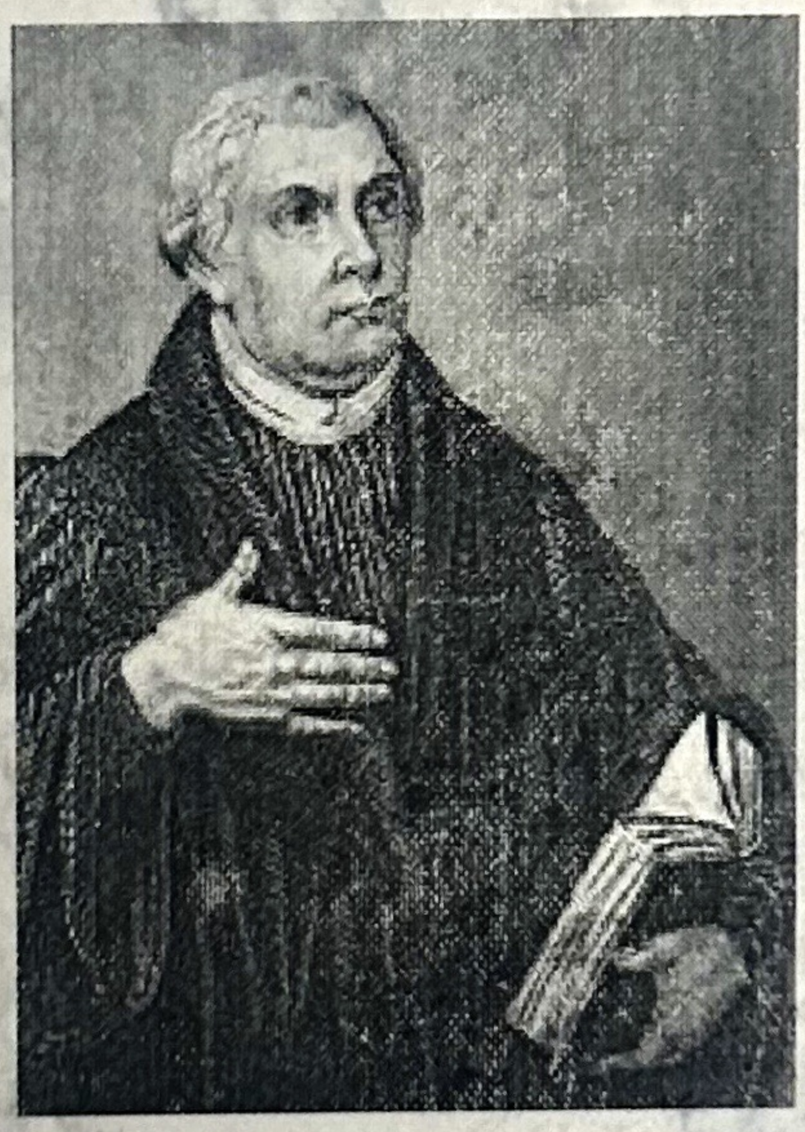
Martin Luther and the Mysticism of

Johannes Tauler



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Acknowledgments

When I was first invited to enter the History Honors Thesis Seminar I had to ask myself what in God's name such a thing was. The informational meeting left me asking myself what kind of masochist would actually enter such a program for fun? (and more importantly was I that kind of masochist?) And when I finally entered the program, and sat down in the first week to discuss the Spur Grant and the proposal writing process, I had to wonder just what kind of person actually wanted to give me money to write a paper about Lutheran theology. Luckily for me somebody did want to give me the money, and I found out, in the course of writing, that I was just the masochist this program was looking for. So many hours, many gallons of coffee, and several nervous breakdowns later I find myself able to sit back and reflect on who has made my decent into insanity possible. First and foremost the entire process would have been impossible without Abraham Friesen's earnest corrections, immense knowledge, and repartee. Jonathan Glickstein's box of red pens kept my writing style both concise, and intelligible, and his guidance throughout the seminar kept me from writing all 50 odd pages one week before the paper was due. (giving me more time to write this Acknowledgement section) Todd Clary's aid in making the Latin language intelligible further aided the formulation of this work, as did the comments from the entire seminar. Finally I would like to thank Jen Dolan for her endless nagging about my grammar, and my roommate Dave for putting up with piles of theological books and dusty paper intruding on his filth.

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Abbreviations

When a specific volume of a multi-volume work is cited the volume number is listed first followed by the page number.

Works	*Luther's Works.* Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 55vols. Philadelphia: Muehlenberg Press, 1955-1986.
Tauler	*Johannes Tauler: Sermons.* Trans. Maria Shrady. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
EDT	*The Theologica Germanica of Martin Luther.* Trans. Bengt Hoffman. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
Werke	*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Ed. Hermann Böhlaus. 61 vols. Weimar, 1883-.

Abstract

Just prior to posting the 95 Theses on the Cathedral doors at Wittenburg, Martin Luther discovered several tracts on German Mysticism: a collection of sermons by Johannes Tauler and a work he named Eine Deutsche Theologie. *This discovery of mysticism helped to further the development of Martin Luther's own theology, and he immediately praised the usefulness of mysticism in understanding theology. Martin Luther's theology was greatly influenced by the mysticism of Johannes Tauler up until around 1520, at which point he made a decisive break with mysticism, favoring his own theology of the Righteousness of God. The key tenet of mysticism was that man was capable of brining about a baptism of the Holy Spirit, while his belief in the righteousness of God dictated that man was utterly incapable of improving himself in the eyes of God. These two beliefs were not compatible, which Luther came to realize by 1519. This break with mysticism led to a decisive break and eventual conflict with the Radical Reformers such as the Zwickau Prophets and Thomas Muentzer. The Radical Reformers had, up until Luther's break with mysticism, viewed Luther as a kindred spirit. When the Radicals entered Wittenburg in 1522 they expected to find a friend in Luther, but instead were rebuked. This rebuke eventually led to a conflict between the Radical Reformers and Martin Luther culminating in the 1525 Peasant's revolt. Martin Luther's relationship with mysticism highlights the development of his theology in the crucial years between 1516 and 1522, and further demonstrates the political consequences of his developing theology.*

Introduction

The Protestant Reformation, which challenged the Catholic Church's supremacy in Europe, grew in response to criticisms of the Church throughout the 15th century. During the Renaissance, the study of Greek and Roman philosophy and literature was revived, as literacy rose and ancient texts were rediscovered through contact with Islamic culture. The study of language as a science also began to develop. The Renaissance humanists desired to find the purest, most accurate copies of Greek and Roman texts. The philologist Lorenzo Valla[1] applied this practice to the Vulgate Bible of St. Jerome by comparing Jerome's Vulgate with the Greek codexes from which the Vulgate was translated. Valla uncovered several mistranslations in Jerome's work, which in turn led theologians to question the infallibility of the Latin Vulgate, thereby undermining church authority. In addition to such humanist attacks as Valla's criticisms of the Vulgate, the Church was suffering from internal crises. Royal authorities had begun to exercise more control of the Catholic Church within their respective territories, as seen in the Gallican Church in France, the Spanish Church, and towards the end of the 16th century the Anglican Church in England. Furthermore, the Black Death had crippled the Church both by killing the most devout clergymen and also by showing the Church's inability to deal with such a crisis. The populace looked to the Church to remove what they saw as a punishment from God, and when the Church failed, the laity began to see the Church as corrupt. The so called "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church, which began with the transfer of the Papacy to Avignon in the first half of the 13th century and culminated with

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[1] (1407-1457) Valla was a humanist scholar who conducted some of the first critical studies of Church Documents and religious texts. In addition to his commentary on Jerome's Vulgate Bible, Valla proved the *Donation of Constantine* to be a medieval forgery, weakening the Popes authority over secular rulers.

the election of three concurrent popes, was not resolved until the Council of Constance in 1415. The Council was able to restore legitimacy to the Roman Pope, but only by placing the authority of a Church council above that of the Pope through its decree of *Sacrosancta*. The decision of Constance, rather than reinvigorating the Church, further weakened its authority by creating a power struggle between Pope and church council that lasted into the 16th century.

Whereas the humanists attacked the Church from an intellectual level, and desired the elimination of the corruption they perceived in the church hierarchy, the Reformers attacked the Church's theology in an attempt to reform the doctrines and beliefs which constituted Catholic orthodoxy. Beginning with Martin Luther's *95 Theses* which attacked the sale of Indulgences by John Tetzel, the Reformation ended the Catholic Church's control of Western Christian thought, and it continued the process of undermining the secular authority of the Roman Catholic Church, which had been initiated by the Gallican and Spanish Churches. Bishops and abbots, who had previously ruled as feudal Lords in Europe, began to be stripped of their secular authority. Starting in Germany and then progressing throughout Europe, the monasteries were closed, Church tithes were replaced with taxes from the nobility and ruling class, and Church courts were abolished within Protestant lands. Thus the Reformation facilitated the rise of the modern nation state. It was the three magisterial Reformers, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli[2], and John Calvin[3], working alongside the rulers and magistrates of their various

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[2] (1484-1531) Zwingli was the leader of the Swiss Reformation in Zurich, and was influenced both by Luther and Erasmus.

[3] (1509-1564) Calvin influenced the Reformation in France, and developed a doctrine of double predestination.

regions, who had the most success instituting new religious ideas at the onset of the Reformation.

The Augustinian monk Martin Luther was the focal point of the Protestant Reformation. He was the first of the magisterial Reformers, and his writings, actions, and beliefs set the stage for the Reformation. Although earlier theologians had attempted similar reforms, none had met with Luther's success. For example, Jan Hus, who held many theological beliefs similar to Luther's, was burned at the stake as a condemned heretic by the Council of Constance. Owing to the success of Luther's attack on the authority of the Church, most modern examinations of his writings and the events surrounding the early Reformation focus on the political and social consequences of Luther's works. The posting of the *95 Theses* is remembered as the event which touched off the Reformation, rather than for its specific theological criticism of the doctrine of Indulgences. Similarly, Luther's attack on Church authority in his *Disputation Against the Scholastics* is less prominent, in modern examinations of Luther, than are the proceedings at the Diet of Worms. In condemning Luther, and forcing him to withdraw, the later forced Luther to work against the Church and the Government both of which opposed him. The condemnation ended any hopes of a peaceful settlement between the Reformers and the Church. Scholars tend to focus on the Diet even though it is his statements in the *Disputation* and elsewhere that earned Luther his excommunication. Notwithstanding this focus on events which facilitated or altered the course of the Reformation, Luther's reforms were prompted by his profound religious beliefs and his intense desire to teach and promote his theological beliefs. Understanding the development of Martin Luther's theology, and how the writings of earlier theologians

influenced his theology, is a crucial step in understanding how the Protestant Reformation as a political phenomenon came to pass.

Luther's theological development can be divided into four major periods. The early education of Luther consisted of his theological training as a monk until the beginnings of his teaching at Wittenburg. This was a period during which his theological beliefs were still largely in the process of forming. The second period, from his early lectures on the Book of Romans until his excommunication by the Diet of Worms, represents the most profound period in the development of Martin Luther's theological ideas. The third period consisted of his brief residency at the Wartburg, where he was hiding from the supporters of the Emperor and those who wished to see him burned as a heretic. During this period, as Luther translated the New Testament from Erasmus' Greek texts into German, his beliefs reached their maturity. The final period in Luther's developing theology, his post-Wartburg period, was one in which he took on the active roll of a magisterial Reformer in Saxony.

Luther's religious beliefs and theological concerns throughout these periods are related to Luther's changing relationship with the German mystics and his understanding of mystical theology. The implications of Luther's theological beliefs during his lectures on Romans and his first series of lectures on Galatians became apparent, and it was during this same period that Luther discovered both the works of Johannes Tauler and the mystical tract *Eine Deutsche Theologie*. The timing of Luther's discovery of these mystical works is crucial to understanding the development of his theology leading up to the Diet of Worms. How did his relationship with mysticism affect his theology, and what theological conflicts arose from Luther's understanding of mysticism? It will also

be important to study how his understanding of mysticism affected his interpretation of St. Paul, whom Luther, in many ways, viewed as a kindred Spirit, especially following the Diet of Worms.

No less important than his initial discovery and acceptance of German mysticism, is Luther's eventual rejection of this theology. Politically Luther's break from mysticism became apparent after he left the Wartburg during his conflict with Thomas Muentzer and Luther's former associate Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Yet while the break with mysticism became apparent only at this time it is important to trace the development of Luther's theology leading up to this break. The timing of his break with mysticism, and how this timing was concurrent theological developments, is crucial in understanding his later conflict with the Saxon Radicals.

The next several chapters will explore the development of Luther's theology, and its changes over time, in relation to his understanding and acceptance of the mystical theology of Johannes Tauler. This examination will focus on Luther introduction to Tauler, just prior to the start of the Reformation, his conflict with mysticism just prior to entering the Wartburg, and finally the conflicts that arose due to his rejection of mystical theology. Finally attention will be paid to the political impact of Luther's break with mysticism, and the political consequences of Luther's developing theology.

The Mysticism of Johannes Tauler

Before we can begin to study the influence of Tauler upon the theology of Martin Luther, we must first establish an understanding of Tauler himself. This chapter shall explore Tauler and his mystical theology by focusing on the origins of his ideas, the importance of his contributions, how his ideas were spread, and how his audience affected his works. This chapter will also explore these subjects with respect to both the actual historical figures of Tauler and the pseudo-Tauler known to Luther through both a spurious account of Tauler's life, *The history and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler*, and various tracts spuriously attributed to Tauler. The establishment of differences between the historical Tauler and the pseudo-Tauler will be critical later in this study when it turns to explaining Luther's changing relationship with mysticism.

The known facts about Tauler's life are few. He was born in the early 14th century to a noble family, and he lived through both the Black Death and much of the Avignon Papacy. These two events strained the social order of Europe and brought the Church under attack by laypersons, since the Church was unable to prevent the Black Death and since the Avignon Papacy displayed the corruption and instability of the Church. Tauler was a mendicant preacher of the Dominican order, the same order to which both Meister Eckhart and St. Thomas Aquinas belonged. Eckhart, who lived during the later half of the 13th century, was the greatest of the German mystics, and his theology of the Seelengrund (the abyss of the soul) and man's merger with God through a baptism of the Holy Spirit strongly influenced the mysticism of Tauler. Tauler's concept of detachment as it related to man's mystical union with God was directly related to Eckhart's mysticism: "What, then, does true detachment, the first of the four requisites,

really mean? It means that we must turn away and withdraw from all that is not God pure and simple."[4] This is a concept directly derived form Eckhart's tract *On Detachment.* Luther would have in turn found in this concept of detachment support for his own notion of the separation of the secular world from the spiritual. On the other hand, had Luther been familiar with this treatise of Eckhart's, he would have found that the theology of detachment conflicted with his own doctrine of *sola fide*:

> But I extol detachment above any love. First, because, at best, love constrains me to God, but detachment compels God to love me. Now it is a far nobler thing my constraining God to me than for me to constrain myself to God.[5]

This passage from Eckhart's tract speaks of man's ability to make himself worthy of God's grace, an ability which is in direct conflict with Luther's doctrine of predestination.

For Eckhart and Tauler a mystical union with God could only be attained through man's works, thus man must "constrain or force God into himself through mystical preparation. For Luther the act of salvation is a passive one; salvation by faith implies a secondary role played by man, who can do nothing to affect or create an infusion of Grace from the Spirit. Luther, however, was unfamiliar with the works of Eckhart since they were condemned as heretical and suppressed by the Church shortly before Eckhart's death. Tauler attempted to distance himself from the theology of Eckhart in order to avoid a charge of heresy. He did this by focusing not on the actual union with God, as

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[4] Tauler p. 80
[5] *Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises.* Trans. M. O'C. Walshe (3vols. Shaftesbury, England: Element Books, 1987) p. 117

did Eckhart, but more on the method by which man might attain such a union.[6] This approach to man's salvation made Tauler popular with those to whom he preached and to Luther as well, because Luther perceived his goals and Tauler's to be one and the same. Tauler's struggle with questions of grace, and of man's capacity to be seen as worthy in the eyes of God, is very similar to Luther's own struggle as he developed his theology.

Although Luther would have agreed with some of the teachings of Eckhart from which Tauler adopted his mysticism, Luther hated the scholastic theology of Thomas Aquinas, who was from the same order as Eckhart and Tauler. Tauler had been trained as a Dominican monk less than a century after the death of Aquinas, who was regarded as the greatest theologian since Augustine, and he no doubt took pride in being part of the same order as Aquinas. Luther, however, tried to distance Tauler from Aquinas and the scholastics. Luther opposed the theology of Aquinas, not only because Luther was an Augustinian monk, but also because he felt that Aquinas' theology, which replaced Augustine's as the orthodox theology of the Church as a whole, was inferior to that of Augustine. Aquinas' theology employed Augustinian logic, and attempted to apply the reasoning of the Pagan philosophers to an understanding of the Scripture. Luther attacked this method for extending beyond scripture rather than seeking within scripture an understanding of God. Furthermore, Luther vehemently opposed scholasticism and the scholastic method as an approach to understanding scripture, favoring a historical, Christocentric view, rather than an allegorical interpretation of scripture. Luther's interpretation of the scripture as the only source of correct theology, based upon a

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[6] *The Great German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso.* (Folcroft, PA: The Folcroft Press, 1969) p.45

humanist view of the importance of original texts, would eventually come into conflict with the mystical tradition of visions and divine revelations.

Tauler, as we have noted, focused on the method of man's attaining a union with God, as distinct from Eckhart's focus on the union itself. The extant sermons of Tauler, which comprise the bulk of his writings, consider this issue not in the difficult Latin prose of Eckhart, but in an easy and emotional German prose. This is the style of writing Luther praises in his preface to E*ine Deutsche Theologie*:

> I wish to warn everyone who reads this book not to harm himself and become irritated by its simple German language … for this noble little book, poor and unadorned as it is in words and human wisdom, is the richer and more precious in art and divine wisdom.[7]

As one who stressed the importance of the use of vernacular in teaching theology, Luther was naturally drawn to Tauler, who remains one of the most influential of the German mystics precisely because of his clarity of speech. Tauler's sermons are so clear and free of lofty scholastic arguments partly because he intended them for the edification of Dominican nuns, whose numbers were swelling during Tauler's lifetime. It fell on Tauler and the Dominican preachers to instruct the nuns in scripture and Church doctrine. The nuns, while for the most part wealthy and educated women, had not been trained in the scholastic method or matters of theology. Tauler had to tailor his sermons to an audience consisting of persons lacking in theological training, and to an audience not versed in Latin, unable to read the scripture.

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[7] Works 31, 75

The origins and objectives of Tauler's preaching are addressed in his pseudo-biography. This work, which Luther would have been familiar with, maintains that layman requested Tauler to give a sermon on the means of attaining grace in language that even a layman could understand. Tauler, so the story goes, claimed that such a feat would be impossible. From what we know of Tauler's oratory skills, however, it seems unlikely that the historical Tauler would have responded to such a challenge in a negative manner. Tauler's role as a preacher and an instructor, and the fame he gained through his preaching, demonstrate Tauler's ability to make even the most difficult of theological ideas accessible to the laity.

The pseudo-biography was not revealed as spurious until the later half of the 19th century, and Luther took the story as a factual account of Tauler's life. The story itself is a common mystical tale wherein the pious layman instructs the corrupt preacher in matters of theology, after which the Clergyman sees the error of his ways, decides to reform himself, and thereby attains grace. The account was written after Tauler's death in an attempt to explain his conversion to a mystical theology. The story of the layman instructing the priest or preacher is representative of a growing disdain for the priestly class it exemplifies a mystical, Renaissance, and Reformation preoccupation with the corruption of the priestly class and the related critical view of scholastic learning. But whereas Luther would have agreed fully with such a criticism of the Church, Tauler, as we have seen, used, taught, and had many reasons to be proud of scholastic theology.

While differences exist between the pseudo-biography and the actual sermons of Tauler, Luther accepted the veracity of both when developing an understanding of Tauler's

theology. Minor differences between the pseudo-biography and the actual Tauler lead to a disparity between Luther's interpretation of Tauler, and the actual mysticism of Tauler.

This conflict between mystical and Reformation theologies can further be seen in the debate over the sacrament of Penance. Tauler's pseudo-biography contains a passage that can be interpreted as a reinterpretation of the Catholic doctrine of Good Works, wherein works are only seen as having merit where authorized by God:

> I began to exercise myself in the life of the Saints with some severities ... Then I thought to myself, I had begun these exercises without council: I will go and tell the old hermit all that has happened to me ... So the hermit said, 'Thou must know that if I am to advise, thou must first tell me all about thy exercises.' So I did, and he said, 'by whose council hast thou done these things?' and I answered, 'Of my own will.' Then the hermit said, 'Thou know it has been the Devil's council, and thou must not obey him ... but thou must utterly give thyself up to God[8]

Such a passage clearly maintains that man cannot through his own actions bring himself closer to God, and furthermore, that a pursuit of God must have proper direction. Such a passage is a step closer to Luther's doctrine of sola fide, and closer to an understanding of man's relationship with God as one in which God alone through Christ can impute grace. Tauler did not reject the doctrine of good works, in fact he clearly supports the idea of works in his sermons, noting that "Saint James teaches that faith without works is dead."

We have furthermore seen how Tauler embraced Eckhart's concept of "forcing" God into

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[8] [Meisterbuch.] *The history and life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler of Strasbourg : with twenty-five of his sermons* (Temp. 1340). Trans. Susanna Winkworth. (London : Smith, Elder, 1857) p.20-21

a mystical union. For Tauler a union with God by no means demanded man's passivity, as it did with Luther.

Luther's initial discovery of Tauler is hampered both by his preconceived theological beliefs and by the spurious biography attached to the 1508 edition of Tauler read by Luther. Thus the route of Luther's conflict with mysticism, as seen in his relationship with the works of Tauler has its origins at the very inception of Luther's mystical thought. Nevertheless Luther's discovery of Tauler, and Tauler's approach to mystical ideas, nevertheless, fundamentally altered Luther's theology, as we shall see in an examination of Luther's lectures on Romans.

Lectures on Romans

In the spring of 1515, two years prior to his *Disputation Against the Scholastic Theology* and his *Ninety-five Theses*, Martin Luther began working on his lectures on Romans. This two-year period, marked by Luther's study of Paul, is a seminal one in the development of Luther's early theology. Growing out of the theological concerns about faith and salvation that he grappled with in his *Dictata*, Luther's lectures on Romans begins to depart from the scholastic method of allegorical interpretation of the scripture. He begins to interpret Paul's actions, and writings as they specifically related to the message of Christ and the growth of the early Church. He focused on the actions of the apostles in an attempt to restore an apostolic understanding of the scripture. His interpretation of Paul, within Romans, was initially influenced by the writings of Augustine. Though the mysticism of Gerson played a minor role in Luther's lectures, Luther most likely did not become aware of Tauler's sermons until the spring of 1516. Prior to his discovery of Tauler, and in the course of his lectures, Luther had already made crucial steps in the development of his doctrine of *sola fide*.[9] Despite his late introduction to Tauler's mystical theology, Tauler nevertheless influenced the development of Luther's theology. Luther, at the time he discovered Tauler, had all of the language of his new Theology, as is seen in his commentary of Romans, but he did not, until several years later and after his discovery of Tauler, see the full meaning or importance of his beliefs. Luther was predisposed to interpret Tauler in accordance with his own theological views, though his discovery of Tauler allowed him to explore more fully the importance of his beliefs and their consequences.

A strong statement of Luther's doctrine first appears in his "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology," most notably his 29th argument: "The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole means of obtaining grace is the eternal election and predestination of God."[10] The concept of justification through faith appears at several points in Luther's glosses on Romans, and clearly he is developing his theology of the Righteousness of God through his readings, though no firm statement of this theology is made during the course of his lectures. Sola Fide was merely the first step in the development of his theology, Luther's doctrine of justification through faith grew out of his struggle with the concept of salvation as it related to his concept of the total depravity of man, which in turn influenced the development of his theology of God's Righteousness. His guide through this examination was the theology of Augustine whom he cited in the very opening of his commentary on Romans, when explaining the importance of Paul:

> Therefore blessed Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Le*tter, ch.7 says: The apostle Paul 'fights hard against the proud' and the conceited against those who are arrogant on the basis of their works.[11]

Here we see the influence of Augustine's writings upon Luther's attack on the doctrine of good works. Luther also frequently refered to Augustine's works in his glosses on Romans.

While Luther's basic theological beliefs grew out of his understanding of Augustine, his discovery of Tauler profoundly influenced this understanding. Noted

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[9] The doctrine of salvation by faith alone, wherein it is the grace of God that earns salvation and not external works.
[10] Works 31, 11

earlier Luther did not begin to read Tauler until 1516, the same year in which he discovered a fragmentary copy of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*. His first mention of Tauler in his lectures occurred during his commentary on Romans 8:*26 For we do not know how to pray*:

> Notice that it [Gen 1:2] says, "upon the face of the deep," and not just "upon the deep," for according to appearances it seems to be opposed to us, when the Spirit comes over us and is about to do what we pray.
>
> Concerning this patience and endurance of God see Tauler, who has shed more light than others on this matter, who has shed more light than others on this matter in the German language[12]

Clearly Luther is taken with Tauler, and most especially Tauler's approach to the concept of the Holy Spirit, with which Luther had grappled. Indeed the entire commentary on 8:26 is ripe with mystical terminology and a mystical approach to the understanding of the Holy Spirit: "He renders us capable of receiving His gifts and His works," and later "For unless the Spirit were helping, it would be impossible for us to bear this action of God."[13] Clearly in speaking of "His gifts" Luther is referring to the mystical idea of the gifts of the Spirit, gifts granted to one who has experienced a baptism of the Holy Spirit. However despite this use of mystical language Luther's underlying belief, that it is through God and not man that these gifts are attained, is maintained:

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[11] Works 25, 135
[12] Works 24, 367-368
[13] Works 25, 365

> we are capable of receiving His gifts and His counsels only when
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> our own counsels have ceased and our works have stopped and
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> we are mad purely passive before God[14]

Luther's commentary on the eighth chapter of Romans was his last in the second period of his Lectures, and ended in the spring of 1516.

As discussed above the primary influences on Luther's thought prior to his discovery of Tauler, were the writings of Augustine. Before Luther encountered Tauler, his use of mystical language was sparse, and in places he even attacked mystical theology, as when speaking of the necessity for divine suffering, the *Anfechtung*, in regards to the process of attaining grace:

> 'we have access [to Grace] and peace' but only 'through our
>
> Lord Jesus Christ." This also applies to those who follow the
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> mystical theology and struggle in inner darkness, omitting all
>
> pictures of Christ's suffering, wishing to hear and contemplate
>
> only the uncreated Word Himself, but not having first been
>
> justified and purged.[15]

His reasons for attacking the mystics are also based around his Christological theology, which focused upon the figure of Christ crucified rather than the powers of the Holy Spirit, and his vision of the suffering Christ, which, for Luther, reflected the suffering which must be experienced to attain a true understanding of God. Tauler was therefore to become even more important to Luther in that he speaks greatly upon the image of Christ throughout his sermons. Tauler focuses on Christ in his *Sermon for Thursday in Easter Week* and on the imagery of the Cross in his *Sermon for Ash Wednesday*, and throughout

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[14] Works 25, 365

both the imagery of Christ on the Cross is explored, however in Tauler's sermons this imagery is used to describe how man might live life like Christ, or become Christ like through their own actions. Tauler, through his use of Christ, was trying to explain how one might enter such a Christ like state, through a baptism of the Holy Spirit, thus Christ became the model for Tauler. This use of Christ as a model contradicted Luther's own developing beliefs in man's depravity, and the very idea that man could become more like Christ was totally impossible in Luther's theology.

Prior to his discovery of Tauler Luther also refered to the Holy Spirit as acting mainly in a passive role, referring to the gift of the Spirit, which brings about salvation.[16] Upon his introduction to Tauler's theology, the role of the Holy Spirit changed for Luther. The passage in which Luther first mentions Tauler is full of references to the actions of the Spirit. Tauler described the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as we have discussed above, and his *Second Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity* discusses readily upon the actions of the Holy Spirit. Luther adopted Tauler's concept of the Spirit, and in the latter portion of Luther's lectures on Romans the Holy Spirit began to take an active role as opposed to a passive one: "For He wills that to the elect who are loved by God and love God the Spirit works all things for good," and later, "unless the eternal and fixed love of God led him through them and the Spirit were present to aid our infirmity."[17] Clearly the Holy Spirit is an active force in these latter passages of Luther, yet key differences remain between Luther and Tauler. The Spirit in Luther, though now an active force, still is not present without the Grace of God. Thus justification, and not merit, is the key, but for Tauler there is the mystical idea, derived from Eckhart, of

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[15] Works 25, 287
[16] Works 25, 296

forcing the Spirit into one's self, or in other words the possibility that one might merit Grace.

With respect to Luther's theological development, and his examination of Paul Luther's lectures on the first six chapters of Galatians followed his examination of Romans. With respect to the Reformation, however, these lectures are preceded by the posting of the ninety-five Theses in 1517. Yet Luther undoubtedly read the 1508 edition of Tauler's works which contained a history of Tauler's life, which was in the 19th century uncovered as spurious. The false account of Tauler's life, notably its account of Tauler's mystical conversion by a layman, influenced Luther's impression of Tauler,. Luther also wrongly attributed *Eine Deutsche Theologie* to Tauler, which would lead to conflict with Tauler's theology later in Luther's theological development. Though Luther came into contact with the writings of Tauler early in 1516, the earliest extant letter of Luther we have referring to Tauler was his December 14th 1516 letter to George Spalatin. He recommends Tauler's works to Spalatin in response to Spalatin's request for advice on preparing theological works in German.[18]

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[17] Works 25, 371
[18] Works 48, 35

Eine Deutsche Theologie

We have mentioned several times the German mystical tract, which Luther read and which he dubbed *Eine Deutsche Theologie.* This section will explore the full importance of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* to the development of Luther's theology including its influence on Luther's relationship with Tauler and German mysticism.

Luther published the mystical tract in two separate editions, the second of which contained the full text of the original work. The time frame in which both editions were published is central to an understanding of their mystical importance. Luther's initial discovery of a fragmentary piece of the work was, as earlier noted, concurrent with his discovery of the teachings of Tauler. It is significant that this edition, mistakenly attributed to Tauler by Luther, was published prior to Luther's emergence as an advocate of church reform, and therefore in publishing this first edition he looked more towards the theology of the tract, as we see in a 1516 letter to George Spalatin: "I have seen no theological work in Latin or German that is more sound and more in harmony with the Gospel than this."[19] Luther is specifically referring to the works of Tauler, but Luther attributed the tract initially to Tauler and the timing is concurrent with the first edition. Luther's use of the tract as a means of advocating church reform took on a less important role in the first edition of the work. The second edition of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, however, was released just months after the *95 Theses*, and in the same year that Luther published an explanation of his *95 Theses*. Luther also edited the second edition during the period in which he finished his lectures on Romans and began his first series of lectures on Galatians. Thus Luther interpreted the second edition in light of his

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[19] Works 48, 36

continuing examination of Paul, and coincided with the beginning of the Reformation following Luther's attack on indulgences.

In other words, the differences between the first and second editions *of Eine Deutsche Theologie* illuminate how the mystical tract affected Luther's understanding of Tauler and Tauler's approach to a mystical union with God. The language of the text, in both editions, avoids the esoteric language so often employed by Eckhart, and to a lesser degree by Tauler. It has more the flavor of the pseudo-biography of Tauler, or as Luther states: "this noble little book, poor and unadorned as it is in words and human wisdom, is the richer and more precious in art and divine wisdom."[20] Luther appears to relate to this tract to a much greater degree than he does to the writings of Tauler. In other words the tract is essentially "Lutheran" in style, in so much as it purports religious beliefs very similar to those which Luther is forming. This can be seen in the similar rejection of good works contained within Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, and *Eine Deutsche Theologie*. Luther's *Disputation* argues both that human works cannot aid in the salvation of man, and that man lacks the ability, without the grace of God, to perform an action worthy of merit.[21] Similarly, the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* argues that man has a will only to be contrary to God, and that since all goodness descends from God alone, to be contrary to God is to commit sin.[22] In both cases man is incapable of improving his condition, and it is only through God's actions that man can be seen as having merit.

This view of human nature conflicted with the viewpoint of Tauler, and served to bring Luther into conflict with Tauler's theology. Differences between Tauler's theology

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[20] Works 31, 75
[21] Works 31, 39-40

and his own would have become apparent to Luther earlier if not for his belief in the veracity of the pseudo-biography and his belief that Tauler authored *Eine Deutsche Theologie*. Had Luther earlier discovered these discrepancies between Tauler's theological beliefs on the one hand, and the pseudo-biography and *Eine Deutsche Theologie* on the other, his broad acceptance of mysticism and the theology of Tauler would have been mitigated by his realization that Tauler's message differed from his own. In editing the second edition Luther discovered that Tauler did not write the mystical tract as previously believed, in that the more complete edition quotes Tauler directly.[23] This discovery would have forced Luther to reexamine his understanding of Tauler's theology, and the discrepancies which we have pointed out between the pseudo-biography of Tauler and the actual theology of Tauler would have become more readily apparent to Luther. The rest of this section will explore the consequences such an evaluation would have had on Luther's relationship with Tauler.

The second edition of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* contains a mystical theology profoundly different from that of Tauler. The author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* rejects the key concept of religious detachment from the world, a concept exhorted both by Eckhart and Tauler:

> They assert that they have reached a stage where suffering does not touch them and they are moved by nothing. It sounds as though each and every one were practicing the kind of obedience we have been talking about and as though no imperfect creatures existed[24]

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[22] EDT p.108
[23] EDT p.74
[24] EDT p.81

Not only does the author reject the idea of mystical detachment, he also rejects the concept of the divinity of man, including the notion that man can through his own detachment attain divinity. Tauler and Eckhart claimed that man could attain a religious perfection through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Similar to the indelible character of Priests, once the Holy Spirit entered the Seelengrund man "becomes so divinized that everything he is and does, God is and does in him."[25] The author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* replaces the concept of detachment, which led to this state of divinity, with the idea of obedience to God. The will of God supersedes the free will of man in the latter's choice to seek detachment.

This shift in focus from the free will of man to the divine will of God also significantly alters the mystical concept of the Seelengrund. The concept of Seelengrund maintains that, by achieving a detached state, man forces God to enter into the abyss of the soul, and thereby man is divinized, or becomes a perfect godlike being. The author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* does not reject this concept of the divinization of man, a key concept in German mysticism, but he does shift, as Luther does, from man to God. For the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* God is the active force in man's salvation:

> Let us imagine a person who is obsessed and held by God's spirit
>
> to such a degree that he is unaware of the flow and ebb from God
>
> ... The power of God then directs at will that person's works,
>
> deeds, and leisure.[26]

This passage, placing man in the passive role, reflects Luther's own differences with the theology of Tauler. Those differences mirrored the ones we have seen between Tauler's teachings and the pseudo-biography.

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[25] Tauler p.143

The shift in focus from man to God can be better understood with respect to the Christological theology of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* and the theologies of both Luther and Tauler. Luther would have read into this work a very well defined Christological theology, similar to Luther's own. It contains a firm statement of man's total depravity in the eyes of God: "When a person comes to know and see himself he sees that he is wicked and unworthy."[27] This is a statement that in itself precludes Tauler's concept of preparing the Seelengrund that is, the possibility of man making oneself worthy of God's grace. Luther presented his concept of man's total depravity in his disputation *Against Scholastic Theology*: "Therefore he who is outside the grace of God sins incessantly, even when he does not attack someone, when he does not do evil, when he does not become enraged."[28] This passage underscores the consequences of Luther's doctrine of man's depravity, it points to the necessity *of sola fide*, as it is through God's will alone that man can receive an infusion of grace.

The idea of man's depravity, and the importance of Christ for man's salvation, also leads the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* to the concept of man's suffering in Christ. This religious idea maintains that true faith leads to man's suffering alongside Christ, and just as Christ suffered on the cross. This concept is exemplified in the stigmata of St. Francis of Acisi, and extends throughout Catholic and Protestant theologies alike. While the author does not reject the possibility of man becoming divine, he grounds it in a process of suffering: "the closer man approaches divine obedience and the more godly and divinized he becomes, the more he will feel pain."[29] The crucial

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[26] EDT p.84
[27] EDT p.72
[28] Works 31, 13
[29] EDT p.80

aspect of Luther's Christological theology as well was Christ's suffering on the cross, together with the necessity for human suffering; for Luther there was no concept of divinization, but rather Christ's suffering on the Cross had made it possible for unworthy man to be saved through God's righteousness. Luther believed that because Christ has suffered as man suffers, man can be saved through faith despite the fact that man cannot improve himself. While Luther did not accept Tauler's method of the baptism of the Holy Spirit through man's detachment, he could still claim to have experienced a mystical conversion in terms of the mysticism outlined in *Eine Deutsche Theologie.*

The concepts of the Christological theology thus outlined conflict greatly with the teachings of Tauler, especially with the teachings of Tauler with which Luther would have been familiar. The mystical theology focused not on man's suffering but on man's detachment. For Tauler, Christ was not the key to salvation, as Christ was for Luther, and man did not necessarily suffer with Christ. Rather, for Tauler Christ served as a symbol of the divinized man. The German Mystics focused on man's union with God, and the figure of Christ was a prime example of such a union. Tauler's second sermon on the *Exaltation of the Cross* presents an interpretation of Christ as the symbol for man. The sermon opens with the parable of a Christian emperor who carried a cross, as did Jesus, through the streets of Jerusalem, and one who was similarly able to perform healing and other miracles associated with the divine spark in man.[30] The sermon continues by giving examples of people who "carry the Cross," or who in other words lead a Christ-like life by their own volition. This is different from the idea of suffering in Christ, since in Tauler's lectures man plays the active role in his attainment of Grace,

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[30] Tauler p.164

while God adopts the passive role. The close of the sermon is a summary of the basic concept of carrying the Cross:

> May we be drawn into Our Lord the way He wished to draw all things to Himself. May we take up the Cross in such a way that we enter the true ground where He has gone before us, he who died for all on the Cross.[31]

Thus man actively takes up the Cross, and in doing so is able to attain a Christ-like state of grace by entering "the true ground." Luther's approach, as we have noted, is quite the opposite. In suffering, Christ has approached man, or has taken up the burdens of man, but man cannot 'take up the Cross,' it is for Christ alone to impute grace, and man cannot act in any way that would affect this. These varying interpretations of the message of Christ reflect Luther's and Tauler's different understandings of Paul.

Eine Deutsche Theologie also brings to light differences between Tauler's and Luther's interpretations of Paul. We have already studied Luther's examination on Romans and later we shall turn to his examination in Galatians. Both of these series of lectures indicate the importance that Luther attributed to Paul in the development of his own theology. As with its Christological theology, so with the role of Paul, the mysticism of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* is much closer to the theology of Luther than it is to the mysticism of Tauler.

Tauler interpreted Paul, as he interpreted the rest of scripture, as a parable by which to understand how man is to bring himself closer to God. This is a scholastic method antithetical to Luther's beliefs and his focus upon the figure of Christ and the Christological message of the scripture. In his *Sermon for the Tenth Sunday After Trinity*

Tauler uses a passage from Paul: "There are different kinds of gifts, though it is the same Spirit" [I Cor 12:6] to support the Catholic doctrine of good works:

> We must perform good and useful work, in whatever way it comes to us. We ought to do our work meticulously, silently, and with inward recollection. With such disposition we shall draw God into it; for the eyes of our soul shall be drawn inward, devoutly, lovingly.[32]

It is clear that for Tauler the "forcing" of the Holy Spirit into the Seelengrund is linked to the works we perform; Tauler interpreted Paul as arguing that man can perform meritorious works in the eyes of God. Because man's works can earn God's grace, Tauler argues that Paul rejects the concept of the total depravity of man. Using Paul, Tauler further argued that acts of love are necessary to salvation, which again illustrates Tauler's support of good works as necessary for faith.[33]

The author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* interpreted Paul in a markedly different manner than Tauler, arguing that Paul rejected the idea of works. According to the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, Paul argued that the Spirit was an active force which compelled man to do good if the Spirit was present within man's soul: "one does not have to enjoin or command them to do good, shun evil, and the like… He [the Spirit of God] bids and calls them to abide in the best."[34] Again, the shift in focus from man to God is significant. The Spirit takes on the active roll, controlling and forcing man to perform good works, should grace be present, and as a result all good works must spring from God. Herein lies the basic argument for Luther's theology of predestination. Like

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[31] Tauler p.168
[32] Tauler p. 155
[33] Tauler p.134

the author *of Eine Deutsche Theologie*, Luther interpreted Paul as a supporter of the doctrine of grace, as opposed to the idea of works, and he also used the fact that Paul was appointed an apostle not by the other Apostles, but rather by God, to support the notion of the predestination of man. This fundamental conflict between the doctrine of good works as supported by Tauler, and the idea of man's predestination, as found in *Eine Deutsche Theologie* also represents the fundamental, and insurmountable, difference between the theologies of Luther and Tauler.

Through examining conflicts between the mysticism of Tauler and that of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, we begin to understand how Luther would have come into conflict with the theology of Tauler. Before the publication of the second edition Luther would have had no cause to question his understanding of Tauler. Before this time he still relied on the pseudo-biography, he still believed *Eine Deutsche Theologie* to be the work of Tauler, and he had as yet made no political stand in which he would have to defend his own views. The editing of the second edition would have made Luther more reliant on *Eine Deutsche Theologie* as a source through which he could defend views expressed in his own theological tracts of the same year. Finding conflicts with the theology of Tauler would have distanced Luther from this theology. Yet, while Luther did make an initial break with the theology of Tauler, he still did not break completely from the mystical theology, nor did he at this time condemn the whole of mystical theology, as he would several years later in his attack on Thomas Muentzer and the *Schwärmer*. To understand the final causes of Luther's break with mysticism we must turn to his *Operationes in Psalmos* and his lectures on Galatians.

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[34] EDT p.100

The break with Mysticism

In his essay "*Simul Gemitus et Raptus*: Luther and Mysticism," Heiko Oberman argues that Luther's relationship with the theology of Tauler did not change fundamentally through the course of Luther's life. However as we have seen in the previous chapter, Luther's relationship with Tauler was, by 1518, already strained to the breaking point. Oberman argues "there is a basic continuity throughout this large span of years (1515-1538), notwithstanding Luther's encounter with Tauler and the *Schwärmer*."[35] Yet even before Luther's encounter with the *Schwärmer* and the Zwickau Prophets, he had already rejected mystical theology. As already noted through his editing of the second edition of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, Luther was forced to examine mystical theology in detail, and he soon discovered conflicts between his beliefs and those of the mystics. It was shortly after the second edition was published that Luther began *his* *Operationes in Psalmos*, a reexamination of the Psalms. During this same period (1518-1521) Luther's theology comes to fruition. The language of Luther's faith, which has been present throughout the lectures on Romans, and becomes apparent in his 95 theses, became formalized, with his rejection of mysticism, in his doctrine of the Righteousness of God. Luther's theological break with mysticism brought him into conflict with the radical Reformers such as the Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Muentzer, and his erstwhile associate Andreas Karlstadt. This chapter will explore Luther's rejection of mysticism, together with the impact of this rejection on the development of the Reformation.

Luther's doctrine of the Righteousness of God was the culmination of his ideas concerning faith and salvation. It maintained that only through the righteousness of

Christ could man attain grace. In one sense, such a theology is the ultimate statement of Luther's belief in man's depravity, in that man is incapable of doing so much as performing an unselfish act without the righteousness of Christ to aid him. James Kittelson, in his biography of Luther, maintains that "in those months of relative calm Luther also made a very important discovery:"[36] that of the righteousness of God. The months of calm Kittelson refers to are those of 1518-1519, at the same time that Luther began his *Operationes*. Kittelson goes on to note that "in a moment, ... Luther suddenly realized that what he had been teaching for four years all fit together"[37] that is, all fell under the idea of God's righteousness. If Luther's discovery of this doctrine was indeed as sudden and shattering as Kittelson maintains, this discovery, interestingly, would have coincided with his rejection of mysticism. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact timing of Luther's rejection of mystical theology, but the rejection clearly occurred during his writing of his commentary on the Psalms:

> Many men have vamped up and fabled forth many things about mystical, negative, proper, and symbolic theology ... nor can the commentaries of such men be without peril: for such as the men are themselves, so are their writings: ... they felt everything the contrary to negative theology: that is, they never knew nor felt death and hell, nor loved such experience[38]

Here Luther is attacking the mystics for their lack of understanding of suffering ("death and hell"), which was embodied in Luther's idea of *Anfechtung*, and which was a crucial

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[35] "Simul Gemitus et Raptus: Luther and Mysticism." *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective.* Ed. Steven E. Ozment. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970) p.229
[36] *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986) p. 134
[37] Ibid. 135
[38] Werke 5, 163

idea in the theology of God's righteousness. Man, for Luther, must suffer this "death and hell" before he can truly understand God's righteousness, and before, even more to the point, that he can understand that he is incapable of being righteous without God's grace.[39]

Luther continued in this attack on mysticism by criticizing the works of Psuedo-Dionysius: "the commentaries of Dionysius are everywhere handed abroad from both Italy and Germany, which are mere 'oppositions of science' vaunting to show off."[40] Such a view of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius is in opposition to the view he expressed in his first lectures on Psalms in 1512: "Therefore blessed Dionysius teaches that one must enter into anagogical darkness and ascend by way of denials. For thus God is hidden and beyond understanding."[41] Clearly there has been a change in Luther's understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius from this 1512 statement and the attack being addressed by Oberman. Oberman is arguing that Luther in 1519: "When from 1519-1520 onward Luther attacks 'Dionysian speculations' there is no reason to base on this finding a theory of development, let alone of reversal."[42] Yet if we look more closely at both statements we see that in 1512 Luther is praising Psuedo-Dionysius for his concept of "darkness," the same concept that he is attacking in his statements in *Operationes*. This concept of darkness as a divine light is not merely a Dionysian one, but is one found in Tauler as well: "this 'darkness' is to be understood in such a way: It is light inaccessible to created reason, far beyond comprehension. It is wilderness because no natural path

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[39] For a more complete examination of Luther's theology of the Righteousness of God see Gordon Rupp's *The Righteousness of God.*
[40] Werke 5, 163
[41] Works 10, 119-120
[42] "Simul Gemitus et Raptus: Luther and Mysticism." *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective.* Ed. Steven E. Ozment. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970) p.225

leads to it. In this wilderness the spirit is raised above itself."[43] The concept of 'darkness,' then, is crucial to Tauler's understanding of the baptism of the Spirit. Furthermore, Luther's rejection of mysticism in his Operationes does not begin with a rejection of Psuedo-Dionysius. Rather here he attacks mystical theology itself, and employs Pseudo-Dionysius only as an example of this theology.

In 1519, while Luther was writing his *Operationes,* he attended a debate between his associate, Andreas Karlstadt, and the leading theological opponent of Luther's writings, Dr. Johann Eck. Luther, who at first tried to remain outside debates, stepped in when Karlstadt began to flounder. Attending these debates was the young theologian Thomas Muentzer, whose "critical period of development occurs in the months before and after June 1519," or in other words during the same Leipzig debates.[44] Muentzer was a radical Reformer whose theology was intrinsically linked with that of Johannes Tauler, and no doubt he was familiar with Luther's editions of *Eine Deutsche Theologie.* Friesen writes, "whether Muentzer was drawn to a study of Tauler's through Luther's meditation cannot be unequivocally ascertained,"[45] but it is clear that in Luther Muentzer found a kindred spirit.[46] It is ironic that Muentzer would have experienced such a profound development in his own theology, partly owing to his understanding of Luther's relationship with mysticism, in view of the fact that at this very time Luther was breaking with the mystical theology. It is this situation, in which the Radical Reformers viewed Luther as a friend and mystic, which would lead to both the conflict at Wittenburg and Luther's later conflict with the Radical Reformers. Thomas Muentzer later came into

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[43] Tauler p.49
[44] *Thomas Muentzer: A Destroyer of the Go*dless. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 6
[45] Ibid p.11

contact with the Zwickau Prophets, who, like Muentzer, followed the mystical theology and believed that they had experienced a baptism of the Holy Spirit.[47] In addition to claiming to have the Spirit "nakedly" within them, both Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets preached a doctrine of "direct illumination by the Spirit,"[48] this was the doctrine that a bearer of the Spirit did not require scripture to determine theological truth. This belief that the Spirit supplanted the written Word comes from Tauler:

> The third gift is that of knowledge. It enables us to listen inwardly to the promptings and warnings of the Holy Spirit; for, as Our Lord said "When He shall come, He will teach you all things," that is things needful to us[49]

The 'warnings of the Holy Spirit' for Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets similarly implied man's understanding of God's will without the aid of Scripture. Both this doctrine of "direct illumination,"- the idea of a baptism of the Spirit- and the Zwickau Prophet's rejection of infant baptism brought Luther into conflict with Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets

Condemned at the Diet of Worms by the Holy Roman Emperor in April 1521, Luther went into hiding at the Wartburg, leaving Andreas Karlstadt in charge of the Reformation in Wittenburg. Luther's *Operationes in Psalmos* was in the process of being published, and thus his theological break with mysticism was still unknown to even his closest associates. Meanwhile, as noted in our brief examination of Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets, the Saxon Radical Reformation, with its strong roots in mysticism,

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[46] For a more detailed account of Thomas Muentzer and his relationship to Martin Luther, Johannes Tauler, and the Radical Reformation see Abraham Friesen's *Thomas Muentzer: A Destroyer of the Godless*
[47] *Thomas Muentzer: A Destroyer of the Godless*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.83
[48] Works 51, 69
[49] Tauler p.95

was beginning to gain momentum. The political consequences of Luther's break with mysticism became clear during the Wittenburg disturbances, touched off by Karlstadt's change of the Catholic Liturgy during the Christmas Mass of 1521. It was through these disturbances that Luther had his first encounter with the Radical Reformers. The change in the liturgy of the mass, forbidden by Duke Frederick of Saxony, was the beginning of Karlstadt's reforms in Wittenburg along radical lines. Karlstadt, in addition to reforming the liturgy, attacked images used in Cathedrals, removed such icons from the Churches, and closed parish schools, all of which led to unrest among the population of Wittenburg.

The Zwickau prophets had entered Wittenburg in December of 1521, influencing Karlstadt's reforms, and prompting Philip Melancthon[50] to write Luther. He requested Luther's advice on how to interpret the teachings of the Prophets, most especially their rejection of infant baptism, and he further inquired of Luther as how best to treat the Prophets and the growing disturbances. That Melancthon appealed to Luther implies that Luther's policy towards the Prophets and there mystical ideas was, towards the end of 1521, still unclear. Melancthon appears no more aware of Luther's hostile attitude, than were the Prophets themselves. Luther responded in a letter from the Wartburg dated January 13th 1522, in which he appears little concerned over the current unrest created by Karlstadt's reforms, and he offers Melancthon advice on testing the Prophets' claim, that they had the Holy Spirit:

> In order to explore their individual spirit, too, you should inquire whether they have experienced spiritual distress and the divine birth, death, and hell. If you should hear that all are pleasant,

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[50] (1497-1560) Melancthon was a close friend, associate, and biographer of Martin Luther. After Karlstadt's break from Luther, Melancthon became one of Luther's key supporters.

> quiet, devout (as they say), and spiritual, then don't approve of them[51]

Luther is employing mystical terminology in recommending that Melancthon test whether the Prophets indeed bear the Holy Spirit. Yet in his statement we see that Luther also departs from mystical theology, when he advises Melancthon to test the 'individual spirit' but fails to question the presence of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we see the importance now placed by Luther on *Anfechtung*, in questioning what 'spiritual distress' the Prophets may have experienced.

While Luther did not immediately attack the Prophets in his letter, he nevertheless very clearly rejected the idea of a baptism by the Holy Spirit. In requesting that Melancthon test the Prophets, he was requesting Melancthon to test both their understanding of God's righteousness and their experience of *Anfechtung*. As the disturbances at Wittenburg worsened, and it became clear to Luther that the Prophets do not adhere to his theology, he lashed out at them in a March 17th letter to Nicholas Hausman:

> The "prophets" who came from your [town] are striving for peculiar things; they are pregnant with monstrosities I do not like... Their spirit is extremely deceitful and specious.[52]

In this statement, it is clear that Luther has rejected the idea of a baptism of the Holy Spirit. The mystics who claim such to be possible and the Saxon Radicals who claim to have experienced such a baptism no longer have the gifts of the Spirit, but rather are 'pregnant with monstrosities.'

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[51] Works 48, 366
[52] Works 48, 401

Luther wrote this letter to Hausman following his return to Wittenburg, and subsequent to his response to Karlstadt's reforms. Luther returned to Wittenburg at the beginning of March 1522, even though Frederick had forbidden his return, because Luther was disturbed by the reforms of Karlstadt and felt responsible for the well being of his congregation:

> I am called by the whole congregation at Wittenburg, in a letter filled with urgent begging and pleading. Since no one can deny that the commotion has its origin in me, and since I confess that I am a humble servant of the congregation to which God has sent me, I had no way of refusing. [53]

Despite the fact that Frederick did not wish Luther to return to Wittenburg, Luther nevertheless successfully controlled a potentially rebellious situation. Luther brought the congregation back under his control and restored order to Wittenburg through the *Invocavit* sermons, which he gave over an eight-day period from March 9th through March 16th. These sermons consist of an attack on the reforms of Karlstadt, on Karlstadt himself, and on the foolishness of both Karlstadt and the congregation for turning the Reformation in the direction of violence. At the onset of the sermons differences between Luther's method of presenting his theology prior to his stay at the Wartburg and his statements within the Invocavit sermons demonstrate a profound change in Luther's view of the Reformation and its relationship to earlier religious movements. In his first sermon on March 9th Luther states, "I was also the very first whom God called to this work" and again, "I was also the one to whom God first revealed that his Word should be

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[53] Works 48, 395

preached to you."[54] Clearly Luther is arguing in these statements that he was the first theologian to arrive at a true understanding of the scripture. Not only is this an attack on the validity of Karlstadt's reforms, which Luther was seeking to undermine, but Luther moreover was no longer relying on past authority for justification of his actions as he had been inclined to do in his responses to both Tauler and Hus. That Luther could so forcefully declare that he was the first to come to these reforms demonstrates a separation from the mystical theology that he had earlier hailed. Continuing his attack on Karlstadt, Luther argues "Here one can see that you do not have the Spirit, even though you have a deep knowledge of the Scripture."[55] He is still employing mystical terminology, but as seen in the January 13th letter, he no longer believes it possible to bear the Spirit, as did the mystics, Muentzer, and the Zwickau Prophets.

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[54] Works 51, 73
[55] Works 51, 74

Lectures on Galatians

Following the edition of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, Luther's *95 Theses*, and the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther began a new series of commentaries on the writings of Saint Paul. As we have seen, editing *Eine Deutsche Theologie* provided Luther with a new understanding of Tauler and German mysticism. The wide dissemination of his *Theses*, and the subsequent debates over it, brought Luther into the public eye and into his role as a Church Reformer. He was now forced to begin to evaluate the consequences of his attack on indulgences. All of these concerns affected the nature and tone of his 1519 commentary on the book of Galatians. Luther would also return to the book of Galatians some 15 years later in 1535, with a new set of lectures on Paul's Epistle appropriate to the time and political situation in which it was written. The 1535 commentary was written under a completely different set of conditions from the first. Luther had already broken with German mysticism and the Saxon Radicals over the concept of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and rather than fearing an imminent attack by the Catholic Church under charges of heresy, as he had in 1519, Luther was now the leader of German Protestantism in Saxony. In so far as they were written at two very different periods of Luther's life, the two separate commentaries illuminate Luther's developing relationship with German mysticism and the ultimate consequences of his rejection of mystical theology. Differences between the two commentaries on Galatians, including their contrasting interpretations of Paul, underscore the theological differences between the pre-Wartburg Luther and the Luther of late reformation Saxony.

Understanding these differences requires further exploration of the political climate surrounding both commentaries. As noted earlier, the 1519 commentary

followed Luther's attack on indulgences and the beginning of the German Reformation. Luther's position during this period was uncertain, as the Church had not condemned his beliefs, but had merely brought them under attack. The commentary was published in the same year of the Leipzig debates, in which Luther was forced to support beliefs maintained by Jan Hus and which were condemned at the council of Constance in 1415. The 1519 commentary was written at a time when Luther's theology had come to fruition but when his political situation was still unclear. His later 1535 commentary represented a more mature and secure position of belief. Luther had sided with the Nobility in condemning the Peasants revolt of 1525. This stance not only firmly established him as a magisterial Reformer, and as we have seen in the last chapter was the culmination of Luther's alienation from and conflict with the Saxon Radicals.

The political situation surrounding Luther's two commentaries affected the manner in which he interpreted the message and character of Saint Paul. Luther, in 1519, still saw himself as a monk, a servant to the people, and one who sought to bring about a clearer understanding of God's Word. Luther was not excommunicated until late in 1519 and was condemned by the Holy Roman Emperor at the Diet of Worms. Up until the Diet of Worms he continued to hope to work for reform from within the Church. Luther's interpretation of Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians reflects his notions about aiding the Church. Thus he stressed the role of Paul as a servant of God and the people: "Here Paul became a Jew with the Jew and weak with the weak, in order to serve them through love until they should become strong in Christ."[56] Luther, in this statement, is essentially presenting Paul as a monk and a preacher, one who like Tauler and like Luther himself merely wishes to preach a true Gospel inspired by the Spirit. After the Leipzig

debate, Luther maintained a growing fear of being charged with heresy, going so far as to cite the fate of Jan Hus at the Council of Constance. The Churchmen had burned Hus as a heretic at Constance despite a writ of safe passage. Therefore when Luther was invited to Rome to present his beliefs, he was hesitant to go, fearing a similar fate. Luther's fear of the charge of Heresy also manifests itself in his commentary of 1519 (6:1).[57] His fears are further evident in a letter he wrote to George Spalatin one year prior to the Diet of Worms:

> I have taught and held all the teachings of John Hus, but thus far I did not know it … Even Paul and Augustine are in reality Hussites … I am so shocked that I do not know what to think when I see such terrible judgements of God over mankind, namely, that the most evangelical truth was burned in public and was already considered condemned more than one hundred years ago.[58]

Luther's association with Hus is clear in this passage, as well as his fear of a similar attack by those who condemned Hus. It is also interesting to note how Luther includes Paul and Augustine as Hussites. Once again Luther attempts to interpret Paul as a kindred spirit, even in associating him with the heresies which Luther himself might soon be charged with.

In 1535 Luther no longer has the fears or concerns that he had in 1519, and his interpretation of Paul reflects his new political situation. Rather than a mere servant spreading the Word, Paul is now interpreted as an authority. This characterization is

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[56] Works 27, 383
[57] Works 27, 389
[58] Works 48, 153

more consistent with Luther's own role as the leader of the Church in Saxony. In Galatians 6:14, Luther writes "At the same time Paul subtly *attacks* the false apostles."[59] This represents a clear difference from Luther's earlier commentary, in which Paul, seen as a servant, had not the authority to attack the other apostles, but could only preach a truer Gospel. The passage from the 1535 commentary also clearly marks the fact that Luther is no longer under attack from the Church as he had been in 1519. By 1535 Luther had developed a more aggressive role: that of attacking the radical Reformers whose theologies did not agree with his own.

The origin of Luther's conflict with the radicals was the Christmas Mass of 1521, which as earlier noted prompted Luther to return to Wittenburg and give the *Invocavit Sermons*. These sermons, along with Luther's actions, were seen by many, including Thomas Muentzer, as a step backwards for the Reformation. Luther maintained that he "simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word,"[60] or in other words Luther maintained that the Gospel supported all of his actions, and that the Gospel would correct errors in Church practice, not the Reformers. Muentzer took the mysticism of Luther one step farther, developing his own interpretation of Tauler's writings, and he maintained, like many mystics before him, that he had had a revelation from God. While Luther argued that the Word, or the Gospel, was the only source of knowledge of God, Muentzer maintained that once a man had experienced a true baptism of the Holy Spirit, he "possesses the word of God nakedly within him and can, therefore, judge all things."[61] Luther, upon breaking with mystical theology, perceived Muentzer as a threat to his own theology, and he attacked Muentzer as being a false bearer of the Holy Spirit. In light of

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[59] Works 27, 136 Italics mine
[60] Works 51, 77

Luther's fear it is clear why he attacks such "false bearers" of the Holy Spirit: "Undoubtedly there were many who defended the false apostles against Paul, saying that they had the Spirit."[62] Referring to the supporters of the apostles who were against Paul, Luther is justifying his own actions following his departure from the Wartburg, including his break with mysticism, and his criticisms of the Peasant's revolt. Luther saw these actions as comparable to Paul's.

Luther's opposition to Muentzer and his attack on individuals claiming to have the Holy Spirit are political consequences of Luther's break with mysticism. But also important are the theological consequences of Luther's break, as can be seen in differences between the two commentaries. As earlier noted, Luther's interpretation of the role of the Holy Spirit changed as his theology evolved. In 1519 the Spirit for Luther was still very much an active force, and Luther maintained that one could "walk in Spirit."[63] In other words, Luther still believed in some form of mystical union with the Spirit. By 1535 this focus had diminished, and Luther now claimed that one did not need to "obey the desires of the Spirit,";[64] one need only "follow the guidance of the Spirit."[65] The difference between the two statements is subtle but nevertheless important: the Spirit is no longer a controlling force, but rather merely a guide for man's resistance to the desires of the flesh. The gradual change in Luther's perception of the Spirit also relates to Luther's conflict with Muentzer and Muentzer's view of the Holy Spirit. Muentzer believed that "the power to do God's will came from the transformation worked in the

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[61] *Thomas Muentzer: A Destroyer of the Godless.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.141
[62] Works 27, 108
[63] Works 27, 365
[64] Works 27, 365
[65] Works 27, 65

elect by the advent of the Holy Spirit."[66] This was a mystical belief that Luther had rejected when he broke with mysticism. By 1535 Luther viewed it as a dangerous and heterorthodox belief. The focus for Luther, in 1535, is no longer on the Spirit and its relationship to Luther's Christological theology. Rather, the total depravity of man has now become his central theme. Passages used to justify a union with the Spirit in 1519 are now used by Luther to argue that the spirit is the foil to the flesh in a conflict of faith. Despite such a conflict, man without Grace cannot perform meritous acts.[67]

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[66] *Thomas Muentzer: A Destroyer of the Godless.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.141
[67] Works 27, 77-79, 365-367

Conclusions

Martin Luther's magisterial reforms, and his break from the Roman Catholic Church, effectively ended a Catholic monopoly on Religion in Western Europe. Following the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, those reforms led to a system of state run churches in Germany, with the individual Princes determining the faith of their region. Luther's actions, beginning with his attack on the sale of indulgences, touched off over one hundred years of Religious unrest[68] throughout Europe. The conflict was not one limited to a struggle between Protestants and Catholics, but as dramatized by the Peasant's revolt of 1525, Luther faced a two-fronted conflict, with the Roman Catholic Church on the one side and the Radical Reformers on the other. Although Luther was both excommunicated by the Pope and condemned as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles I, there was no immediate violent conflict between Catholics and the growing number of reformers. It was not until after the Wittenburg disturbances and the Peasant's revolt of 1525 that wars began to break out between Catholic and Protestant rulers. Such a sequence of events might indicate that Luther's reforms were not truly seen as a threat until after the radical Reformers had become a prominent force in Germany.

It is clear that Luther's conflict with the Radical Reformers began with the Wittenburg disturbances and Karlstadt's reforms in Wittenburg. The radicals, such as Thomas Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets, came into conflict with Luther's theology, in part due to a misconception of Luther's relationship with mysticism. At the very time that Muentzer began to view Luther as a "friend of the Spirit," Luther had already

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[68] In 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia ended the 30yrs war, which had decimated the German countryside

experienced, or was in the process of experiencing, his critical theological break with mysticism. His *Operationes in Psalmos*, which contained the first clear statement of Luther's rejection of mysticism, was not published until after he had already entered the Wartburg, and it probably was not widely read until after the Wittenburg unrest had already begun. The misconception that Luther was still a friend of mystical theology partly prompted the Zwickau Prophets to journey to Wittenburg, and it also prompted Muentzer's appeal to Luther for theological advice prior to Luther's *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, which condemned the Radical Reformers. Luther attacked Karlstadt and the Prophets for the disturbances that they caused at Wittenburg and elsewhere, and while his criticisms were political and methodological in nature, they stemmed directly from his rejection of mystical theology.

The crucial importance of Luther's rejection of mystical theology was not its impact on his own theology, though his rejection of mysticism did coincide with his clarification of the doctrine of God's righteousness. The importance of the rejection instead lay in its alienation of the radical Reformers who previously viewed Luther as an ally. Luther discovered Tauler and *Eine Deutsche Theologie* at a point when all of the language of his theology, if not the crucial understanding which would lead him to his idea of righteousness, was already in place. Thus Luther, in reading Tauler and editing *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, approached mysticism with already formed theological beliefs.

In contrast such reformers as Thomas Muentzer, who read Luther's editions of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* along with Tauler's sermons, made a study of mysticism while their theological beliefs were still forming. This allowed the mysticism present in Tauler to influence the development of Muentzer's theology in a way in which Luther's beliefs

were never affected. Although Luther could safely abandon mystical theology without truly undermining his own beliefs, the doctrines of Muentzer and the Zwickau Prophets were intimately tied up with those of Tauler and mysticism.

As seen in the examination of Luther's second edition of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, it was the fact that Luther's theology was not so closely linked to that of Tauler's as Luther had once thought which caused Luther to break from mysticism in the first place. If Luther could not even except the differences between Tauler's theology and his own, then his reaction to the Wittenburg disturbances should not be surprising. Luther's unwillingness to compromise his theology was evident throughout his life. Such unwillingness was manifested in his response to Zwingli at the Marbourg Colloquy, wherein he refused to compromise his theological beliefs, or seek middle ground with those of Zwingli. This unwillingness was also first clearly seen, not at the Diet of Worms, but rather in Luther's *Invocavit* sermons and his response to the Wittenburg unrest. It would be interesting, in this connection, to study Luther's later career in relation to the events surrounding his earlier break with mysticism. He does make reference to his experiences with the radicals in his biographical fragment, but his rejection of mysticism might still illuminate his later correspondence and lectures.

As seen in discussing the differences between Luther's first series of lectures on Galatians and his later lectures, Luther's political position and power vastly changed over a ten-year period. His rejection of mysticism, and his corresponding relationship with the radical Reformers are central to Luther's emerging role as a magisterial Reformer. The period between Luther's discovery of Tauler and his *Invocavit* Sermons is the period of

his most profound theological growth. It is also the period in which his political role as a reformer underwent the most significant changes.

Luther was as a monk never concerned with politics, nor the political considerations necessary or a reform of Church practices, and as such did not enter the role of Church Reformer as a reformer of practice, but rather as a reformer of doctrine. It was not until after witnessing the response to his *95 Theses* that Luther began to fully realize the political consequences of his actions, but even then he remained true to his theological considerations, as is shown at the Diet of Worms. Luther did not foresee the political consequences of his rejection of mysticism, nor could he have been aware of his link to Thomas Muentzer through his support of mystical theology, until he had already broken away from mysticism. The Wittenburg unrest, and Luther's conflict with the Radicals, compromised Luther's first major theological conflict with a group not associated with the Roman Catholic Church. The conflict also compromised the first true test of Luther's ability to make the Reformation viable from a political standpoint in Wittenburg. It is fitting then that this first major trial of Luther's reforms, arose out of a situation essentially created by Luther himself. Luther revived in the 16th century German mysticism, which was adopted by the Radicals. He then proceeded to reject the very same mysticism which he had sought to revive. Finally he condemned the Radicals who had read the works, which he had earlier encouraged all German theologians to read, and embrace as true theology.

Glossary

Christological Theology (Theology of the Cross): Varying Christian faiths focus on differing elements of the Bible when developing their theologies. For example some focus on the works of God and see him as the crucial figure in the course of human history, while other's focus on the importance of the teachings of Christ. Luther's Theology of the Cross focuses on the actual event of Christ's crucifixion as the center point of Christian religion. This theology maintains that Christians must contemplate the suffering of Christ and the Sacrifice made by Christ in order to attain true faith. Furthermore such a theology stresses the fact that Christ died to cleanse Christians of their sins, and it was the act of crucifixion which represented this cleansing.

Doctrine of Good Works: The Catholic doctrine of good works is embodied in the sacrament of penance which maintains that a person must perform good deeds as a counter balance to sins committed in life. A person could only gain salvation through the commission of good works.

Humanism: Humanism was a Renaissance movement that focused on the abilities and talents of mankind. Humanist art was realistic, attempting to show the human form, as opposed to the abstraction of medieval art. Humanist Philosophers revived Plato, and other Greek philosophers lost to the Scholastics, and attempted applying human reason and moral philosophy to the medieval world. Humanism stressed secular concerns over religious philosophy.

Magisterial Reformer: The Magisterial Reformers were Church Reformers who worked with the local Government, the magistrates, to bring about Reform. The three most prominent Magisterial Reformers were martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. They tended to be more successful in reforming the Church than the Radical Reformers, as they had the support of their local magistrates when bringing about reform.

Mysticism: A theological approach to bring oneself closer to an understanding of God, focusing on the ability in mankind to have a complete understanding of the nature of God. The mystics argued that mankind could, in a sense become perfect "godlike" beings. (A teaching of Meister Eckhart condemned by the Catholic Church) The process of coming to such an understanding of God was neo-platonic (see below) in nature and focused on "forcing" the Holy Spirit to enter the Abyss of the Soul (see Seelengrund). The mystics condemned focusing on the secular world, praising spiritual contemplation above all else, and arguing for personal detachment from the secular world.

Neo-Platonism: A philosophy that focuses and attempts to revive the philosophical writings of Plato, namely his approach to the concept of God and the soul wherein he established a method of bringing oneself closer to God. Often attacked by the Church Reformers of the 15th century as having routes n Paganism, and therefore inappropriate for Christian theology.

Scholasticism: The name for the orthodox study of theology during the middle ages, based on the writings of Aristotle, Church Fathers such as Augustine and Thomas a' Kempis, and the scripture. Scholasticism fell under attack by Luther and the other reformers for its use of Aristotle (a pagan philosopher), its focus on the writings of the Church Fathers (as opposed to the Scripture), and its use of rhetoric in the discussion of theological issues.

Seelengrund (Abyss of the soul): This mystical concept maintains that there is a void within the soul of every human which can only be filled by the Holy Spirit, or in other words that a person's soul could only be made complete through the entrance of God into that person. The mystics spoke of forcing the Holy spirit into this void through meditation, devotion, and one's detachment from the secular world.

Sola Fide: Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone, as opposed to the doctrine of good works. This doctrine maintained that Christ predestined those intended for salvation, and that the performance of good deeds played no roll in a person's salvation. The only way to achieve salvation was therefore through faith in Jesus Christ.

Sola Scriptura: The second most important of Luther's doctrines attacked the Catholic idea that a church council could decide matters of faith. Instead Luther argued that the only source of orthodoxy was the bible, and thus any theology that could not be justified through the reading of the scripture was unorthodox.

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