

Valentin Weigel. *Zwei nützliche Traktate, Bericht zur "Deutschen Theologie": Die vernünfftige Kreatur.*

Ed. Horst Pfefferl. Valentin Weigel: Sämtliche Schriften 1. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2012. lx + 132 pp. €386. ISBN: 978-3-7728-1840-0.

Volume 1 of Valentin Weigel's *Sämtliche Schriften (Neue Edition)* is the tenth to appear in an edition five volumes short of completion at fifteen volumes, with the editor's revised dissertation to be added to the set. It supersedes the inadequate earlier edition of Winfried Zeller, which was discontinued after his death. The present slender volume is especially noteworthy since it offers seminal insight into Weigel's neglected importance as a complex speculative, devotional, and mystical author, long overlooked in the margins between disciplines and between Renaissance and Reformation studies.

This volume comprises the earliest extant writings from the years 1570 and 1571. Compiled soon after Weigel arrived in his life-long position as town pastor of Zschopau in Saxony, *Two Useful Treatises* and *Report on the "Theologia Germanica"* cite and incorporate several key sources of his enterprise: the medieval mystical sermons of Eckhart and Tauler, the *Theologia Deutsch*, the impulses of Reformation dissenters like Sebastian Franck, the nature philosophy of Paracelsus, and above all Martin Luther. Channels of dissent and devotion link Weigel with seventeenth-century Pietism and mysticism and with currents that stemmed from them and merged into romanticism and German idealism. Weigel therefore embodies the continuity of German literature and thought over the course of a half millenium. His work establishes that the great flowering of German intellectual life around 1800 had roots in the literature of the Middle Ages 500 years earlier. From Eckhart to Hegel, the thread was never broken. No less significant, the new volume confirms the key role of Weigel's anticlerical motives in the emergence of his dissenting theory: "Es wirdt *disputirt*, vntter den falschen *Theologen*, von den Wercken, oder mitwircken . . . Ob der Mensch durch freyhen Willen, möge mit wircken, daß er die Neue geburth, oder Seeligkeit erlange" (15). It soon becomes clear that "the false theologians" are not the Philippists or the Gnesio Lutherans, but rather the entire quarreling ranks of academic theologians and church authorities, against whom Weigel sets the speculative mystical criteria of reflection and renunciation. These he posits or concedes as the refuge for a laity hard-pressed by clerical authoritarianism.

Weigel's corollaries in the realm of cosmology and anticlericalism are to be made more accessible in the coming volumes of the new edition devoted to the author's *On the Place of the World* and his *Dialogus de Christianismo*. Although all of the abovementioned writings were contained in Zeller's discontinued edition, it has been greatly surpassed by the new edition. Because of the research of his dissertation, Pfefferl could draw on a much more complete corpus of manuscripts. Incorporating their variants in lettered notations and cross-references to the full Weigelian and pseudo-Weigelian corpus, as well as well-selected external sources in numbered notes, Pfefferl's edition is a model for editorial work of this kind.

It is also an inspiration for all who believe in the philological foundation of literary studies and intellectual history. What is not said in Pfefferl's modest introductions to his edition — but needs to be said on behalf of its significance in the history of ideas — is that it offers testimony to the need for a large-scale recontextualization of sixteenth-century studies, which have been poorly served by our academic disciplinary distinctions between church history on the one hand and secular-minded Renaissance studies on the other. This imposed dichotomy has meant that nonconformists like Weigel have been pigeonholed into invented categories such as that of Spiritualism or mysticism and thereby defined as peripheral figures of the Reformation, whereas their anticlericalism and their radical rethinking of authority would be better understood as a salient pointing from the late Middle Ages toward the impulses of the Enlightenment. Weigel's questioning of external and institutional authorities and transferral of the locus of truth and rebirth to the inner human being have roots that extend back to Saint Augustine and ancient philosophy. The achievement of Pfefferl's edition with its ample documentation of sources is to show that the Enlightenment's rebellion against traditions and institutions was anticipated not by a sleepwalking ecstatic but by a thinker of clarity and deliberation in the case of Weigel.

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