context of my argument, this means that the functional and quite understandable movement of the discourse from the polarity of immediacy and mediation of salvation to the polarity of centrality and decentrality was decisive in turning the Reformation movement into heresy.

3. The Development of the Reformation as a Decentralized Event

Consistent with what has been said, the development of Reformation churches unfolded in a decentralized manner. The breakthrough event of the Zurich Reformation, the First Zurich Disputation, was primarily an act of dissolution

und die frühe Reformation," in *Biblische Theologie und historisches Denken: Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien. Aus Anlass der 50. Wiederkehr des Basler Promotion von Rudolf Smend*, ed. Martin Kessler and Martin Wallraff (Basel: Schwabe, 2008), 62–109, esp. 73–74.

⁷² WA 59:500.2081–2083: "Hoc solum mihi reservo, quod et reservandum est, concilium aliquando errasse et posse errare, praesertim in his quae non sunt fidei. Nec habet concilium auctoritatem novorum articulorum condendorum in fide."

⁷³ WA 59:508.2309–2311.

⁷⁴ On this interpretation, see Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: WBG, 2010), 144–51; idem, "Papst, Konzil und Kirchenväter. Die Autoritätenfrage in der Leipziger Disputation," in *Die Leipziger Disputation, 1519*, ed. Markus Hein und Armin Kohnle (Leipzig, 2011), 117–24.

⁷⁵ WABr 1:471.218–219 (No. 192): "Also gibt man uns ins Maul, daß wir, wir wollen oder wollen nit, sagen müssen: Das Concilium hat geirret."

⁷⁶ Peter Fabisch and Erwin Iserloh, eds., *Dokumente zur Causa Lutheri*. 2. Teil, *Corpus catholicorum* 42 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991), 319. On this interest in detail, see Peter Fabisch, "Johannes Eck und die Publikationen der Bullen 'Exsurge Domine' und 'Decet Romanum Pontificem,'" in *Johannes Eck (1486–1543) im Streit der Jahrhunderte. Internationales Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum aus Anlaß des 500. Geburtstages des Johannes Eck vom 13. bis 16. November 1986 in Ingolstadt und Eichstätt*, ed. Erwin Iserloh, *Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte* 127 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1988), 74–106, esp. 74–84.

from the hierarchical association of the late medieval church. This event was once thought to be an “invention” of Zwingli, as assumed by Bernd Moeller⁷⁷ and repeated by many – including me.⁷⁸ But the fact that the suggestion for a disputation-type of event to document Zwingli’s assertions and errors came from Canon Hofmann, his greatest enemy, suggests it was not an invention, and it illustrates how close the different approaches were within the complicated situation of the late Middle Ages:

In accordance with God’s will and the common good, I want to forstall any dangers and offence to Christian teaching and to avert them. So I will take as much trouble as necessary before my provost and chapter and the whole council, as long as its members are willing to be here, to set out the reasons for the articles and opinions stated herein, as is within my powers. It should take place here in Zurich at a suitable public location on an agreed-upon day and in the presence of a designated notary. And my parish priest Ulrich Zwingli, his followers, and others who are of his opinion should also present reasons for their articles and opinions that are opposed to my articles and opinions. And when this has happened and, in this way, both sides have been heard, my provost, my chapter, the mayor, and the council should take up the matter and bring it before our gracious lord in Constance so that he can handle the matter according to the circumstances, as it is appropriate and fruitful.⁷⁹

Even if one avoids an overly emphatic stress on the reformatory novelty of the event, the Zurich disputation meant that something happened that had no place within the legitimate late medieval church. This was primarily so because the arrangement, as decided by the city council, was clearly different from what Hofmann intended, for the bishop of Constance was only invited as a participant:

⁷⁷ Bernd Moeller, “Zwinglis Disputationen: Studien zu den Anfängen der Kirchenbildung und des Synodalwesens im Protestantismus. I. Teil,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* 87 (1970): 304.

⁷⁸ Leppin, “Zwingli,” 796.

⁷⁹ So will ich umb gottes willenn und eines gemeinen nutzens willen / große widerwertigkeit und ergerniss in christenlicher lere zefürkomen oder zewenden / die arbeit uff mich nehmen / das ich nach minem vermögen / will fürgeben und erscheinen ursachen meiner yetzgemelten articklen und meinungen (so vil not wirt sein /) vor minen heren Bropst und Capitel und vor allen gelertten hie zürich / und vor einem gantzen Rat die dar by wellent sin in einer offenlichen statt, die dar zuo geschickt und tuglich ist / uff einen gestimptten tag / der minem her lütpriester einen Monat dar vor verkünt sye und mir ouch / in gegenwertigkeit eines offenen Notari / dar zuo verordnet / in sömlichen geding und fuog / das min her lütpriester Meister uorich zwingli und sine anghenger / und ander die siner meinung sind / ouch fürgeben und erscheinen ursachen / iren articklen und meinungen / die wider mine artickel und meinungen syent // unnd wenn dann sömlichs beschächen ist / und also bede teil verhört sind / das dann mine herren Bropst und Capitel / Burgermeister und Rat / die sach trülich ze handen nemendt / und unßerem gnedigen heren von Costents fürbringent / darinn ze handeln wie ziemlich / billich und fruchtbatr sind mag / nach gelegenheit der sach. “Klagschrift des Chorherrn Hofmann,” 352.13–353.1.

We should also invite our gracious gentleman from Constance so that his grace or his representative, if they desire, might also be present.⁸⁰

This meant that the position of the bishop according to church law as the office responsible for deciding pending questions was grossly ignored; from a legal understanding, he became a participant in the dispute. It can be rightfully speculated whether the loss of power by the local bishop within the process of decentralization played an especially strong role in questions regarding decisions on doctrine. The attack in this case came from a different direction, from the imperial authorities, which could have strengthened the tendency toward independence that had characterized urban politics of religion in the late Middle Ages. The famous decision of the city council that the reformers could continue their manner of preaching had the consequence of creating a strong impulse toward the communalization of the church,⁸¹ which persisted particularly long in Zurich. Broader alliances played out on the level of church politics – including the *Consensus Tigurinus* – but not within the framework of the church's jurisdictional structures.

In Saxony, the heartland of the central German Reformation, the decentralized approach was also influential, which at times took on the form of an experimental transformation of the medieval church. The dissolution of the medieval hierarchy of bishops became evident early on; Luther effectively took over functions that had traditionally been performed by the bishop.⁸² This can be dated quite certainly to his successful attempt in 1522 to quiet the Wittenberg unrest; ironically he began his *Invocavit* sermons on the exact day when the decisive Affair of the Sausages took place in Zurich. The following years were also marked by Luther's quasi-episcopal activities: In 1524 he conducted what was essentially a visitation tour in the central area of the Saale River to control the alternative models of Reformation of a resistance group that had assembled around Orlamünde and its pastor, Karlstadt.⁸³ All of these were, of course, events that merely covered up the factual lack of a central governing authority in the church. A structurally stable solution was found only with the introduc-

⁸⁰ "Wir werdent ouch unserm gnädigen herren von Costentz söllich anzögen, damit irn gnaden oder dero anwelt, ob sy wöllent, ouch darby sin mögend." CR 88:467.16–18.

⁸¹ Blickle, *Reformation im Reich*, 217.

⁸² On this, cf. Volker Leppin, "Zwischen Notfall und theologischem Prinzip: Apostolizität und Amtsfrage in der Wittenberger Reformation," in *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge*. Bd 1: *Grundlagen und Grundfragen*, ed. Gunther Wenz and Theo Schneider (Freiburg/Br.; Göttingen: Herder, 2004), 376–400, esp. 387–88.

⁸³ The most comprehensive account of this visitation tour is still in Wolfgang Trappe, "Zwischen Reformation und Revolution – Karlstadt 1523/24," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 32 (1983): 101–10, esp. 105–110; for the context, cf. Volkmar Joestel, *Ostthüringen und Karlstadt: Soziale Bewegung und Reformation im mittleren Saaletal am Vorabend des Bauernkrieges (1522–1524)* (Berlin: Schelzky & Jeep, 1996).

tion of the magisterial visitation after the first Diet of Speyer in 1526, but in reality, the Diet of Speyer was not the only cause behind the introduction of this instrument of ecclesial supervision. Already in the late summer 1525, the Zwickau pastor Nikolaus Hausmann had stressed the necessity of visitations,⁸⁴ and Luther had picked up this suggestion and brought it to the elector.⁸⁵ Thus the first visitations had begun before the Diet of Speyer, but the diet gave the Saxon authorities the impression of safety that they thought necessary to legitimize this sort of process.⁸⁶ A long-term safeguard came later through the creation of the office of superintendent. The Visitation order by John of Saxony from 16 June 1527 already mentioned the “superintendent and guard.”⁸⁷ In terms of language, this took up medieval Latin forms of the term for bishops,⁸⁸ but this office was no longer part of a worldwide network of dioceses that, at least ideally, was headed by Rome. Instead, it was dependent on the respective princes. This was not fundamentally changed by attempts to appoint Nicolas von Amsdorf and Georg von Anhalt in Naumburg and Merseburg as Protestant bishops in traditional diocesan posts.⁸⁹ This was in no way a reestablishment of the central hierarchy, but instead was connected to the tendency toward decentralization by regional bishoprics, and it was done deliberately and explicitly. John Frederick in his writing of 18 January explicitly stated that the election of the bishop of Naumburg, in accordance with tradition, “must occur with the foreknowledge and permission of the Prince of Saxony as the regional and protective ruler,”⁹⁰ and thus he legitimized the Reformation’s institution of new laws with the late medieval law of precedent. This remained only a short while; in the long run the governing authorities of superintendents and consistories were established. All these forms were, however, expressions of a primarily decentral understanding of the church. The view was not focused on leadership of the pope or the college of cardinals. Instead, it was decisive for the differen-

⁸⁴ This is suggested in Luther’s answer in WABr 3:582.11–12 (No. 926).

⁸⁵ WABr 3:595.36–59 (No. 937).

⁸⁶ See Christian Peters, “Visitation. I. Kirchengeschichtlich,” in *TRE* 35:151–63, esp. 154.

⁸⁷ “superintendenten und aufseher(n).” *Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1, ed. Emil Sehling (Leipzig: O. R. Riesland, 1902), 146

⁸⁸ *Decretum C.* 8 q.1 c. 11: CIC[L] I,594; for Luther cf. WA 50:339.25–340.1.

⁸⁹ On this see Peter Brunner, *Nikolaus von Amsdorf als Bischof von Naumburg*, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 179 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1961); Hans-Ulrich Delius, “Das Naumburger Bischofsexperiment und Martin Luther,” in *Martin Luther und das Bischofsamt*, ed. Martin Brecht (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1990), 131–40; Peter Gabriel, *Fürst Georg III. von Anhalt als evangelischer Bischof von Merseburg und Thüringen 1544–1548/50: Ein Modell evangelischer Episkope in der Reformationszeit* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1997); Augustin Sander, “*Ordinatio Apostolica*”: *Studien zur Ordinationstheologie im Luthertum des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Bd. 1: *Georg III. von Anhalt (1507–1553)*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 65 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2004).

⁹⁰ “mit Vorwissen und Bewilligung der Fürsten zu Sachsen als der Landes- und Schutzfürsten hat beschehen müssen.” WABr 9:312.

tiation of the confessions in the early modern period to contrast their opponent, the increasingly centrally-governed Roman Catholic Church, with Protestant churches that had a variety of forms of governance. The polarity that the opponents of the Reformation had noted as a decisive point of difference was, for the early modern period, precisely the thing that formed its institutions.

These observations must be understood in a more general sense so that the attempt to explain the Reformation and the formation of confessions from the conditions of late medieval polarities is not carried out too narrowly, as if these polarities of the late Middle Ages were completely divided up among the confessions. The modern Roman Catholic Church did not completely renounce moments of interiority and immediacy in the experience of God (*Innerlichkeit und Unmittelbarkeit der Gotteserfahrung*), nor did the Protestant churches completely disregard external dimensions – this would have been fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) in Luther's eyes. And yet it was this interplay of different understandings of these polarities that created the confessional diversity of the modern era from the one, tension-filled church of the Middle Ages.