Comenius and Spener—this subject has recently attracted little interest, although several researchers pointed out quite early numerous parallels in the reform models of both theologians. For Dmitrij Tshižewskij, Comenius was the decisive “forerunner” and “stimulator” of a religious renewal movement in Europe.¹ Joseph Theodor Müller also remarked that it seemed as though both Comenius and Spener promoted public meetings that were designed to contribute to an engagement with the biblical text and its exegesis, an idea that, thus, established Pietism as a socially tangible movement.² Johannes Wallmann’s study on Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus provided new impulses into the discussion about the origins of Pietist ecclesiology. In 1986, he determined that Comenius could have influenced the formation of conventicles,³ but then expressed his view that one could go no further here than speculation.⁴ The unresolved research problems thus touch

equally upon the question of the beginnings of Pietism as well as upon the question of its nature. Another investigation of the sources can uncover insights that can bring us further along with regard to these questions.

I.

In 1670, at the suggestion of a number of academics in the free imperial city of Frankfurt, a new and groundbreaking form of devotional meeting took place within the Lutheran Church. The Senior of the Frankfurt clergy, Philipp Jakob Spener, supported the academics’ concerns, and exerted an influence on the further development of these private exercises by providing his parsonage on Sunday and Wednesday afternoons for the meetings at which fifteen to twenty persons were present.\(^5\) The establishment of a devotional circle was the most controversial action during Spener’s period of activity in Frankfurt.\(^6\) In 1675, in the face of numerous attacks against him, he considered the collegium pietatis to be an ecclesiastical institution for the reform of church and society, justified this view theologically, and integrated it into his reform program.

At the beginning, the meetings aimed at the foundation of a “holy friendship” among their participants.\(^7\) The character of the meetings changed fundamentally when social restrictions were dropped and access to the collegium was granted to all congregational members.\(^8\) In 1671, in a letter to his former fellow student, Balthasar Bebel in Strassburg, Spener gave a detailed report about the activities in Frankfurt and the participants in the meetings, who— upon this he placed special emphasis— came from different social strata.\(^9\) The second reshaping of the meetings took place at the end of 1674, and the beginning of 1675, when the members laid aside their devotional-dogmatic works and devoted themselves

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\(^5\) Wallmann, \textit{Spener} (see above, n. 3), p. 278.
\(^8\) Wallmann, \textit{Spener} (see above, n. 3), pp. 290–298.
\(^9\) “Intersunt autem numero non adeo multi, sed non unius ordinis viri, docti, indocti.” Spener, \textit{Briefe} (see above, n. 6), p. 325, line 47–48.