TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Students and scholars of Reformation and Early Modern Europe have been well served in recent years by able translators, who have made important German works by Peter Blickle, Bernd Moeller, Heinz Schilling and others available to English readers. Some of the other leading German spokespersons in the field, however, have remained less accessible. On anyone's list of regrettable omissions, several studies by Berndt Hamm (Professor for Historical Theology, Erlangen) would surely find a place. Despite Hamm's contribution on "The Urban Reformation in the Holy Roman Empire" in the recent Handbook of European History, 1400-1600, and an article on the doctrine of justification in the newly published The German Reformation: The Essential Readings, access to both the core and defining parameters of his scholarship has been hindered by a German in which syntactic and stylistic complexities present formidable obstacles. The following translation seeks to bridge some of the gap by presenting a programmatic article in which Hamm summarizes and extends two decades of developing insights on the "theology of piety" and "normative centering"—two terms which, in the manifest awkwardness of their translation, warrant some preliminary remarks.

Hamm's own summary of his research and use of the term "theology of piety" (Frömmigkeistheologie) need no further elaboration here, other than the warning that with Frömmigkeit
he intends more than we might usually associate with 'piety' or 'devotional practice': Frömigkeit is "the practical realization of religion—of modes of believing, proclaiming, teaching, forming ideas, conceiving and articulating values, fears, hopes, etc.—in such a way that daily life is formed and informed by it." A diverse group of late medieval authors and artists (newly discussed in this article) sought to direct their discourse to the level of those who lacked advanced theological training in pursuit of the common goal of comforting the soul and ensuring its salvation. This program lies at the heart of what Hamm designates as Frömigkeitstheologie. Because authors within the Modern Devotion (Deo dio moderna) are but one of several groups included as spokespersons for the program of Frömigkeitstheologie, I have chosen to avoid the more elegant rendering, "devotional theology," a term that is sometimes associated with the specific program of Jean Gerson and that always risks conjuring up the Deo dio moderna at the expense of other contemporaries. If the term "theology of piety" results in more than a few transgressions against the commandments of style, perhaps indulgence may be granted for the sake of the concept's integrity.

Precisely the opposite stance has been taken with normative Zentrierung, which will be translated as "normative centering" and is defined below as "the alignment of both religion and society towards a standardizing, authoritative, regulating and legitimizing focal point." The English abstract of Hamm's 1993 German article on this theme was surely incorrect in its translation of the term as "normative centralisation;" however, Thomas A. Brady, Jr. was surely correct in rendering the concept as, "the concentration of norms," offering a descriptive rather than literal translation. Brady's choice, however, has proven impractical here: whereas his brief summary required that bulky nominative only twice, in the following "normative centering" recurs repeatedly and plays varying syntactic roles. Thus stylistic considerations, along with the reception of Hamm's term among German scholars, inform our choice. Zentrierung as 'centering' in this article often accompanies equivalents such as concentration, reduction, simplification, standardization, focusing, consolidation, and the like.

The translation of both terms has become all the more significant, given recent evidence that both the "theology of piety" and "normative centering" have been assimilated into the discourse of the field. In his magisterial account and handbook of medieval religiosity, Arnold Angenendt has ranked Hamm's elaboration of the "theology of piety" among those concepts which best describe the "epochs and movements" of the roughly 1000 years spanning the Germanic conversions and the beginnings of the European Reformation. Angenendt aptly pinpoints the core, and recognizes the implications, of Hamm's research: "The task of theology was to address issues of piety, especially that of the unlearned... Most important, the influence of the 'theology of piety' was felt at all levels of thought within the church, and that had consequences for the average Christian as much as it did for those at universities and in monasteries." To be sure, Hamm acknowledges that his characterization of the fifteenth century as an "era of piety" represents only one way of conceptualizing a large body of sources. Nevertheless, the value of his interpretive model will be evident to all those who have been faced