

LUTHER AND THE DISSIDENT SECTS OF THE  
SIXTEENTH CENTURY

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
University of Manitoba



In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
Harry Loewen  
April, 1961

## PREFACE

For quite a number of years I have been familiar with two views concerning Luther's relationship to the dissident sects of the sixteenth century. The one emphasized Luther's righteous struggle against fanatics who maliciously attempted to thwart the Reformer's cause; the other looked upon the dissenters as more or less innocent people who merely proposed to live in accordance with biblical precepts and who on account of this, had to suffer persecution at the hands of the leading Reformers. This thesis is the outcome of my desire to examine the validity of these contrasting views. The result of my research--and I do not pretend to having made any particular "contribution to knowledge"--tends to point to a synthesis of the two approaches to the problem.

At the outset of the thesis an attempt has been made to discover the reason for Luther's hostile attitude towards the dissident sects. From the data it should become evident that his conversion experience and his subsequent theology led Luther to believe in having discovered the true Gospel; and since he considered himself to be the prophet of this newly acquired truth, opposition to him became opposition to God. At first, however, Luther's principles of sola fide and sola scriptura, which he had advocated in all of his earlier writings, were hailed by various individuals and groups and

Luther became the hero and acknowledged leader of the radical movement in Europe. But to their dismay, the radicals soon discovered that Luther began to yield to various circumstances and considerations and refused to go "all the way" in his reform drives. In addition, some groups found that the one-sided emphasis of justification by faith alone added nothing to the betterment of Luther's followers. To top it all off, the splintering nature of Protestantism made cooperation between the various sects and Luther impossible.

Luther's changed attitude towards radical reform efforts became apparent in his encounter with the Wittenberg radicals in 1521. The rashness and image-breaking of his colleagues must have convinced the Reformer that some of his pronouncements in favour of change were dangerously unwise. Fearing for the safety of his cause, he turned against his friends who were merely applying his theories to concrete situations. Thomas Muentzer and the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 further increased Luther's suspicion of the whole radical movement. This initial encounter with enthusiasts and fanatics is important, for when Luther after 1525 came in touch with the peaceful Anabaptists, who had very little in common with Muentzer and Carlstadt, he found it difficult to distinguish between these and the more revolutionary groups. The Muenster episode in 1535-36 only confirmed his former view that all dissenters were bent on destroying all order in society, and

that even a peaceful Anabaptist was a rebel in disguise.

As a result of his untoward experiences with the radicals, Luther neutralized his earlier pleas for tolerance and religious liberty. At first he had advocated that only arguments and the Word of God should be employed against heretics, for, he thought, the truth would prevail at all time. When he found, however, that the "battle of the spirits" might turn to his disadvantage, the Reformer counselled coercion in spiritual matters and even agreed to the execution of heretics. In connection with liberty of conscience an attempt has also been made to determine whether certain sects were truly tolerant as some sympathizers of the radical movement have claimed. After the completion of the thesis Joseph Lecler's Toleration and the Reformation has come to my attention. The work is an excellent review of the subject, but Lecler's conclusions are in essential agreement with mine.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, most historians have disregarded the case of Anabaptism. But since then some writers have gone to the other extreme and have condemned Luther for his attitude and action. The concluding chapter, therefore, takes issue with this change in historical writing. It is an attempt to vindicate the dissident sects on the one hand, and to lend a sympathetic ear to Luther on the other. I have thus sincerely endeavored to be fair to both Luther and the radicals, but if my sympathies should be found



slightly on the side of some of the Anabaptists, this, I trust, may be excused in view of my tradition and background.

A word should be added concerning the notes in the thesis. In view of the great number of references, it has been found advisable to place them at the end of each chapter. The following two works have been abbreviated throughout the notes:

SWEA . . . Dr. Martin Luthers Saemmtliche Werke,  
Erlangen Ausgabe, 1826 -.

MQR . . . The Mennonite Quarterly Review.

In conclusion I should like to express my gratitude to several persons without whom it would have been impossible to complete this thesis. I am especially indebted to my adviser, Dr. T. J. Oleson, for his kind suggestions, criticism as well as encouragement in my work. The other members of the committee, Dr. K. W. Maurer and Father V. J. Jensen, have also offered helpful suggestions. Miss Charlotte Janzen, who spent much time in typing the thesis, also deserves a word of acknowledgement.

Harry Loewen

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	ii
Chapter	
I. THE BACKGROUND FOR LUTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DISSIDENT SECTS . . . . .	1
Luther's Conversion Experience . . . . .	1
Luther's Early Writings . . . . .	8
NOTES TO CHAPTER I . . . . .	18
II. THE DISSIDENT SECTS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY . . . . .	24
Definition of Terms and Classification . . . . .	24
The Question of Origins . . . . .	30
Reasons for Opposing the Reformers . . . . .	33
NOTES TO CHAPTER II . . . . .	37
III. LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE WITTENBERG RADICALS, I . . . . .	42
Conservatism versus Radicalism . . . . .	42
Increasing Radicalism and Luther's Reaction . . . . .	50
NOTES TO CHAPTER III . . . . .	62
IV. LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE WITTENBERG RADICALS, II . . . . .	68
Luther's Treatment of Carlstadt . . . . .	68
The Sacramental Controversy . . . . .	74
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV . . . . .	85
V. LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY RADICALS . . . . .	90
Luther's Ideas Concerning Authority Prior to 1525 . . . . .	90
Thomas Muentzer and Luther . . . . .	96
Muentzer's Increasing Radicalism . . . . .	102
Luther and the Peasants' Revolt . . . . .	108
NOTES TO CHAPTER V . . . . .	119

Chapter	Page
VI. LUTHER AND THE EVANGELICAL ANABAPTISTS, I	127
Origins and Spread of Anabaptism . . .	127
Luther's Early Contact with Anabaptism . . . . .	132
Anabaptism and Revolutionary Radicalism . . . . .	136
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI . . . . .	145
VII. LUTHER AND THE EVANGELICAL ANABAPTISTS, II	151
Adult versus Infant Baptism . . . . .	151
State Church versus Free Church . . .	159
Dogma versus Morals . . . . .	164
NOTES TO CHAPTER VII . . . . .	170
VIII. LUTHER AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ANABAPTISTS	177
The Anabaptist Kingdom in Muenster .	177
Luther's Attitude Towards the Muenster Episode . . . . .	186
Anabaptism and Muensterism . . . . .	189
NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII . . . . .	197
IX. LUTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SPIRITUAL- ISTS, ANTINOMIANS AND ANTITRINI- TARIANS . . . . .	203
The Spiritualists--the Inner versus the Outer Word . . . . .	203
Luther's Struggle with the Anti- nomians . . . . .	211
Luther and the Antitrinitarians . . .	215
NOTES TO CHAPTER IX . . . . .	220
X. LUTHER AND THE RADICALS ON TOLERANCE AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY . . . . .	226
Luther Advocates Tolerance . . . . .	226
Luther's Changed Views on Tolerance .	229
The Radicals and Tolerance . . . . .	235
NOTES TO CHAPTER X . . . . .	243

Chapter	Page
XI. CONCLUSION . . . . .	249
Vindication of the Dissident Sects . .	249
An Attempt at Synthesis . . . . .	252
NOTES TO CHAPTER XI . . . . .	257
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	259

## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND FOR LUTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DISSIDENT SECTS

#### Luther's Conversion Experience

In order to understand Luther's attitude towards the radicals of his time, one must be familiar with the Reformer's individualistic experience in the monastery and his subsequent theology.<sup>1</sup> This experience and theology led to Luther's early writings and his rebellion against the dogma of the Church;<sup>2</sup> his example and writings had in turn a powerful impact on other men and groups, who inversely, for various reasons, were led to rebel against the originator of the Protestant movement. Luther, through his experience bound in his conscience, could not help but oppose these dissenters. The vicious circle was thus complete.

Although Luther's conversion experience was the result of his emotional disposition,<sup>3</sup> several factors led up to it. The Brethren of the Common Life, with whom he had studied in Magdeburg (1497 - 1498), taught him to believe in the sinfulness of man;<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine's doctrine of predestination, which Luther, no doubt, found in The City of God, intensified his feeling of despondency;<sup>5</sup> and his unsuccessful attempt to find peace of soul, led him to believe in the total depravity of man, which to him was the result of original sin.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Luther was brought into close touch with the mysticism of his

Vicar General Staupitz, who pointed the struggling man to the love of Christ. In his most popular book, On the Love of God, Staupitz urges men to love God, to experience him not by the dead letter, but by the revelation of the Spirit of God in the heart of man.<sup>7</sup> Luther confessed later that it was Staupitz who had helped him through his trying years.<sup>8</sup> The Vicar General, however, was deeply grieved when Luther went to excesses.<sup>9</sup>

Countless men and women before Luther had entered the monastery to make satisfaction for sin, to fulfill a vow, or to dedicate their lives to the love of God. Countless men and women before the Reformer had gone through the agonies of soul; but through the media of prayer, the sacraments, or even mysticism, they had resolved their spiritual problems. Luther, for certain reasons, failed to find peace. Boehmer comments on this:

The one thing, therefore, that distinguishes Luther from the great mass of ascetics is simply the fact that all the means of quieting such doubts provided for by the old monastic teachers not only failed but rather had a completely opposite effect; that is, they merely increased his inner distress and anxiety.<sup>10</sup>

In his commentary on Galatians in 1531, Luther reflected on these years in the monastery: ". . . I devoted myself entirely to fasting, vigils, prayers, the reading of Masses, etc. Meanwhile, however, I constantly fostered mistrust, doubt, fear, hatred. . . . All Christ, for Luther, was a fear-inspiring judge, sitting on a rainbow ready to execute judgement.

He feared him more than the devil. "I could not call upon Him," he wrote in 1537, "nay could not even bear to hear His name mentioned."<sup>12</sup>

Luther's inner break-through occurred probably in 1514<sup>13</sup> when he lectured on the books of the Bible. The biblical phrase, "the righteousness of God," instilled terror into his heart until he read in one of the Old Testament Prophets,<sup>14</sup> that "the just shall live by his faith." "From this passage I concluded," he commented later, "that life must be derived from faith. . . . then the entire Holy Scripture became clear to me."<sup>15</sup> God's righteousness now became for Luther a quality which God imputes to sinful man without man's doing in any sense, solely on account of Christ's substitutionary suffering and death.<sup>16</sup>

With his experience Luther had not brought back the concept of "grace" as contrasted to the "law" of Roman Catholicism, for the Catholic Church had a highly developed doctrine of grace.<sup>17</sup> But in Catholicism the Church had the power to bring down the grace of God through the channels of the sacraments. Luther, however, was unable to obtain satisfaction and peace of mind through these media; he experienced the grace of God directly from above, without, as he called it, "the works of man."<sup>18</sup> It is thus a Christo-centric experience that lies at the basis of Luther's theology of the cross as well as his conception of God's direct working in

the heart of man.<sup>19</sup>

Luther's sense of having grasped the full truth was so strong, that he did not shrink from identifying his subsequent teaching with that of the Gospel of Christ. Concerning his doctrine of justification by faith alone he wrote:

Since I am sure of it, I shall through it be your judge and the judge of angels, as St. Paul says (Gal. 1:8), so that he who does not embrace my doctrine cannot be saved. For it is God's doctrine and not my own; therefore, the judgement, too, is God's and not mine.<sup>20</sup>

In a letter of December 22, 1525 to Duke George of Saxony, Luther wrote that no one, including Duke George, will be able to quench his gospel. It will accomplish its divine work, for it is not his but God's.<sup>21</sup> To Chancellor Brueck he wrote on August 5, 1530:

God cannot forget us, he must needs first forget himself. For that would mean our cause were not his cause and our word not his word. But we are convinced and are without doubt that it is his cause and his word, and thus our prayer is surely heard and help is at hand.<sup>22</sup>

In view of his sola fide principle it is not surprising that Luther in his later years was unable to tolerate any person, group or system which refused to subscribe fully to his type of theology.

As a result of his experience Luther not only began to emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but he also deduced from this conversion his principle of sola scriptura. Since Luther had received the "light" from the Word of God, it followed that nothing could count besides Scripture as



far as spiritual matters were concerned.

The Bible became his foundation, his weapon, his court of appeal, and his very life--provided it agreed with his experience of justification by faith alone. Thus the conscience of man, or one's individual interpretation of the Bible, and the Word of God almost became synonymous. "To act against conscience," Luther pronounced in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, "is not allowed. Neither bishop nor pope, nor any man whatever, has the right to prescribe a single syllable to any Christian, even with his own consent."<sup>23</sup> For the Reformer, conscience was freed from obedience to anything contrary to the Bible. Conscience, therefore, led Luther to break with the Catholic Church in favour of his own interpretation of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> But in interpreting the Bible, Luther, of course, would not agree that he read his own experience into it. He was convinced that he interpreted Scripture by the spirit of the Word.<sup>25</sup> In 1521 he wrote: "I have no wish to be known as a man more learned than others, but I wish Scripture to be sovereign, and not interpreted according to my mind or the mind of another, but interpreted by itself in its own spirit."<sup>26</sup>

The Catholic Church was by no means unfamiliar with the idea of the authority of Scripture and its full inspiration; through the centuries the Bible had been regarded as authoritative in matters of faith and morals.<sup>27</sup> Luther's quarrel with the Church was that it did not interpret Scripture according to,

what he thought, was its plain sense, thinking, no doubt, of his doctrine of justification by faith alone. Quite disturbed about this, he wrote that the Catholics "treat the Scriptures and make out of them what they like, as if they were a nose of wax, to be pulled about at will."<sup>28</sup> The right of interpretation, however, Luther granted to others as well, but he believed that all Christians of good-will would of necessity arrive at his own interpretation of Bible truths.<sup>29</sup> There is much truth in Vedder's assertion, that the Reformer had merely changed the submission to authority of one kind to an authority of another kind, namely, from an authority of the Church to an authority of princes and his own interpretation of Scripture.<sup>30</sup>

The significance of Luther's conversion experience and his subsequent theology, cannot be overestimated. The principles of sola fide and sola scriptura led without premeditation on the part of Luther to all consequent activity, the internal organization of the Lutheran Church, and questions with regard to Church and state.<sup>31</sup> If these newly acquired principles were contradicted by any man, authority, system or sect, Luther not for a moment doubted that he was right and all others wrong.<sup>32</sup> For him "the doctrine of justification by faith alone was to the end of life the sum and substance of the gospel, the heart of theology, the central truth of Christianity, the article of the standing or falling church."<sup>33</sup> In an exposition in 1532, Luther stated that only those who understand and teach the article of justification by faith alone, may be considered true theologians.

"Few there are," he continued, "who have thought it through well and who teach it aright."<sup>34</sup> In his lectures on Galatians in 1531, he brings this thought out very forcefully. "If the article of justification is lost," he asserts, "all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. And all the people in the world who do not hold to this justification are either Jews, or Turks, or papists, or heretics."<sup>35</sup>

Not only did Luther consider the opponents of his gospel as the very enemies of God, but it is also undeniable that he carried a Protestant spirit into his version of the Bible.<sup>36</sup> His central doctrine became the standard of value for all the biblical books.<sup>37</sup> The word "alone" was inserted in Romans 3:28 in spite of all outcries to the contrary. Those books of the New Testament<sup>38</sup> which contradicted his doctrine, were not regarded as fully inspired.<sup>39</sup> Concerning the book of James, for example, Luther wrote: "Here at Wittenberg we nearly thrust James out of the Bible." And again: "Some day I will use James to heat my stove."<sup>40</sup> In his Preface to the Epistle of James Luther gives his reasons for not including the book of James in the Canon:

Firstly, because it directs opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible, it ascribes justification to works, and declares that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered up his son. . . . Secondly, because in the whole length of its teaching, not once does it give Christians any instruction or reminder of the passion, resurrection, or spirit of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

For Luther, then, it was impossible to reconcile St. Paul who

emphasizes the doctrine of faith, with St. James who advocates works in addition to faith; if someone could do it for him, Luther challenged his table companions, he would consent to being called a fool.<sup>42</sup>

### Luther's Early Writings

When Luther on October 31, 1517 nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, he gave expression to his conversion experience and his subsequent theology. The stir his Theses created was great. Eager students seized upon them, translated them into German, and, without the Reformer's consent, published them.<sup>43</sup> In a letter to Pope Leo X in 1518, Luther stated that his Theses were intended for disputation only and not for the public. "I therefore published a list of theses," he wrote, "and invited only the more scholarly to a discussion with me, if they so wished. This should be obvious even to my adversaries, from the preface to those very theses."<sup>44</sup> He then went on to explain that they were not doctrines, and had he known or foreseen the commotion they would stir up, he would have taken the necessary precautions.

However sincerely Luther may have asserted that the purpose of his Theses was purely academic in character, there can be little doubt that he intended that his new gospel should penetrate to the people.<sup>45</sup> He must have known, no doubt,

that the content of his proposed disputation would have become known to the public. That Luther had these thoughts in mind is seen from the fact, that on the same afternoon he preached in the historic church itself on the substance of his contention: Indulgences and Grace.<sup>46</sup> Then also, after the subject had become a public issue, the Reformer plunged into the battle with zeal and vigor, not tiring of writing, teaching, preaching and disputing. He soon kept three printing presses entirely occupied.<sup>47</sup> By 1521 Luther had progressed to such an extent, that his humble submission which he had expressed in his letter to Pope Leo X,<sup>48</sup> had given way to outright rebellion.<sup>49</sup>

In the year 1520 Luther published three major pamphlets, which were to become destructive to the established authority of the Church and influential in the formation and strengthening of various sects. The first of these pamphlets, To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,<sup>50</sup> was completed on July 20, and before August 18, more than four thousand copies--an enormous number for those days--were published and a new edition was called for.<sup>51</sup> Its influence in a world of turmoil will be more fully appreciated after a brief review of its content.

Luther begins by stating that since the clergy is not in a position to bring about a reformation of the Church, the German nobility should be moved by the plight of Christendom

and do something about it to relieve it.<sup>52</sup> He then goes on to destroy what he calls the "three walls" of the papacy: That the spiritual power is above secular authority; that the pope alone may interpret the text of the Bible; that the pope alone may call a general council.<sup>53</sup> The "first wall" Luther attacks by stating that all Christians are spiritual since all have received baptism as well as the Gospel of Christ. The only difference between the clergy and laity is that of administration or function.<sup>54</sup> Since God has ordained the secular powers to punish the wicked and reward the pious, the magistrates have the right and it is even their duty to discipline wicked popes as well.<sup>55</sup> The "second wall" of the papacy Luther attacks by asserting that all Christians may interpret the Bible, for the Spirit of God dwells in all.<sup>56</sup> The "third wall" falls automatically with the first two. Since all baptized Christians are in truth priests and bishops, Luther states, and all have the right to interpret Scripture, the pope, it follows, cannot hold a special position above all others. If the pope is evil--and Luther implies that he is-- the magistrates have the right to call a council for corrective measures.<sup>57</sup>

There were other statements in this tract which of necessity were to lead to rebellion. If we fight the Turks, Luther argues, and thieves and murderers are being hanged, why then do we tolerate the wickedness and robbery of the

papacy.<sup>58</sup> God has made us free from all human laws contrary to God and our soul's salvation; we therefore need not obey anyone in spiritual matters which are the concern of the individual.<sup>59</sup> The clergy should have the freedom to marry, for to prohibit marriage is contrary to all natural law; all pilgrimages to Rome must discontinue; private masses, the interdict and all festivals, except Sunday, must be abolished;<sup>60</sup> some of Aristotle's books<sup>61</sup> which do not further spirituality but only confuse the soul of man, must be purged from the universities. Universities, Luther continues, are gates of hell if they do not train the young people in Holy Scriptures.<sup>62</sup> Other passages, which were especially favorable to the formation of sectarian groups, pertained to the autonomy of Christian groups and local churches:

. . . if a little group of Christians [Luther wrote] were taken into exile where there was no ordained priest and if they were to elect one of their number, married or unmarried, they could confer on him authority to baptize, say mass, absolve, and preach, and he would be as true a priest as if ordained by all the bishops and popes.<sup>63</sup>

In connection with this, Luther gives an example from the Old Testament story of Balaam, whose ass spoke against the prophet. Should God not be able, the Reformer deducts from this, to speak through a godly man against a wicked pope? Luther, of course, meant himself, but he failed to realize at the time that later his dissenters would take up this very argument for the purpose of turning the tables on him.

The pamphlet To the Christian Nobility was a fire brand. Some feared that it might lead to a religious war.<sup>64</sup> Many of Luther's friends, especially John Lang, were fearful of the consequences and warned the Reformer not to publish the tract.<sup>65</sup> Although the pamphlet did not cause a war at the time,<sup>66</sup> its influence on the public cannot be overestimated. The destruction of the "three walls" of the papacy and the idea of a general priesthood, necessarily led to the emancipation of the laity from churchly control, and to their participation in the affairs of the Church.<sup>67</sup> The first evidence of this is seen in the attempted reform of the Wittenbergers during Luther's absence at the Wartburg, and later this lay movement found expression in the radical reformers in general. Luther's idea of the little group of Christians in the wilderness, although meaning his own group only, was later taken over by the sectaries and applied to their particular situation.<sup>68</sup> They too were a little group of Christians dwelling alone and forsaken in the desert of intolerance and persecution; since they had the Holy Spirit as well, they too were priests who had direct access to God; as did the Lutherans and the Reformed, they too could appoint a minister for themselves, with rights equal to those of their enemies. The opposition the dissenters met on all sides, could also be interpreted, as Luther did in his case, as being a visible sign of God's favor upon their faith and action.<sup>69</sup>



Thus the very arguments Luther had used against the Catholic Church, were later successfully used against him by those who broke away from him.

Luther closed his To the Christian Nobility by announcing that he had "another song" to sing against Rome,<sup>70</sup> meaning, of course, an additional tract against Roman Catholicism. In October, 1520 he published his De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae Praeludium, which also bred rebellion and may have initiated the sacramental controversy which caused so much grief in Protestantism. Luther begins his tract by denying that there are seven sacraments; he feels there should be three only, baptism, penance and the Last Supper. Yet he doubts whether according to the usage of Scripture there could be more than one sacrament only--the Eucharist--; the other two should possibly be reduced to sacramental signs.<sup>71</sup> He then goes on to insist that the cup in the Last Supper be not withheld from the laity. If the people desire to partake of the cup as well, it is impious and tyrannous, though it be done by an angel from heaven, to withhold it.<sup>72</sup> Yet Luther qualifies his strong statement by adding that no one should attempt to seize the cup by force; he is merely instructing the conscience, he states, "that every man may endure the tyranny of Rome, knowing that he has been forcibly deprived of his right in the sacrament on account of his sins."<sup>73</sup> But to expect moderation from men like Carlstadt and some of the other

radicals, who also felt bound in their conscience to bring about reform, is somewhat illogical after having uttered devastating statements of this kind. Furthermore, if Luther had the right to cast doubt on the validity of most of the sacraments, why should he later be greatly surprised when the Sacramentarians, also on the basis of Scripture, repudiated all of the sacraments, reducing baptism and the Eucharist to ordinances or signs only?

The mass, Luther continues, ought to be abolished on the basis that it has become a good work and a sacrifice, thereby annulling the sacrifice of Christ; external things "such as vestments, ornaments, hymns, prayers, musical instruments, lamps, and all the pomp of visible things," should be done away with because of their detraction from things essential;<sup>74</sup> vows and religious orders are unscriptural and show contempt for the ordinary walk of life;<sup>75</sup> the so-called sacrament of extreme unction is ridiculous and invalid, for it rests on no proper biblical foundation.<sup>76</sup> On the question of baptism the tract is somewhat confusing. Luther seemingly recognizes baptismal regeneration,<sup>77</sup> yet at the same time he speaks of baptism as a "symbol" of a person's death and resurrection in Christ, and if baptism is to be valid a person must continue to believe in Christ's merits for sinners.<sup>78</sup> In his elaboration on the rite of the mass, Luther had stated that no priest can perform a mass for the benefit of others,

for everyone must believe for himself.<sup>79</sup> Yet in connection with infant baptism he writes, "that infants are aided by the faith of others, namely, that of those who bring them to baptism."<sup>80</sup> This confusion of thought was soon to be evident in others. Both the Anabaptists who demanded faith before baptism, as well as the believers in pedobaptism, later appealed to the teachings of Luther on the subject.<sup>81</sup>

In November, 1520 Luther published his third major reformation pamphlet, The Freedom of a Christian.<sup>82</sup> In a letter to Pope Leo X the Reformer states that this tract contains the sum of a Christian life.<sup>83</sup> The tract points out that man is unable to fulfill the demands of the Old Testament law, and, therefore, in despair he accepts Christ's mercy in faith. This faith in Christ releases a Christian from all works of the law; he has become perfectly free.<sup>84</sup> It is faith only that justifies man before God; works are only the result of man's justification and an expression of gratitude to God. Thus a Christian is free from all works of the law, yet at the same time he is also a servant of all men.<sup>85</sup> Although Luther in The Freedom of a Christian skilfully managed to balance works and grace, certain loose spirits within the Lutheran camp very soon became aware of the fact that the Reformer overemphasized grace and greatly diminished the question of observing the law. The result, as we shall see in another chapter, was the

antinomian controversy, which led Luther to modify some of his earlier views on the relationship between law and grace. On the weighty consequences of Luther's early writings, Newman observes well when he states:

The impetuous reformer did not always weigh well his words. He spoke with enthusiasm and with power . . . and naturally did not stop to consider the bearing of his words on a different state of things, or their effects on minds differently constituted from his own and with different antecedents.<sup>86</sup>

The implications and effects of Luther's example and writings must never be lost out of sight when one wishes to understand the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. Whether the sects originated with the Reformers or had their roots in the Middle Ages, will be discussed elsewhere, but that the enunciation of Luther's principles had a powerful influence on them cannot be denied.<sup>87</sup> The Reformer's early writings "had awakened in the layman an entirely new conception of his obligations with reference to the existing order."<sup>88</sup> As a member of "the priesthood of all believers" he could not sit idly while the Church was held in bondage; he felt he had to act and correct the abuses.<sup>89</sup> The principles of sola fide and sola scriptura with their dissolving effects on all constituted authority were applied, and often misapplied, to suit all thought and action. Luther's light treatment of the biblical canon undoubtedly encouraged doubts with regard to the inspiration of the Bible and rationalism

in the case of the Antitrinitarians. His writings of 1520 had a direct influence on the people of Zwickau, a town near the Bohemian border, whence later the so-called "Zwickau Prophets" and Thomas Muentzer came.<sup>90</sup> When Luther encountered these "enthusiasts," as he called them, the idea of the universal priesthood of all believers almost disappeared into obscurity and gave way to other considerations.<sup>91</sup> His intense religious experience and theological convictions, coupled with various circumstances, made it impossible for him to agree with the dissenters; the wide influence of his early writings on the various sects made it in turn impossible for the radicals not to oppose the Reformer. To the men and groups who dared to disagree with Luther we now must turn.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Cf., P. S. Watson, Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 26 f.

<sup>2</sup>Luther stated: "Wherefore we ought not so much to consider the wicked life of the Papists, as their abominable doctrine and hypocrisy, against the which we especially fight." Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>On his conversion experience see the following biographies: J. Koestlin, Martin Luther. Sein Leben und seine Schriften (2 vols.; Dritte Auflage; Elberfeld: Verlag von R. L. Friderichs, 1883), I, 90-152; H. Grisar, Martin Luther: His Life and Work (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1930), pp. 58-88; H. Boehmer, Martin Luther: Road to Reformation, trans. by J. W. Doberstein and T. G. Tappert (Living Age Books; New York: Meridan Books, 1957), pp. 87-117; R. H. Bainton, Here I Stand (A Mentor Book; New York: The New American Library, 1950), pp. 27-51.

<sup>4</sup>Luther was deeply impressed by the teaching of Gerard Groote on the subject. As late as in 1532 he wrote the rector of the Brethren at Herefort: "If all other things were in as good condition as the brethren-houses, the church would be much too blessed even in this life." A. Hyma, The Brethren of the Common Life (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 168-169.

<sup>5</sup>Boehmer, Martin Luther, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup>J. T. Mueller, "A Survey of Luther's Theology," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 113 (1956), 156 f.

<sup>7</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Reproduction of the second edition; Revised; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), VII, 118 ff.

<sup>8</sup>SWEA, LXII, 193.

<sup>9</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 118.

<sup>10</sup>Boehmer, Martin Luther, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>Ewald M. Plass (ed.), What Luther Says: An Anthology (3 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), II, 834. He continues: "... even when I was most devout, I

approached the altar a doubter; a doubter I returned. After I had said my penance, I still doubted. If I did not say it, I doubted again. . . ." Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., II, 834.

<sup>13</sup>It is not known when exactly the "tower-experience" in the Black Cloister at Wittenberg took place. The dating ranges all the way from 1511 to 1518. The year 1514 has been commonly accepted. Cf. Ibid., III, 1226 n.

<sup>14</sup>Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>15</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 835. Especially the Epistle to the Romans became precious to Luther: "As much as I had heretofore hated the word 'righteousness of God', so much the more dear and sweet it was to me now. And so that passage of St. Paul became for me in very truth the gate to paradise." Quoted in Boehmer, Martin Luther, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 835.

<sup>17</sup>Watson, Let God be God! p. 12.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, trans. by O. Wyon (2 vols.; Halley Stewart Publication, I; London: George Allan and Unwin Ltd., 1931), II, 468-469.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Walter Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer (Zuerich: Artemis Verlag, 1949), p. 330. In reality Luther's theology was not completely that of St. Paul. St. Paul's strong eschatology, his mystical enthusiasm, his aloofness from the world, etc., are lacking completely in Luther. Cf. Paul Wappler, Die Täuferbewegung in Thuringen von 1526-1584 (Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1913), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Henry C. Vedder, The Reformation in Germany (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 295.

<sup>21</sup>SWEA, LIII, 340.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Ernst Walter Zeeden, The Legacy of Luther, trans. from the German by Ruth M. Bethell (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1954), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>H. H. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1947), pp. 62-64.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Zeeden, The Legacy of Luther, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Watson, Let God be God! p. 12.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, pp. 296-297.

<sup>31</sup>Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, pp. 26-29.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Ibid., pp. 21-25.

<sup>33</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 124.

<sup>34</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 704.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., II, 703.

<sup>36</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 360.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Such Old Testament books as Esther were also regarded as inferior.

<sup>39</sup>The books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation belonged to this group.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, pp. 111 and 112.

<sup>41</sup>M. Luther, Reformation Writings, trans. by B. L. Woolf (2 vols.; London: Lutherworth Press, 1952), II, 306. In 1515 Luther was still able to reconcile Paul with James: "Therefore when the blessed James and the apostle say that man is justified by works, they are disputing the false conception of those who contended that a faith without works would be sufficient." Plass, What Luther Says, II, 720-721.

<sup>42</sup>SWEA, LXII, 127. Luther also ousted the Apocryphal Books from the Bible. Some of the Anabaptists opposed him on this point. Ludwig Haetzer pointed out that there are also contradictions within the so-called inspired books; the Apocrypha, he insisted, were just as useful as the other books.



Haetzer also chided the Reformer for his unfavorable attitude towards the apocalyptic passages in the Bible. On this account he accused Luther of ignorance and lack of judgement. G. J. F. Goeters, Ludwig Haetzer (ca. 1500-1529) Spiritualist and Antitrinitarian (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1957), pp. 127-128.

<sup>43</sup>Luther, Reformation Writings, I, 30.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>49</sup>Luther now abandoned the idea of a reformation and advocated a revolution. He wrote: ". . . dass man nicht eine Reformation vorgebe, diese Menschenlehre und geistlich Recht zu bessern; denn es ist unmöglich: sondern dass man es gar verbrenne, abtue, vertilge, und umkehre." Quoted in Samuel Geiser, et al., Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden. Eine kurzgefasste Darstellung der wichtigsten Ereignisse des Taufertums (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1931), p. 109.

<sup>50</sup>Full German title: "An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von der christlichen Standes Besserung" (SWEA, XXI, 274-360).

<sup>51</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, p. 206.

<sup>52</sup>SWEA, XXI, 277-278.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 286-289.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 289-291.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 305-306.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 306-345.

<sup>61</sup>Especially the Physicorum, Metaphysicae, de Anima Ethicorum, and others. Ibid., p. 344 f.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>63</sup>Quoted in R. H. Bainton, The Age of the Reformation (An Anvil Original under the general editorship of L. L. Snyder; Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1956), p. 104.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 211.

<sup>65</sup>Luther, Reformation Writings, I, 107.

<sup>66</sup>But in 1524 the peasants appealed to the principles Luther had enunciated in his To the Christian Nobility.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 207.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. T. J. v. Braght (ed.), Maertyrer-Spiegel der Taufgesinnten oder Wehrlosen Christen, etc., trans. (2 vols.; Berne, Indiana: Verlag Licht und Hoffnung, 1950), II, 1.

<sup>69</sup>Luther had stated at the end of his To the Christian Nobility, that opposition to him and his ideas will be a sign of God's pleasure upon his work. SWEA, XXI, 360.

<sup>70</sup>SWEA, XXI, 360.

<sup>71</sup>M. Luther, First Principles of the Reformation or the Ninety-Five Theses and the Three Primary Works, edited by H. Wace and C. A. Buchheim (Trans. into English; London: John Murray, 1883), p. 147.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 200-202.

<sup>76</sup>"I should say," Luther states, "that it was not lawful for an Apostle [St. James] to institute a sacrament by his own authority." Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>77</sup>Baptismal regeneration is the belief that the conversion of a sinner takes place in water baptism.

<sup>78</sup>Luther, First Principles of the Reformation, pp. 192-193.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>81</sup>The Anabaptists believed that the Reformers retained infant baptism because they were afraid of "the cross" of persecution. Cf. A. J. E. Zieglschmid (ed.), Die aelteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brueder (Ithaca, New York: The Cayuga Press, Inc., 1943), p. 44.

<sup>82</sup>German title: "Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen" (SWBA, XXVII, 173-199).

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-181.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 192-195.

<sup>86</sup>Albert Henry Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 65.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 466-467.

<sup>88</sup>E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 535.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Wappler, Die Täuferbewegung in Thueringen, p. 8. Luther dedicated his German version of The Freedom of a Christian to the town provost of Zwickau, Herman Muelport. Luther, Reformation Writings, I, 355.

<sup>91</sup>Kraam, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 78.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RADICAL REFORMERS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

#### Definition of Terms and Classification

The men and groups who dissented from Luther and other leading Reformers, were all lumped together under names such as "enthusiasts", "rebels", "fanatics", "visionaries", "baptists", or most commonly "anabaptists" (rebaptizers). It is true, the diversity of these groups makes it difficult to decide as to which individuals or groups should be included in the study of the so-called Anabaptist movement,<sup>1</sup> yet it can hardly be excused when even today Luther's sympathizers follow the bigotry and often ignorance of the originator of their movement, and refer to the Mennonite bodies as having sprung from the "Anabaptist fanatics, who at the time of Luther, under the leadership of Muentzer, Storch, etc., boasted of celestial revelations. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Similarly another writer, without properly differentiating between the various sects, simply ascribes the beginning of the Anabaptists to the appearance of the "Zwickau Prophets".<sup>3</sup> Another recent writer, in a biography of Luther, dismisses the Anabaptists in one page and a half and refers at that to the Muenster catastrophe only, ignoring thus the true Anabaptists altogether.<sup>4</sup> Such examples of treating the radicals of the sixteenth century as if they were all bent on destroying the whole Protestant movement, show utter disregard of Anabaptist

sources.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the radicals resented being called Anabaptists, for they did not regard infant baptism as true baptism, hence they did not consider themselves being re-baptizers. Moreover, although most of the dissenting groups opposed infant baptism, not all of them accepted adult baptism.<sup>6</sup> On the whole, baptism was not the most essential thing with these sects. For some groups it was merely an expression of their concept of the Church, consisting only of baptized believers;<sup>7</sup> for others it was an act of initiation whereby they accepted members into their community;<sup>8</sup> for still others it was a symbol of an inner transformation and dedication to Christ.<sup>9</sup> However apparent some of their differences may have been, in one respect the sects were all alike: they were all radical with regard to reform. Such things as compromise, moderation, conservatism and consideration were foreign to them. They sought to reform all existing institutions, be they social, economic, political or religious; in this they disregarded all tradition and historical development. Some groups attempted to re-establish the primitive Church, whereas others felt to be called to inaugurate the Kingdom of God as it never had existed before. The term "radical reformers", therefore, seems to be most appropriate to describe all of the groups and individuals who dissented from the leading Reformers and at the same time opposed Roman

Catholicism.

Because of their diversity, as has been intimated, it is difficult to classify the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. Even their contemporaries found this so, and Luther looked upon this confusion and division among them as a clear sign of their ungodliness.<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Franck, a contemporary chronicler, writes: "There are many more sects and opinions, which I do not all know and cannot describe, but it seems to me that there are not two to be found who agree with each other on all points."<sup>11</sup> Franck certainly exaggerated, but there is at least some truth in his observation.

Some have attempted to classify the radicals according to their conception of the Church. There were those who believed in a restored and gathered congregation of baptized believers under strict discipline and separation from the world and state. Generally the Swiss, South German and Mennonite Anabaptists belonged to this group. Then there were the Hutterian Brethren who believed in a church-community, holding all things in common. Muentzer and the Muenster Anabaptists believed in a church-kingdom as the ideal Church. Lastly, there were men like Sebastian Franck, Caspar Schwenckfeld and Hans Denck who held to an inward, invisible, spiritual and universal Church.<sup>12</sup> Others classify the radicals on the basis of their theological views: Those who denied the Real Presence in the Last Supper; those who denied the validity of infant

baptism; those who denied the validity of the Old Testament; and those who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Keller differentiates between three main parties among the radicals. Between 1525 and 1530, he states, the peaceful movement under the leadership of Hans Denck predominated; between 1530 and 1535 the Muensterites under the guidance of John of Leyden dominated the scene; after 1535 Menno Simons becomes the recognized leader of the Anabaptist movement.<sup>14</sup> The Baptist historian, A. H. Newman differentiates between chiliastic, biblical, pantheistic, mystical and antitrinitarian Anabaptists.<sup>15</sup>

Today most historians generally agree on a threefold division within the radical movement, differentiating between the Spiritualists, Anabaptists and Rationalists.<sup>16</sup> There was a marked difference between the Spiritualists and the Anabaptists. The latter looked into the past, seeking to recreate original Christianity along New Testament lines; the Spiritualists in general gazed into the future, seeking to establish an entirely new Church.<sup>17</sup> The Rationalists, who were greatly influenced by humanism, tried to explain the mysteries of Christianity on the basis of reason and common sense. These three groups may further be subdivided.<sup>18</sup> Among the Spiritualists there are distinguishable three groups. First, there were the revolutionary Spiritualists who were largely inspired by Thomas Muentzer. They experienced the Spirit as a driving power,

drew largely upon the books of Daniel and Revelation, and emphasized the "cross", or the bitter Christ, in opposition to Luther's "sweet Christ". Secondly, there were rational Spiritualists who contemplatively philosophized on the mysteries of religion.<sup>19</sup> Thirdly, there were the evangelical Spiritualists who advocated a middle way position between Lutheranism and Catholicism.<sup>20</sup>

The Anabaptists may also be divided into three groups.<sup>21</sup> The revolutionary Anabaptists looked consistently to the Old Testament as the standard for their behaviour. The contemplative Anabaptists, like Hans Denck and Ludwig Haetzer, stressed the importance of the "Inner Word" in contrast to the "Outer Word", or biblicism. The evangelical Anabaptists, such as the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterites and the Mennonites, stressed the New Testament as the standard of all teaching and morals and looked upon the Old Testament as figurative and symbolical only. They repudiated the use of the sword and capital punishment, and applied the ban rigorously. The Rationalists we have divided into two groups for the sake of convenience rather than accuracy: the Antinomians and the Antitrinitarians. In his later life, as we shall see, Luther came in touch with these two groups.<sup>22</sup>

In view of these diversified parties within the radical reformation, one may rightly ask whether Luther was justified in lumping the radicals all together and fighting them



indiscriminately. It must not be overlooked, however, that all of the groups had certain things and ideas in common. One writer states that the only thing the radicals had in common was their opposition to Luther and the Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup> True, the radical reformation was a distinct reaction against the limitation of the spiritual freedom which Luther proclaimed but sought to restrict in others; like mysticism it was also the claim of experience against all authority and tradition.<sup>24</sup> But it was more than this, and the radicals had other things in common. Most of them emphasized, in one way or another, the principle of communism, which may account for the popularity of the movement among the lower classes.<sup>25</sup> Almost all groups opposed Luther's teaching on the will and good works; they believed, in varying degrees, in the freedom of the will and emphasized the necessity of good works,<sup>26</sup> which, in many instances, led to legalism as opposed to the Reformer's concept of Christian freedom.<sup>27</sup> Almost all of the radicals sought to establish a visible Church as contrasted to Luther's invisible Church.<sup>28</sup> This led them to the denial of infant baptism and in most cases to the acceptance of adult baptism; a visible Church, they held, must consist of voluntary believers. Almost all radicals regarded the centuries between Constantine the Great and the sixteenth century as a period of spiritual apostasy. Muentzer even went so far as to believe that the true Church had disappeared immediately after the death of the

last Apostles.<sup>29</sup> And, lastly, all of the radicals repudiated the Real Presence in the Last Supper. For Luther this was the weightiest characteristic of all the fanatics.<sup>30</sup>

### The Question of Origins

It is still being debated whether the radical reformers owe their origin to some medieval heretical sects, or to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, or to both. Some historians emphatically insist on their medieval origin, connecting them with the Wycliffites, Waldensians and the Hussites. R. A. Knox, for example, points to the following similarities of views between these former sects and the radicals: Both held that the Church is for saints only; both believed that the progress of iniquity must be actively opposed; and both insisted on the correction of existing sin and crime. Other characteristics, such as opposition to warfare, the taking of oaths, and service in the state, as well as an undue emphasis on enthusiasm, are also to be found in both.<sup>31</sup> Others connect the radical reformers with the mystics such as Tauler, Eckhard, Suso and the Brethren of the Common Life under whose influence many of the fanatics had come.<sup>32</sup> W. J. Kuehler points out that the Devotio Moderna formed the basis for the piety of the Anabaptists, and gave them the idea of a conventicle-like separation from the world.<sup>33</sup> Ludwig Keller sought to give historical documentation for these views, pointing out that Luther merely expressed the views of the existing Waldensians.<sup>34</sup> In Staupitz he believed

to have found a connecting link between the free spirits of the Middle Ages and modern times.<sup>35</sup> In fact, some of the Anabaptists believed themselves to be the spiritual descendants of the Waldensians.<sup>36</sup> Lindsay simply states: "For the whole Anabaptist movement was medieval to the core."<sup>37</sup>

Opposed to this view there are writers who maintain that the radicals were the children of the Reformation. Especially Luther is held responsible for the rise of the various sects. Both Luther and most of the radicals, it is pointed out, for example, emphasized the principle of repentance in their preaching. The Reformer had written in the opening statement of his Ninety-five Theses: "The penitence to which Christ has called us, is to affect our entire life."<sup>38</sup> For both Luther and the Anabaptists this radical repentance is an act of God and not of man. Furthermore, both stressed the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian; both believed in a personal faith which in both cases meant freedom of conscience; and both claimed to adhere to the principle of sola scriptura.<sup>39</sup> Then also, and this is worthy of note, most of the radicals, such as Carlstadt, Muentzer, Melchior Hofmann, Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier, B. Rothman and others, were former Lutherans.<sup>40</sup> Another point in favour of this view is the fact that there seems to be no historical connection between the radicals and the medieval sects.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to these views there is the question of whether humanism may be held responsible for the rise of the radical reformers. J. Huizinga held with Walter Koehler that Erasmus of Rotterdam was the father of Anabaptism.<sup>42</sup> Robert Kreider has recently made an intensive study of the lives of the leading Anabaptists,<sup>43</sup> and found that most of them had studied under humanistic influences. He also investigated the theological emphases of the Anabaptists and came to the conclusion that their stress on the freedom of the will, non-resistance--in the case of the peaceful groups--, the liberty of the Church, and on ethics rather than dogma, is similar to the principles advocated by the Christian humanists. Kreider points out, however, that Anabaptism went beyond humanism in that it fixed its eye not on man but on God.<sup>44</sup>

These various opinions on the origin of the radical reformers indicate that the subject needs to be further explored,<sup>45</sup> or that all of these views contain some truth. That humanism, medieval mysticism, and heresy in general had influenced these men to a certain extent, cannot be denied.<sup>46</sup> Although no historical connection between the radicals and the medieval sects has as yet been found, the fact remains that Anabaptism flourished in areas where Waldensians had existed in large groups in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>47</sup> The teachings of the "Zwickau Prophets" and Thomas Muentzer showed considerable dependence on Taborite

views, and Tauler's sermons were venerated and cited by these radicals.<sup>48</sup> The Antitrinitarians also, although they were stimulated by Reformation ideas, actually belonged within Renaissance humanism.<sup>49</sup> In the final analysis, however, it was Luther who ignited the powder keg and caused these latent views and ideas to come boldly into the open, and encouraged their growth by his own example of rebellion as well as by his provocative early writings. Whether radicalism would have appeared as it did in the sixteenth century without the emergence of Luther, cannot be answered; that the radicals appealed to the teachings of the Reformer is a fact. We may agree with Troeltsch who concludes: Although

greatly assisted by some lingering traces of the influence of the Waldensians and other sects . . . at bottom, therefore, the whole movement belonged to the Reformation. It was caused by the Reformation; it appealed to its principles and ideals, and it remained in closest touch with it.<sup>50</sup>

#### Reasons for Opposing the Reformers

If the radicals owed their very existence to Luther and the other leading Reformers, why then did these radicals so soon oppose their policies? "In their records," Littell aptly states, "they refer to Luther half in praise and half in sorrow, as a leader whom they first followed but who did not carry them through to as thorough a reformation as they had anticipated."<sup>51</sup> An unknown Anabaptist leader expressed himself in 1538 as follows:

While yet in the national church, we obtained much instruction from the writings of Luther, Zwingli, and others, concerning the mass and other papal ceremonies, that they are vain. Yet we recognized a great lack as regards repentance, conversion, and the true Christian life. . . . I waited and hoped for a year or two, since the minister had much to say of amendment of life, of giving to the poor, loving one another, and abstaining from evil. But I could not close my eyes to the fact that the doctrine which was preached . . . was not carried out.<sup>52</sup>

This writer, then, found that the Lutherans were inconsistent, leaving a great gap between their theory and their practice.<sup>53</sup>

Menno Simons, writing in 1541 in his The True Christian Faith, reviews the "faith of the Lutherans" and then states that they overemphasize the doctrine of justification by faith alone, so that it almost becomes heretical to preach good works, yet their lives are abominable. When one points them to Jesus Christ, Menno continues, and his blameless example and that it is not right for a Christian "to boast and drink, revile and curse; then he must hear from that hour that he is one who believes in salvation by good works, is a heaven stormer, a sectarian agitator, a rabble rouser, a make-believe Christian, a disdainer of the sacraments, or an Anabaptist!"<sup>54</sup> Thus Luther's overemphasis of justification by faith alone was another cause for dissent.

In his Reply to Gellius Faber, a Lutheran, Menno Simons wrote in 1554 that the governing principle of the Reformation, namely, the rejection of all unscriptural institutions in favour of biblical doctrines and practices, had not been carried through. He continues:

. . . although they and their writers have in the past condemned unto hell all the institutions and commands of men, and have written one volume after another against them, yet they, alas, altogether continue to cling to this rude abomination [infant baptism], because they do not want to assume the cross, nor the reproach of the world.<sup>55</sup>

The same view is expressed in an anonymous booklet, written perhaps between 1525 and 1535. The writer acknowledges his debt to the "evangelical preachers", who have caused him to realize his lost and sinful condition. But soon, to his dismay, he found that "they speak the truth of Christ partly, but did not want to pass through the narrow gate."<sup>56</sup>

The writer of Die aelteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brueder<sup>57</sup> accuses Luther and Zwingli of having succeeded in breaking down Roman Catholicism but having failed to build anything better instead. They have, he continues, attached themselves to the magistrates and princes, trusting in human strength rather than in God. They have retained infant baptism and they are defending their doctrines with the sword, which is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and which they have learned from the anti-Christ himself. Their highest merit, he concludes, is to eat meat, take women to wives, and scold the popes, monks and clerics, whereas their lives remain corrupt.<sup>58</sup>

There is also some reason to believe that certain radicals dissented from Luther for social, economic and political reasons. Thomas Muentzer's ideas testify to this,

and even the Swiss Brethren protested in 1523 against tithes and other standing economic institutions,<sup>59</sup> a fact which some Mennonite historians do not wish to emphasize. On the whole, however, the origin of the radical reformers was purely religious, but later on, due to various circumstances, as we shall see, the radicals had to cope with social and economic influences.<sup>60</sup> Luther's attitude towards the peasants in 1524 and 1525, drove many of them, no doubt, into the camp of the radicals.

In addition to these theological, ethical and social reasons, we may also mention the splintering nature of Protestantism which had its share in the formation of numerous sects. The principles of sola scriptura and the "priesthood of all believers" led to different interpretations of Scripture and hence to a clash of personalities as well. When the leading Reformers began to squabble among themselves, people began to doubt the truth of the new evangel and in turn proceeded to study and interpret the Bible for themselves.<sup>61</sup> It was soon found that the Spirit did not reveal the truth to these people in like fashion. The stage was thus set for the conflict between Luther and the radical reformers.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>G. R. Elton (ed.), The New Cambridge Modern History (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1958), II, 119.

<sup>2</sup>E. L. Lueker (ed.), Lutheran Cyclopedia (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 668.

<sup>3</sup>R. A. Knox, Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 126 f.

<sup>4</sup>W. Dallmann, Martin Luther. His Life and His Labor (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), pp. 150-151. Cf. W. G. Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 260.

<sup>5</sup>Until the 19 century only the sources of contemporary writers hostile to the movement were consulted. Cf. e.g. J. H. M. D'Aubigne, History of the Reformation, trans. by H. White (5 vols.; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1846), III, 46-73; 286-293.

<sup>6</sup>E. g. the "Zwickau Prophets" and Thomas Muentzer.

<sup>7</sup>E. g. the Swiss Anabaptists.

<sup>8</sup>E. g. the Muenster Anabaptists.

<sup>9</sup>The Mennonites, the Hutterites as well as the Swiss Brethren.

<sup>10</sup>The Mennonite Encyclopedia, ed. by H. S. Bender, et al. (4 vols.; Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957), III, 418.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in B. Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1903), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. J. L. Garret, "The Nature of the Church According to the Radical Continental Reformation," MQR, XXXII (April, 1958), 115-120. Cf. also G. H. Williams (ed.), Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers (The Library of Christian Classics, XXV; London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>F. F. Brentano, Luther, trans. from the French by E. F. Buckley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 229.

<sup>14</sup>L. Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1882), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>A. H. Newman, A Manual of Church History (2 vols.; Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1931), II, 156-200.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. G. F. Hershberger (ed.), The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1957), pp. 57-58.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, pp. 22-23.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-35.

<sup>19</sup>Sebastian Franck was one of them.

<sup>20</sup>Caspar Schwenckfeld, the Silesian nobleman, belonged to this group.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, pp. 28-31.

<sup>22</sup>On classification see further Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 57-58.

<sup>23</sup>Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, pp. 3-4.

<sup>24</sup>Alfred Coutts, Hans Denck 1495-1527 Humanist and Heretic (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1927), p. 114.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. R. J. Smithson, The Anabaptists. Their Contribution to our Protestant Heritage (London: James Clarke and Co., 1935), p. 129.

<sup>26</sup>W. Fellmann (ed.), Hans Denck Schriften: Religioese Schriften (2 vols.; Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1956), II, pp. 107-108. Cf. R. M. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 17; Newman, A Manual of Church History, II, 154-155.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 261.

<sup>28</sup>E. H. Harbison, The Age of Reformation (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 68. Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 17-18.

<sup>29</sup>For this reason the radicals have been charged with

not being historically minded. Cf. G. Westin, The Free Church Through the Ages, trans. from the Swedish by V. A. Olson (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958), pp. 39-155; Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup>On no other subject has Luther written as much as on the Eucharist.

<sup>31</sup>Knox, Enthusiasm, pp. 118-126.

<sup>32</sup>Ricarda Huch, Das Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltungen (Berlin and Zurich: Atlantis-Verlag, 1937), pp. 210-211.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Stupperich, Das Muensterische Taeufertum (Muenster in Westfalen: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup>L. Keller, Die Anfaenge der Reformation und die Ketzerschulen (Berlin: R. Gaertners Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1897), p. 41. Keller also quotes a letter from Zwingli to Luther to the effect that the Reformer was not the first to discover the true Gospel. The Waldensians were there before him, but they did not have the courage to come out with it in the open. Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>35</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, pp. 26-27.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. 39-40.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas M. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907), II, 441.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in H. Fast, "The Dependence of the First Anabaptists on Luther, Erasmus, and Zwingli," MQR, XXX (1956), 105.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-114. Cf. F. Blanke, "Zollikon 1525. Die Entstehung der aeltesten Taeufergemeinde," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 256-259.

<sup>40</sup>Luther stated: "Out of the Gospel and divine truth come devilisch lies; . . . from the blood in our body comes corruption; out of Luther come Muentzer, and rebels, Anabaptists, Sacramentarians, and false brethren." Quoted in J. E. E. Acton, Essays on Freedom and Power (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1948), p. 94.

<sup>41</sup>Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 696. Cf. Westin, The Free Church, pp. 46-77.

<sup>42</sup>Huizinga's statement has to be substantiated.  
Stupperich, Das Muensterische Taeufertum, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup>Conrad Grebel, Pilgram Marbeck, Hans Denck and Menno Simons.

<sup>44</sup>R. Kreider, "Anabaptism and Humanism: An Inquiry into the Relationship of Humanism to the Evangelical Anabaptists," MQR, XXVI (April, 1952), 123-141. Cf. Smithson, The Anabaptists, pp. 31-34.

<sup>45</sup>G. H. Williams, "Studies in the Radical Reformation (1517-1618)," Church History, XXVII (March, 1958), 51-52.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 1-8.

<sup>47</sup>John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Second edition slightly revised; Mennonite History, Vol. I; Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 9-15.

<sup>48</sup>F. H. Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church (Second edition rev. and enl.; Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 5. See, e.g. Muentzer's "Sermon to the Princes," Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 49 ff.

<sup>49</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 57-58. Cf. R. G. Torbet, A History of the Baptists (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1950), pp. 15-34.

<sup>50</sup>Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 699. Cf. G. Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung nach dem grossen Bauernkrieg (Berlin: Ruetten and Loening, 1958), pp. 122-140.

<sup>51</sup>Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>Quoted in H. S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," MQR, XVIII (April, 1944), p. 76.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. C. Grebel's letter to Muentzer, Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 73 ff.; L. von Gerdell, Die Revolutionierung der Kirchen (Berlin: Diesseits-Verlag, 1924), pp. 20-21.

<sup>54</sup>Menno Simons, Complete Writings, trans. from the Dutch by L. Verduin and edited by J. C. Wenger (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1956), p. 334. Cf. Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, pp. 78-79.

<sup>55</sup>Menno Simons, Complete Writings, p. 712.

<sup>56</sup>H. J. Hillerbrand (ed.), "An Early Anabaptist Treatise on the Christian and the State," MQR, XXXII (Jan. 1958), pp. 30-and 38.

<sup>57</sup>The Chronicle was begun by the Silesian, Kaspar Braitmichel, shortly before his death in 1573. He recorded the events till 1542. After him six other handwritings are evident. The Chronicle concludes with the year 1665. See Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. xxiii-xxv.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-44.

<sup>59</sup>E. Crous, et al., Gedenkschrift zum 400-jaehrigen Jubilaeum der Memnoniten oder Taufgesinnten, 1525-1925 (Herausgegeben von der Konferenz der Sueddeutschen Mennoniten; E. V. Ludwigshaven a. RH., 1925), pp. 42-43.

<sup>60</sup>Bax, The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, p. 27 ff. H. H. Schaff goes too far when he writes: "Although Anabaptism was thus on its face primarily religious in its immediate origin, its chief value and interest lay in the protest which Anabaptist groups made against the political order of the time, rather than in the religious principles which they adopted." The attitude of the Reformers towards the peasants, he continues, furthered these political and economic aspects in Anabaptism. H. H. Schaff, "The Anabaptists, the Reformers, and the civil Government," Church History, I (1932), p. 29. Had Schaff differentiated between the various groups and applied his view to the revolutionary Anabaptists, he would have been more correct. For Schaff's line of thought, see also Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldutschen Tauerbewegung, pp. 167-168.

<sup>61</sup>H. H. Schaff, Church History, I (1932), 28.



### CHAPTER III

#### LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE WITTENBERG RADICALS, I

##### Conservatism versus Radicalism

After Luther with the support of some German nobles had successfully defended his position and writings at the Diet of Worms in April, 1521, he was secretly taken into solitary confinement at the Wartburg. "Luther was absent," Vedder states, "but the spirit that he had called up was still at Wittenberg and could not be idle."<sup>1</sup> Men like Gabriel Zwilling, chaplain of the Augustinian convent, Justus Jonas, Philip Melancthon, and above all others, Andreas Bodenstein, threw themselves wholeheartedly into the work of reform. To trace the new reform movement in Wittenberg and Luther's corresponding attitude towards it, is the object of the following two chapters.

The man who has been held most responsible for the violent outbreaks at Wittenberg in the winter of 1521-1522, was Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt. He was born at Karlstadt, Bavaria<sup>2</sup> around 1480. In 1499 he enrolled at the University of Erfurt, where he studied until 1504 when he removed to the University of Cologne. In 1504 he came to the newly established University of Wittenberg, in which he became famous as a teacher of philosophy. He clung tenaciously to scholasticism, believing in the supreme authority of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> By 1510 Carlstadt had acquired all the higher academic degrees, and in that year

he also became archdeacon at the collegiate church in Wittenberg. As such he was obligated to preach and say mass once a week, as well as to lecture at the university. In 1515 he went to Rome where he studied law and took a degree with the intention of becoming dean of the Castle Church. Since all this was done without the permission of the university and the Elector of Saxony, Carlstadt was not upon his return given the desired position.<sup>4</sup>

It was during this time that Luther acquainted Carlstadt with St. Augustine, whose writings he began to read with great interest. Carlstadt now broke with scholasticism and accepted Luther's views on the schoolmen.<sup>5</sup> Since he had delved, however, deeper into the method of scholasticism than both Luther and Melancton, Carlstadt continued to be under its influence even after accepting the teaching of Luther.<sup>6</sup> In 1516 Carlstadt published his 151 theses which contain the fundamental traits of his later theology. In these he combats the scholastics and Aristotle and even ponders the question, no doubt having received the stimulus from Luther,<sup>7</sup> whether the human will is capable of attaining to God. Although Carlstadt shared the Reformer's hostility towards Roman Catholicism, there never existed a personal friendship between the two men.

The differences between the two men became soon apparent. After his disputation with Dr. Eck in June and July, 1518, Carlstadt increasingly began to emphasize the efficacy of grace alone, writing tracts against indulgences and justification by

works. Luther, however, who was very sensitive to this doctrine, soon detected theological flaws in the writings of his colleague. Whereas Luther strongly emphasized justification by faith alone, Carlstadt insisted that justification was only the beginning of a Christian's life and that sanctification had to follow.

Luther believed the emphasis on a life of holiness was unnecessary since it would follow automatically the act of justification.<sup>8</sup> When Carlstadt began to lecture on his point of view, his classes were remarkably well attended.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Carlstadt could not agree with Luther that the book of James should be excluded from the biblical canon. He soon realized that the Reformer's attitude towards some of the biblical books, was conditioned by his one-sided view on justification. Carlstadt, on the other hand, felt wonderfully attracted to the strict discipline and emphasis on holiness that breathed from the pages of James.<sup>10</sup> Sensing a dangerous type of legalism in his colleague, Luther from now on sought to detract the students from Carlstadt's lectures.<sup>11</sup>

Whether Carlstadt was jealous of Luther's reputation cannot be established;<sup>12</sup> that he was eager to help with reform is certain. Upon a request from King Christian II of Denmark to send someone from Wittenberg to assist with the reform in his country, there is some reason to believe that Luther and Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony, were eager enough to send Carlstadt in order to get rid of him from Saxony.<sup>13</sup> Carlstadt gladly went early in 1521, but after six weeks of fruitless



activity the combined resistance of the Danish clergy and nobility forced him to leave the king's court.<sup>14</sup> To the dismay of both Luther and the Elector, Carlstadt returned to Wittenberg.

In October, 1521, the Augustinian monks of Wittenberg, under the fiery leadership of Gabriel Zwilling, took the initiative in advocating the abrogation of the private mass.<sup>15</sup> Although Carlstadt had earlier written against celibacy and other practices and institutions of the Church, he did not intend at first to bring about changes by the use of force. In a dispute with the zealous monks, he advocated caution in order not to give their enemies occasion for attack.<sup>16</sup> Melanchton, however, supported Zwilling on the ground that he had the Word of God and the example of the Apostles on his side. "He preaches so purely," Melanchton said of Zwilling, "so simply, that it would be hard to find anybody to compare with him."<sup>17</sup> Carlstadt, however, retorted that the mass could only be abolished with the approval of the magistrates.<sup>18</sup> The Elector counselled moderation, ordering the university to set up a commission to investigate and then report to him concerning the disturbances. This was done and a letter expressing the more moderate views of Carlstadt, was sent to Frederick the Wise.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that Luther's sympathies were decidedly in favour of those who advocated radical measures. Viewing the situation from the Wartburg, the events in Wittenberg were seemingly not moving fast enough for him.<sup>20</sup> Upon hearing

concerning the action of the Augustinian monks, Luther prepared several pamphlets, On Monastic Vows, A Blast Against the Archbishop of Mainz, and Concerning the Abuse of the Mass, which he sent to Spalatin, chancellor of Saxony, with instructions to publish them immediately. When Spalatin hesitated to do so, the Reformer's anger knew no bounds.<sup>21</sup> The tract Concerning the Abuse of the Mass,<sup>22</sup> which was written in October, reveals admirably Luther's initial attitude towards the radicalism of the monks.

Luther begins his tract by expressing his joy at the zeal of the Wittenbergers who are the very first of his followers to begin abolishing the mass, but he wonders whether all who are engaged in the good work, act from motives of pure love and faith.<sup>23</sup> This caution, however, soon gives way to a more radical strain. Luther intends to write this pamphlet because his earlier writings on the subject have not stirred<sup>24</sup> the people as yet to more concrete action. He is not concerned as to what tradition, the saints, the Fathers and the Parisian theologians have taught and practised; if a certain practice or usage does not agree with Holy Scripture, it must be abandoned.<sup>25</sup> Not even St. Paul or an angel from heaven may impose doctrines which are contrary to God's Word.<sup>26</sup> He then advises the Catholic priests to abrogate the mass, which is from the devil, and become useful laymen instead. Since all Christians possess the Holy Spirit, they all may preach and even judge in spiritual things;

not even the pope may lawfully silence a Christian.<sup>27</sup> After having elaborated in the second part of the tract on the blasphemy of the papists in connection with the sacrificial character of the mass, and having charged the pope with violating the laws of God in the third, Luther concludes by encouraging his Wittenbergers to proceed with reform inspite of the howls and objections of their enemies.<sup>28</sup> Luther does not neglect to add, however,--as ironical as it may seem after writing such a tract-- that in all measures of reform the weak brother should never be left out of sight and faith and love should be employed at all time.

It may be of interest to note that Carlstadt's booklet against the mass, which he wrote just a little later, was not as radical in tone as that of Luther's.<sup>29</sup> It is somewhat difficult to understand how the Reformer towards the end of 1521 and the beginning of 1522 could persuade himself to oppose the radicalism of the Wittenbergers, for they were merely doing what he had clearly taught in word as well as in deed.<sup>30</sup> In fact, in a letter which Luther sent to Spalatin together with his Concerning the Abuse of the Mass, he explicitly stated that he approved of the abolition of the mass in Wittenberg.<sup>31</sup>

When rumours of the disturbances continued to pour in at the Wartburg, Luther decided to go to Wittenberg in order to investigate the situation for himself. On December 4, 1521 he appeared secretly on the streets of the city, and generally was

pleased to find that the reformation was making progress. The day before, however, there had been violence; students and townfolk had invaded the parish church and had molested those who had been saying private devotions to the Virgin. Then also on the way back to the Wartburg Luther sensed a spirit of rebellion in the air.<sup>32</sup> Yet on December 9 he still wrote to Spalatin: "All I see and hear, pleases me immensely."<sup>33</sup> But in thinking over the situation and the consequences to which it may lead, Luther's "conservative" nature must have asserted itself,<sup>34</sup> and thus he wrote to the Wittenbergers not to proceed too hastily in their reform drives, for such haste is inspired by the devil. Not that he is against innovations, but reform must be the result of the preaching of the Word of God, for there are "many brothers and sisters in Leipzig, Meissen, and elsewhere, and these we must take to heaven with us."<sup>35</sup>

The letter was followed by a Warning to all Christians to Keep from Uproar and Sedition.<sup>36</sup> In this pamphlet Luther asserts that only the constituted authorities may bring about changes by force and destroy the power of the papacy; since it is their duty to punish wickedness, their action could not be considered to be rebellion. But then he reverses his trend of thought, expressing his belief that no human power will succeed in destroying the papacy; only God's hand will be able to do so.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he seems to imply that God will bring about the destruction of the papacy by means of the princes. The sword

will have to be used in order to avert the more severe judgment of God upon the Church. Just as Moses permitted 3,000 men to be slain in order to forestall God's wrath against the whole congregation, so must the nobles now follow that ancient example.<sup>38</sup> The common man, on the other hand, should always obey the magistrates; as long as the magistrates do not attack, he must rest in peace. "But if you can move the magistrates to attack and to command," Luther qualifies, "you may do so."<sup>39</sup> However, "they that read aright and understand my teaching do not raise riots," for they have not learned it from me.<sup>40</sup> The papists charge us with rebellion and sedition, Luther continues, and ascribe them to our teaching, but this is a lie, for we preach submission to the powers that be.<sup>41</sup> In conclusion the Reformer advises to "teach, to preach, to speak and to write," that all man-made laws are nothing; preach against becoming monks and nuns; do not give any money for bulls, candles, bells, tablets, and churches; let us preach and teach in this manner for two years and there will be no pope, cardinals, monks, masses, rules and statutes. But only refrain from employing violence and have consideration for the weak.<sup>42</sup>

In view of this harsh condemnation of the papacy and its institutions, it seems almost unreasonable to expect the Augustinian monks and eager men like Carlstadt to refrain from violence. Vedder comments:

He had uttered sweeping opinions in favour of freedom of

conscience, liberty of private judgement, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers--opinions that contained logical implications of which he was at the time unconscious, and that he rejected as soon as others, more logical than he, attempted to realize them.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, while the Reformer attempted to persuade his Wittenbergers to adhere to the customary ceremonies and use restraint in all things, he had to admit that they were not unreasonable nor inconsistent in abrogating those ceremonies, prayers and fasts, which to all appearances were contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>44</sup>

On December 17, 1521 the congregation of Wittenberg submitted to the city council six articles demanding reform. They included the demand of the Last Supper in both kinds, the abolition of relics, the abrogation of compulsory masses, the abolition of beer parlors and houses of infamy, and they requested that the Word of God be preached freely.<sup>45</sup> Carlstadt found, to his pleasant surprise, that the council was well disposed toward these measures of reform. When he observed that both the congregation and the city magistrates desired innovations and demanded a Christian life, it gave him reason enough to believe that God's favour rested upon all this.<sup>46</sup> He is now ready for the first time to accept the leadership in these drives for reform.

#### Increasing Radicalism and Luther's Reaction

On Christmas Day approximately 2,000 people celebrated

mass in the Castle Church, with Carlstadt officiating in plain clothes and advising the people not to confess nor fast before partaking of the sacrament. The mass was then recited partly in Latin and partly in German in a very abbreviated form, omitting all the passages on sacrifice. With the permission of the city council and the support of the university professors, Carlstadt then distributed the Holy Communion in both kinds, permitting the laymen to take the bread in their hands.<sup>47</sup> In view of Luther's recently written pamphlet concerning the mass, Carlstadt was perfectly at ease, knowing that he was acting in accordance with the thinking of the Reformer at the Wartburg.<sup>48</sup> The dam now seemed to be broken. Priests, monks and nuns began to marry and the tonsured permitted their hair to grow; priests from now on wore plain clothes while celebrating the mass; the mass was more and more recited in the German language; masses for the dead were discontinued and here and there images were smashed; as a result of Luther's earlier implications and Carlstadt's increasing aversion to all human wisdom, the enrollment at the university declined considerably;<sup>49</sup> and on January 19, 1522 Carlstadt himself married a young girl. When Luther heard about the marriage, he wrote: "I am very pleased over Carlstadt's marriage. I know the girl."<sup>50</sup>

While this turmoil was going on in Wittenberg, there appeared on December 27 certain laymen from Zwickau, near the Bohemian border, whence they had been expelled for holding

unorthodox views and advocating radical measures. Nickolaus Storch and Markus Stuebner were the most outstanding among these enthusiasts who claimed to be prophets of God and relied on the Holy Spirit rather than on the Bible. Although they did not rebaptize adults, they repudiated infant baptism and advocated the erection of the Kingdom of God on earth. There may have been a distant connection between the "Zwickau Prophets" and the radical Hussites of the fifteenth century, but it is more plausible to explain their rise in connection with the unrest of the time, the rejection of all established order, and the acceptance of one's own interpretation of Scriptures.<sup>51</sup> Markus Stuebner, a former Wittenberg student, had become quite well versed in the text of the Bible, so that Melanchton was unable to meet him on that ground and as a result was strangely attracted to the prophet. One Felix Ulscenius wrote about this to Capito in Mainz: ". . . Melanchton continually clings to his side, listens to him, wonders at him and venerates him. He is deeply disturbed at not being able to satisfy that man in any way."<sup>52</sup> On the day of their arrival in Wittenberg, Melanchton wrote to the Elector of Saxony:

They say wonderful things of themselves: that they have been commissioned to teach by a clear voice from God; that they hold familiar converse with God; that they see into the future; briefly, that they are prophetic and apostolic men. I can hardly say how much they affect me. . . . It is evident from many reasons that there are spirits in them, but no one save Martin (Luther) can judge of them.<sup>53</sup>

It was just natural for the prophets to expect finding a



spiritual home in Wittenberg. Had not the Reformer himself claimed to have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit? During the discussions at the trial at Worms in April, 1521, for example, Luther had claimed the right to criticize the decisions of the councils on the basis of I Corinthians 14:30: "If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent."<sup>53</sup> Thereupon John Cochlaeus, the Frankfurt dean, asked Luther whether something had been revealed to him. When the Reformer answered in the affirmative, Cochlaeus retorted: "Who is going to believe that something has been revealed to you? Where is the miracle, where is the sign by which you would have to prove this."<sup>54</sup> When Luther early in 1522 was confronted by the "Zwickau Prophets", he also demanded a miracle of them to substantiate their divine mission. Markus Stuebner replied that in about seven years Luther would see a miracle,<sup>55</sup> adding: "Luther, that you may know that I am indeed with the Spirit of God, I will tell you the thought that is in your mind: you are half inclined to believe that my doctrine is true."<sup>56</sup> The Reformer interrupted hastily: "Get thee behind me, Satan."<sup>56</sup> Apparently the prophet had divined his thoughts, but Luther sensing the danger to his cause from such extreme mysticism, dismissed the prophets without further disputing with them.<sup>57</sup>

It seems there was no involved relationship between the "Zwickau Prophets" and Carlstadt.<sup>58</sup> Basically their beliefs

went too far apart. The prophets were highly mystical, advocating Gelassenheit, Willigkeit and Langeweile,<sup>59</sup> while at the same time they believed in the use of the sword against the wicked. Stuebner stated:

The Turk shall soon take possession of Germany. All priests shall be slain if they now take wives. In a short time, about five, six, or seven years, there shall be such a change in the world that no ungodly or sinful man shall remain alive. Then there shall be one way, one baptism, one faith.<sup>60</sup>

Carlstadt, on the other hand, was far from advocating the slaughter of the wicked, even writing to Muentzer at this time to abstain from all revolutionary ideas.<sup>61</sup> Then also, whereas the prophets on the whole rejected the Word of God and relied on visions and dreams, Carlstadt, although believing in a personal, subjective experience of salvation, stated in February, 1522 that "no death will detract me from the foundation of the Word of God."<sup>62</sup> Yet he must also have been slightly influenced by the prophets, for after their arrival in Wittenberg he began to expound the prophetic books of Melachi and Sechariah, and to Thomas Muentzer he wrote enthusiastically: "I have talked more about dreams and visions than anybody on the faculty."<sup>63</sup> Yet to identify Carlstadt with the "Zwickau Prophets", as Luther later did, is quite unfair to the man.

From the Wartburg Luther warned the Wittenbergers against the prophets. Melancthon's proposal to arrange a meeting between Luther and the prophets, was rejected by the Reformer. From what he had heard concerning them Luther knew enough. He wrote:

When these men talk of sweetness and of being transported to the third heaven, do not believe them. Divine Majesty does not speak directly to men. God is consuming fire, and the dreams and visions of the saints are terrible. . . . Prove the spirits; and if you are not able to do so, then take the advice of Gamaliel and wait.<sup>64</sup>

In another letter he expressed the fear that the Elector might interfere with the sword to check the influence of the prophets:

"I am sure we can restrain these fire brands without the sword.

I hope the prince will not imbrue his hands in their blood. I see no reason why on their account I should come home."<sup>65</sup> Luther's leniency was bound to change for the worse.

On January 24, 1522 the Council of Wittenberg published the first ordinance of the Reformation in which it sanctioned most of the innovations in the city. The communicant, it stated, may touch the host, and images should be abolished in order to prevent the people from practising idolatry; the mass ought to be conducted in Carlstadt's fashion; Luther's ideas on social reform, such as the prohibition of begging, ought to be implemented; and prostitutes and all immorality in the city must be banned. Carlstadt was overflowing with joy, saying that God had softened the hearts of the magistrates.<sup>66</sup> Both Carlstadt and the city council condemned the excesses which accompanied these changes,<sup>67</sup> but the Elector looked with concern upon the whole situation. The enthusiasm of the "Zwickau Prophets", the ecclesiastical changes and especially the abolition of the mass, drew upon the Wittenbergers the displeasure of Frederick the Wise. The Elector's attitude may have been aggravated by a

letter from Duke George, a Catholic prince across the borders of Electoral Saxony, complaining about the radicalism at Wittenberg and indirectly accusing Frederick of condoning it.<sup>68</sup> In a letter to John Oswald, councillor at Eisenach, the Elector in turn complains of the general confusion in Wittenberg with regard to the mass, vestments and other things. Because of this commotion, he goes on, many students have left the university and some princes have asked their students to leave the city.<sup>69</sup> On February 13 Frederick ordered that the weak Christians should be taken into consideration, images should be left intact until further notice, no essential part of the mass should be omitted, and Carlstadt should not preach anymore.<sup>70</sup> Melancton showed himself submissive, but Carlstadt promised to halt all further reform only after the reform had been carried through which he deemed essential. The Elector, however, insisted on an entire rehabilitation of the old Church usages.<sup>71</sup>

Until the beginning of 1522 Luther was on the whole still well disposed towards the Wittenberg reform movement, but Melancton's report concerning the "Zwickau Prophets", may have changed his attitude.<sup>72</sup> In a letter of January 17 he writes to George Spalatin concerning the image breaking in Wittenberg: "I became surety for their preservation." He then adds that he must return in order to prevent the Wittenbergers from putting the "Zwickau Prophets" into prison.<sup>73</sup> In a letter of February, 1522 Luther sarcastically congratulates the Elector on the "new

sanctuary" in Wittenberg, and the "whole cross with nails, lances and whips," which God has sent him. The Reformer adds that he knows what Satan is up to.<sup>74</sup> Early in 1522 the city council apparently sent Luther an invitation to return and restore order.<sup>75</sup> On March 6 the Reformer arrived in Wittenberg, thus making good his earlier intentions of not staying longer at the Wartburg than until Easter.<sup>76</sup>

Meanwhile, in view of the political situation in Germany, the Elector was against Luther's leaving his hiding place. But in a letter of March 5, Luther insists on returning to Wittenberg, informing Frederick that he is not afraid of Duke George, even though it should rain Duke Georges for nine days. He is not in need of the Elector's protection, for God is with him. The Gospel of Christ suffers violence at Wittenberg, therefore he must come back at once.<sup>77</sup> Even after Luther had returned Frederick was still ill at ease. Apparently fearing more radicalism as well as the accusation of his enemies, he ordered that Luther refrain from preaching in Wittenberg.<sup>78</sup> In a letter to Spalatin on March 7, Luther assured the Elector that, although he too was in favour of abrogating certain abuses, auricular confession, the worship of saints, etc., he intended to bring about these changes by preaching the Word only and not by force.<sup>79</sup> On the same day Luther also complied with a request from the Elector, asking the Reformer to state his reasons for disobeying the prince's command not to leave the Wartburg. Luther's reasons

for returning to Wittenberg are the following three: First, the Wittenberg Church and council had invited him to return; secondly, during his absence the devil has intruded his fold; thirdly, since the peasants have perverted and misapplied his gospel, he feels Germany will rebel against all constituted authorities.<sup>80</sup> It thus appears that Luther's concern for order, coupled with a fear that his cause may suffer loss through the radicalism of the Wittenbergers, that induced Luther to rush back to Wittenberg.

To restore order in the city, Luther preached eight consecutive sermons<sup>81</sup> from March 9 to 17. They were clearly directed against Carlstadt, but the Reformer skillfully refrained from mentioning his name. In these sermons Luther first of all accuses the Wittenbergers of having disregarded the weak brethren and having proceeded without faith and love.<sup>82</sup> The matter of reform is good in itself, but the haste with which it has been done is against God.<sup>83</sup> Some preachers among you, he continues, have not been called to preach; I am your minister; you should have listened to me and asked me first before doing anything drastic.<sup>84</sup> Some things are commanded in Scripture and others are not; the things about which the Bible is silent are left free to all. St. Paul very well knew that images were of no use, yet he was not called upon to destroy them, nor have I done anything by brute force. For while I slept, Luther boasts, God's Word accomplished more than what mere force would have.<sup>85</sup> Moses

nowhere speaks against keeping images but only against worshipping them. And, after all, only the properly constituted authorities may abolish images and other abuses by force. Concerning a layman's touching the sacrament with his hands, Luther agrees that Christ and the Apostles took the bread in their hands, but these minor things are irrelevant and should not be made into a law.<sup>86</sup> Above all else, Luther concludes his sermons, a Christian's freedom in Christ must be preserved and a middle course must be followed at all time.<sup>87</sup>

Shortly after he had preached his eight sermons, Luther also published a pamphlet, Concerning the Sacrament and other Innovations,<sup>88</sup> which in a more forceful language was directed against Carlstadt as well. Luther repeats in it much of what he had said in his sermons, but it is of interest that at this time he still strongly adhered to his principle of sola scriptura and one's own interpretation of the Bible. In fact, concerning certain usages, such as the wearing or not wearing of vestments, the touching of the sacramental bread, and other things, he strongly advocates a Christian's inner feeling as the criterion for action. If one inwardly feels that the Word of God demands certain practices, one ought not to be disobedient to this heavenly voice.<sup>89</sup> This comes very close to the type of spiritualism which the "Zwickau Prophets" advocated, and it is similar to the "Inner Word" of later Spiritualists like Denck and Schwenckfeld with whom Luther collided. Yet the Reformer

in this tract always comes back to warn against radicalism and extremes. At one time the devil sought to make us too popish, he laments, but now he wants to make us too evangelical.<sup>90</sup> The usage of the sacraments, auricular confession and celibacy may all be contrary to God's Word, but one should never forget that the new wine is too strong for the old wineskins.

There is a difference of opinion as to why Luther changed his attitude towards the reform in Wittenberg and why he returned from the Wartburg with such haste. Some have suggested that Luther's jealousy of Carlstadt's popularity and success, may account for this change of mind.<sup>91</sup> Several considerations seem to substantiate this view. In a report to Caspar Guettel, prior of the Augustinians at Eisleben, Luther wrote on March 30, 1522: "His [Carlstadt's] ambition is to set up a new doctrine on his own account, and to establish his rule and system on the ruin of my authority."<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere he writes: "Even if it were true that the Mass implies a good work, and Dr. Karlstadt were in good blood, he would have addressed us first and warned, before he made such a great shame of us publicly before all the world."<sup>93</sup> Later in his Table Talks he stated that whatever Carlstadt did was done out of jealousy; had it been the will of God, Luther would have gladly yielded to him, but he felt that through the grace of God he was more learned than all others.<sup>94</sup> That Luther's plea for moderation early in 1522 was somewhat of an exaggerated nature, is seen by



the fact that as late as 1523 he repeatedly urged the Wittenbergers to abolish all the Catholic practices in the Castle Church.<sup>95</sup> We may thus be justified in supposing, without detracting anything from the man who was able to bring the storm under control, that there is at least some truth in the view that Luther could not endure a man who acted and proceeded without consulting him first and who even threatened to challenge his leadership.<sup>96</sup>

While this may be true, the reason for Luther's sudden reversal of his former views must be sought deeper than in the mere personality clashes of the two men. Walter Nigg seems to be quite correct when he attempts to explain Luther's change of mind from the circumstances in which the Reformer suddenly found himself, as well as from the double nature of his character. Luther, according to Nigg, was the greatest revolutionist that ever lived, yet in his soul he was the most conservative person there ever was.<sup>97</sup> Luther was also practical enough to realize that an alliance with the lawless elements among his own could very well jeopardize his own cause.<sup>98</sup>

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>14 miles north-west of Wuerzburg.

<sup>3</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. by S. M. Jackson (12 vols.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1908-1912), II, 413.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>R. H. Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 329.

<sup>6</sup>G. Wolf, Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationsgeschichte (3 vols.; Gotha, 1914), II, 77-81.

<sup>7</sup>Hermann Barge, one of the best authorities on Carlstadt, believes that Carlstadt arrived at these views independent of Luther, and that he may even have influenced the Reformer in this. The New-Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414. But Luther battled with this question before this date.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Rudolf Thiel, Luther (Wien: Paul Neff Verlag, 1935), pp. 433-434.

<sup>9</sup>H. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (2 vols.; Leipzig: Friedrich Brandstetter, 1905), I, 181-184.

<sup>10</sup>Wappler, Die Taeuferbewegung in Thueringen, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 196-200.

<sup>12</sup>Some of Luther's sympathizers believe he was. See R. H. Bainton, W. A. Quanbeck and E. G. Rupp, Luther Today (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), p. 110 ff.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414.

<sup>15</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 311-322.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>17</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 181.

- <sup>18</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 444.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup>Bainton, Here I Stand, pp. 157-158.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 153.
- <sup>22</sup>German title: "Vom Missbrauch der Messe" (SWEA, XXVIII, 27-44).
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-31.
- <sup>24</sup>"noch nicht genug bewegen." Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>25</sup>Later, as we shall see, Luther argued that all that is not prohibited in the Bible may be practised.
- <sup>26</sup>SWEA, XXVIII, 31-33.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-44.
- <sup>29</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 334.
- <sup>30</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, pp. 182-183.
- <sup>31</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 334.
- <sup>32</sup>Cf. Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 159.
- <sup>33</sup>Quoted in The Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. C. G. Herbermann, et. al. (15 vols.; New York: The Universal Knowledge Foundation, Inc., 1907-1912), IX, 448.
- <sup>34</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 194.
- <sup>35</sup>M. Luther, The Letters of, sel. and trans. M. A. Currie (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), pp. 91-93.
- <sup>36</sup>German title: "Eine treue Vermahnung zu allen Christen, sich zu verhueten vor Aufruhr und Empoerung" (SWEA, XXII, 43-58).
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-48.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 49.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-57.
- <sup>43</sup>Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 194.
- <sup>44</sup>Cf. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 27.
- <sup>45</sup>Cf. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 352-353.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 353-354.
- <sup>47</sup>Gerdtehl, Die Revolutionierung der Kirchen, p. 143.
- <sup>48</sup>Cf. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 374-375.
- <sup>49</sup>In his earlier writings Luther condemned Aristotle and all secular education. SWEA, XXI, 351. Elsewhere he wrote: "... arme Bauern und Kinder bass Christum verstehen, denn Papst, Bischoefe, und Doktores." Quoted in G. Ritter, Luther. Gestalt und Tat (6. Auflage; Muenchen: F. Bruckman Verlag, 1959), p. 129. But the attendance at the university also dropped because students no longer were supported by ecclesiastical stipends.
- <sup>50</sup>Quoted in Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 155.
- <sup>51</sup>Cf. Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 184.
- <sup>52</sup>Quoted in E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 538.
- <sup>53</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 183.
- <sup>54</sup>Quoted in Boehmer, Martin Luther, p. 420.
- <sup>55</sup>SWEA, LXI, 1-2.
- <sup>56</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 190.
- <sup>57</sup>Luther later regarded the prophets as servants of the devil. SWEA, LXI, 1-2.
- <sup>58</sup>Cf. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 402.
- <sup>59</sup>This implies passive and complete resignation to God. Cf. Thiel, Luther, pp. 440-441.

- <sup>60</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 184 n.
- <sup>61</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414. Cf. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, p. 549.
- <sup>62</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 403-404.
- <sup>63</sup>Quoted in Bainton, Quanbeck and Rupp, Luther Today, p. 118.
- <sup>64</sup>Quoted in Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 161.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 161-162.
- <sup>66</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 378-379.
- <sup>67</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414.
- <sup>68</sup>Letter of Feb. 2, 1522 in E. L. Enders (ed.), Dr. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel (10 vols.; Calw and Stuttgart: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1884-1903), III.
- <sup>69</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, III, 292-293.
- <sup>70</sup>Cf. Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 162.
- <sup>71</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414.
- <sup>72</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 434-435.
- <sup>73</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 96.
- <sup>74</sup>SWEA, LIII, 103-104. Luther refers to the Elector's habit of collecting relics.
- <sup>75</sup>Cf. Letter to the Elector, March 7, 1522, SWEA, LIII, 110. Some do not believe the city had extended an invitation to return. Cf. The Catholic Encyclopedia, IX, 449.
- <sup>76</sup>Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 162-163.
- <sup>77</sup>SWEA, LIII, 104-109.
- <sup>78</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, III, 297-298.
- <sup>79</sup>SWEA, LIII, 112-114.
- <sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 109-111.

<sup>81</sup>"Acht Sermonen D. M. Luthers von ihm gepredigt zu Wittenberg in der Fasten, darin kuerzlich begriffen von den Messen, Bildnissen, beiderlei Gestalt des Sacraments, von den Speisen und heimlicher Beichte," SWEA, XXVIII, 202-284.

<sup>82</sup>H. Barge states that this shows how little Luther knew of the real situation, for the Wittenbergers were more or less all agreed in their action of reform. Moreover, St. Paul's exhortation to be mindful of other brethren refers to weak Christians within the congregation and not to outsiders (1. Cor. 8:9). Andreas Bodenstein, I, 444 ff.

<sup>83</sup>"Die Sache ist wohl gut an ihr selbst; aber das Eilen ist zu schnelle."

<sup>84</sup>SWEA, XXVIII, 205-215.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 216-221.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 235-239.

<sup>87</sup>"eilet nicht so schwinde, auf dass uns der Teufel nicht aus der rechten Bahn fuehre; wie er denn im Sinne hat." Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>88</sup>German title: "Von beider Gestalt des Sacraments zu nehmen und anderer Neuerung" (Ibid., pp. 285-318).

<sup>89</sup>"... sondern du musst bei dir selbst im Gewissen fuehlen, Christum selbst, und unweglich (inwendig) empfinden, dass es Gottes Wort sei, wenn auch alle Welt dawider stritte. So lange du das Fuehlen nicht hast, so lange hast du gewisslich Gottes Wort noch nicht geschmeckt." Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>91</sup>Cf. The Catholic Encyclopedia, IX, 449.

<sup>92</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 191.

<sup>93</sup>Quoted in Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup>SWEA, LXI, 19.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Letters to Justus Jonas of March 1, 1523 and to the clergy at Wittenberg of July 11, 1523, Enders, Briefwechsel, IV, 90. 176.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. Gerdtehl, Die Revolutionierung der Kirchen, pp. 146-148.

<sup>97</sup>Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer, pp. 348-349.

<sup>98</sup>Cf. Knox, Enthusiasm, p. 126 f.

## CHAPTER IV

### LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE WITTENBERG RADICALS, II

#### Luther's Treatment of Carlstadt

Luther's appearance in Wittenberg, his sermons and his writings produced the desired effects. As early as March 9, only three days after the Reformer's return, Hieronymus Schurf, a councillor at Wittenberg, wrote to the Elector that with Luther at home all will be well now, and that his sermons will make an end to all that the devil and his followers have wrought.<sup>1</sup> To the great humiliation of Carlstadt, Luther managed to shake off the influence of the radical preacher, although permitting him to remain on the faculty of the university. The Lord's Supper sub una specie and the elevation of the host were restored again. Outside of Carlstadt, all of the persons involved in the late radicalism realized their rash actions and repented of their follies.<sup>2</sup> For the contritious Gabriel Zwilling, Luther soon found a pastorate at Altenburg. In a letter (April 17, 1522) to the former Augustinian monk, Luther advises him to accept the charge, but warns him to "behave in circumspect manner, going about in an orderly priest's dress; and for the sake of the weak, do away with that broad angular monstrosity of a hat, remembering that you are sent to those who must still be fed with milk. . . ."3 When Zwilling later encountered difficulties in his new charge,



Luther stood faithfully behind him.<sup>4</sup> Melancthon was also in full harmony with Luther again. On March 15 Schurf reported again to Frederick the Wise: Luther has managed to bring all of the Wittenbergers back to the way of truth; the educated as well as the uneducated are glad and full of joy; only Carlstadt is still dissatisfied, but he, no doubt, will be unable to do any harm.<sup>5</sup>

Carlstadt continued to smart under the humiliation caused by his junior colleague and secretly sought an opportunity for revenge. When he attempted to publish an article against his enemy, Luther and the city council discovered the plot in time to prevent it from appearing.<sup>6</sup> The university now, under the guidance of the Reformer, was intent on curtailing Carlstadt's activities even more,<sup>7</sup> but thanks to the Elector's sense of righteousness he was kept on the staff and remained unmolested for the time being.<sup>8</sup> On March 30 Luther wrote:

I have offended Carlstadt by annulling his ordinances, although I do not condemn his doctrine, except that he has busied himself in merely external things, to the neglect of true Christian doctrine, that is, faith and charity. For by his unwise way of teaching he has led the people to feel that the only thing they have to do to be Christians is to communicate in both kinds, take the bread and cup in their hands, neglect confession and break images.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that Luther is oversimplifying Carlstadt's intentions, beliefs and practices.

From now on Carlstadt increasingly devoted himself

to mysticism, with the result that he began to look upon all media in the religious communication between God and man as superfluous. He even began to dispise the ministry itself, lived for some time as a peasant in Segrena, near Wittenberg, with relatives of his wife, and called himself "a new layman".<sup>10</sup> While he was absent from Wittenberg he continued to collect his income from the university, but his ill conscience in connection with this led him in 1524 to accept the call to Orlamuende.<sup>11</sup> The congregation at Orlamuende was happy to get such a learned professor as pastor who was willing to lead them in their crusade against images, infant baptism and the mass.<sup>12</sup> As "a new layman" and "brother Andres" Carlstadt listened sympathetically to the peasants' interpretation of the Bible, subjected himself to the judge of Orlamuende, encouraged all who felt God's call to preach the Word, demanded a more strict observance of the Sunday, and penalized "idol worship" and all sin. With all this he greatly perplexed Luther who was unable to find a Bible text against the scandal.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, without mentioning Luther's name, Carlstadt began writing against the Reformer, attacking at first especially Luther's exaggerated principle of forbearance for the weak brethren and his overemphasis of justification by faith alone at the expense of sanctification.<sup>14</sup>

Luther did all he could to molest Carlstadt in his new charge. He accused him of going to Orlamuende for two reasons:

Financial greed and the freedom to teach and practice his fancies.<sup>15</sup> Luther did not believe Carlstadt was properly called to his pastorate, for he had completely disregarded the wishes of Frederick the Wise and had forced himself upon the congregation.<sup>16</sup> Luther also complained to the magistrates that the university had not been consulted by the congregation of Orlamuende with regard to their choice. But the magistrates reminded the Reformer that in the previous year he had advocated complete freedom of a congregation to elect a pastor.<sup>17</sup> This incident must have convinced Luther of the far-reaching effects of his earlier writings, but it did not deter him from further pursuing his enemy. On January 30, 1524 he informed the Chancellor of Saxony, George Brueck, of Carlstadt's printing press in Jena, advising him to censor Carlstadt's writings. "Although this cannot do much injury to our ministerium," he wrote, "still it is apt to bring dishonour upon our Prince and University, as both have promised that nothing should be published without censorship by proper parties."<sup>18</sup> The authorities took the necessary steps to silence the trouble maker.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime Luther made a tour through the country, preaching against the "spirit of Alstedt", by which he meant the destructive influence of Thomas Muentzer and Carlstadt. On August 22, 1524 he preached in Jena, emphasizing the breaking of images and the despoilation of the sacraments, especially

the sacrament of the Eucharist. Carlstadt, who happened to be in the audience, was hurt and after the sermon sent to Luther asking him for an interview.<sup>20</sup> The request was granted and the two men met in an inn, To the Black Bear, where Carlstadt attempted to justify himself by pointing out that holding different views<sup>21</sup> concerning the Last Supper had nothing to do with the "spirit of Alstedt". He further accused Luther of stabbing him in the back instead of admonishing him like a brother, of censoring his writings and of forbidding him to preach freely, all of which indicates fear on the part of Luther that Carlstadt's teaching may prevail in the end. When the Reformer retorted that he had not been properly called to preach, Carlstadt replied that God had called him to the ministry, and the call of God is more important than that of men. After having accused each other of jealousy and vain-glory, the interview ended with Luther giving Carlstadt the permission to write and publish against him as much as he wished. To guarantee this freedom, Luther gave Carlstadt a golden coin, which the latter accepted with joy. But Carlstadt still doubtful concerning Luther's intentions, wrote on September 11 to Duke John of Saxony asking him to confirm his freedom to publish freely against his enemy. In this letter he also complains that Luther regards him an enthusiast and rebel, which he definitely is not.<sup>22</sup>

After the affair in Jena the town council and

congregation of Orlamuende wrote a letter to Luther, accusing him of identifying them with the "spirit of Alstedt". When the Reformer passed through the town, he discussed their letter with the council point by point, showing that they were erring in certain respects. The Orlamuenders insisted they were true Christians and on the basis of the Old Testament they effectively argued against the "worship of images". They also pointed out that according to Luther's earlier writings and according to Scripture they had the right to call their own priest. On the basis of appropriate Bible texts, Luther attempted to convince them of their unreasonableness, but the hostility against him increased to such an extent that he was happy to leave the town alive.<sup>23</sup>

This uncivil treatment was too much for Luther. On September 22 he wrote to John Frederick of Saxony, asking him to banish Carlstadt, this restless spirit at Orlamuende.<sup>24</sup> The congregation interceded in vain for their beloved pastor, his pregnant wife and child.<sup>25</sup> In his farewell address to the people of Orlamuende, Carlstadt signed: "Andreas Bodenstein, expelled by Luther, unheard and unconvinced."<sup>26</sup> Carlstadt's friends and supporters were soon banished from Saxony as well.<sup>27</sup> Luther who a few years earlier had expected to die a martyr's death, had now become a persecutor himself.<sup>28</sup>

### The Sacramental Controversy

After Carlstadt was driven from Saxony he went on journeys to Strassburg, Basel, Zurich and other places, writing feverishly all this time against Luther and his doctrines, in particular against the Reformer's retention of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Carlstadt must be held responsible for initiating the so-called sacramental controversy which caused so much grief and strife among the Protestants. It must be noted that Carlstadt's views on the Last Supper were shared, with minor variations, by most radicals and Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.

To understand the sacramental controversy which ensued between Luther and the radical reformers, we must cast it against the background of the Roman Catholic conception of the mass. The celebration of the Eucharist was early in the history of the Church designated as an "offering" or "sacrifice".<sup>29</sup> Even Protestant scholars agree that Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian in Africa, and Cyprian believed in the sacrificial nature of the mass and held either to transubstantiation or consubstantiation.<sup>30</sup> Cyprian, for example, wrote: "Since we make mention of His passion in all our sacrifices, for the passion is the Lord's sacrifice which we offer, we ought to do nothing else than what He did (at the last supper)."<sup>31</sup> The word missa (mass) was seemingly derived from the dismissal of an assembly after the priest had invoked God's

blessing upon it. The word was soon permanently employed to designate the celebration of the mass.<sup>32</sup>

According to Catholic teaching the Holy Eucharist was instituted for two purposes: It was to be the food of the souls of men and it was to continue the sacrifice of Christ in the Church.<sup>33</sup> The mass, therefore, is not a commemoration of Christ's death only, but a renewal and continuation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This does not mean that the mass derogates anything from the sacrifice on Calvary, which is complete; "the Sacrifice of the Mass exists only in relation to that of the cross from which it derives its efficacy."<sup>34</sup> To put it in the words of the Council of Trent:

This new offering is necessarily also a sacrifice in its own right, but not one that has independent redemptive value, since it is nothing else than a sacramental extension of the one and only redemptive sacrifice on Calvary which the Epistle to the Hebrews had in view.<sup>35</sup>

The sacrifice of the mass is of a human and divine essence; it is made by Christ as well as by the recipient.<sup>36</sup> Since it is in the very nature of man to offer a gift to his Creator, God accepts his bread and wine after these elements have been transformed into the body and blood of Christ, for only the very best is acceptable to the divine Majesty.<sup>37</sup> Thus the mass is not simply man's good work, as Luther explained Catholic teaching on the subject, but it contains an element of both, the human and the divine.

Not only did Luther object to the mass as a sacrifice

and good work, but he also found fault with the concept of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation was a term employed by the Lateran Council of 1215, to define the way in which the physical realities of the elements were transformed into the real body and blood of Christ.<sup>38</sup> The Lateran only attempted to redefine a matter which for several centuries had been the subject of heated controversies. As early as the second century Christians believed in the Real Presence.<sup>39</sup> This belief in transubstantiation was more clearly defined at the Council of Trent. It declared:

If any man deny that in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist are contained truly, really and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ, but says that He is there only as a sign, figure, or power, let him be anathema.<sup>40</sup>

Luther first expressed his views concerning the mass in his pamphlet On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520). Concerning the Catholic mass he had, as we have intimated, three objections: He attacked the communion in one kind, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the sacrificial nature of the mass. The first objection receded into the background as he saw that the Wittenberg radicals made a major issue of it. Concerning this he wrote to Chancellor Brueck as late as 1543: "These godless ceremonies are giving us much more trouble than greater and more essential matters, as they have always done."<sup>41</sup> With regard to transubstantiation Luther felt that it was a milder bondage of Rome.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless



he repudiated it because he was afraid that the conception was an attempt to deny the importance of earthly substances; it is the same tendency that underestimates the importance of matrimony and ordinary worldly occupations in favour of the "purely spiritual" ascetic life.<sup>43</sup> Although he never used the term, Luther seemed to believe in consubstantiation. Just as in a red-hot bar the fire and the metal do not lose their identity, he reasoned, so is Christ in, with and under the elements of the Eucharist. Or, just as God and man became one in Christ, so do the elements and Christ's body become one, yet both retain their distinct essence.<sup>44</sup> In this view the Reformer believed to follow the Fathers. St. Augustine's statement, "the sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace,"<sup>45</sup> Luther interpreted as simply meaning that Christ the invisible joined the visible elements of the sacrament, thus actually confirming his own position.<sup>46</sup> When Tertullian looks upon the Last Supper as figura of Christ, he does not, according to Luther, mean a figure or a symbol, as some radicals interpreted it, but a material form (Gestalt), something tangible and substantial.<sup>47</sup> On the whole then, Luther retained with the Catholic Church the Real Presence.

Luther's third objection, against the sacrifice of the mass, was much more serious, for the belief in it struck at the very heart of his experience and theology. It must be noted that the later medieval period had overemphasized the

sacrificial aspect of the mass and had stressed in various forms the value of it for gaining God's grace for the living and the dead. As a result of this, Church authorities before and after Luther found reason for making certain corrections.<sup>48</sup> But Luther went far beyond a mere correction of abuses; his conception of the Eucharist had to harmonize with his Christology.<sup>49</sup> He denied the human role in the transaction altogether, for the sinner is passive and merely accepts what Christ freely offers. Furthermore, the mass cannot be called a sacrifice because Christ's work holds good for all time. If St. Augustine calls the mass a sacrifice, he simply means that it reminds us of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.<sup>50</sup> Luther's retention of the Real Presence, and his rejection of the sacrificial nature of the mass were the result of, as Bornkamm puts it, his

yearning for a reality of grace not less real than his sins. His doctrine of Holy Communion is an expression of his faith in this reality of God in the midst of the world's reality and the reality of man's Anfechtungen; it is the ultimate deduction of his belief in the reality of forgiveness.<sup>51</sup>

Of the radical reformers Carlstadt was the first to be at variance with Luther on the point of the Real Presence, and Zwingli and the Anabaptists<sup>52</sup> were to follow him. Carlstadt pointed out that Christ's body and blood were not really present in the Last Supper, but that the elements simply represented Christ and in partaking of them the believers commemorated his death on the cross.<sup>53</sup> When Christ said, "This is my body",

Carlstadt argued, he pointed to himself and not to the bread.<sup>54</sup> In a letter to Chancellor Brueck, Carlstadt emphatically stated, that the words of institution are clear on this point and that they could not be understood literally; he would like to be of one mind with Luther but the Scripture is in between them, and the Reformer perverts its clear meaning.<sup>55</sup> With the denial of the Real Presence, it soon became fashionable to laugh and joke about the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ.<sup>56</sup> In a most radical tract<sup>57</sup> on the subject, written after his expulsion from Saxony, Carlstadt, as it were, threw the gauntlet before the Reformer, challenging him to defend his position.

Luther was not slow to accept the challenge. In the winter of 1524-1525 he wrote his most biting booklet, Against the Celestial Prophets,<sup>58</sup> grouping all enthusiasts, such as Storch, Stuebner, Muentzer and above all Carlstadt, under this title. With this Luther proposes to answer all of Carlstadt's writings. He begins by pointing out that by dissenting from the true teaching concerning Holy Communion, Carlstadt has become an apostate and an enemy of Christ. After reviewing at some length all of Carlstadt's "sins", Luther concludes the Elector has dealt very leniently with him by banishing him from the land; actually he had deserved to die for his crimes.<sup>59</sup> To Carlstadt's accusation that the Lutherans call the Last Supper a mass and hence an offering,

Luther replies that there is nothing in a name, as long as the mass is not conceived of as a sacrifice.<sup>60</sup> By concerning himself with such irrelevant matters, Carlstadt shows how ridiculous he is.

Concerning the words of institution, Luther says they must be taken literally. In fact, the Bible text must always be taken literally, unless it demands a symbolical interpretation, as, for example, in Psalm 18:3 where God is referred to as being a rock; our faith plainly instructs us that God is not a rock in the literal sense. On the other hand, we are clearly taught by faith that Christ's body is literally in the elements of Holy Communion.<sup>61</sup> How the bread and wine are able to contain Christ, Luther confesses not to know, but he is certain that it is so, for the Word cannot lie; to rationalize on this point, as Carlstadt does, is from the devil. Luther then attempts to refute Carlstadt's argument from Greek grammar, showing that the enthusiast has utterly misunderstood the original text.<sup>62</sup> The accusation that the Reformer promises the kingdom of heaven for a piece of bread, is refuted by pointing out that the recipient of the Last Supper must have faith in Christ before he can benefit from it. When the bread and wine are partaken in faith, there is forgiveness and power in the sacrament; without faith there is damnation.<sup>63</sup> Luther concludes his Against the Celestial Prophets by stating that the Sacramentarians

misunderstand the great truth concerning the Eucharist because they have not experienced the forgiveness of God.<sup>64</sup>

The sacramental controversy had caused Luther the profoundest struggles; it seems he reacted so violently against the Sacramentarians because he himself had had doubts on the issue. As late as 1524 he confessed how strongly he had been tempted to regard the Last Supper as a symbol only, but the words of Christ were too strong for him.<sup>65</sup> To Justus Jonas, a close friend, he wrote: "Would that the Sacramentarians experienced for one quarter of an hour the sorrows of my heart, then I would declare they were truly converted. But now my enemies are mighty, and heap anguish on him whom the Lord chastens."<sup>66</sup> To John Brismann in Koenigsberg he laments that the prophets increase steadily, a trial for the true believers, but, he adds, "God will expose Carlstadt in His own time."<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere he writes:

Ah, if only they would deign to acknowledge that they are Herods, Pilates and Caiaphases, and renounce the name of Christians, confessing themselves the enemies of Jesus, I would suffer all the evil they might be pleased to do me!<sup>68</sup>

Not even the Roman Catholics, the Reformer confessed, had caused him so much trouble and grief as the Sacramentarians.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, he comforted himself, the Gospel has always been attacked and it must defend itself in order to grow strong; thus even the devil must serve God in this.<sup>70</sup>

Luther's final encounter with Carlstadt came after the

Peasants' Revolt. When the war broke out, Carlstadt was active as minister in Rothenburg on the Tauber. He was sent as envoy to pacify the peasants in his region, but in doing so he made himself unpopular with them.<sup>71</sup> Although he had repudiated Muentzer's revolutionary ideas, Luther's writings against the fanatics had stigmatized him also as a rebel, and consequently after the collapse of the war he escaped with difficulties. Being in fear of death, his resistance to Luther broke down, and on June 12, 1525 he wrote to the Reformer from Frankfurt on the Main, asking him to forgive him all the evil he had written against him. He has decided not to write nor preach anymore, and he humbly asks Luther to speak for him and his family to the Elector that they may be permitted to return to Saxony. He is willing to give full satisfaction to Luther for all he has done to him.<sup>72</sup> Carlstadt, in addition, wrote a tract in which he justified himself against alleged participation in the revolt, asking Luther to publish it in order to vindicate his name.

The Reformer was gracious. In a pamphlet addressed to all Christians,<sup>73</sup> Luther states that although Carlstadt is his enemy on account of his doctrine, according to Romans 12:20 it is a Christian's duty to give aid even to an enemy. He also expresses hope that Carlstadt will eventually be converted to the true view on the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Peasants' Revolt Luther now blames not on the fanatics but on

the princes and bishops who have driven the peasants to extremities. In conclusion the Reformer asks all princes to accept Carlstadt's apology and to believe him for Christ's sake. Upon Luther's request Carlstadt also wrote a partial recantation of his Eucharistic views, which Luther supplied with a preface.<sup>74</sup> Carlstadt's explanation that he is still seeking the truth and that he has not as yet arrived at a final conclusion on the subject, the Reformer accepts with joy. Luther now also recalls that all the titles of Carlstadt's previous writings, were usually in the form of a question rather than dogmatic statement. But since Carlstadt had written quite forcefully on his subjects, Luther had forgotten to consider the wording of the titles. Although it is dangerous to waver in one's faith, as Carlstadt does, it is our Christian duty to assist the erring in brotherly love. In conclusion Luther warns, however, to beware of the still lingering influence of his former enemy.

Luther apparently dared not to speak to the Elector on behalf of Carlstadt, but he wrote his former colleague to come and live secretly in his house. Carlstadt accepted the invitation,<sup>75</sup> but from 1526 on he had to earn his living as a peasant and storekeeper. Before the close of that year, he was reduced to almost complete poverty, and when he retracted his recantation, Carlstadt and his family again were compelled to leave Saxony. His wayward life ended when he found an open

door with the Swiss reformers, who joined and supported him when Luther renewed his attack on Carlstadt. In 1534 Carlstadt was called to Basel as preacher and professor at the university, a position he held until on December 24, 1541 he died during a plague. Luther was convinced that Carlstadt went to hell.<sup>76</sup>

Herman Barge points out that Luther's return from the Wartburg nipped the lay movement of the Reformation in the bud. The priesthood of all believers, a principle the Reformer had advocated at first, did not seem to work out according to his liking. With the help of the secular arm, Luther saw to it that the democratic and puritanical movement had to give way to absolutism; between God and man there was once again placed the "spiritual office".<sup>77</sup> While this may be true to a certain extent, Barge underestimates the reasons for extinguishing the flame which Luther himself had helped to kindle. Jealousy, selfishness and inconsistencies, as we have seen, may all have played a part; his "orthodox nature" and his love for order<sup>78</sup> may have asserted themselves; but basically it was his cause, which he identified with the Gospel of Christ and which now was threatened with destruction, that induced Luther to turn with such fury on his former friends.<sup>79</sup>



NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

- <sup>1</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, III, 299-302.
- <sup>2</sup>Koestlin, Martin Luther, I, 547.
- <sup>3</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 105.
- <sup>4</sup>SWEA, LIII, 134-136.
- <sup>5</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, III, 307.
- <sup>6</sup>Koestlin, Martin Luther, I, 547.
- <sup>7</sup>Carlstadt had been forbidden to preach after Luther's return.
- <sup>8</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, I, 458-459.
- <sup>9</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 191.
- <sup>10</sup>Cf. Koestlin, Martin Luther, I, 701-704. Dallmann represents Carlstadt as standing "barefooted on a dung heap" pitching manure, "best thing he ever did in his life." Martin Luther, p. 143.
- <sup>11</sup>Thiel, Luther, p. 428 f.
- <sup>12</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, II, 99-103.
- <sup>13</sup>Thiel, Luther, p. 432.
- <sup>14</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 414-415.
- <sup>15</sup>SWEA, XXIX, 172-173.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-171.
- <sup>17</sup>Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 32.
- <sup>18</sup>Luther, The Letters of, pp. 119-120.
- <sup>19</sup>Thiel, Luther, pp. 434-435.
- <sup>20</sup>For the dramatic episode in Jena see M. Reinhard, "Die sogenannten Acta Jenensia, oder Bericht von der Handlung zwischen Luther und Karlstadt zu Jena," SWEA, LXIV, 384-404.

<sup>21</sup>Carlstadt, as we shall see, rejected the Real Presence in the Eucharist and held that Christ was only spiritually present in the bread and wine.

<sup>22</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 20-21.

<sup>23</sup>For Luther's meeting with the Orlamuenders see SWEA, LXIV, 398-404.

<sup>24</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 25-26.

<sup>25</sup>Thiel, Luther, pp. 436-439.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 192.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Reinhard for example, who had enraged Luther by writing the Acta Jenensia, was banished from Saxony in October of the same year. Cf. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, II, 141-142.

<sup>28</sup>To Amsdorf Luther wrote on Oct. 27, 1524: "Du siehst, dass ich, der ich selbst haette Maertyrer werden sollen, dazu gelangt bin, andere zu Maertyrern zu machen." Quoted in Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. J. A. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite. Its Origins and Development, trans. by F. A. Brunner (New rev. and abridged edition in one volume; New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1959), pp. 129-130.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. e. g. G. W. Dollar, "The Lord's Supper in the Second Century," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 117 (April, 1960), 144-154. But the author accuses the Church Fathers of muddled thinking.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Second edition; Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 115.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, pp. 131-133.

<sup>33</sup>Nicholas O'Rafferty, Instructions on Christian Doctrine--The Sacraments (New York: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1939), p. 170.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, p. 140.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>37</sup>Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, pp. 142-143;  
cf. O'Rafferty, Instructions in Christian Doctrine, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup>Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, p. 630 n.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Dollar, Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 117 (Apr. 1960),  
144 f.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in O'Rafferty, Instructions in Christian,  
p. 94.

<sup>41</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 421.

<sup>42</sup>Luther, The First Principles of the Reformation,  
p. 157.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup>SWEA, XXIX, 265-266.

<sup>45</sup>Sacramentum est invisibilis gratiae visibilis forma.

<sup>46</sup>SWEA, XXX, 105-106.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-110.

<sup>48</sup>Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, p. 136.

<sup>49</sup>Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, pp. 701-702.

<sup>50</sup>SWEA, XXX, 144-145.

<sup>51</sup>H. Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, trans.  
M. H. Bertram (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House,  
1958), p. 112.

<sup>52</sup>For a detailed description of the Anabaptist position on  
the Last Supper see Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. 277-285.

<sup>53</sup>Koestlin, Martin Luther, I, 706.

<sup>54</sup>Carlstadt argued that the Greek text demands such an  
interpretation.

<sup>55</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, VI, 339-353.

<sup>56</sup>Thiel, Luther, p. 520.

<sup>57</sup>German title: Ob man gemach faren soll.

<sup>58</sup>German title: "Wider die himmlischen Propheten von den Bildern und Sacrament" (SWEA, XXIX, 134-296).

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-176.

<sup>60</sup>"Wenn die Papisten nur ablassen wollten die Messe zu opfern, Herre Gott, wie gerne wollt ichs zulassen, dass sie es hiessen wie sie nur wollten, am Namen laege mir nichts."  
Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 227-235.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-285.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 296-297.

<sup>65</sup>Letter to Christians at Strassburg, Dec. 15, 1524,  
SWEA, LIII, 274.

<sup>66</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 169.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>68</sup>Quoted in Brentano, Luther, pp. 232-233.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Thiel, Luther, p. 530.

<sup>70</sup>SWEA, LXI, 119.

<sup>71</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, 415.

<sup>72</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 193-194.

<sup>73</sup>"Schrift D. M. L. an alle Christen, D. Karlstadts Buechlein belangend, darin er sich des Aufruhrs entschuldigt,"  
SWEA, LXIV, 404-408.

<sup>74</sup>"Luthers Vorrede zu Karlstadts Erklaerung," SWEA, LXIV, 408-410.

<sup>75</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 240.

<sup>76</sup>Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 272.

<sup>77</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, II, 505.

<sup>78</sup>Through all of Luther's writings there runs a thread of consistency with regard to order and his aversion to rebellion

against the powers that be.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Thiel, Luther, pp. 384-386.

## CHAPTER V

### LUTHER'S STRUGGLE WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY RADICALS

Luther's struggle with the Wittenberg radicals had not yet ended, when there arose on the southern horizon a more formidable foe to Lutheranism than Carlstadt. Thomas Muentzer, the Lutheran pastor at Zwickau, whence in 1521 the "Zwickau Prophets" had come to Wittenberg, soon found reason to dissent from the Reformer and thus he began the controversy of, what may be called, the status quo versus millenianism. Unlike Carlstadt, Muentzer was not content with opposing the existing order with his pen only, but he soon advocated the destruction of the godless to make room for the reign of the saints. The vehemence with which these ideas were proclaimed, greatly fanned the spreading flame of the Peasants' Revolt. That Luther also had somewhat confused man's thinking concerning his relationship to the state, is obvious from his writings prior to 1525; yet when the Reformer saw the logical conclusions to which some of his ideas on the subject led, he was not slow to turn against those whom he had at first attracted. To see this trend of development is the purpose of this chapter.

#### Luther's Ideas Concerning Authority Prior to 1525

It must be mentioned at the outset that Luther on the whole was remarkably consistent with regard to man's position

towards the powers that be. The "common man", he emphasized in his earliest writings, had to be obedient to the magistrates at all costs. Rebellion, according to Romans 13, his classical Bible passage on the subject, was against God's will, and rebels were to be punished severely. In too many instances, however, Luther qualified this general position in favour of insubordination to the state. Moreover, in his spiritual rebellion against Rome, he often went to excesses and made rash statements concerning man's relationship to the government, which often left people in doubt as to what he actually meant. His own example and many statements in his writings up to 1524, definitely sanctioned, if not encouraged and even incited, rebellion against the status quo, whether spiritual or secular. With some reservation we thus may agree with Belford Bax when he states: "The Lutheran Reformation, from its inception in 1517 down to the Peasants' War of 1525, at once absorbed, and was absorbed by all the revolutionary elements of the time. Up to the last-mentioned date it gathered revolutionary force year by year."<sup>1</sup> After 1525 Luther's movement ceased to be revolutionary; it increasingly submitted to the temporal authorities.

Having said this much about the Reformer's general attitude towards the powers that be, we shall now proceed to analyze some of his statements and writings with regard to a citizen's relationship to his government. Perhaps because it

suiting his own position, Luther carefully differentiated between spiritual and temporal powers.<sup>2</sup> To rebel against the spiritual authorities when they are in the wrong, is permissible, whereas rebellion against the magistrates is not allowed. In his interpretation of the fourth commandment in his treatise on good works in 1520, he stated: "This is why one must resist the spiritual power when it does not do right and not resist the temporal power even though it does wrong."<sup>3</sup> Yet Luther is quick to qualify his statement concerning the temporal authorities: "If it should happen, as it often does, that the temporal power and authorities, as they are called, should urge a subject to do contrary to the Commandments of God, or hinder them from doing them, the obedience ends, and that duty is annulled."<sup>4</sup> But the question arises, who is to decide whether the government acts contrary to the Word of God or not?

Luther's vituperations against the spiritual authorities were especially harsh. To John Lang he wrote on August 18, 1520: "We are convinced that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist. . . . So far as I personally am concerned, I confess to owing the pope no other obedience than that which I owe the very Antichrist."<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere he writes that it would be much better to kill all the bishops and root up all monasteries and similar institutions, than to allow one soul, not to speak of all the souls, to perish on account of them.<sup>6</sup> In this connection he also adds a warning to the princes,



advising them not to forget that the times are changing and that they cannot do with their subjects as they used to. In a letter (April 28, 1521) to the artist Lucas Cranach, Luther recalls his humiliating treatment at the Diet of Worms where he had been simply asked to recant without being convinced and refuted by learned theologians. "Oh, we blind Germans," he concludes, "how childish we act to allow the Romanists to make fools of us in this miserable manner."<sup>7</sup>

The censorship of his New Testament in Bavaria gave Luther an occasion to treat more fully the question of a Christian's obedience to the powers that be. In January, 1523 he published his carefully worked out booklet, Secular Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed.<sup>8</sup> There are two kingdoms, Luther begins, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The children of God, who belong to the former kingdom, need no human laws, but the wicked people, who are in the vast majority, cannot be held in check without imposing laws and force upon them. Since a Christian is governed by the Spirit of God, he actually need not subject himself to the magistrates and their laws, but for the sake of order, and as an example for the wicked, he subordinates himself freely to human governments, pays all taxes and seeks the good of his fellow men.<sup>9</sup> To the question whether a Christian may bear the sword, the Reformer replies, that as a Christian he is not in need of it, and as far as his private

life is concerned he will rather suffer pain and injustice than use force against another. But since a Christian must seek the welfare of his neighbor as well as that of the state, he gladly bears the sword for his government, for refusing to do so would imperil the safety of his society. All saints in the Old Testament employed the sword, and although the Mosaic law need not be binding in the new dispensation, we are obliged to follow their good examples, for right will always remain right.<sup>10</sup>

Having said this much in favour of obedience to the magistrates, Luther goes on to define the limits of the temporal powers with regard to the spiritual realm. The secular princes, first of all, have no jurisdiction over the souls of their subjects. No prince, bishop, or any ruler can make laws concerning one's beliefs, and no power may compel one to believe this or that. Only in strictly temporal matters do magistrates have power.<sup>11</sup> They have no right, for example, to interfere in the publication and distribution of Christian literature, for this means interference in the strictly spiritual realm.<sup>12</sup> When it comes to this, Christians ought to obey God rather than men. Even heresy is no concern of the temporal powers; this belongs to the jurisdiction of the bishops and pastors who ought to combat adverse teachings with the Word of God only. Since heresy is of a spiritual nature, iron, fire and water cannot prevail against it.<sup>13</sup> In

the second place. Luther deals with a vassal's relationship to his lord, stating that the former may at no time attack the latter. A vassal, no matter how dignified he may be, may only implore his overlord to do the right and shun all evil. Yet a prince may attack his own vassals, provided all peace offers have been rejected. But if a vassal, or any other man, perceives that his lord or government is intent on doing evil, he need not obey in such case.<sup>14</sup>

Should a subject, however, be ignorant or in doubt concerning the nature of the point at issue, he should obey his lord with a clear conscience.<sup>15</sup> In this, it must be noted, Luther merely followed medieval feudal theory on the subject.

In the same year Luther published another pamphlet which proved to be of weighty consequence. In his That a Christian Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge all Doctrine,<sup>16</sup> he argues that bishops have no right to teach falsely, thus endangering the spiritual life of the flock. It is the duty of the Christian congregation to determine whether the doctrines that are being taught, are according to God's Word.<sup>17</sup> Bishops and councils act against the express command of Christ in taking over judgement in matters of faith and doctrines, "and we all see by this that tyrants who rule over us in a manner contrary to God's will are to be driven out of Christendom like wolves and thieves."<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere Luther wrote in this connection:

It is my firm belief that the angels are getting ready, putting on their armor and girding their swords about them, for the last day is already breaking, and the angels are preparing for the battle, when they will overthrow the Turks and hurl them along with the pope, to the bottom of hell.<sup>19</sup>

The saints and angels were soon to appear, who were convinced of the evil intent of the temporal powers, who would oppose all interference in spiritual matters, who obeyed God rather than men, and who were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to march against all the godless. Thomas Muentzer was to become one of their apostles.

#### Thomas Muentzer and Luther

Thomas Muentzer was born in Stollberg in the Harz Mountains around 1488. He received a good education which familiarized him with the Bible, the mystics, Plato, St. Augustine and the classic Christian writers.<sup>20</sup> In 1513 he became a Catholic priest, soon after that he was promoted to be provost of a monastery, and in 1519 he became father-confessor of a nunnery.<sup>21</sup> It was at this time that he became acquainted with Luther. In 1520, upon the Reformer's recommendation, Muentzer became a Lutheran pastor in Zwickau where he met Nicolaus Storch, one of the "Zwickau Prophets", who emphasized God's direct revelation to his chosen servants. Influenced by these prophets, Muentzer soon began to fight the monks in the town and created a general disturbance. When Luther was informed about this, he more or less approved

of Muentzer's zeal for the evangelical cause.<sup>22</sup> In April, 1521 the zealous reformer of Zwickau was compelled to leave the town.

Until February, 1522 we find Muentzer in Prague where he drew up the "Prague Manifesto", which became the actual program for his future life. The Manifesto was a visionary document proposing a "new church", the church of the spirit, which was not to depend upon the letter of Scripture, but on the direct communication with God. Muentzer did not, however, seem to have much success in Bohemia, the land of John Huss, and he had to leave once again, whereupon he passed through Wittenberg while Luther was at the Wartburg. From Easter in 1523 until August, 1524 Muentzer was the minister in Alstedt, a small town in the Harz area inhabited by restless ore miners, always eager to promote social changes.<sup>23</sup> Although the town itself had only a few hundred people, Muentzer's sermons, in which he expounded in consecutive order all the books of the Bible, were allegedly attended by 2,000 hearers.<sup>24</sup> The preacher himself wrote that "the poor thirsty folk did so yearn for the truth that all the streets were full of people come to hear it."<sup>25</sup>

In Alstedt Muentzer found his first success on a large scale. The whole worship service was soon conducted in the German language;<sup>26</sup> the sacrament of Holy Communion was distributed in both kinds; he wrote several pamphlets concerning

the mass and against infant baptism;<sup>27</sup> and, like Luther a year later, he married a former nun and reared children. As late as July 9, 1523 Muentzer had still not broken with Luther, for on that date he wrote a conciliatory letter to the Wittenberg Reformer.<sup>28</sup> During the following winter Muentzer founded the Alstedt League, a society which was to carry out by any possible means, including violence, the Prague program. It was at this time that a nearby Catholic chapel went up in flames. It is probable that the League was responsible, but the records do not state who caused the fire.<sup>29</sup> The differences between Luther and Muentzer now became apparent.

Muentzer was well grounded in Luther's doctrines of salvation and the priesthood of all believers. But in addition he was more deeply impressed by the German mystics,<sup>30</sup> as well as by the extreme views of the Taborites of the fifteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The combination of all of these trends of thought led him to believe that personal salvation enables man to communicate with God directly through the Spirit.<sup>32</sup> From Tauler Muentzer had borrowed the idea of Christian suffering, which gave expression to his doctrine of the "bitter Christ" in opposition to Luther's "sweet Christ".<sup>33</sup> He charged Luther with making the way of salvation too easy, telling the people simply to believe, thus making a doll out of God to be played with at will. The godless, Muentzer

argued, who shun all suffering and the cross, like this idea of someone suffering in their place. Suffering, according to Muentzer's theology, was necessary in order to prepare the human heart for the Spirit to enter in all his glory.<sup>34</sup> In this emphasis on pain and agony of the soul this radical reformer was not too far out from Luther's early views. In his 92 and 93 theses the Reformer had stated in 1517:

Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, 'Peace, peace', and there is no peace. Blessed be all those prophets, who say to the people of Christ, 'The cross, the cross', and there is no cross.<sup>35</sup>

In spreading his ideas Muentzer thus applied the same standard which Luther had claimed for himself, "namely, the way of interior agony."<sup>36</sup> In a letter to Luther Muentzer explained how amid fear and suffering he had come to realize his true mission. The Reformer, however, saw the danger of this over-excitement and therefore rejected him.<sup>37</sup>

Luther's bibliolatry and lukewarm position towards some of the Catholic practices further incited Muentzer's opposition.<sup>38</sup> The Bible for Muentzer, was not the firm foundation for his proclamation of God's message; it was simply a record of God's revelation to individuals in Bible time and a testimony to that which he himself had felt and experienced in his heart.<sup>39</sup> Belief in the mere letter of the Bible leads only to spiritual death rather than to life. Moreover, the Bible is inadequate without a divinely inspired interpreter, but the true interpreter is not the Church nor Luther, but the true prophet--no doubt meaning himself--inspired

by the Spirit of God. Without this heavenly interpreter the Bible remains a book sealed with seven seals.<sup>40</sup> Muentzer, according to Luther, had advocated several steps before God could reveal his secrets to man. First of all, man has to get rid of all coarseness and sin (Entgroebung); then he has to think piously about the new life in Christ and eternity (Studierung); thirdly, he has to speculate about the sinfulness of sin and God's grace to man; further, he has to sorrow and repent genuinely of his former life (Langeweile); and, lastly, man must attain a state of perfect resignation to God (tiefe Gelassenheit), at which point the voice of God will be heard.<sup>41</sup> For Luther this was too subjective; he needed the external Word of God and the visible sacraments to assure him of God's favour to man.

There were other points of differences between Luther and Muentzer. The Reformer, for example, never boasted of an assurance of salvation, but left the matter wholly to God. "We must believe in the grace of God," he stated, "but must remain uncertain concerning our own election and that of others."<sup>42</sup> For Muentzer there was no question concerning this, for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a sure sign of salvation. Furthermore, Luther as well as Muentzer taught that the temporal powers existed as a result of sin and that the magistrates and princes were tools of divine wrath; both called them henchmen and warned that God in time would punish



them. But Luther condemned only the abuses--at times rather strongly--of the temporal governments, whereas Muentzer, as we shall see, preached insubordination to, and abolition of all temporal authorities.<sup>43</sup> Chiliasm soon became the driving force in all that this revolutionist thought and did. It is missing the point, however, to think of Muentzer as being a socialist or communist in the modern sense; he was a deeply religious man<sup>44</sup> and his proposed social reforms he justified on the basis of a divinely received revelation.<sup>45</sup>

With these differences<sup>46</sup> in mind, it should not be difficult to understand Luther's attitude towards Muentzer. On December 26, 1523 Luther wrote to George Spalatin that he "had begged the officials of All-Stadt to beware of Muentzer's spirit of prophecy." He cannot, Luther continues, "endure such a spirit, whoever the man may be. . . . He lauds my doctrine, and yet tries to tear it to bits. . . . Then he talks and prays in such an insipid manner, using such unscriptural expressions, that anyone would fancy he was mad or drunk."<sup>47</sup> Muentzer soon felt similar towards the Reformer at Wittenberg, looking upon him as the self-appointed pope of the new movement. As Nigg puts it, in Muentzer the Protestant man opposed the Protestant authority which had become crystalized in the person of Luther.<sup>48</sup>

Muentzer's Increasing Radicalism

The authorities of Saxony were embarrassed by Muentzer's radicalism at Alstedt, not knowing what to do about it. Therefore, as Duke John and his son passed through the town of Alstedt they invited Muentzer to preach before them and explain his theology.<sup>49</sup> After having had two weeks time to prepare his sermon, he preached on July 13, 1524 in the princely castle his famous "Sermon on Daniel".<sup>50</sup> After the death of the Apostles, the preacher began, the Church of God has become dilapidated, and the "little stone", which represents Christ, has not been heeded by men. Through all types of ceremonies and man-made ways of salvation (meaning Lutheranism) people have been led astray from the path of truth. But the "little stone" will soon fill the whole world, and it is the Christians' duty to assist God in this gigantic work. The wicked "one must stave off in the fear of the Lord," for they only hinder the progress of God's cause on earth.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, to read the Bible is not enough; we must seek to have visions and dreams from God. "He (who has not the Spirit) does not know how to say anything deeply about God, even if he had eaten through a hundred Bibles!"<sup>52</sup> To attend upon visions is a mark of a true prophetic spirit. "Therefore it is no wonder that Brother Fattened Swine and Brother Soft Life [meaning Luther] rejects them."<sup>53</sup>

Becoming more fanatical, Muentzer urges the princes to

wield the sword against the wicked and the Lutheran divines who lead men astray.<sup>54</sup> If the temporal authorities will fail to do this, the peasants, who perceive things more clearly than their princes, will take this matter into their own hands. "Therefore let not the evildoers live longer who make us turn away from God (Deut. 13:5). For the godless person has no right to live when he is in the way of the pious."<sup>55</sup> To the objection that the Apostles did not employ force and violence, Muentzer replies that St. Peter was a timid man, of whom even Christ said that he feared death. Had it been in the power of St. Paul "to push his teaching to its conclusion among the Athenians," he would have, no doubt, broken their idols. True, Antichrist will be destroyed by God, but it is the sword that God will use to do so.<sup>56</sup> "For the godless have no right to live," Muentzer concludes, "except as the elect wish to grant it to them, as it is written in Exod. 23:29-33. Rejoice, you true friends of God, that for the enemies of the cross their heart has fallen into their breeches."<sup>57</sup>

The Saxon authorities were now even more confused than before, asking therefore Luther for advice. When Luther heard about the sermon, he stood aghast at this audacity on the part of his former follower. As far as the Reformer was concerned, it was not the duty of the state to set up Utopia on earth, but to prevent earth becoming hell.<sup>58</sup> He, therefore, sat down immediately and wrote a letter to the princes,<sup>59</sup>

warning them against the "spirit of Alstedt" and advising them to be on guard. This prophet claims to have voices and visions, he continues, yet he is afraid to answer for his views to Luther. Although he had no voices from God, the Reformer boasts of himself, he was not afraid to appear at Leipzig, Augsburg and Worms when he was asked by his enemies to do so.<sup>60</sup> Luther then laments that it was he who won the victory from the pope, but now his deserters exploit it to their own advantage. His advice is to let these prophets preach and teach, as long as they do not take up arms against the government; but if they draw the sword they must be banished from the land. The spirits must fight it out between themselves, for the true doctrine, Luther is confident, will prevail in the end.<sup>61</sup>

The "Sermon on Daniel", however, soon caused unrest in the town of Alstedt, whereupon the Elector summoned Muentzer to Weimar for a conference with Luther. Apparently afraid to meet his enemy, Muentzer fled to Muehlhausen, Thuringia, breathing out slaughter and reviling against "that archheathen, archrascal, Wittenberg pope, snake, and basilisk."<sup>62</sup> Luther in a letter of August 14, 1524 warned the council of Muehlhausen not to receive Muentzer, for his activities in Zwickau and Alstedt had proved that he is a murderer. In addition Luther advises the council to ask Muentzer who has called and sent him to preach; if he insists that the Spirit has sent him, he must be able to perform miracles, for God always attests extraordinary activities with

signs and wonders.<sup>63</sup> The letter was too late, for Muentzer had arrived a few days earlier and had been accepted by the town.<sup>64</sup> With the help of other radicals, especially Heinrich Pfeifer, a real social revolutionary, the town council was soon overthrown, but after two months of restless activity, Muentzer had no other choice but to flee to Nuernberg, where he exerted some influence upon later leaders of Anabaptism.<sup>65</sup>

From Nuernberg Muentzer wrote angry pamphlets against the Reformer, calling him in one of them, "the spiritless, easy-going flesh at Wittenberg".<sup>66</sup> To Luther's boasting of having stood courageously before princes and emperor, Muentzer replied that Luther had no other choice but to insist on the rightness of his position, for had he faltered and yielded at Worms, the princes would have "stabbed you to death."<sup>67</sup> In November and December of 1524 Muentzer wandered aimlessly about in southern Germany, preaching everywhere his revolutionary doctrines. But his success in these regions has been overestimated. Muentzer seemed to be popular in Muehlhausen only; not even all of Thuringia accepted his ideas and Franconia rejected him outright.<sup>68</sup> Otto Schiff has also conclusively shown that Muentzer cannot be held responsible for the revolt in the upper-Rhine regions.<sup>69</sup> The reason for this limited success may be that his ideas and program for instituting Utopia were somewhat muddled, lacking a constructive approach.<sup>70</sup>

In February, 1525 Muentzer was back in Muehlhausen,

whither Heinrich Pfeifer had returned by the end of 1524. The prophet now placed his last hopes of carrying out his apocalyptic program upon the rebellious peasants, expecting at any time the great cataclysmic crisis of mankind.<sup>71</sup> In order to arouse them to action against the authorities, Muentzer wrote an explosive letter to the miners of Mansfeld, pointing in it with satisfaction to certain localities where the peasants have drawn the sword already. They must strike now while the iron is hot; the swords must not cool from the blood of the princes; it is impossible to have peace and be free while the wicked rule over us; it is the war of God and he will fight for the peasants. The author of the letter signed: "Thomas Muentzer, a servant of God against the godless."<sup>72</sup> In another letter, written from Frankenhausen, Muentzer warns a certain "Brother Ernest" not to oppress and persecute the "Christians", for God will not permit his cruelty to go on unpunished; the "sword of Gideon" is soon to strike.<sup>73</sup> On May 15, 1525 the sword did strike in the tragic battle near Frankenhausen, which ended in defeat for the fanatic and his deceived peasants. Before Muentzer was executed on May 27, he recanted and received the mass according to Catholic rites.<sup>74</sup> It must be said to his credit, that even in the face of death this radical reformer urgently entreated the princes to deal more mercifully with their subjects and govern them according to God's Word.<sup>75</sup>

The doctrines of Thomas Muentzer did not die with their author; the sources show that the rebel was esteemed highly by many until the late fifteen-thirties. Not without reason did Luther continue to warn against the "spirit of Alstedt".<sup>76</sup> Right after Muentzer's death the Reformer wrote A Terrible Story and Judgement of God of Thomas Muentzer,<sup>77</sup> addressed to his "beloved Germans." He writes this in order to show how God judges so righteously and to "warn, to terrify, and to admonish" those who are still contemplating rebellion, and to comfort and strengthen those who suffer on account of the rebels. After including some of Muentzer's letters to show his diabolic spirit, Luther concludes the pamphlet by commenting on the false hope and confidence the peasants had placed in their leader. Muentzer had promised one peasant would be able to kill a thousand enemies and the prophet himself would divert all the bullets into his sleeves, but instead 5,000 disillusioned peasants lay brutally murdered near Frankenhausen. Luther expresses sorrow for the fate of the peasants, but he regards it as God's judgement upon them, and he prays for the victory of the princes.<sup>78</sup> To John Ruehel, his brother-in-law, Luther wrote he is glad about Muentzer's death. "It is the judgement of God. He who takes the sword shall perish by the sword."<sup>79</sup> Even in his later years the Reformer was unable to forget his deadly foe. In his Table Talks he told with pleasure stories of alleged immorality

committed by Muentzer,<sup>80</sup> and constantly referred to his death as a punishment for rebellion, blasphemy and unbelief.<sup>81</sup>

### Luther and the Peasants' Revolt

Neither Luther nor the radical reformers can be held responsible for causing the Peasants' Revolt which broke out in 1525 with such unprecedented fury.<sup>82</sup> The war was only a repetition on a large scale of many similar attempts in the past, and the interests underlying all of them were not primarily religious, although they played a part, but political, social and economic.<sup>83</sup> Ever since the Hussite Wars of the fifteenth century, Germany had been troubled with peasant uprisings; there had been a war in Wuerttemberg as late as 1514. We are, however, not interested in the background nor in the procedure of the conflagration, but primarily in Luther's relationship to the rebellion and his attitude towards the peasants, which seemed to have had far-reaching consequences for the radical reformation.

While Luther cannot be accused of causing the Peasants' Revolt, it was due in no small part to the Reformer's influence that this war surpassed in magnitude any seen in Germany before.<sup>84</sup> Our review of some of his writings, no doubt, will have borne this out. In view of his recent tract on the limits of temporal powers, Luther was regarded by the peasants "as in some sort the central figure of the revolutionary movement, political and social, no less than religious."<sup>85</sup> McGriffin comments:



His attack upon many features of the existing order, his criticisms of the growing luxury of the wealthier classes, his denunciation of the rapacity and greed of great commercial magnates and of the tyranny and corruption of rulers both civil and ecclesiastical, all tended to inflame the populace and spread impatience and discontent.<sup>86</sup>

Luther's contemporaries, whether friends or foes, were fully aware of this. "Luther has plunged Germany into such a state of frenzy," wrote Ulrich Zasius, the humanist, in the spring of 1525 to his friend Amerbach, "that one must perforce regard as peace and safety the mere hope of not being knocked on the head."<sup>87</sup> After the Reformer had published his fierce booklet, Against the Peasants, Erasmus wrote in his Hyperaspistes concerning Luther and the war:

We have the fruit of your spirit. The mother has gone forward to bloody slaughter, and we fear more atrocious things, unless God should mercifully avert them. . . . You have indeed in your most bitter little book against the peasants turned suspicion from yourself; and yet you cannot make men believe that the occasion of these tumults was not furnished by your pamphlets, especially those in German. But, O Luther, I do not yet think so ill of you as to suppose that you intended this.<sup>88</sup>

Elsewhere Erasmus wrote: "You Luther refuse to acknowledge the insurgents, but they acknowledge you, and the instigators of this war claim the Gospel as their guide."<sup>89</sup> Erasmus had observed correctly when he wrote that the Reformer had not intended the war. It is true, Luther's own example and some of his writings were revolutionary in nature, but on the whole his pamphlets were misunderstood, misinterpreted and misapplied. Some tracts were written for the instruction and

encouragement of all laymen,<sup>90</sup> but the peasants believed it was a special assignment for them to cause a reformation of the entire old order; others were meant for the nobility only,<sup>91</sup> but the peasants thought they were an appeal to them to fight against all oppression. Luther's gospel of Christian liberty was changed from the Reformer's meaning of an inner freedom of the reborn man, to mean freedom from social injustice and from the economic bondage of feudalism.<sup>92</sup> This may partly explain Luther's later attitude toward the rebellious peasants.

In March, 1525 the peasants of south-western Germany drew up twelve articles, asking of the feudal lords certain concessions and alleviations.<sup>93</sup> The Twelve Articles are addressed "To the Christian reader" and are highly religious in tone, each article being supported with ample Scripture passages. Their demands include that the congregation has the freedom to elect their own priest and that he be supported by the tithes of the community; that the status of villeinage be abolished; that there should be freedom of hunting; that the woods be accessible to all; that the services due to the lord be diminished; that the princes no longer oppress the peasants; that death dues be abolished; etc. In the twelfth article the peasants agree to revoke any point that may be objected to, provided "the same articles are proved as against the Word of God, . . . so soon as this is declared to us by

reason and Scripture."<sup>94</sup> Some historians feel that the average sentiment and opinions of the German peasants in 1525, are not to be sought in the extreme radicalism of Muentzer, but in the nature and tone of the Twelve Articles; they appear to be quite reasonable and seem to express a truly Christian sentiment.<sup>95</sup>

Luther at first found this also to be so. But when the disturbances began to increase in the south, he wrote his Warning toward Peace Based on the Twelve Articles,<sup>96</sup> which consists of two parts, one addressed to the nobility and the other to the peasants. Luther begins the first part, devoted to instructing the nobles, by citing Psalm 7:16: "His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own pate his violence descends."<sup>97</sup> He then accuses the princes and bishops of opposing the Gospel and oppressing the peasants, warning them that judgement is sure to come upon them, for it is not the peasants but God himself who is against them. The princes only are to blame for the social and political unrest; and the signs and wonders in heaven and on earth portend their destruction.<sup>98</sup> Luther agrees that the demands of the Twelve Articles are reasonable and show a great deal of restraint on the part of the peasants; the princes should yield and accept them, for Luther himself would have demanded much more.<sup>99</sup> In conclusion the Reformer threatens the nobles for placing the blame for the disturbances on his doctrines--the peasants shall

soon teach them a lesson for such blasphemy.<sup>100</sup>

In the second part of the pamphlet Luther turns to the peasants, his "beloved friends" and "brethren", admonishing them not to heed the fanatical preaching of the enthusiasts who incite them to godless action. It is against all natural law as well as the Word of God to oppose the powers that be, no matter how evil they may be.<sup>101</sup> If you cannot endure it in one city, he advises them, seek refuge in another, and by the time you have been in all the cities, Christ will have come to deliver the children of God;<sup>102</sup> only do not rebel, for rebellion will only retard the progress of the Gospel and play into the hands of the devil. In reviewing the first three articles, Luther finds that the first, about choosing a pastor, is in agreement with the Word of God. The second, dealing with the abolition of tithes under the pretence of giving the revenue to the minister and the poor, is outright robbery, for the tithes belong rightfully to the government. The third article, concerning the abrogation of villeinage, is quite repulsive because it implies degrading the spiritual freedom in Christ to a carnal level. And, after all, did not Abraham and the other patriarchs own slaves? The remaining eight articles Luther refers to the judgement of the lawyers, for as a minister he cannot advise in such things as forest laws, hunting regulations, and such like mundane matters; his duty

it is to instruct the consciences only.<sup>103</sup> In conclusion he attempts to appease and pacify both sides, stating that a good conscience must be maintained at all costs.

Excellent as Luther's intentions in writing the tract may have been, his exhortation was imprudently expressed.<sup>104</sup> It cannot be doubted that the ambiguous tone was interpreted by the peasants to their advantage and served to stimulate rather than to pacify the insurrection. In fact, the document strikes one as definitely more favourable to the insurgents than to their opponents.<sup>105</sup> At any rate, Luther's train of reasoning did not convince the peasants. He first seems to state their case and then withdraws, telling them, that unbearable as their lot may be, as Christians they have no right to overthrow the existing order in order to remedy it, because Christ taught submission to all authority, no matter how tyrannical it may be.<sup>106</sup> As far as the nobles were concerned, the pamphlet strengthened their position considerably by admitting their right to oppress their subjects, without fear of active opposition on the peasants' part.

After having written his tract, Luther tried to ignore the disturbances which sprang up in various localities, but when he learned that he was quoted in support of lawlessness and violence, he was roused to action. On April 16, 1525 he visited Eisleben and received much first-hand information concerning acts of violence committed by the peasants. He then

made a tour through the region, risking his life in an effort to restore peace, but his preaching fell on deaf ears; he became aware of the fact that the situation was out of hand.<sup>107</sup> On May 4 he wrote from Seeburg to John Ruehel in Mansfeld, urging him to use the sword against the rebellious peasants, "for those who take the sword must perish by the sword;" our conscience need not condemn us in this harsh treatment.<sup>108</sup> Frederick the Wise, who lay on his death bed at the time the revolt began to increase in severity, was still of a different opinion, advising his brother, who was to succeed him, to do all he could to pacify the insurgents before finding it necessary to attack them.<sup>109</sup> With the determination to write another pamphlet treating the disturbances, Luther returned to Wittenberg. On May 6 he wrote Against the Murderous and Flundering Bands Among the Peasants,<sup>110</sup> for which he has been severely criticized to this day.

In his Against the Peasants, Luther indicts the rebels on three charges: They have broken their oath to the government, hence they are subject to arrest and trial; they have robbed and murdered, therefore, they have deserved death in body and soul; and they cover all their sins in the name of Christian brotherhood, thereby blaspheming God and disgracing his holy name.<sup>111</sup> He compares the peasants to a mad dog which must be destroyed lest it contaminate a whole community. He calls upon all to flee from the rebels as from the very devil,

and urges the rulers to put away all scruples about inflicting the death penalty upon the obstinate.<sup>112</sup> In his previous pamphlet the princes were a set of scoundrels for the most part; now they are all God's ministers and if they fall in this war they are true martyrs, whereas whoever is killed on the peasants' side, will suffer forever in hell.<sup>113</sup> In conclusion Luther enjoins all nobles to stab, beat and strangle the peasants, for such strange times have come that a prince can more easily earn heaven through bloodshed, than another through prayer.<sup>114</sup>

From the circumstances in which the Reformer suddenly found himself, his attitude towards the peasants can be explained, but his sharp language cannot be excused and the wisdom of writing the tract may seriously be doubted. He must have known that the princes were winning on all sides; his pamphlet, therefore, could have been dispensed with. The burgomaster of Zwickau felt the princes would have punished the rebels severely enough even without Luther's advice to do so.<sup>115</sup> But in addition to his unfortunate experiences with Carlstadt and Muentzer, Luther had definite reasons for writing so harshly against the peasants.<sup>116</sup> From his writings we learn that Luther suffered greatly from the accusation of his enemies that he was responsible for the Peasants' Revolt, and of this he had to clear himself, even at the expense of the peasants if necessary, lest the princes should take a similar view and stop supporting

his reform movement.<sup>117</sup>

Luther's treatment of the revolting peasants had its serious effects. Not only did the peasants and his enemies accuse Luther of flattering the nobles in his support against the rebels, but even friends became apprehensive about the Reformer. Had he not, they asked, dismissed all kindness and mercy? By advocating gruesome deeds in order to merit heaven, had he not betrayed his principle of justification by faith alone?<sup>118</sup> At first Luther tried to ignore these objections, for he had a good conscience about all this.<sup>119</sup> In July, however, he decided to explain and justify his severe pamphlet by publishing his A Circular Letter Concerning the Hard Booklet Against the Peasants.<sup>120</sup> In it he emphatically states that he will not retract anything in his former booklet, and he does not care whether it displeases men or not, as long as it pleases God. Whether one should be merciful or not is of little importance when the Word of God is plain concerning a certain issue. One cannot persuade a rebel with reason, for he will not listen to sense; these peasants must be answered with the fist until the blood gushes forth from the nose.<sup>121</sup> That the princes in punishing the insurgents too often abuse their power, is none of Luther's concern, for from him they have not learned this, and, what is more, they shall have to account for their own iniquity. He is far from flattering the nobles; in the near future he shall write against them as well. Had the authorities



listened to his persistent warning against the fanatical preachers before the war, Luther concludes, all the misery and bloodshed could have been prevented.<sup>122</sup>

Before the end of 1525 the main revolt was brutally subdued. The Reformer himself assumed that a word from him would have gone far to turn the scale in favour of the rebels. It was he, he said, who was responsible for the death of the peasants, "for I commanded them to be slaughtered."<sup>123</sup> On May 23 Luther wrote again to John Ruehel, who was moved with compassion towards the suffering peasants, not to take it too hard, for had God not judged the rebels, Satan would have done even more harm.<sup>124</sup> When the humane nobleman, Heinrich von Einsiedel, was troubled in his conscience about the corvees and heavy dues which the peasants continued to pay after the war, he asked Luther for counsel. The Reformer replied the "common man" ought to have burdens imposed upon him, for otherwise he would become overbearing.<sup>125</sup> Commenting a little later in one of his sermons on the condition of slavery in Abraham's time, Luther stated: "It were even a good thing were it still so. For else no man may compel nor tame the servile folk."<sup>126</sup> Luther could well say in 1526:

I am almost inclined to boast that since the time of the apostles the temporal sword and government have never been so clearly described or so highly praised as by me. Even my enemies must admit this. But the sincere gratitude I have thereby earned as a reward is this that my doctrine is reviled and condemned as seditious and as striking at the government.<sup>127</sup>

The suppression of the Peasants' Revolt had also an unfortunate effect on the Lutheran reformation movement. The peasants' hope that Lutheranism would become the means of affecting a social and political reformation was blasted, and the new movement, as a result, ceased to be popular; the peasants were bitterly disillusioned and hopelessly alienated from all that Luther stood for. Southern Germany, where the war had raged most, either remained faithful to Roman Catholicism or else diverted to Anabaptism which in 1525 began to spread rapidly.<sup>128</sup> There seems to be evidence that the Anabaptists used the Peasants' Revolt as propaganda for the furtherance of their type of Christianity.<sup>129</sup> At any rate, it is undeniable that the failure of the peasant movement in 1525 drove many simple folk into the arms of Anabaptism.<sup>130</sup> Luther thus had played into the hands of his enemies.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>E. B. Bax, The Peasants War in Germany 1525-1526  
(London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1899), pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>Ritter, Luther. Gestalt und Tat, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 296.

<sup>4</sup>H. T. Kerr (ed.), A Compend of Luther's Theology  
(Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 231. Luther  
thus left a door open for his own disobedience at Worms in 1521.

<sup>5</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 34.

<sup>6</sup>"Es waere besser, dass alle Bischöefe ermordet, alle  
Stifte und Kloester ausgewurzelt wuerden, denn dass eine Seele  
verderben sollte, geschweige dass alle Seelen sollten verloren  
werden um der unnuetzen Potzen und Goetzen willen." Quoted in  
Ritter, Luther. Gestalt und Tat, pp. 136-137.

<sup>7</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 836.

<sup>8</sup>German title: "Von weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man  
ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei" (SWEA, XXII, 62 ff).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89. That Luther a year later would  
censor Carlstadt's books, must have been unknown to the  
Reformer at this time.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>14</sup>According to medieval theory it was permissible to  
rebel against wicked authorities. Cf. Ritter, Luther. Gestalt  
und Tat, p. 144.

<sup>15</sup>SWEA, XXII, 101-102.

<sup>16</sup>German title: "Dass eine christliche Versammlung Recht  
und Macht habe, alle Lehre zu urtheilen" (SWEA, XXII, 140-150).

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-146.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in H. H. Schaff, Church History, I (March, 1932), 32.

<sup>19</sup>Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 244.

<sup>20</sup>Bainton, Quanbeck and Rupp, Luther Today, p. 130 f.

<sup>21</sup>Robert Friedmann, "Thomas Muentzer's Relation to Anabaptism," MQR, XXXI (April, 1957), 76.

<sup>22</sup>Thiel, Luther, p. 445.

<sup>23</sup>Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (April, 1957), 76.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 239.

<sup>26</sup>Muentzer's example may have induced Luther later to write his own German liturgy. See Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, IV, 280.

<sup>27</sup>The records are contradictory as to what Muentzer practised with regard to baptism. Some state that he baptized all infants who were two months old, others that he postponed baptism until the children were six or seven years of age. Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (April, 1957), 77. Muentzer's teaching on infant baptism seems to have been purely academic in nature. For while he rejected infant baptism, he never rebaptized adults, hence he cannot be called the originator of the Anabaptist movement. Cf. Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup>Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (April, 1957), 77.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, IV, 280.

<sup>31</sup>Bainton, Quanbeck and Rupp, Luther Today, p. 130 f.

<sup>32</sup>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, IV, 280.

<sup>33</sup>Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer, pp. 354-355.

<sup>34</sup>J. W. Fretz, "Mennonites and their Economic Problems," MQR, XIV (October, 1940), 206.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 166. This was in connection with Tetzel's indulgences.

<sup>36</sup>Grisar, Martin Luther, p. 219.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>38</sup>Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup>H. Gerdes, Luthers Streit mit den Schwaermern um das rechte Verstaendnis des Gesetzes Mose (Goettingen: Goettinger Verlagsanstalt, 1955), p. 89.

<sup>40</sup>Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup>SWEA, LXI, 64.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Thiel, Luther, p. 445. Cf. R. H. Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty. Nine Biographical Studies (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1951), p. 67.

<sup>43</sup>Otto Schiff, "Thomas Muentzer und die Bauernbewegung am Oberrhein," Historische Zeitschrift, Vol. 110 (1913), 75-76.

<sup>44</sup>Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, p. 39. Cf. Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer, p. 356.

<sup>45</sup>Gerdes, Luthers Streit mit den Schwaermern, p. 87.

<sup>46</sup>There were also differences in their ideas concerning the will. To Luther Muentzer wrote: "You are nothing but a miserable sinner, a wretched viper in your revolting humility. The extravagance of your spirit has produced, with the help of Saint Augustine, an audaciously impious doctrine which destroys free will and dishonours humanity." Quoted in Brentano, Luther, p. 225.

<sup>47</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup>Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer, p. 353.

<sup>49</sup>The son sided with Luther on the question of Christian magistracy, but the Duke himself had been influenced by the more radical strain of Carlstadt and Muentzer. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup>Full title: "Exposition of the second chapter of Daniel the prophet preached at the Castle at Allstedt before the active and amiable dukes and administrators of Saxony by Thomas Muentzer, minister of the Word of God" (Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 49).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

- <sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 61.
- <sup>54</sup>He does not name any Lutherans, but he means them.
- <sup>55</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 66.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 69.
- <sup>58</sup>Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 43.
- <sup>59</sup>"Ein Brief an die Fuersten zu Sachsen vom auf-  
ruehrerischen Geist," SWEA, LIII, 255 ff.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 260-261.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 265-266.
- <sup>62</sup>Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin  
Luther (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914), p. 153.
- <sup>63</sup>SWEA, LIII, 253-255.
- <sup>64</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, IV, 377.
- <sup>65</sup>Hans Denck, the rector of the School of St. Sebalds',  
came under Muentzer's influence. Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (Apr.,  
1957), 78.
- <sup>66</sup>"das geistlose, sanftlebende Fleisch zu Wittenberg."  
For the content of this tract see Thiel, Luther, pp. 450-451.
- <sup>67</sup>Enders, Briefwechsel, IV, 374.
- <sup>68</sup>Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, pp. 33-34.
- <sup>69</sup>Schiff, Historische Zeitschrift, Vol. 110 (1913),  
89-90.
- <sup>70</sup>Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, pp. 234-235.
- <sup>71</sup>Cf. Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (Apr., 1957), 79.
- <sup>72</sup>For complete letter see Will Schaber (ed.), Weinberg  
der Freiheit. Der Kampf um ein Demokratisches Deutschland von  
Thomas Muentzer bis Thomas Mann (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub-  
lishing Co., 1945), pp. 26-28. Cf. SWEA, LXV, 14-16.

<sup>73</sup>SWEA, LXV, 16-18.

<sup>74</sup>Friedmann, MQR, XXXI (April, 1957), 79.

<sup>75</sup>Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 272.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, pp. 26-28.

<sup>77</sup>German title: "Eine schreckliche Geschichte und Gericht Gottes ueber Thomas Muentzer, von Dr. Luther herausgegeben" (SWEA, LXV, 12-22).

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-22.

<sup>79</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 139.

<sup>80</sup>Muentzer, according to Luther, told a girl God had revealed it to him, that he was to sleep with her in order to be able to continue his ministry as a prophet of God. SWEA, LXI, 56.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. Crous, et al., Gedenkschrift, pp. 19-47.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, XI, 598; Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, I, 805; Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 76.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, pp. 166-167.

<sup>85</sup>Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 30. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, XI, 598; Wappler, Die Taeuferbewegung in Thueringen, pp. 19-25.

<sup>86</sup>A. C. McGriffin, Martin Luther the Man and his Work (New York: The Century Company, 1914), p. 250.

<sup>87</sup>Quoted in Brentano, Luther, p. 198.

<sup>88</sup>Quoted in Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 253.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted in Brentano, Luther, p. 197.

<sup>90</sup>E. g. The Freedom of a Christian (1520).

<sup>91</sup>E. g. To the Christian Nobility (1520).

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 142.

<sup>93</sup>It is not known who was the author or compiler of the Twelve Articles. Some believe that Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, the Anabaptist leader of Waldshut, had a hand in it. Cf. Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, p. 84. For a full text of the Articles see Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, pp. 63-74.

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Ibid., p. 74. This reminds one of Luther at the Diet of Worms.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Ibid., pp. 34-35; Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, p. 84.

<sup>96</sup>German: "Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwoelf Artikel der Bauernschaft in Schwaben" (SWEA, XXIV, 257-286).

<sup>97</sup>Quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>98</sup>M. Luther, Werke, edited by D. Dr. Buchwald, et al. (8 vols.; Dritte Auflage; Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1905), VII, 312-313.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>101</sup>SWEA, XXIV, 266-269.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>103</sup>Luther, Werke, VII, 333-336.

<sup>104</sup>Cf. Smith, The Life and Letters, p. 159.

<sup>105</sup>Cf. Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 278.

<sup>106</sup>Cf. James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1929), III, 202.

<sup>107</sup>Cf. Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 278.

<sup>108</sup>SWEA, LIII, 291-294.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>110</sup>German: "Wider die moerderischen und raeuberischen Rotten der Bauern" (SWEA, XXIV, 287-294).



- 111 Ibid., pp. 289-290.
- 112 Luther, Werke, VII, 351-352.
- 113 Ibid., pp. 350-351.
- 114 "Solch wunderliche Zeiten sind jetzt, dass ein Fuerst den Himmel mit Blutvergiessen verdienen kann besser, denn andere mit Beten." Ibid., p. 351.
- 115 Ibid., p. 355.
- 116 Schwiebert feels Carlstadt and Muentzer are responsible for Luther's fury. Luther and His Times, p. 548.
- 117 Cf. Smithson, The Anabaptists, pp. 177-178.
- 118 Luther, Werke, VII, 355.
- 119 Ibid., p. 358.
- 120 German: "Ein Sendbrief von dem harten Buechlein wider die Bauern" (SWEA, XXIV, 295 ff.).
- 121 Luther, Werke, VII, 360-361.
- 122 Ibid., p. 371.
- 123 Quoted in Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, III, 204.
- 124 SWEA, LIII, 303.
- 125 Bax, The Peasants War in Germany, p. 351.
- 126 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 352-353.
- 127 Plass, What Luther Says, II, 576.
- 128 As we shall see in another chapter, Anabaptism cannot be held responsible for causing or contributing appreciably to the revolt. Anabaptism originated early in 1525 when the disturbances were in progress.
- 129 Ekkehard Krajewski, Leben und Sterben des Zuericher Tauerfuehrers Felix Manz (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957), p. 156.

<sup>130</sup>Cf. Paul Peachey, Die soziale Herkunft der Schweizer Täufer in der Reformationszeit (Schriftenreihe des Menno-nitischen Geschichtsvereins, No. 4: Karlsruhe: Buchdruckerei und Verlag Heinrich Schneider, 1954), pp. 50-72.

## CHAPTER VI

### LUTHER AND THE EVANGELICAL ANABAPTISTS, I

#### Origins and Spread of Anabaptism

There are three views concerning the origin of Anabaptism. The oldest view, represented by Karl Holl, holds that the beginning of Anabaptism is to be found in the "Zwickau Prophets" and Thomas Muentzer. That these prophets, although advocating the abolition of infant baptism, never re-baptized adults, has ably been pointed out by recent historians.<sup>1</sup> The other view holds that Zurich, Switzerland, is the cradle of the Anabaptist movement.<sup>2</sup> A third, more recent view sees the beginning of Anabaptism in Germany as well as in Switzerland, pointing out that the German Anabaptists were more radical and fanatical, whereas the Swiss were more quietistic and pious.<sup>3</sup> With some modifications we may accept the last view.

Contemporary writers and historians do not present a uniform picture of the origin of the Anabaptists. Sebastian Franck, for example, mentions none of the Swiss leaders by name; as far as he is concerned such South-German Anabaptists as Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Denck, Rinck and Hans Hut are the leading men of the movement. Urbanus Rhegius names Denck only as the distinguished leader. Luther and Melancton, as we shall see, apparently did not know the Swiss Anabaptists too

well.<sup>4</sup> It has been, however, quite well established that the first adult baptism during the Reformation was performed in Zollikon, near Zurich, on January 21, 1525.<sup>5</sup> After a group Bible study, one George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him for the sake of God with the true Christian baptism, whereupon Grebel, although not ordained to the ministry, performed the rite. Blaurock in turn baptized Grebel, Felix Manz, Broetli and others who were present.<sup>6</sup> On the same night the first Anabaptists were banished from Zurich. Hans Denck, who represented the South-German Anabaptist movement, was also on January 21 banished from Nuernberg by the Lutheran authorities. In 1526 Denck was baptized by Hubmaier, who had been in close contact with the Swiss Brethren, and in May of the same year Denck baptized Hans Hut, his friend, who had been considerably influenced by Muentzer's apocalyptic views. In the fall of 1526 the representatives of both Anabaptist wings met for a conference in Strassburg, where their differences soon became apparent. Hans Denck, a follower of the German Theology, emphasized faith and love in contrast to the Swiss baptists' emphasis on the external Word and rites such as baptism.<sup>7</sup> The Swiss Schleitheim Confession<sup>8</sup> of 1527 repudiated the South-German group because of their more mystical strain.<sup>9</sup> Thus the two wings of the Anabaptist movement, although having had considerable contact with each other, had sprung up as well as followed their courses independent of each other.

The story of the break between Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer, and the Swiss Brethren has been well recounted.<sup>10</sup> We only want to add that the schism was occasioned by insignificant details, such as Conrad Grebel's opposition to usury and tithes,<sup>11</sup> the use of leavened bread in Holy Communion, the mixing of wine with water, and others, all of which Zwingli regarded as unimportant trivialities.<sup>12</sup> Grebel and his group looked upon this indifference as a false forbearance towards Catholic practices; from reading the Bible the Anabaptists felt that more radicalism in these matters was needed.<sup>13</sup> What Zwingli as well as Luther, no doubt, sincerely considered to be wisdom and prudence, "Grebel saw as a spiritless slipping along, as a compromising yielding which was bound to result in serious danger to the cause of the Gospel."<sup>14</sup> But the fundamental issue in the dispute between the Anabaptists and the Reformers, was the question of a voluntary Church composed of adult believers, which the Anabaptists advocated and the Reformers rejected.<sup>15</sup> That the Anabaptists had a right and a holy obligation to judge all practices, actions and doctrines, they were in no doubt. Especially Luther had long since advocated this right on the part of all laymen.<sup>16</sup> But the Reformers had not anticipated this turn of events; what they at one time had applied to Catholic doctrines, the Anabaptists now applied to the doctrines of the Reformers.

Until recently it was held that the Anabaptists all

belonged to the lower strata of society. While this may be true as far as their later development is concerned, in their initial stages this was not so. Paul Peachey in a recent study has attempted to trace the social background of the Swiss Anabaptists, and he has found that they originated in the cities and consisted of leading humanists (Grebel), priests, monks, evangelical preachers (Michael Wuest), scholars (Felix Manz), and a few noblemen.<sup>17</sup> This fact seems to be proof enough that economic dissatisfaction and considerations have not played appreciable parts in the rise of Anabaptism;<sup>18</sup> in its inception the movement was purely religious.<sup>19</sup> Even the first peasants who were baptized by the Anabaptist leaders, were not concerned primarily about earthly goods but with their relationship to God.<sup>20</sup> This is seen from their powerful, emotional experience which resembled that of Luther's,<sup>21</sup> and which was the direct result of the preaching of the first Anabaptists.<sup>22</sup> As a result of persecution, however, the movement was soon deprived of its spiritual and intellectual leadership.<sup>23</sup> Added to this came the defeat of the peasants, after which the disillusioned masses listened eagerly to any preacher who promised them redemption in this world or the next. Remarkable success accompanied the Anabaptist preaching in the southern regions of Germany, with the result that the movement in many instances degenerated to hatred of the

nobility and the magistrates.<sup>24</sup> The culmination of this religious movement was the erection of the Anabaptist kingdom in Muenster.

Two forces caused the Anabaptists to spread rapidly in all directions. Persecution and the social element have been referred to already. Felix Manz was the first to be drowned by the command of the authorities of Zurich with the approval of Zwingli.<sup>25</sup> The rest were able to escape death by fleeing, propagating their gospel wherever they went. The other force which caused this rapid spread was the inner urge of the Anabaptists to evangelize all men. No matter whether it involved persecution, suffering or death, they felt God's call to convey their views and experiences to others. Luther, no doubt, had contributed to this conviction, for in 1522 he had written: "The greatest work that follows from faith is that with my mouth I confess Christ, sealing that confession with my blood and, if it is so to be, laying down my life for it."<sup>26</sup> In 1523 he had stated that if there were not sufficient ministers to preach the Gospel, lay Christians were required to assume this task, for obedience to the Word of God was supreme;<sup>27</sup> when God calls, a Christian must even be willing to forsake father, mother, relatives, the government and the Church.<sup>28</sup> When the Anabaptists, however, followed his utterances to the letter, Luther opposed them on the basis that the great commission of Christ to go into all

the world to proclaim the Gospel, applied to apostolic time only; at present all men ought to remain in their particular calling.<sup>29</sup> But the success of these "hedge-preachers", as Luther called them, was phenomenal. As early as 1531, Sebastian Franck wrote:

The Anabaptists spread so rapidly that their teaching soon covered the land as it were. They soon gained a large following, and baptized thousands, drawing to themselves many sincere souls who had a zeal for God. . . . They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising by them though I have learned that this fear had no justification whatsoever.<sup>30</sup>

Thus from a small beginning in Zurich, the Swiss Brethren had influenced the South-German Anabaptists, whence the movement spread eastward along the Danube river, giving rise to the Hutterian Brethren, and northward along the Rhine valley, influencing the Low-German and Netherland Anabaptists.<sup>31</sup>

#### Luther's Early Contact with Anabaptism

As late as 1528, Luther admitted that he knew very little concerning Anabaptism and its teachings. Electoral Saxony, he states in a letter, is still free of such ministers as Balthasar Hubmaier who teaches perverted doctrines. Until now he has had little occasion to think seriously about the matter of baptism.<sup>32</sup> The Anabaptists, it must be noted, confined their activities to Hesse because of Duke Philip's leniency towards them. Luther's knowledge of Anabaptism, therefore, was of a second-hand nature, derived largely from



such prejudiced persons as Philip Melancton, Urbanus Rhegius and some students who came to Wittenberg.<sup>33</sup> Yet Luther's admission of not being familiar with these people, shows that he at first differentiated between the Anabaptists and the Wittenberg and Zwickau fanatics, with whom he was acquainted all too well.

Of this difference between the radical groups Luther must have become aware through a letter which Conrad Grebel had written to him in September, 1524. The letter has been lost but the intention of writing. Grebel announced to Vadian, his brother-in-law, on September 3, 1524, stating that he had found courage to admonish Luther's leniency towards certain practices.<sup>34</sup> From Gerhard Westerborg, whom Carlstadt had sent to the Grebel group to announce his coming to Zurich, Grebel must have learned concerning Luther's attitude towards the radical Wittenbergers. The Reformer's treatment of Carlstadt had apparently enraged the Swiss.<sup>35</sup> Then from Conrad Grebel's letter to Thomas Muentzer on September 5, 1524, we learn of the content of Grebel's letter to Luther. The Swiss leader writes:

I, C. Grebel, desired to write to Luther in the name of all of us to admonish him to desist from his forbearance which he is practising without the support of Scripture, and which he is promoting in the world and in which others are following him. . . . So I wrote in my name and of the other brethren to Luther and admonished him to desist from the false forbearance of the weak, which weak ones they themselves are.<sup>36</sup>

Luther had received the letter, for Erhard Hegenwalt, a student at Wittenberg from 1524 to 1526, reported in a letter to Grebel early in 1525, that he had inquired whether the Reformer proposed to answer Grebel's letter. Luther had replied that since he did not know how or what to answer Grebel, he did not intend to respond to the letter. Yet Luther sent greetings through Hegenwalt to the group in Zurich, so that the Swiss would not think that he, Luther, was "ill-disposed" towards them, although he disliked some of their ideas.<sup>37</sup> The fact that Luther was unable to answer Grebel may imply that the Swiss had presented some good scriptural arguments to support their position.<sup>38</sup>

It was not long before the relations between Wittenberg and the Anabaptists clouded. Grebel and Hegenwalt continued to exchange letters on such subjects as the spirit, the call to preaching, the Lord's Supper and infant baptism. Hegenwalt soon warned Grebel not to be as radical on these issues, and grouped him with Carlstadt and other fanatics who denied the Real Presence. He also announced that Luther at the time was writing a pamphlet which would tear all the arguments of the enthusiasts to pieces.<sup>39</sup> And Luther, as early as March, 1525 wrote concerning some fanatics, who had come from Holland and whom he later identified with the Anabaptists: "We have here a new sort of prophets come from Antwerp who pretend that the Holy Spirit is nothing more than

the natural reason and intellect.<sup>40</sup> It is obvious that these were not true Anabaptists. On December 31, 1527 he wrote: "The new sect of Anabaptists is making astonishing progress. They are people who conduct themselves with very great outward propriety, and go through fire and water without flinching in support of their doctrines."<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime the Swiss Reformers and the Anabaptists had joined Carlstadt in his attack upon the Real Presence. Lumping all of these Sacramentarians together, Luther released in 1527 a treatise entitled, Against the Enthusiasts.<sup>42</sup> There are various sects that oppose us, Luther laments in it, and all pretend to base their teachings on the Word of God, but in one thing they are all the same: they are all united in persecuting Christ.<sup>43</sup> All of his writings, the Reformer feels, are of no avail against these fanatics; they simply despise him and do not even bother to refute his arguments sufficiently. Their great success stems from the devil who blinds the eyes of those who are unwilling to accept the truth.<sup>44</sup> In writing against them he is not trying to convert them from their errors, for this is impossible, but he wishes to enlighten the weak and save them from perdition, as well as demonstrate to all that he has nothing in common with these fanatics, nor will he ever be one of them.<sup>45</sup> Believing firmly in his heart that their doctrines are from the devil, he cannot help but

condemn them; yet as soon as one looks disapprovingly upon these fanatics, they have a martyr's complex and heap upon themselves all the crowns of glory.<sup>46</sup> They first begin the struggle with him and then later accuse him of not keeping the peace; and, after all, who can keep peace when such vital issues as the Real Presence are at stake. Luther does not believe the fanatics are wilfully evil, but they are blinded to such an extent that they are unable to perceive the devil working in them--how tragic this is when one thinks of the truly talented men among them.<sup>47</sup> In conclusion Luther warns all cities which harbour these enthusiasts to be seriously on guard against them, for while these people may have good intentions, they have no control over the spirit which works within them. "Muentzer is dead, but his spirit is not quenched as yet."<sup>48</sup>

#### Anabaptism and Revolutionary Radicalism

In view of Luther's grouping the Anabaptists together with all the other enthusiasts, we must investigate whether there was any considerable connection between the Anabaptists and the radicals like Carlstadt and in particular Thomas Muentzer. There is a tendency among some Mennonite theologians and historians to disown all those radicals of the sixteenth century who failed to conform strictly to the ideals and practices of the Grebel group and the beliefs of the Mennonites of today.<sup>49</sup> Even the gentle, but somewhat mystically inclined

Hans Denck, is not considered to be a true Anabaptist.<sup>50</sup> While the Reformers' assertion that the "Zwickau Prophets" were the founders of Anabaptism<sup>51</sup> has no historical foundation, it is equally unhistorical to disclaim the influence of the radicals on, and their connection with the more peaceful Anabaptists. To a certain extent the whole radical movement was revolutionary in nature. Both groups, the more quietistic as well as the more radical, were desperate in their defensiveness as an outlawed movement, and even the Swiss Brethren were not wholly free from excesses and untoward trends.<sup>52</sup> George Blaurock, one of the acclaimed leaders of the early Swiss Anabaptists, for example, attempted on January 29, 1525 to usurp the pulpit from the Zwinglian pastor in Zollikon near Zurich. The attempt failed the first time, but on October 8 at Hinwil, Blaurock had more success. He entered the pulpit while the pastor happened to be absent, told the congregation he had been sent by God to preach to them, and then delivered his sermon. As a result of the first incident the Anabaptists at Zollikon were scattered and on January 30, 1525 Blaurock, Felix Manz and some baptized farmers were arrested.<sup>53</sup> Other Anabaptists like Ludwig Haetzer, for example, sympathized with the Peasants' Revolt, but there is no evidence that any took part in it.<sup>54</sup>

There were also direct contacts between the Swiss Anabaptists and the Wittenberg radicals.<sup>55</sup> Carlstadt's writings

on the mass, which he published at the end of October, 1524 when he arrived in Basel, were well known to the Grebel group, but there is no reason to believe that the Swiss Anabaptists did not get their views concerning the Last Supper from Zwingli.<sup>56</sup> At the end of 1524, however, Carlstadt made personal contacts with the Swiss Brethren at Zurich, but he left them soon;<sup>57</sup> why Carlstadt did not remain with the Anabaptists is not known.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, to please the Swiss Brethren Carlstadt wrote a pamphlet against infant baptism;<sup>59</sup> Grebel in turn had been attracted to the man because he had accomplished at Wittenberg what he and his group attempted to do in Zurich.<sup>60</sup> But Carlstadt's influence was felt in Zurich in a more concrete way. On September 24, 1523 Ludwig Haetzer published in Zurich a tract against the use of images in churches, which initiated the iconoclastic campaign led by Zwingli. This tract, as Garside has shown from its structure, thought, line of argument and passages cited, depended wholly on Carlstadt's pamphlet against images which was published in Wittenberg on January, 1522. Thus there exists a connecting link between the image breaking in Wittenberg and that in Zurich.<sup>61</sup>

That Thomas Muentzer had any appreciable influence on the Anabaptists in Switzerland, is doubtful.<sup>62</sup> The statement of Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Zwingli, that the Swiss Anabaptists made personal contacts with this revolutionist

is highly suspect of falsification of facts or of gross error at best; not even Zwingli, to whose advantage it would have been to do so, charged the Brethren with this.<sup>63</sup> But that the Swiss Brethren sought to establish contact with Muentzer after they had read some of his theological (not revolutionary) pamphlets,<sup>64</sup> cannot be denied. In the name of the radical group in Zurich, Conrad Grebel wrote on September 5, 1524 a most interesting letter to Muentzer,<sup>65</sup> at the time preacher at Alstedt. The letter never reached Muentzer, for by then he was not in Alstedt any more.

This letter has been of considerable embarrassment to Mennonite historians, for opponents of the Anabaptist movement have pointed to passages in it which seem to confirm their assumption that all radical groups were similar in nature. Harold Bender, in his excellent biography of Grebel, has ably dealt with this subject, but he seems to go to the other extreme when he states somewhat emphatically:

On the other hand--and this is its primary purpose--it constitutes a strong criticism of Muentzer. In fact the whole epistle, except for the short introduction and the similarly short conclusion, is cast in the form of an admonition and instruction to Muentzer.<sup>66</sup>

A brief review of Grebel's letter will show that the Swiss Brethren wished to convey more to Muentzer than mere instruction and criticism.

Grebel addresses Muentzer thus: "To the sincere and true proclaimer of the gospel, Thomas Muentzer at Allstedt

in the Hartz, our true and beloved brother with us in Christ."<sup>67</sup> Grebel then announces the purpose of his writing. First, he desires Muentzer's fellowship: ". . . and request thee like a brother to communicate with us by writing. . . ." Secondly, Christ who is the master of all true believers "has moved us and compelled us to make friendship and brotherhood. . . ." Thirdly, "to bring the following points to thy attention." Fourthly, your "writings of two tracts on fictitious faith has further prompted us" to write to you.<sup>68</sup> Grebel then makes it quite clear that he and his group were deploring the "false forbearance" of the Reformers before they had learned about Muentzer, but by his writings they were "more fully informed and confirmed, and it rejoiced us wonderfully that we found one who was of the same Christian mind with us and dared to show the evangelical preachers their lack. . . ."<sup>69</sup>

Grebel then objects to Muentzer's use of the mass translated into German, as well as his hymns in the worship service. Since the Apostles nowhere in the Bible command us to sing, we ought not to do so; only those things should be observed which were practised and taught in Scripture.<sup>70</sup> Detailed regulations are then given as to how the Last Supper is to be administered: Not in priestly garments; not by a minister but by a lay brother; not in "temples" but in houses; only worthy members may participate; simple bread is to be



used; ". . . the bread is nought but bread. In faith, it is the body of Christ and the incorporation with Christ and the Brethren. . . . for the Supper is an expression of fellowship, not a Mass and sacrament."<sup>71</sup> The writer then somewhat apologetically adds: "Let this suffice, since thou are much better instructed about the Lord's Supper, and we only state things as we understand them. If we are not in the right, teach us better."<sup>72</sup>

Commenting on Muentzer's and Carlstadt's opposition to the Wittenberg Reformers, Grebel has nothing but praise: ". . . thou and Carlstadt are esteemed by us the purest proclaimers and preachers of the purest Word of God."<sup>73</sup> Their opposition to Luther and Muentzer's devotional pamphlets have fortified the Swiss Brethren and have instructed them "beyond measure us who are poor in spirit."<sup>74</sup> "And so we are in harmony on all points," Grebel continues, "except that we have learned with sorrow that thou hast set up tablets, for which we find no text or example in the New Testament."<sup>75</sup> Then a short paragraph of only thirteen lines follows to admonish Muentzer not to employ the sword, for it is against the express teaching of the New Testament.<sup>76</sup> Grebel concludes: "Regard us as thy brethren and take this letter as an expression of great joy and hope toward you through God, and admonish, comfort, and strengthen us as thou art well able."<sup>77</sup>

On account of rain, the messenger was delayed in

advancing the letter, and in the meantime the Swiss had heard about Muentzer's preaching of violence against the princes. Grebel then adds a postscript to the letter, and, surprising enough, in only five lines he admonishes Muentzer to drop this point from his program. "Then wilt thou be completely pure, who in other points pleasest us better than anyone in this German and other countries."<sup>78</sup> The greater part of the postscript is devoted to strengthening Muentzer in the face of Luther's hostile attitude and threatening writings against him. The writer concludes the postscript by drawing Muentzer's attention to their fellowship in suffering:

May God give grace to thee and us. For our shepherds also are so wroth and furious against us rail at us as knaves from the pulpit in public, and call us Satanas in angelos lucis con versos. We too shall in time see persecution come upon us through them.<sup>79</sup>

Grebel and his group sign, "thy brethren, and seven new young Muentzer's against Luther. . . ."<sup>80</sup>

The letter, as pointed out, never reached its destination, but we may draw some conclusions from its content. Grebel's criticism of Muentzer is not the primary object of the letter, as Bender would have us believe, but is only incidental. This does not mean that the Swiss Anabaptists agreed theologically with Muentzer, but Grebel, although he is somewhat uneasy about this revolutionist, seems to hush over the points which were objectionable to him and his group.

Even after learning concerning Muentzer's revolutionary sermons, the postscript is written in much milder language than one would expect from a peace-loving group. The primary object of writing the letter was to establish contact and fellowship with a person who was somewhat akin to the Anabaptists and who underwent similar experiences and sufferings. True, Grebel knew Muentzer from his writings only and that before the Peasants' Revolt, but even after his tragedy, it must not be forgotten, many sincere people continued to sympathize with Muentzer. Years after the war some Hutterites, a branch of the evangelical Anabaptists, continued to look upon Muentzer as a great man, not blaming him at all for the uprising, and his death was looked upon as innocent blood. As far as they are concerned, Muentzer was a "talented" man who taught about God and concerning his living Word and its heavenly voice against the biblicists (Buchstaebler).<sup>81</sup> Only after Luther's propaganda concerning Muentzer's crimes had penetrated more deeply, did this revolutionary figure assume a darker color in the eyes of the people. At any rate, Grebel and his group were disappointed in the men from whom they sought sympathetic understanding and assistance; alone and forsaken they had to face persecution and martyrdom.

Having said this much, we must guard against over-emphasizing the connection between Anabaptism and the

revolutionary radicals. The evangelical Anabaptists were in general peaceful and nonresistant, repudiating all recourse to violence; in their preaching "an apocalyptic note may occasionally have been sounded, though it was not characteristic of the movement as a whole."<sup>82</sup> Even Lowell Zuck, after having criticized the Mennonite historians severely for refusing to acknowledge any objectionable trends in the Anabaptist movement,<sup>83</sup> in conclusion admits: "A remarkable aspect of early Anabaptism is thus not so much its occasional violence, as its frequent exhibition of sobriety and good sense amidst emotional upheaval and martyrdom."<sup>84</sup> Thus while Luther had some occasion to look with suspicion upon all dissenting groups, we cannot excuse him for wilfully lumping them all together; a man of Luther's reputation should have at least taken the pains to investigate. The struggle, however, which ensued between him and them, blinded his eyes.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. H. S. Bender, "Die Zwickauer Propheten, Thomas Muentzer und die Täufer," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 262 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. e.g. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 703.

<sup>3</sup>H. W. Schraepler, Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Täufer in der Deutschen Schweiz, Südwestdeutschland und Hessen, 1525-1618 (Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins, Heft 5; Tübingen, 1957), p. 11. Zschaebits, an East-German historian, agrees with this view, but he applies to the movement a strong social coloring. He sees both wings of the Anabaptists as reacting against the existing social order. Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. H. S. Bender, Conrad Grebel c. 1498-1526 The Founder of the Swiss Brethren (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1950), p. 220.

<sup>5</sup>F. Blanke, "Täuferforschung: Ort und Zeit der ersten Wiedertaufe," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (Januar-Februar, 1952), 74-76.

<sup>6</sup>On this historic occasion see Zieglschmid, Die älteste Chronik, p. 47 ff.

<sup>7</sup>J. J. Kiwiet, Pilgram Marbeck. Ein Führer in der Täuferbewegung der Reformationszeit (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957), p. 148.

<sup>8</sup>For a translation of the Confession see J. C. Wenger, "The Schleithem Confession of Faith," MQR, XIX (October, 1945), 244-253.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Kiwiet, Pilgram Marbeck, pp. 40-46.

<sup>10</sup>See e.g. Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 76-135 and Horsch Mennonites in Europe, pp. 30-51.

<sup>11</sup>This fact some Mennonite historians would want to forget. On July 13, 1523 Grebel wrote to his brother-in-law, Vadian, that the magistrates deal tyrannically in this matter of tithes. Crous, et al. Gedenkschrift, pp. 42-44. But Grebel never advocated violence to abolish the tithes.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. J. C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Second edition rev. and enl.; Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1947), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup>See Grebel's letter to Muentzer in Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 74.

<sup>14</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Crous, et al., Gedenkschrift, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. e.g. SWEA, XXII, 142-143.

<sup>17</sup>Peachey, Die Soziale Herkunft, pp. 91-94, 107-151. This also applies to the South-German Anabaptists. Hubmaier had been professor at the University of Ingolstadt and Denck was a humanist scholar.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Blanke, Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 262.

<sup>21</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 62-63.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. 46-47. See also Blanke, Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 255.

<sup>23</sup>Peachey, Die soziale Herkunft, pp. 91-94.

<sup>24</sup>Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, p. 49 f.

<sup>25</sup>Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 960.

<sup>27</sup>SWEA, XXII, 146-147.

<sup>28</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 265.

<sup>29</sup>Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, pp. 114-115.

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Bender, MQR, XVIII (April, 1944), 69.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Kiwiet, Pilgram Marbeck, p. 148. It has not been established too well whether the Swiss-South-German movement had

a direct influence on the rise of Anabaptism in the Netherlands. N. van der Zijpp, professor of Church History in the Doopsgezind Theological Seminary in Amsterdam, believes although the similarities are great, the direct influence was negligible. Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup>SWEA, XXVI, 255.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 209-210.

<sup>34</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup>See H. Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, II, 207-208.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 119-120.  
Cf. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, p. 119. Cf. Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 213.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. e.g. Grebel's letter to Muentzer which abounds in scriptural references. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 73 ff.

<sup>39</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 121-122.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in A. Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Full German title: "Das diese Worte Christi: 'das ist mein Leib, etc.', noch fest stehen, wider die Schwarmgeister" (SWEA, XXX, 14-150).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 26. In speaking of talented men, Luther thinks in particular of Zwingli. Whether he had Conrad Grebel and some of the other Anabaptists in mind, is doubtful.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 150. Elsewhere he again grouped all radicals together: "Denn das ich oben ansahe, was verzweifelter boesen Secten und Ketzerey haben sich erfurgethan, als Muentzer,

Zwingeler, Widertaeuffer und viel mehr." He continues: "So sollt ihr wissen, das der Muentzer geist auch noch lebt. . . ." Quoted in L. H. Zuck, "Anabaptism: Abortive Counter-Revolt Within the Reformation," Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 221.

<sup>49</sup>This trend is unconsciously expressed in the words of L. Verduin: "Another early Anabaptist, whom we would also like to forget because of his notorious career, was Jan Beukelszoon van Leiden." "The Chambers of Rhetoric and Anabaptist Origins in the Low Countries," MQR, XXXIV (July, 1960), 196.

<sup>50</sup>Denck, it is true, himself renounced Anabaptism shortly before his death.

<sup>51</sup>Melanchton wrote in 1530: ". . . Storch und seinen Anhang dem dies ganze Geschlecht der Wiedertaeufer seinen Ursprung verdankt." Quoted in H. S. Bender, Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 270.

<sup>52</sup>See e.g. L. H. Zuck, Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 211-226.

<sup>53</sup>For more details see F. Blanke, Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 249-251.

<sup>54</sup>E. M. Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism. Socinianism and its Antecedents (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 30.

<sup>55</sup>See H. S. Bender, Conrad Grebel, p. 108.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 69. See also Wappler, Die Täuferbewegung in Thuringen, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup>Goeters, Ludwig Haetzer, pp. 49-50.

<sup>58</sup>Bender suggests that Carlstadt may not have been impressed by the small number of the Brethren, and he must have foreseen their inevitable conflict with Zwingli. Conrad Grebel, pp. 109-110. H. Barge states the Swiss Anabaptists favoured Muentzer's revolutionary ideas, therefore, Carlstadt was repulsed from them. Andreas Bodenstein, II, 216-217. Barge, no doubt, bases his view on Grebel's letter to Muentzer. But this, as we shall see, is a weak basis for his contention.

<sup>59</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein, II, 205.

<sup>60</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 109-110.



<sup>61</sup>C. Garside, Jr., "Ludwig Haetzer's Pamphlet Against Images: A Critical Study," MQR, XXXIV (January, 1960), 20-36.

<sup>62</sup>See H. C. Vedder, Balthasar Huebmaier the Leader of the Anabaptists (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), pp. 105-106.

<sup>63</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 112-116. Even recent works continue to hold Bullinger's biased views on this point. See Wappler, Die Täuferbewegung in Thuringen, p. 16; Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 274; Bainton, Quianbeck and Rupp, Luther Today, p. 139. The best authorities, however, state that the Swiss Anabaptists were well established in their views before they ever heard of Muentzer, and that they repudiated his revolutionary tendencies. See e.g. Krajewski, Leben und Sterben des Zuericher Täuferführers Felix Manz, pp. 48-49.

<sup>64</sup>E.g. "Protestation . . . von dem rechten Christen Glawben, unnd der Tawfe" (1524) and "Von dem gelichten Glawben."

<sup>65</sup>For the letter in translation see Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 73 ff.

<sup>66</sup>Bender, Conrad Grebel, p. 172.

<sup>67</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 73.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-77.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>81</sup>Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, p. 29.

<sup>82</sup>The New Cambridge Modern History, II, 121.

<sup>83</sup>Zuck states: "Thus the traditional Lutheran and Reformed criticism of Anabaptism has considerable validity, in spite of American Anabaptist efforts at revision." Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 219-220.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

## CHAPTER VII

### LUTHER AND THE EVANGELICAL ANABAPTISTS, II

#### Adult versus Infant Baptism

The most distinguishing mark of the Anabaptists was their rejection of infant baptism and the adoption of adult baptism or, as they called it, believers baptism. With this they not only challenged the prevalent practice of baptizing infants, but also the belief in baptismal regeneration<sup>1</sup> held by Catholics and Lutherans alike. The Anabaptists claimed that infant baptism was an invention of the pope, but this merely shows the prevailing ignorance of Church history.<sup>2</sup> The belief in the remission of sins in connection with the baptismal act, can be traced as far back as the primitive Church.<sup>3</sup> Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (ob. in Rome A.D. 117), the Didache, Justin the Martyr (ob. in Rome A.D. 165), the second Letter of Clement, originating between A.D. 135 and 140, Tertullian, Cyprian, and St. Augustine, all held to the view of baptismal regeneration.<sup>4</sup> Infant baptism seems to have been the rule from the fourth century on. That the practice, however, was in use before this, is evident from the writings of Tertullian (A.D. 197). Because this Church Father did not believe in the post-baptismal forgiveness of sins, he condemned pedobaptism, asking for a delay in baptism until adolescence or until after marriage.<sup>5</sup> He writes in his book concerning baptism: "More caution is shown in

earthly things. Should one entrust a heavenly possession to a person to whom one would not entrust an earthly? . . . Let them first understand to ask for salvation so that it may be granted to them at their request."<sup>6</sup>

In the fourth century several sects arose which attacked the sacraments including baptism. The Donatists who believed that the validity of baptism depends on the moral character of the baptizer, rebaptized all those who seceded to them from the Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine called in the help of the civil power against the Donatists when his efforts to secure unity in the Church failed.<sup>8</sup> The Paulicians and the Jovinians<sup>9</sup> rejected both infant baptism and baptismal regeneration. Baptism was to follow conscious faith and was believed to be an outward sign of the inner transformation wrought by faith. The Jovinians were condemned as heretics by Jerome, St. Augustine, Ambrose and a Roman synod in A.D. 390.<sup>10</sup>

In the twelfth century Peter de Bruys of France and Henry of Lousanne, a Cluniac monk, followed in the footsteps of the fourth century heretics. Peter the Venerable in referring to the regions of their activity lamented that people there were rebaptized, churches profaned, altars overthrown, and monks were compelled by terror and torture to marry.<sup>11</sup> Arnold of Brescia, student and defender of Peter Abelard, led the radical movement in northern Italy; he also rejected the baptism of infants. By 1184 the Arnoldists had to some extent united with the Waldensians<sup>12</sup>

who were not too clear on baptism. Some rebaptized adults, others simply laid on hands instead of baptism, and still others practised infant baptism.<sup>13</sup> Similarly the Bohemian Brethren, who arose shortly after the Hussite wars, practised both infant baptism and rebaptized those who joined them. Early in the sixteenth century to ward off persecution, the Bohemian Brethren admitted that "baptism is to be administered to children also,"<sup>14</sup> thus giving expression to what they believed and practised before.

This brief historical sketch will have shown that opposition to infant baptism did not originate with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century; nor was opposition to Anabaptism something new. As we shall see in another chapter, the old Justinian laws against rebaptizers were revived and enforced with the utmost severity.

The Anabaptists sincerely believed that their views concerning baptism were in harmony with the Word of God.<sup>15</sup> For this belief they were willing to suffer persecution and even martyrdom. Menno Simons' summary of this position is characteristic of all Anabaptists. ". . . we are driven only," he writes, "by a God-fearing faith which we have in the Word of God to baptize and to be baptized, and by nothing else."<sup>16</sup> In his booklet entitled Christian Baptism (1539) Menno elaborates on three reasons for baptizing adults and not infants. First, Christ commanded that faith precede baptism;<sup>17</sup> secondly the Apostles

taught believers baptism;<sup>18</sup> thirdly, the Apostles practised adult baptism only.<sup>19</sup> Conrad Grebel in his letter to Muentzer gives us also a good picture as to what the Anabaptists believed concerning baptism. Before a man is baptized, Grebel writes, he must have faith in the redeeming work of Christ who forgives the repentant sinner. Water baptism is only a sign or symbol of what has taken place in the heart; ". . . so that the water does not confirm or increase faith, as the scholars at Wittenberg say, and does not give very great comfort nor is it the final refuge on the death bed."<sup>20</sup> Baptismal regeneration is rejected because it dishonours "faith and the suffering of Christ. . . ."<sup>21</sup> As far as unbaptized children are concerned, they will be saved without faith on the merit of Christ's death. Infant baptism Grebel condemns as "senseless" and "blasphemous", and "contrary to all Scripture."<sup>22</sup>

Luther did not quarrel much with the Catholic doctrine on baptism. All he had against it was, as he put it, their teaching that after man has fallen into sin, the effects of baptism are erased and the sinner has to perform certain works to come back to grace.<sup>23</sup> In 1519, when the Anabaptists had not appeared as yet, Luther still emphasized faith in connection with baptism. "Baptism certainly does not justify without faith," he wrote, "but faith does justify without baptism; therefore no part of justification may be ascribed to baptism."<sup>24</sup> Moreover,

since baptism signifies the drowning of the old man, children should be immersed completely in water.<sup>25</sup> Although water baptism does wash away sin, a life of sanctification and faith must follow in order to validate one's baptism. At this time Luther valued baptism so highly because the priesthood of all believers was derived from it; baptism makes all men equal before God, thus abrogating the sacerdotal function of the Church.<sup>26</sup>

These early, general views on baptism soon gave way to a more precise teaching on the subject. In the appearance of the Anabaptists, Luther saw his theology threatened with ruin and as a result he had to redefine his position. In baptism he now began to see more and more a means of receiving the grace of God, and this was best illustrated in the baptism of infants who are completely passive in this act of God.<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine's statements on baptism became now very precious to the Reformer; especially the following statement he described as a "beautiful saying": "In baptism there is remitted all our sin, not as if it no longer existed, but that it is not imputed."<sup>28</sup>

Upon the question of two clerics from southern Germany in 1528 as to what to do with the Anabaptists who infested their regions, Luther found occasion to elaborate more fully on the subject of baptism. In his pamphlet Concerning Rebaptism<sup>29</sup> he accuses the Anabaptists of murdering Christians by denying the sacramental value of baptism; even the papists are better in

this, for they at least leave Christ to the people.<sup>30</sup> To baptize upon faith, as the Anabaptists pretend to do, is ridiculous, for how can one be certain whether there is faith in the person being baptized? Such a baptism is actually a "baptism of adventure".<sup>31</sup> One should not baptize upon faith but on the sure foundation of the Word of God. Luther believes that since infant baptism has been practised since the beginning of Christianity, it should not be changed; God would not have permitted Christians to be in the dark about such an important matter for so long.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, how can the Anabaptists say children cannot have faith when there is no scriptural basis for such an assertion? Did not little John the Baptist leap in his mother's womb as a result of faith (Luke 1:41)?<sup>33</sup> And, after all, is it not possible for Christ to implant saving faith in the hearts of infants? Infant baptism is most beautiful, Luther continues, for children are "not concerned to do any kind of effort or any kind of work, completely free, sure and blessed alone through the glory of their baptism."<sup>34</sup> Just as the Old Testament children were received into the covenant of God through circumcision, so are the children of the new dispensation received into the covenant of Christ through baptism.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Christ has commanded to baptize all nations which no doubt includes the children as well.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, just as faith remains with an adult in his unconscious condition, such as sleep, for



example, similarly faith can begin in infants though they are unaware of it.<sup>37</sup> The objection that many priests did not truly believe while administering baptism, Luther refutes by referring to the Donatists of old who held the same errors; the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the moral character of the person administering them.<sup>38</sup> Judging from their gross errors, the Reformer concludes, it is evident that the Anabaptists are blasphemers of God and messengers from the devil.<sup>39</sup>

Although Luther pursued his later arguments on the subject along these general lines, there were other points which he emphasized as time went on. A year later in his Small Catechism the Reformer stated that it is not the water which saves the person, but the Word of God which is attached to the water and man's faith which accepts the Word.<sup>40</sup> In 1530 he wrote that if adults only should be baptized, most people would live like pagans until the very hour of their death before desiring to be baptized; they would thus neglect coming to hear the Word of God, for non-Christians are indifferent to spiritual things. To exemplify this, Luther refers to St. Augustine who was not baptized till he was thirty years old, falling as a result into the heresy of the Manichaees.<sup>41</sup> When the Anabaptists denied the sacramental nature of baptism, Luther in 1535 argued to the contrary, stating that baptism has all three requirements of a sacrament. It has the external

element (water), it has the Word of God attached to the element, and, most important of all, it is backed by the command of Christ.<sup>42</sup> Since this is so, our faith or unbelief do not affect the sacrament of baptism at all. If the candidate for baptism believes, well for him; if he does not have faith, and if he refuses to believe after baptism, he will have received the sacrament for his own damnation.<sup>43</sup> Since God attaches such importance to baptism, it is the greatest blasphemy to call it a dog's bath or simply bath water as the Anabaptists do.<sup>44</sup>

It is needless to say that the Anabaptists were not slow to counter-attack Luther's arguments. In his Foundation of Christian Doctrine (1539), Menno Simons expressed surprise at Luther's belief in a dormant faith in infants of which the Bible had nothing to say. "If Luther writes this as his sincere opinion," Menno states, "then he proves that he has written in vain a great deal concerning faith and its power. But if he writes this to please men, may God have mercy on him. . . ."<sup>45</sup> Menno then goes on to refute Luther's arguments point by point on the basis of his interpretation of Scripture. His reasoning is quite logical and some arguments have weight, others are just as feeble as some of the Reformer's arguments in support of infant baptism.<sup>46</sup> Nothing, however, could move Luther from his position. In a letter of December 17, 1534 to Prince Joachim of Anhalt, he asked the prince to stand sponsor

on his daughter's baptism in order, as he stated, to help "the poor little heathen out of her sinful state by nature into the most blessed new birth. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

### State Church versus Free Church

Luther charged the Anabaptists with legalism for making such great issue about baptism.<sup>48</sup> While the right administration of baptism was important to them, it was not the act of baptism itself which dominated the thinking of the Anabaptists; it was rather their concept of the Church which was so closely connected with baptism. From reading Luther's German edition of the New Testament and possibly from the Reformer's own teaching on the subject, the Anabaptists arrived at the conclusion that the Church must be composed of voluntary believers and must be separated from the state.<sup>49</sup> Infant baptism was diametrically opposed to this concept. Before looking more closely at this idea of a free Church, we must review Luther's position on the question of Church and state in order to appreciate more fully the Anabaptists' dissent.

In his defense of the thirteenth thesis against Dr. Eck in 1519, Luther asserted that the Church, the Una Sancta, is "the Communion of Saints"; those who truly believe belong to the Church of Christ.<sup>50</sup> In his "Lectures on Romans" he had spoken of the Church as a persecuted remnant.<sup>51</sup> Between 1522 and 1527 Luther attempted to establish a Church composed of

earnest Christians, who not only professed the Gospel but also lived it. He thought at first of entering the names of such pious people in a special book, thus separating them from the nominal Christians. He himself then proposed to be the minister of this saintly group while someone else would serve the larger congregation. Luther concluded, however, that he would not have a sufficient number of such dedicated people to realize his plan.<sup>52</sup> The excuse may have been an indication of his knowledge that the princes would not have tolerated such a church within the Church.<sup>53</sup>

The idea of a separate Church remained with Luther throughout his life. As late as 1538 he declared in a sermon that Church and state "must remain severed and separated from each other if we are to preserve the true Gospel and the true faith. For the nature of the Kingdom of Christ is very different indeed from that of temporal government committed to princes and lords."<sup>54</sup> To carry through this principle, Luther would have had to ally himself with dissenting groups such as the Anabaptists, but this, of course, was practically as well as theologically impossible.<sup>55</sup> To assure the course of the Reformation after the Peasants' Revolt, Luther was necessitated to subject his church to the territorial princes.<sup>56</sup> The precedent for this had been established in the Eigenkirchentum, against which the Church reformers of the eleventh century had fought with all their might; and the humanists' conception of the Christian

state sanctioned the idea.<sup>57</sup> Luther, however, was never easy about his surrender to the state. To overcome his embarrassment in the face of the Anabaptists he had to explain somehow his awkward position. The princes were soon called "emergency-bishops", who were expected to assist in the work of the Reformation not because they were princes, but because they were members of the Christian Church with special powers and authority. As soon as the circumstances were more settled, these princes would step back from church affairs and leave the spiritual government to the clergy.<sup>58</sup> This position compelled Luther to speak of an "invisible Church" which manifested itself, not necessarily in the good life of a Christian community, but in the preaching of the pure Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.<sup>59</sup> His early ideals of a true Church had, for all practical purposes, dwindled into obscurity.

In contrast to Luther's "invisible Church" and his subjection of the Church to the state, the Anabaptists sought to follow the Reformer's first principle of separation to its logical conclusion, establishing a concrete, visible and restored Church composed of voluntary believers.<sup>60</sup> The Anabaptists looked upon Constantine the Great as the man who, by uniting the Church to the state had brought about the fall of the Apostolic Church.<sup>61</sup> Most of the Anabaptists agreed that Luther and the other Reformers of the sixteenth century

had begun restoring the early Church, but the task was abandoned by them and then taken over by the radical reformers.<sup>62</sup> The signs of a truly restored Church, according to Anabaptist sources, are a community of voluntary believers who have become members by repentance, faith and adult baptism, an unadulterated pure doctrine, a scriptural administration of the sacramental signs, true discipleship (Nachfolge), willingness to suffer persecution and martyrdom, a brotherly love which often manifests itself in community of goods, and complete withdrawal from the state and the world.<sup>63</sup>

This withdrawal from the world and the state drew upon the Anabaptists the suspicion of the Reformers and magistrates who accused them of conspiring against the powers that be. The fact that most of the later Anabaptists belonged to the lower strata of society heightened this fear. That this apprehension was unfounded is borne out by a careful examination of the sources. One Anabaptist treatise states that out of love God has instituted the government in order to preserve law and order; therefore, "the true Christians are indebted as children of God, for love's sake, to give to the outward powers all obedience and submission even until temporal death. All outward matters, even life and body, are subject to the outward powers, only the true faith in Christ may not be compelled or conquered."<sup>64</sup> When Zwingli accused the Swiss

Brethren of being guilty of disturbances and sedition, Grebel justified himself by stating that he "never took part in sedition and never talked or spoke in any way anything which would lead to it, as all those with whom I have ever had anything to do will testify of me."<sup>65</sup> A recently found old manuscript written by a certain Clemens Adler in April, 1529, gives some reasons for not taking up arms against others:

. . . for the love of Christ they [Christians] love their enemies, do good to them and pray for them, as Christ teaches them, and thus hearken to the voice of their shepherd. Even if the world rises up against them, yet they rage and storm against none; and if the world lifts up its sword against them, yet they take no sword against it nor against any-one, for they have made their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks.<sup>66</sup>

Even for self-defense the Anabaptists refused to carry a weapon as was customary at that time.<sup>67</sup> Thus the Anabaptists' concept of a free Church and their emphasis on discipleship, that is, following Christ almost literally according to New Testament teachings, lay at the basis of their refusal to acknowledge infant baptism as biblical.<sup>68</sup>

Having been driven by circumstances to surrender his Church to the secular powers, Luther soon began to look with contempt upon the Anabaptists who attempted to maintain a free Church, and their adherence to strict church discipline was misinterpreted. "Where they want to go," Luther said of the Anabaptists, "I am not disposed to follow. God save me

from a Church in which are none but the holy."<sup>69</sup> Again he wrote: The Anabaptists "paint this life in a terrible aspect. They want to run out of the world entirely, and are unwilling to associate with anyone. . . ."<sup>70</sup> In a sermon on the Wheat and Tares from Matt. 13:24-30, Luther compared the Anabaptists to the Cathari and Donatists of old who also had attempted to establish a pure Church, quite impossible according to the parable. The saints from Adam on, he commented, have always had wicked people within their ranks; even Christ had tolerated Judas among the Apostles.<sup>71</sup> Thus by a strange turn of events Luther had changed from at first advocating a free and pure Church to charging the Anabaptists with sedition simply because "they held with the Catholics, that the State is not responsible for religion."<sup>72</sup>

#### Dogma versus Morals

One of the Anabaptists' greatest stumbling blocks in Lutheranism, was the Reformer's overemphasis of justification by faith alone, which, as the dissenters perceived rightly, frequently led to a loose moral life. The Anabaptists agreed with Luther that man is saved by the grace of God, but they repudiated his idea of an enslaved will and maintained that a justified person had to bring forth good works to make good his salvation.<sup>73</sup> This gave the Reformer occasion to brand the Anabaptists as Romanists, but it was difficult for him to deny that there was a difference between their life and that of his



followers.

To be fair to the Reformer we must state at the outset that he was not indifferent to the practical life of his adherents.<sup>74</sup> As early as 1521 he wrote to the Wittenbergers that it is necessary to live according to one's faith and not only talk about it.<sup>75</sup> In 1535 he asserted that to teach aright will be of no avail if the good life does not follow.<sup>76</sup> In a sermon of September 14, 1538 Luther declared: "Believe me, Christ did not come that you might remain in your sins and damnation; for you will not be saved if you do not stop sinning. To be sure, sins are forgiven; but you must stop being a miser, an adulterer, or a fornicator."<sup>77</sup> In 1546, shortly before his death, he emphatically stated that it is impossible to reach heaven without having seriously striven for sanctification here on earth.<sup>78</sup>

Luther's emphasis on dogma, however, was much stronger than on the good life, and this made the difference in the results. In 1520 he wrote to pope Leo X: ". . . I have no dispute with any man concerning morals, but only concerning the word of truth."<sup>79</sup> To other Catholics he said in 1521: "Whether you are good or bad does not concern me. But I will attack your poisonous and lying teaching, which contradicts God's Word."<sup>80</sup> In 1524 he wrote to certain princes that he would have had little to do with the papists had they taught aright; their evil lives did not matter much.<sup>81</sup> Justification

by faith alone, Luther believed, would automatically produce good works.<sup>82</sup> To be justified by Christ means sanctification already; a person is holy as soon as he believes in Christ; the emphasis on good works is thus unnecessary and irrelevant.<sup>83</sup> Luther's pure doctrine thus almost became an excuse for an impure life. To put it in the words of the Reformer:

Our doctrine is pure because it is a gift of God. But in our life there still is something sinful and punishable. However, this is forgiven and not imputed. It is not put on the books against us; but remissio peccatorum (remission of sins) is placed over it, and the sin is wiped out.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Dorner, an evangelical divine in Germany wrote in 1871:

"Justification by faith is made to cover, in advance, all sins, even the future ones; . . . Hence we see not seldom the justified and the old man side by side, and the old man is not a bit changed."<sup>85</sup>

That this was so to a large extent is borne out by Luther's contemporaries. In 1522 the Bohemian Brethren were much interested in the Reformation in Germany, but they found fault with the discipline and the moral life of the Lutherans. When they complained to Luther about this, the Reformer was much annoyed at their plain speaking, but he promised to do something about this laxity.<sup>86</sup> On April 1, 1524 Staupitz wrote to Luther, pleading with him not to disregard the moral aspect of Christianity, "for I see that countless persons abuse the gospel for the freedom of the flesh."<sup>87</sup> Luther himself had realized this two years earlier. He wrote: "We who at the

present are well nigh heathen under a Christian name. . . .<sup>88</sup>

Hans Sachs, the poet, in addressing the Lutherans in 1524

stated:

There is much cry and little wool about you. If you have no use for brotherly love, you are no disciples of Christ. If you were really evangelical as you profess to be, you would lead a godly life like the Apostles.<sup>89</sup>

Melanchton wrote in 1525 that the "common people adhered to Luther only because they think that no further religious duty will be laid upon them."<sup>90</sup> The Lutheran minister of the St. Sebald's Church in Nuernberg declared in 1530 that there was no moral improvement in his congregation; it was only distinguished "by a carnal freedom."<sup>91</sup> In the same year the Reformer blamed his "lazy and indifferent" ministers for the peoples' utter disregard for the sacraments.<sup>92</sup> "The longer we preach the Gospel," he lamented, "the deeper the people plunge into greed, pride and luxury."<sup>93</sup>

Luther did not find it too difficult acknowledging this well-meant criticism by the friends of the Reformation, but when the Anabaptists began attacking not only the life of the Lutherans but also the doctrine which underlay it,<sup>94</sup> Luther's anger knew no bounds. The criticism of the Anabaptists, Luther stated, was a sure sign of their lack of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit condemns false doctrines only and suffers the "weak in faith."<sup>95</sup> The Reformer even went so far as to accuse the Anabaptists of committing adultery in their secret meetings in fields and gardens.<sup>96</sup> Likewise the Swiss Reformers charged

the dissenters with fanaticism, murder and other crimes.<sup>97</sup>

John Horsch has shown quite conclusively that all of these charges are unfounded and that the slander was hurled against them out of enmity to justify their cruel persecution.<sup>98</sup>

That the Anabaptists' emphasis on the moral teachings of the New Testament, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, had remarkable results, will be seen from the testimonies of their enemies.

Philip Landgrave of Hesse wrote to his sister, the Duchess Elizabeth of Saxony: "I find more goodness in those so-called 'Enthusiasts' than in those who are Lutherans."<sup>99</sup> Erasmus wrote to the Archbishop of Toulouse in 1529: "The Anabaptists are to be commended above all others for the innocence of their lives." And again: "This sect so hated contains many persons of better life than the separated factions. They preach repentance; they summon all men to amendment of life; they follow the examples of the Apostles."<sup>100</sup> Johannes Kessler, Reformed leader of St. Gall, Switzerland, wrote that the Anabaptists' "walk and manner of life was altogether pious, holy and irreproachable."<sup>101</sup> Franz Agricola, a Roman Catholic theologian, wrote in his Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists (1582):

As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display is found or is discernible among them, but only humility, patience, uprightness,

meekness, honesty, temperance, and straight forwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they have the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>102</sup>

The good life of the Anabaptists, however, did not cause the Reformers to reconcile themselves with these despised people. On the contrary the opposite was true. "Those who show a purpose to lead an earnest Christian life, and live piously," Caspar Schwenckfeld wrote, "are generally considered and accused of being Anabaptists."<sup>103</sup> Some people were unable to clear themselves of the suspicion of being Anabaptists "except by engaging in frequent drinking bouts."<sup>104</sup> The more pathetic this becomes when it is kept in mind that the evangelical Anabaptists only sought to obey the commands of Christ as they understood them, and to observe the early principles of the Reformers, which they had accepted as truth. The Swiss Brethren lamented in their Vindication:

The ministers of the established church at first have taught this evangelical doctrine, and some of them teach it even today, that one should abstain from sin, lead a pious, irreproachable Christian life, be born of God and regenerated, manifest Christian love, follow Christ, bear the cross, . . . forsake home, property, wife, children, etc., . . . . And now, when we by God's grace desire to do, believe, teach, and live, in accord with their first teaching, we are to them an abomination, they cannot tolerate us, they defame and reproach us in this our Christian faith, . . . as if it were heretical and erroneous; . . . .<sup>105</sup>

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

<sup>1</sup>The belief that in water baptism the original sin is removed.

<sup>2</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 76.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, pp. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Johannes Warns, Baptism. Studies in the Original Christian Baptism, its History and Conflicts, its Relation to a State or National Church and its Significance for the Present Time, trans. from the German by G. H. Lang (London: The Pater-noster Press, 1957), pp. 75-77.

<sup>5</sup>William A. Be Vier, "Modes of Water Baptism in the Ancient Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 116 (July-September, 1959), 232-234.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Warns, Baptism, p. 79.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup>Warns, Baptism, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup>So called after the name of an Italian monk, Jovianus, ca. A.D. 378.

<sup>10</sup>W. A. Be Vier, "Summary and Conclusion Concerning Water Baptism in the Ancient Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 116 (October-December, 1959), 318-319.

<sup>11</sup>Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, pp. 31-34.

<sup>12</sup>For particulars on this union see Ibid., pp. 36-39.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>See e.g. Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. 270-276. Cf. Goeters, Ludwig Haetzer, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, p. 236.

<sup>17</sup>E.g. Mark 16:16

<sup>18</sup>E.g. Acts 8:37.

- <sup>19</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, pp. 229-287.
- <sup>20</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 80. Grebel is referring to Luther's teaching on the subject.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup>SWEA, XVI, 93-94.
- <sup>24</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 708.
- <sup>25</sup>SWEA, XXI, 232-233. The Anabaptists baptized by affusion as well as by immersion. See B. J. Kidd (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 455.
- <sup>26</sup>Cf. A. W. Dieckhoff, Luthers Lehre von der kirchlichen Gewalt, Historisch dargestellt (Berlin: Verlag von Gustav Schlawitz, 1865), pp. 87-90.
- <sup>27</sup>Cf. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 55.
- <sup>28</sup>Quoted in J. T. Mueller, "A Survey of Luther's Theology," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 113 (July, 1956), 230. Cf. SWEA, XXI, 235.
- <sup>29</sup>Full German title: "Von der Wiedertaufe, an zwei Pfarrherrn" (SWEA, XXVI, 254-294).
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 260.
- <sup>31</sup>"Denn wer die Tauf auf den Glauben gruendet, und tauft auf Abentheuer, und nicht gewiss ist, ob Glaub da sei, der thut nichts Bessers, dann der ohn Glaube taufet." Ibid., p. 267.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 269.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 269-270. Luther finds another scriptural proof in Psalm 106:38: "They poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan." Since innocence is a result of true faith, Luther argues, these children, no doubt, had faith from God.
- <sup>34</sup>Quoted in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 417. Cf. SWEA, XXVI, 272.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 273. Cf. John Murray, Christian Baptism (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952), p. 75. Murray points out that Col. 2:11-12 indicates the close connection between circumcision and infant baptism.

<sup>36</sup>In support of his argument Luther refers to biblical baptisms of whole households. See e.g. passages such as Acts 2:39; 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:16.

<sup>37</sup>Memnonite Encyclopedia, III, 417.

<sup>38</sup>Luther believes it is better to receive the Word and sacraments from a wicked person than from godly ministers, for when saints preach men might cling to the holiness of the preacher rather than to the Word of God. Even Christ told his disciples to listen to the wicked pharisees (Matt. 23:2). SWEA, XXVI, 280-281.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 290-291.

<sup>40</sup>SWEA, XXI, 17.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., XXIII, 163-165.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., XVI, 56.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>45</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, p.126.

<sup>46</sup>For Menno's arguments against pedobaptism as well as for adult baptism see Ibid., pp. 130-138.

<sup>47</sup>Luther, The Letters of, pp. 303-304. This reference unmistakably shows that Luther firmly believed in baptismal regeneration. But he did not wish to press the point on this.

<sup>48</sup>SWEA, XXVI, 278-279.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Westin, The Free Church Through the Ages, pp. 53-54.

<sup>50</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 258.

<sup>51</sup>See Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup>For more details see Bender, MQR, XVIII (April, 1944),



76-77. In this connection Luther stated: "Denn dieses wuerde erstlich die rechte Art einer evangelischen Versammlung sein, da man nicht offentlig oder ohne Unterschied mit Zulassung allerhand Leute zusammen kaeme, sondern dahin sich versammelten, welche mit ganzem Ernst Christen waeren und das Evangelium mit Hand und Mund bekennten." Quoted in Geiser, et al. Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden, p. 112.

<sup>53</sup>Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 28. It is of interest to note that the idea of a congregation within the Church came partly from the Silesian nobleman Caspar Schwenckfeld who later estranged from the Reformer.

<sup>54</sup>Flass, What Luther Says, I, 293.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Geiser, et al. Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden, pp. 115-118.

<sup>56</sup>Mueller, Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 13 (July, 1956), 237-238.

<sup>57</sup>For more details see Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, pp. 250-252.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Dieckhoff, Luthers Lehre von der kirchlichen Gewalt, pp. 182-183.

<sup>59</sup>SWEA, XXII, 141-142; Flass, What Luther Says, I, 272. Cf. Thiel, Luther, p. 395.

<sup>60</sup>F. H. Littell, The Free Church (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957), pp. 37-38.

<sup>61</sup>Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup>For an excellent study on this see Frank J. Wray, "The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the Church," MQR, XXVIII (July, 1954), 186-196.

<sup>63</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, pp. 739-742. Cf. E. Waltner, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church," MQR, XXV (January, 1951), 5-16; Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, pp. 82-108. The Swiss Brethren, the Mennonites and the Hutterites also included nonresistance in the list, but the South-German Anabaptists, led by Hubmaier, believed in bearing arms for the government.

<sup>64</sup>Hillerbrand, MQR, XXXII (January, 1958), 31.

<sup>65</sup>Quoted in Bender, Conrad Grebel, pp. 130-131.

<sup>66</sup>Samuel Geiser, "An Ancient Anabaptist Witness for Nonresistance," MQR, XXV (January, 1951), 67.

<sup>67</sup>Luther stated in his Table Talks: "Die Wiedertaeufer sind verzweifelte boese Buben, tragen keine Wehre, und ruehmen sich grosser Gedult." SWEA, LXII, 191. For scriptural reasons for non-participation in government and war see Zieglschmid, Die aelteste Chronik, pp. 296-308.

<sup>68</sup>One must guard against overemphasizing the Anabaptists' conception of non-participation in governmental affairs, for external circumstances, as we shall see in another chapter, contributed much to this idea. See Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 320-321.

<sup>69</sup>Quoted in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 184.

<sup>70</sup>Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 119.

<sup>71</sup>SWEA, XVI, 246-247.

<sup>72</sup>Acton, Essays on Freedom and Power, p. 95.

<sup>73</sup>See Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, pp. 107-108.

<sup>74</sup>J. Koestlin's observation, however, that all of Luther's theological studies and sermons were directed to man's living, is an exaggeration. Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1379 n. Similarly futile are P. Schaff's explanations of the antinomian tendencies in Lutheranism. He states that the increase of wealth in Europe and the confusion resulting from the break with Rome were responsible for the loose living and not Luther's doctrines. History of the Christian Church, VII, 23-24.

<sup>75</sup>SWEA, XXXIX, 136.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., XVI, 100-101.

<sup>77</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 723.

<sup>78</sup>SWEA, XVI, 255-256.

<sup>79</sup>Luther, First Principles of the Reformation, p. 96.

<sup>80</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 415.

<sup>81</sup>SWEA, LIII, 263-265.

<sup>82</sup>See Lennart Pinomaa, "Die Heiligung bei Luther," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (Januar-Februar, 1954), 47. Luther said that just as fire will give off light so will faith produce good works. Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer, p. 333.

<sup>83</sup>In his temptations this was his greatest comfort. He wrote: "Moegen Teufel, Tod und Suende wider mich stehen, ich bin doch heilig; denn ich glaube an Christus und kenne ihn." Quoted in Pinomaa, Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (Januar-Februar, 1954), 41.

<sup>84</sup>Flass, What Luther Says, II, 867.

<sup>85</sup>Quoted in Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 667.

<sup>86</sup>Edward Langton, History of the Moravian Church. The Story of the First International Protestant Church (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1956), pp. 41-43.

<sup>87</sup>Quoted in Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 120.

<sup>88</sup>Quoted in Bender, MQR, XVIII (April, 1944), 76.

<sup>89</sup>Quoted in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 244.

<sup>90</sup>Quoted in Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 28.

<sup>91</sup>Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 244.

<sup>92</sup>SWEA, XXIII, 166.

<sup>93</sup>These examples and quotations could be multiplied. Luther's sanction of the bigamy of Philip of Hesse is well known. See Luther's letter to Philip in SWEA, LV, 263. Even ministers were permitted to divorce and to remarry with the Reformer's consent. In one instance, Michael Kramer married three times "because he could not be without a wife." See Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 228-229.

<sup>94</sup>Menno Simons wrote: "For with this same doctrine [justification by faith alone] they have led the reckless and innocent people, great and small, city dweller and cottager alike, into such a fruitless, unregenerate life, and have given them such a free rein, that one would scarcely find such an ungodly and abominable life among Turks and Tartars as among these people." Complete Writings, p. 333. Coutts comments:

" . . . just as Luther had traced all the moral chaos of his time to the errors of Rome, so the spiritual reformers found the explanation of the moral and spiritual degeneration of the Reformation age in the doctrinal errors of the Reformed Church." Hans Denck, p. 81.

<sup>95</sup>SWEA, LIII, 263-265.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., LXI, 281-282.

<sup>97</sup>See Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, pp. 53-65, and Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, pp. 17-18.

<sup>98</sup>J. Horsch, "An Inquiry into the Truth of Accusations of Fanaticism and Crime Against the Early Swiss Brethren," MQR, VIII (January, 1934), 18-31 and MQR, VIII (April, 1934), 73-89.

<sup>99</sup>Quoted in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 256.

<sup>100</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 118.

<sup>101</sup>Quoted in Gordon D. Kaufman, "Some Theological Emphases of the Early Swiss Anabaptists," MQR, XXV (April, 1951), 95.

<sup>102</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, pp. 117-118. Christopher Andreas Fisher, also a Catholic, wrote similarly concerning the Anabaptists. See J. Horsch, "The Character of the Evangelical Anabaptists as Reported by Contemporary Reformation Writers," MQR, VIII (July, 1934), 133. Cf. also Sebastian Franck's judgement in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 115, as well as Justus Menius' statements in Wappler, Die Taeuferbewegung in Thueringen, pp. 59-64.

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in J. Horsch, MQR, VIII (July, 1934), 128.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Quoted in Ibid., p. 129. From their emphasis on good works it is evident that the Anabaptists were less concerned about a carefully worked out theology; they believed in what we would call today, "existential Christianity". Cf. Robert Friedmann, "Anabaptism and Protestantism," MQR, XXIV (January, 1950), 12-24. In addition, the persecution of the Anabaptists and the early death of their leaders, prevented them from leaving to posterity a systematic theology.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LUTHER AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ANABAPTISTS

When the Anabaptists erected their kingdom in Muenster (1534-1535) Luther's attitude was that of "I told you so". He regarded these developments as the logical outcome of the Anabaptist movement, which could have been prevented had the civil authorities acted more decisively when he warned them against such radicals as Carlstadt, Muentzer and others.<sup>1</sup> This conception of the Anabaptist movement lingered in the minds of historians until in the middle of the nineteenth century the Catholic historian C. A. Cornelius, disentangled the threads and showed that the Muenster episode was not characteristic of all the Anabaptists.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in addition to showing Luther's attitude towards the Muensterites, we shall also devote a section in this chapter to the possible connection between the evangelical Anabaptists and the Muenster radicals.

#### The Anabaptist Kingdom in Muenster

The Anabaptist movement in Muenster stood in closest relation to the unrest of the time in general and the revolutionary tendencies within the city in particular.<sup>3</sup> Muenster, with a population of about 15,000, was the major city in Westphalia in northwestern Germany. The bishop of Muenster was also the civil ruler in his bishopric. Since the city enjoyed a

large measure of self-government, radical changes were possible at any time. As early as 1525, during the Peasants' Revolt, the masses of Muenster began to demand improvements in economic, social and religious conditions.<sup>4</sup> The Craft- and the Merchant-Guilds, seventeen in number, were properly represented in the council; since they were quite powerful, no important measures could be passed without their consent.<sup>5</sup> The guilds and the mob of the city later gained control over the council and the bishop.<sup>6</sup>

One of the priests of the city, Bernt Rothmann, began in 1530 to advocate anti-Catholic reforms. He had been educated with the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer where he had become acquainted with the new Testament.<sup>7</sup> In 1531 he visited Wittenberg, the headquarters of Lutheranism, and thence he went to Strassburg where he was the guest of the Zwinglian reformers. Upon his return to Muenster, Rothmann began to preach with great success, so that the great St. Maurice Church became too small to hold the audiences and, therefore, a pulpit was erected outside the church. The council gave Rothmann strict orders to preach inside the church only, but the enthusiastic preacher disregarded the command.<sup>8</sup> After having been outlawed by the bishop on January 7, 1532, Rothmann asserted his Catholic orthodoxy, but within a few weeks he published a confession in which he defended Lutheran doctrines and advocated the establishment of a new

state church along Lutheran lines.<sup>9</sup> Hermann Knipperdolling, a cloth merchant and a prominent member of the council, and a mob supported Rothmann in his defiance of the council and the bishop. On August 10, 1532 all the churches of the city, with the exception of the cathedral, were in the possession of the Lutherans or radicals.<sup>10</sup>

Before the close of the year 1532, however, a split occurred in the ranks of Rothmann's followers. The preachers began to favour Zwinglian and Anabaptist views on the Last Supper, whereas the Syndic Johann von der Wieck upheld the Lutheran standard. Luther in a letter to the council of Muenster warned against tolerating Zwinglianism and similar heresy, but it was no longer in the power of the magistrates to silence Rothmann.<sup>11</sup> Through the influence of Heinrich Roll, who had come to Muenster from nearby Wassenberg, a Melchiorite<sup>12</sup> centre, Rothmann's faction began early in 1533 to advocate some Anabaptist views. Infant baptism was repudiated and adults were baptized; within a short time approximately 1,400 people had been baptized.<sup>13</sup> C. A. Cornelius points out that the newly baptized renounced all worldliness, adhered to communion of goods, led good moral lives, and lived simply and piously.<sup>14</sup> But from all appearance the Anabaptist principle of nonresistance was absent; the factions warred with each other, opposed the established order, defied the council as well as the bishop, and advocated Luther's

earlier principle of the layman's right to participate in Church reform. With the assistance of the ever increasing number of refugees who flocked to Muenster from all parts of the empire, the city was by the end of 1533 in complete control of the radical reformers.<sup>15</sup>

Jan Matthys, the fanatical prophet of Haarlem in the Netherlands, had kept for some time an eye on the affairs at Muenster. Similar to Thomas Muentzer, Matthys claimed to be directly inspired by God and to receive divine revelations. After the example of Christ, he sent twelve apostles into the world, commanding them to baptize and to preach that no Christian blood ought to be spilled any longer, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.<sup>16</sup> As a result of severe persecution the apocalyptic expectations had become very strong among the Anabaptists. They considered themselves to be at a crucial point in history, believing that God "assembles his people now for the decisive attack, but Satan, too, arms with all his forces for the great counter attack. All the forces of the Civitas Diaboli are let loose now upon the Civitas Dei: the old dragon and the great beast, the Anti-Christ, and the false prophets."<sup>17</sup> These eschatological visions were much stronger among the Dutch Anabaptists than the Swiss Brethren. Most of the visionaries, however, looked upon the end in spiritual terms, expecting a heavenly kingdom; only a strong minority, influenced by the economic, social and political conditions of the time, thought



of an earthly establishment of Christ's Kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

Luther himself was not wholly free of unsound notions concerning the end of the world. In view of the dark prospects of his cause, he wrote in 1521: "Oh, how truly these are perilous times, worthy of the last days." According to the prophet Daniel (8:25) the Reformer was certain that the pope was Antichrist, which was an indication of the end times.<sup>19</sup> In 1534 he expected to see certain signs which would precede the coming of Christ. Two years earlier he expressed the opinion that the last day would come before the close of 1532. At first Luther even advocated not to resist the Turks, for, according to him, God would use them as a means of ushering in the end of the world. He was quite certain that the world would not endure longer than the year 1548, "for Ezechiel is against it."<sup>20</sup> This shows that the Anabaptists were not the only people who held such views concerning the end.

Returning to our narration of the developments in Muenster, on January 5, 1534 Bartholomaeus Boekebinder and Willem de Kuiper, two of Matthys' apostles, came to the city of Muenster. On their way from Amsterdam they preached about the worthy example of the faithful in Muenster who had taken matters into their own hands, and admonished the people to look forward to the great salvation and peace on earth when no one would be persecuted for practising adult baptism. Upon their arrival, Rothmann began to preach not in churches but in

other buildings in order to make a complete break with the established order of the past.<sup>21</sup> On January 13 another apostle of Matthys, John of Leyden, a tailor, arrived in Muenster, and in February the prophet himself, Jan Matthys, appeared. In fear for the safety of Catholics and Lutherans in the city, the council still feebly urged moderation and tolerance, but on February 23, at the regular election of the council, Knipperdolling, the radical mob leader, was elected burgomaster. Fearing the worst to come, many Catholics and Lutherans now left the city.<sup>22</sup>

Jan Matthys now disclosed his plans for destroying all the remaining unbelievers in Muenster. Knipperdolling, however, warned that these rash measures would prove fatal for the new movement. The prophet was finally persuaded to lengthen the days of grace to March 2, giving the "godless" an opportunity to leave the city until that time. Many fled; others received baptism, not from conviction but as a matter of expediency. By March 2 the city was free of all opposing elements--so it was believed--and Church and state were united in Muenster. A blacksmith who dared to call Matthys a deceiver was killed by the prophet himself in spite of protests by Knipperdolling and Rothmann. But the days of the prophet were numbered as well. After having received a revelation from God, Matthys proposed to go outside the city with a small band of warriors to lift the siege which the bishop of Muenster, Franz von Waldeck, with the

aid of Cologne, Hesse and other allies had prepared.<sup>23</sup> On April 5, 1534 he carried out his vision and, needless to say, he perished miserably.<sup>24</sup>

After the death of Matthys, John of Leyden assumed the long-desired leadership of the faithful.<sup>25</sup> Similar to Matthys, John also received a revelation that the city council should be abolished and instead, twelve men should be ordained as "the elders of the twelve tribes of Israel," to rule the new people according to the precepts of the Old Testament law. The twelve men chosen were, of course, all friends of John, who could be relied upon by the new prophet. Daily they attended to the business of discharging their duties in the city hall, and John did not fail to attend their sessions, readily giving his wise counsel when needed. The prophet also saw to it that the city was turned into a well organized military camp; to ensure the vigilance of his people, John of Leyden occasionally inspected the guards on the walls at night. The strength of the new Zion was revealed when the besiegers of the city made a signal attempt to take Muenster by storm on May 25, 1534. The undertaking failed with many of the bishop's warriors being killed while the Muensterites lost only a few men. The position of John of Leyden was greatly strengthened by this victory; the time had now come when the youthful<sup>26</sup> prophet dared to attempt the effecting of a long-cherished plan--the introduction of polygamy.<sup>27</sup> Although he lived in wedlock at the time, it did not prevent the

prophet from receiving a revelation that he was to marry the widow of Jan Matthys. These strange news were heard with horror by the better elements of Muenster, but the prophet's views prevailed after having argued and debated for eight days effectively on the matter from the practices in Old Testament times. When in addition John of Leyden threatened to punish those who showed insubordination, the arguments seemed to take on added weight. Polygamy was instituted and all persons of marriageable age were compelled to accept the bonds of matrimony. The prophet had soon seventeen wives and Bernt Rothmann practised polygamy on a slightly more moderate scale. In his tract entitled The Restitution, Rothmann defended the innovations on the grounds of the Old Testament.<sup>28</sup>

It must be interpolated here that greater religious leaders in the sixteenth century had similar views on the plurality of wives. Luther, for example, consented to the bigamy of Philip of Hesse on the basis of Old Testament practices.<sup>29</sup> And as early as September, 1531 the Reformer advised the queen of Henry VIII of England not to consent to the proposed divorce, suggesting rather that Henry VIII take another wife after the example of the Old Testament patriarchs. Similarly Melancthon in the same year stated that polygamy was not prohibited by divine law.<sup>30</sup> Some of the radical reformers as a result of their emphasis on the oneness of the believers in Christ, had, as Zschaebitz points out, also loose views on this matter.<sup>31</sup> When Rothmann wrote

his The Restitution, he must have known of these current opinions.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the Muensterites, however, showed more moral backbone than Rothmann, John of Leyden and Knipperdolling. On July 29, 1534 two hundred men, under the leadership of Heinrich Mollenhecke, seized the prophet, Knipperdolling and Rothmann and told them that they would be set free only on the condition of the abolition of polygamy. John's friends, however, overpowered Mollenhecke's band and the prophet was set free; a terrible blood bath followed. Once again in command of the situation, and after another success against the enemies outside the walls of the city, the prophet proclaimed to the citizens of Muenster early in September, 1534 that, according to a revelation from God, he was to be king in Zion after the order of King David. He immediately surrounded himself with an imposing court, converted priestly garments into royal robes, erected a throne in the market place of the city, and made his favourite wife, the former widow of Jan Matthys, the queen. Wherever the tailor king appeared, people sank to their knees before him and no one dared to question his kingship. But on such dismal height the eventual fall was inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

After the bishop and his allies had fortified their position, the city towards the end of 1534 was visited by famine and untold hardships. The new king tried to comfort

his people by promising a speedy salvation from outside or from above, but no relief came. The empty stomachs he tried to fill with all types of amusements, such as dances, music and theatrical performances, but this also failed to work on the long run. In spring, 1535 old men, women and children began to flee into the arms of the enemies where many were executed whereas others received pardon after abjuring their errors. On July 24, the city of Muenster was betrayed and taken by the combined forces; approximately 4,000 inmates, including Bernt Rothmann, were slaughtered.<sup>34</sup> John of Leyden, Knipperdolling and others were imprisoned only to await torture and execution half a year later. The inglorious kingdom of the Anabaptists had ended in smoke and ashes.<sup>35</sup>

#### Luther's Attitude Towards the Muenster Episode

At first Luther was not too perturbed about the rising unrest in Muenster. Rothmann's reform drives, his views on Church and government, which were those of Luther,<sup>36</sup> and the declining influence of Catholicism in Muenster, must have given the Wittenberg Reformer great satisfaction.<sup>37</sup> When Rothmann, however, inclined to the Anabaptists' view on the Last Supper, Luther became suspicious of his motives. On December 21, 1532, he wrote a letter to the Council of Muenster, warning them against the Anabaptist and Zwinglian teachings concerning the sacraments. With reference to Rothmann he writes: "God has given you fine preachers, especially Bernhard Rothmann; yet they need to be

admonished, for the devil is a rascal who can lead astray good, pious and scholarly preachers."<sup>38</sup> As a warning, Luther then reminds them of certain fanatics who have perished as a result of their enthusiasm and madness.<sup>39</sup> But the news from Muenster continued to be discouraging. The Muensterites soon attacked in one breath Luther and the pope as "Twin Prophets of Wickedness".<sup>40</sup> The Reformer was roused to anger. As far as he was concerned "Muenster was reaping the whirlwind of all the storm which the older fanatics had unleashed."<sup>41</sup>

Luther wrote two missives against the Muensterites in the form of two prefaces, one to Rhegius' Confutation of the Muenster Confession<sup>42</sup> and the other to News from Muenster.<sup>43</sup> In the first preface Luther laments over the fact that the Anabaptists charge him with being a false prophet who is worse than the pope, and, secondly, that the papists charge him with being the cause of all the existing sects. He attempts to clear himself of these charges by pointing out that the devils also were angels at one time, yet God cannot be held responsible for their apostasy. Furthermore, just as the bees suck honey from a rose and the spiders poison, so does the Church produce both pious and wicked people. After all, all heretics have come out of the Church of Christ and not from paganism. In the second preface, Luther simply ridicules the Anabaptists' folly at Muenster. It must be an inexperienced devil,<sup>44</sup> he says, who attempts to set up a kingdom in Muenster. In order to be successful, he should

have put on a pious front, proclaimed days of prayer and fasting, taken no money from the people, eaten no meat, regarded all women as poisonous, shunned worldly amusements, and repudiated all recourse to force. But in taking many wives, and swinging the sword against all law and order, all people can see clearly that the devil in person is keeping house in Muenster.<sup>45</sup> But the devil, Luther goes on, cannot be combated with temporal weapons as the bishop and princes attempt to do. Since he is a spirit he must be fought with the Word of God; the bodies of the Anabaptists may be killed but the devil still retains their souls.<sup>46</sup> Luther, however, is not too concerned about the external affairs in Muenster; he is more worried about the false doctrines of the Muensterites. First, he holds it against them that they deny the human nature of Christ, believing that Mary was simply the channel through which the divine Christ came into the World.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, they condemn the sacrament of infant baptism as a human institution. Thirdly, they hold perverted ideas concerning marriage and polygamy. Luther concludes by pointing out that their perversion is so obvious, that there is no need of further writing concerning them.<sup>48</sup>

The Muenster tragedy thus confirmed Luther's suspicion he had had concerning the whole Anabaptist movement. It proved to him beyond all doubt, that every heretic and fanatic was also a rebel in disguise. For it is just natural, he argued,



to sow lies first and later seal these lies with murder.<sup>49</sup>

It also confirmed his belief that every Anabaptist, no matter how pious he may seem, is a devil concealed.<sup>50</sup> As far as the Reformers were concerned, "God opened the eyes of the governments by the revolt at Muenster, and, thereafter, no one would trust even those Anabaptists who claimed to be innocent."<sup>51</sup>

Luther's sermons and writings after 1535 are filled with references to the Anabaptists' attempt to establish a Kingdom on earth. In a sermon of November 2, 1539, for example, he stated:

And what moved them to harbor this idea [the Anabaptists' conception of the Millenium] is this, that the ungodly are so fortunate in the world, possess kingdoms and worldly authority, wisdom and power, while the Christians are of no account in comparison with them. So they thought: Surely all the ungodly will be rooted out so that the pious may live in peace.<sup>52</sup>

For Luther the case of Anabaptism was closed; they had been tried and found wanting.

#### Anabaptism and Muensterism

For a dogmatist like Luther, the case of Anabaptism may have closed after the tragedy of Muenster, but not so for the historian. He must examine the underlying causes of this chapter in Anabaptist history and distinguish, if possible, between the various groups within the radical reformation. R. A. Knox emphatically states that there is a contradiction between the Anabaptist doctrine of nonresistance and the blood-drenched

history of their course. He attempts to resolve the problem thus: They preach nonresistance since they regard the state as a part of the kingdom of darkness with which they have nothing to do. But when it comes to fight the ungodly under "perfect" rulers or generals, such as Muentzer or John of Leyden, they become more blood thirsty "than is the common wont of 'psychic' men."<sup>53</sup> Obviously Knox follows the traditional line of thinking, ignoring all historical differentiation between the teachings and practices of the true Anabaptists and the revolutionary trends of other groups. He also ignores the fact that Muensterism cannot be regarded as the inevitable and final development of Anabaptism. It was only an excrescence of the Anabaptist movement, brought about by the appearance of certain elements which were entirely foreign to the principles and ethics of the original Swiss Brethren.<sup>54</sup>

What were these unfortunate elements and how can they be accounted for? First, it must be noted that the violent suppression of the Peasants' Revolt had not destroyed the seeds of discontent among the peasants and workers; the lower classes remained as dissatisfied as ever,<sup>55</sup> and the magistrates expected further uprisings after 1525.<sup>56</sup> Muenster was one such uprising; the religious aspect in the episode was apparently a front only behind which the real nature of the uprising was hidden.<sup>57</sup> The only thing that the Muensterites and the evangelical Anabaptists

had in common was the outward form of baptism.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, the kingdom was preceded by a steadily mounting persecution of the Anabaptists in the Low Countries and to some extent in Germany.<sup>59</sup> This is significant. When the able Anabaptist leaders such as Denck, Grebel, Mantz and Hubmaier were no more, the noble traits of Anabaptism underwent corruption which in turn, in some instances, gave rise to manifestations such as in Muenster.<sup>60</sup> Thirdly, there was the fact of their rapid expansion which, no doubt, introduced elements into the movement which had not truly been saturated with the essence of Anabaptism. After quickly organizing a congregation in one place, the Anabaptist evangelist left for another, often leaving the immature group to inexperienced leaders.<sup>61</sup> Fourthly, the Muenster kingdom was not characteristic of the whole movement, but was the result, as we have seen, of a few fanatical leaders. Even in Muenster itself John of Leyden was unable to uphold his authority without the use of brutal force.<sup>62</sup> Lastly, Muenster was only an isolated manifestation of the worst aspect of radical Anabaptism;<sup>63</sup> it really was a caricature of the movement.<sup>64</sup>

These considerations will be borne out by a comparison of the beliefs and practices of the Anabaptists and Muensterites. The Muensterites forced baptism upon all people in the city; the Anabaptists baptized only after there was evidence of genuine repentance and faith. The Muensterites held to a state-church

with a visible king who combined the functions of church and government; the Anabaptists advocated a free and separate Church and did not believe in serving in state affairs. The Anabaptists' principle of liberty of conscience was foreign to the Muensterites; like Muentzer they advocated the use of force and violence which the evangelical Anabaptists repudiated. The Muensterites lived in immorality and practised polygamy; the Anabaptists generally adhered to a strict church discipline and excluded all those who offended on moral lines.<sup>65</sup> Whereas the Muensterites exalted the Old Testament above the New, the Anabaptists are known for adhering to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and the New Testament in general. Then also, in his The Restitution Rothmann ignored the Swiss Brethren completely. He pointed out that the restitution of Christianity was begun by Luther, "but through our brother, John of Leyden . . . the truth has been gloriously established."<sup>66</sup> Similarly the Anabaptists disavowed the Muensterites, pointing out that there was no bond of union between them. The Hutterian Brethren, for example, although they fought Luther as a "false prophet", yet they rejected with the same fervor the Muenster experiment as devil's work.<sup>67</sup> But the greatest enemy of Muensterism was Menno Simons of Friesland after whom all the Mennonites are called.<sup>68</sup>

Ordained to the priesthood when he was about 28 years of age, Menno soon began to doubt the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Luther's reformation writings of 1518 to 1520 heightened these doubts, and thus from a Catholic priest he slowly turned into a Lutheran minister.<sup>69</sup> In his views on the Eucharist, however, Menno soon differed from Luther's position.<sup>70</sup> The execution of an Anabaptist in 1531, which Menno himself witnessed, was to change the course of his entire life. The faith of the dying heretic led him to study the doctrine of infant baptism which he soon began to doubt. As a result he began to associate with Anabaptists, but he stayed away from the fanaticism of the Muensterites which was then gripping the country.<sup>71</sup>

Menno vigorously opposed the teachings, pretensions and practices of John of Leyden. In a pamphlet written in 1535, The Blasphemy of John of Leyden,<sup>72</sup> Menno especially attacked the prophet's claim to the kingship of David. In the introduction of this tract Menno states that necessity compels him to write against the Muensterites, "because we cannot tolerate the shameful deceit and blasphemy against God that a man be placed in Christ's stead. . . ."<sup>73</sup> Since Christ is the King, Menno continues, "how can John of Leyden call himself a joyous king of all. . . ?"<sup>74</sup> And again he writes: "Greater antichrist there cannot arise than he who poses as the David of promise."<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, if Christ fights his enemies with the sword of his mouth, "how can we, then, oppose our enemies with any other sword."<sup>76</sup> "Christ did not want to be defended with Peter's sword."<sup>77</sup> Christ, according to Scriptures, will not destroy

his enemies before the time of his coming, but John of Leyden proposes to destroy the enemies before such time.<sup>78</sup> In conclusion Menno warns:

Let every one of you guard against all strange doctrine of sword and resistance and other like things which is nothing short of a fair flower under which lies hidden an evil serpent which has shot his venom into many. Let every one beware.<sup>79</sup>

In other writings Menno tried his utmost to cause the authorities to become aware of the differences between true Anabaptism and Muensterism. In 1539 he wrote in his Christian Baptism:

Therefore I say, if you find in me or in my teachings which is the Word of God, or among those who are taught by me or by my colleagues any thievery, murder, perjury, sedition, rebellion, or any other criminal act, as were and are found among the corrupt sects--then punish all of us.<sup>80</sup>

The tragedy of Muenster, however, soon stigmatized all Anabaptists as rebels and criminals, and Menno's pleas for clemency were left unheeded. He himself first had to flee to Amsterdam, but no longer safe in the territory of Charles V, he finally found his way to Holstein where he found a haven of refuge at Wuestenfeld near Oldesloe under the protection of the Count Bartholomew von Ahlfeldt. There, by a strange turn of events, he was not only visited by many of his followers, who regarded him as their patriarch, but also Lutherans sought his spiritual counsel.<sup>81</sup> He died on January 13, 1559.

As has been alluded to, the Muensterites were in closer harmony with Lutheranism and the Swiss Reformers than with

evangelical Anabaptism. Two points of contact shall be singled out here. First, the Reformers accused the Anabaptists of fomenting revolutions and causing bloodshed, but they themselves were more guilty of this crime than the Anabaptists. In 1529 the Zwinglians forced their reformation upon Basel through a revolution; and the leading Lutheran princes, John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, in 1542 invaded the Catholic province of Brunswick, drove out the rightful ruler, Duke Henry, and forced the Lutheran creed upon the people.<sup>82</sup> Examples of this nature could be multiplied.<sup>83</sup> The Anabaptists were not blind to these inconsistencies. Menno Simons wrote:

Why do they so indiscreetly accuse us of uproar while we are wholly innocent and clear of all uproar and they never pay attention to their own destructive, bloody murdering uproar. Again what bloody uproars the Lutherans have for some years made to introduce and establish their doctrine, I will leave to them to reflect upon. Nevertheless we, although innocent, must be accounted the tumultuous heretics and they the God-fearing, pious, peaceable Christians.<sup>84</sup>

Another similarity between the Muensterites and Lutheranism was their conception of the Old Testament. In matters of morals and ethics both regarded the Old as well as the New Testament as authoritative for the Christian Church. Their conception of Church and state, their policy with regard to marriage, their sanction of corporal punishment of heretics, and similar views and practices, both Lutherans and the Muensterites derived from the Old Testament. Franklin Littell also points out that the

Muenster fanatics were more imbibed with Lutheran ideas than with Anabaptism.<sup>85</sup> To lay the offences of the Muensterites, therefore, to the charge of the Anabaptists on the only ground that both practiced adult baptism is, as Menno pointed out, "as unreasonable as to accuse the Lutherans of the crimes of which some of the popes became guilty, on the ground that both were pedobaptists."<sup>86</sup>

In conclusion, then, although we fully appreciate, in the light of circumstances, Luther's attitude towards the Anabaptists, we cannot accept his judgement of them as historically sound. From the foregoing data we have seen that the great mass of Anabaptists were moderates; that they consistently acknowledged the civil governments as from God and paid duty and taxes to them; but held that no coercion in matters of faith may be employed by the state.<sup>87</sup> Granting there was at times a fanatical element within the movement, "there was always in the Anabaptist party a more pacific current represented especially by its Swiss adherents."<sup>88</sup> Even Bax, who with Luther looked upon the Muenster episode as the inevitable culmination of Anabaptism and described the movement as an "aggressive spirit", had to agree, "that the non-political tendencies present in these earlier communities continued to maintain themselves in many cases. . . ."<sup>89</sup>



NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

<sup>1</sup>See SWEA, XXXIX, 254.

<sup>2</sup>Cornelius' writings on the subject include Geschichte des Muensterischen Aufruhrs (1855) and Historische Arbeiten vornehmlich zur Reformationszeit (1899). Ludwig Keller and others followed Cornelius in introducing an objective, scholarly method of research on the Anabaptists in general. See Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 780 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, VIII, 43.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 777.

<sup>5</sup>John Horsch, "The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists of Muenster," MQR, IX (April, 1935), 92.

<sup>6</sup>See The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 777.

<sup>7</sup>See Wilhelm Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten aus dem Täuferium (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1952), III, 201.

<sup>8</sup>Horsch, MQR, IX (April, 1935), 92.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>The Melchiorites were followers of Melchior Hofmann a former associate of Luther in Wittenberg. He is known for his apocalyptic visions and his advocating the speedy return of Christ. As early as 1525, when he was still a follower of the Reformer, these visionary trends are discernible from his letters. (See e.g. Hofmann's letter to the church of Dorpat, Latvia, in which, quite ironically, he warns against "enthusiasts". Enders, Briefwechsel, V, 213-217). Hofmann had been quite active in northern Germany and in the Rhine regions, preaching and baptizing. However, he never advocated the use of force, and while in prison in Strassburg, he warned against the spirit of the Muensterites and admonished to cease from employing force. Cf. Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 60 ff.

<sup>13</sup>There are apparently conflicting reports as to when the Muensterites began baptizing adults. Wiswedel (Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 201-202) says it began in 1533, whereas

Horsch (MQR, IX [July, 1935], 130) states that it occurred in 1534 when the prophets from Holland arrived. Cf. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, VIII, 45.

<sup>14</sup>There is a lengthy quotation from C. A. Cornelius in Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 202.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Horsch, MQR, IX (April, 1935), 96-103.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 202.

<sup>17</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, "The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom," MQR, XIX (July, 1945), 197.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 72-73.

<sup>19</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 638. Cf. SWEA, LXI, 120-123.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Horsch, MQR, VIII (April, 1934), 83-84.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, VIII, 45.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 130-131.

<sup>23</sup>On the allies and the strength of the besieging army see The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, VIII, 45.

<sup>24</sup>On the death of the prophet cf. Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 204.

<sup>25</sup>There is reason to believe that John induced Matthys to attack the besieging army. See Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 132.

<sup>26</sup>John of Leyden was about 25 years of age at this time.

<sup>27</sup>For more details see Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 136-137. Cf. Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 204-205.

<sup>28</sup>On this pamphlet see Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 138.

<sup>29</sup>However, when Heinrich of Lening, one of Philip's theologians, defended the example of his lord in a book, Luther wrote a refutation of Lening's arguments.

<sup>30</sup>See Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 138-139.

<sup>31</sup>Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung,

pp. 119-121. Ludwig Haetzer, for example, has been charged with immorality, and Goeters points out that it is difficult to clear this radical reformer of these accusations. Ludwig Haetzer, p. 147 ff.

<sup>32</sup>Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 139.

<sup>33</sup>For a good description of Muensterism see the chapters in Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, dealing with the episode.

<sup>34</sup>Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 207.

<sup>35</sup>Zschaebitz, writing from a Marxist's point of view, states that the princes did not fight so much religion in the Anabaptists, but the lower social classes whom they greatly feared. It was believed, Zschaebitz continues, that religion was only a pretext and cover for social reform and rebellion against the nobility. Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeufbewegung, pp. 67-75.

<sup>36</sup>H. H. Schaff states: ". . . there is so much similarity between the views of some of the Reformers on civil government and those of the Anabaptists that one is induced to believe that it was probably from the Reformers that the Anabaptists learned, or at least to them that they looked for support." Church History, I (March, 1932), 31.

<sup>37</sup>See Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 280.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Ibid. Cf. SWEA, LIV, 345-346.

<sup>39</sup>These men are Muentzer, Haetzer, Hut, Hubmaier and Zwingli. SWEA, LIV, 346.

<sup>40</sup>Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 280.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Full German title: "Vorrede zu Urban Regii Widerlegung der Muensterischen neuen Valentinianer und Donatisten Bekenntniss" (SWEA, LXIII, 332-336).

<sup>43</sup>German title: "Vorrede zu der Schrift: Auf die neue Zeitung von Muenster" (LXIII, 337-341).

<sup>44</sup>In the words of Luther: ". . . ein junger ABC Teufel oder Schulteufel." Luther used sharp wit and ridicule quite effectively. Cf. e.g. his Against the Celestial Prophets in SWEA, XXIX, 134-296.

<sup>45</sup>SWEA, LXIII, 337-338.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>47</sup>Melchior Hofmann had widely disseminated this idea throughout northern Germany and the Rhine regions. Even men like Menno Simons were influenced by it. On Menno's point of view see C. Krahn, Menno Simons (1496-1561) Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten (Karlsruhe, i. B.: Heinrich Schneider, Druck und Verlag, 1936), p. 155 ff.

<sup>48</sup>SWEA, LXIII, 339-341.

<sup>49</sup>SWEA, LXI, 79.

<sup>50</sup>Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 208. Luther said later that since many devils had taken possession of the heretics, Anabaptists and fanatics, there were now fewer at large in the world. See Grisar, Martin Luther, p. 491.

<sup>51</sup>Heinrich Bullinger quoted in The New Cambridge Modern History, II, 129. It has been estimated that in the ten years following the disaster at Muenster, no fewer than 30,000 Anabaptists were executed in Holland and Friesland alone. Ibid. From 1535 on even in Moravia and Hesse toleration of Anabaptism ceased. Cf. Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, V, 1916.

<sup>52</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 284.

<sup>53</sup>Knox, Enthusiasm, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 112. It must be admitted, however, that no historian of the Anabaptist movement, using the term in its widest general meaning, can claim the absence of all lineal connection between the South-German Brethren and the Muensterites. There was in a way a direct succession from the followers of Hans Denck in Strassburg, where M. Hofmann was baptized, through the latter by way of Jan Matthys and John of Leyden. See C. H. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Third ed. revised and enlarged by C. Krahn; Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publishing Office, 1950), pp. 76-77. Cf. Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 226, who seems to question this.

<sup>55</sup>See Newman, A History of Anti-Pedobaptism, p. 292.

<sup>56</sup>Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung, p. 53, ff.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

- <sup>58</sup>Wiswedel, Bilder und Fuehrergestalten, III, 209-210.
- <sup>59</sup>See Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 307-308.
- <sup>60</sup>Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, pp. 13-14.  
Cf. Huch, Das Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltungen, p. 244.
- <sup>61</sup>Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, p. 52.
- <sup>62</sup>For more details see Geiser, Die Taufgesimten Gemeinden, pp. 291-292.
- <sup>63</sup>Cf. Gerdtehl, Die Revolutionierung der Kirchen, pp. 99-103.
- <sup>64</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, pp. 307-308.
- <sup>65</sup>See Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, pp. 223-224.
- <sup>66</sup>Quoted in Horsch, MQR, IX (July, 1935), 134.
- <sup>67</sup>Stauffer, MQR, XIX (July, 1945), 198.
- <sup>68</sup>The best biography of Menno Simons is C. Krahn, Menno Simons.
- <sup>69</sup>For ten years Menno considered himself a Lutheran.
- <sup>70</sup>For details see Krahn, Menno Simons, p. 21.
- <sup>71</sup>Tillmanns states: "The disaster of the Heavenly Kingdom led Menno to his second great doctrine: His teaching of non-resistance." The World and Men Around Luther, p. 281. This statement is incorrect. T. M. Lindsay is closer to the truth when he writes: "He purged their minds of the apocalyptic fancies taught by many of their later leaders under the influence of persecution, inculcated the old ideas of non-resistance, of the evils of state control over the church, of the need of personal conversion, and of adult baptism as its sign and seal." A History of the Reformation (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907), II, 496. Cf. The Catholic Encyclopedia, I, 446.
- <sup>72</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, pp. 33-50.
- <sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 34.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 35.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 49. The fact that Menno does not mention the immorality and polygamy of the Muensterites, has perturbed some historians and theologians. C. Krahn explains, with good reason, that Menno apparently had no time to elaborate on these abuses. Menno Simons, pp. 31-32.

<sup>80</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, p. 284. Had Menno had any doubts concerning the innocence of his followers, he would not have uttered these words.

<sup>81</sup>See Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 282.

<sup>82</sup>See J. Horsch, "Menno Simons' Attitude Toward the Anabaptists of Muenster," MQR, X (January, 1936), 67.

<sup>83</sup>In Scandinavia and Iceland Lutheranism was also forced upon the people.

<sup>84</sup>Quoted in Horsch, MQR, X (January, 1936), 68.

<sup>85</sup>Littell, The Free Church, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup>Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 226.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. H. H. Schaff, Church History, I (March, 1932), 35. Schaff even goes as far as to state, that "what has been characterized as their determination to overthrow established government, was actually nothing more than a determination to secure from the government freedom of worship." Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>The Catholic Encyclopedia, I, 446.

<sup>89</sup>Bax, Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists, pp. 93-94.

## CHAPTER IX

### LUTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SPIRITUALISTS, ANTINOMIANS AND ANTITRINITARIANS

#### The Spiritualists--the Inner versus the Outer Word

The excessive mysticism of the "Zwickau Prophets" had been so pronounced that Luther had no difficulty in detecting in it, what he called, the work of evil spirits. But when it appeared in more moderate measure in sane men like Denck, Franck, Schwenckfeld and some of the Anabaptists who stressed especially the "Inner Word", which struck a cord in his own heart, Luther was compelled to re-examine his own position. The result was opposition to the Spiritualists.

Luther's conception of the Word of God underwent a gradual change as time went on. The Reformer, as has been referred to, had been profoundly influenced by the mystics of the Middle Ages. For the Theologia Germanica, which stressed the Inner Light above the written Word, he had a great admiration; he asserted that apart from the Bible and the Works of St. Augustine he had learned from no book "more of what God and Christ and men and all things are,"<sup>1</sup> than from the Theologia Germanica. This is noteworthy when it is remembered that this work contains no reference to the supreme authority of the Bible nor to justification by faith alone.<sup>2</sup> Yet even his justification by faith alone was an expression of his

mysticism, for it made a subjective experience the touchstone of salvation. Wherever in Holy Writ he did not find a confirmation of his experience, he found neither inspiration nor authority.<sup>3</sup> At first the Bible and the "Word of God" were not identical for Luther.<sup>4</sup> The stress was upon feeling and the Spirit of God in the heart of man.<sup>5</sup> In an exposition in 1520 he clearly stated:

No one can correctly understand God or His Word unless he has received such understanding directly from the Holy Spirit. But no one can receive it from the Holy Spirit without experiencing, proving and feeling it. In such experience the Holy Spirit instructs us as in His own school, outside which nothing is learned but empty words and prattle.<sup>6</sup>

At times Luther's stress on the Inner Word seemed almost fanatical. Everyone, he stated, had to believe that it was the Word of God when he felt within him that the Bible was true. "The heart speaks: this is true, even if I should die one hundred deaths for it."<sup>7</sup> To understand God's Word, one must meditate upon it "with a quiet spirit as the Psalm says, I will hear what God Himself says within me. No one can comprehend it except such a quiet, meditating spirit."<sup>8</sup> The letter of the Word was thus less important; in fact, Luther believed, as we have pointed out in our first chapter, that the Bible contains much that is of no spiritual value.<sup>9</sup> Although Luther later neutralized these early principles of Bible reading, they became determining factors with the Spiritualists and some of the Anabaptists. What was implicitly



accepted by the Reformer, the Spiritualists of the sixteenth century explicitly taught, "that the ultimate authority from which there is no appeal is the Holy Spirit, who speaks to men directly by the Inner Word."<sup>10</sup>

Among the more prominent men who in Luther's time strongly advocated the Inner Word, were Hans Denck, Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld. The most attractive of all three was Denck,<sup>11</sup> rector of the St. Sebald's Church in Nuernberg. A humanist and scholar he had been greatly influenced by the medieval mystics, by Luther, as well as by Thomas Muentzer's stress on the Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup> Denck abstained, however, from all recourse to violence; no one practised the principle of nonresistance as well as he.<sup>13</sup> The unregenerate life of the Lutherans in Nuernberg caused Denck to give heed to Anabaptist ideas, and his increasing emphasis on the divine spark in man, which he believed to be a part of the Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> soon drew the suspicion of Osiander, the Lutheran minister, upon him. On January 16, 1525 he had to submit a Confession<sup>15</sup> to the council; the Confession proved unsatisfactory to the Lutherans. He was banished from Nuernberg and forbidden "for ever" to return within ten miles of the city on pain of death.

The severity of this punishment will be more fully appreciated after a brief review of Denck's doctrines. In addition to his Anabaptist views on the Eucharist and baptism,<sup>16</sup>

and his belief in the free will of man and good works,<sup>17</sup> which he felt were necessary to maintain a true Christian life, Denck adhered to the conception of the Inner Word, similar to Luther's earlier belief. In his Confession he stated:

He who does not regard God's revelations in his breast but presumes to explain the Holy Scriptures, which is really the right of the Spirit alone, he will surely make an abomination of the divine secrets written in the Holy Scriptures, and abuses the grace given to him.<sup>18</sup>

Only those, according to Denck, can interpret Scripture correctly who live by the Spirit of God and constantly listen to his voice.<sup>19</sup> Similar to Luther's earlier views, Denck did not identify Scripture with the Word of God; the written Word Denck regarded above all human treasures, but not as high as the living, powerful and eternal Word of God.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, salvation does not depend on the reading or preaching of the Bible, for then no one who is unfamiliar with the letter of Scripture could be saved; all people who are filled with true love and goodness, which is identical with possessing the Spirit of God, belong to the family of God.<sup>21</sup> This emphasis on the Inner Word or the divine spark in man, was so pronounced in Denck's teachings, that even after having been rebaptized, he later repudiated Anabaptism,<sup>22</sup> commending himself wholly to the redeeming power of the Inner Word and of Christ, who everywhere and among all men, Catholics, Zwinglians and Lutherans, creates his Church, if only one will allow oneself to be led by

the Spirit into quietness and brotherly love.<sup>23</sup>

With reference to these manifestations of heresy at Nuernberg, Luther in a letter to Lazarus Spengler expressed anger at the audacity of the "Alstedt spirit" that had sneaked into that city.<sup>24</sup> In a letter to Johann Brismann on February 4, 1524, Luther commented on the sentence imposed on Hans Denck and on his alleged doctrines:

The devil has carried it so far that, in Nuernberg some people are denying that Christ is anything, that the Eucharist is anything, that the Word of God is anything, that the Magistracy is anything. They say that only God is.<sup>25</sup>

The misrepresentation of the facts is due, no doubt, to the highly biased report of Osiander to Luther.<sup>26</sup>

The most outspoken member of the Spirituals was Sebastian Franck.<sup>27</sup> Greatly distressed by the sterility of Luther's teaching and by the impossibility of making men good simply through the proclamation of the external Word, he resigned his post as a Lutheran pastor and lived as a free writer in Strassburg and Nuernberg, supporting himself, like St. Paul, by the work of his hands. Like Denck, he advocated a Christian individualism which did not need church organization and dogma, but rather the Spirit which he identified with the Word of God; in this he opposed Anabaptism as well as Lutheranism. The Church, according to Franck, is composed of those who have been led by the Spirit into communion with God; but this Church is present to faith alone; "it has no external form of worship, no

external bond, no outward means of grace and no mere authority of the 'letter'.<sup>28</sup> In a letter written in 1531 to John Campanus, a former friend of Luther, Franck stated:

I should wish, however, that thou wert not so addicted to the letter of Scripture, thus withdrawing thy heart from the teaching of the Spirit, and that thou wouldst not drive out the Spirit of God as though it were Satan, crowding him against his will into the script and making Scripture thy God. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Scriptures, Franck insisted, are to be regarded only as confirmation of man's conscience; the God in man's heart must not yield to the letter of the Bible, for the letter kills and is of no avail. All we have learned from Luther must be unlearned again, for "the intention of the Lord does not," as Luther falsely believes, "reside precisely in the rind of Scripture,"<sup>30</sup> In Addition to his excessive mysticism Franck also sympathized with Servetus' views on the Trinity,<sup>31</sup> thus adding more reasons for Luther's opposition to him.

The Silesian nobleman, Caspar von Schwenckfeld, was another Spiritualist whom Luther considered to be the greatest opponent of the Word of God.<sup>32</sup> Schwenckfeld at first was the most fervent Lutheran and active reformer in Silesia. Soon, however, he discovered that Luther's one-sided emphasis on justification by faith alone, had detrimental effects on the ethical life of the Reformer's followers. When Schwenckfeld spoke to Luther about this, the Reformer at first agreed that something had to be done about the lax discipline of his people, but Schwenckfeld's insistence on the matter soon annoyed Luther

and he became suspicious of the nobleman's motives.<sup>33</sup> When in addition Schwenckfeld began protecting the persecuted Anabaptists in Silesia, arguing against the Lutherans that they will have to account for their hostile attitude against them,<sup>34</sup> his prince, the Duke of Liegnitz, was prevailed upon to dismiss the worthy servant. Not only did Schwenckfeld advocate the doctrine of the Inner Word, but he also held peculiar views concerning the Eucharist and the nature of Christ. In 1526 he stopped celebrating the Holy Communion until, as he said, God would reveal the true meaning of it.<sup>35</sup> Concerning Christ's nature he held to the conception of the "celestial flesh", similar to the views of Melchior Hofmann and some of the Dutch Anabaptists.<sup>36</sup>

Schwenckfeld took the break with Luther very hard, for, as he confessed, he owed much to the Reformer. In 1543 he sent Luther some of his doctrinal pamphlets, as well as a message in the hope of a friendly understanding.<sup>37</sup> Luther's answer was most disheartening. On December 6, 1543 the Reformer addressed his letter not to Schwenckfeld personally, but to his messenger Herman Riegel who had dared to deliver the letter and tracts to Luther. In this letter Luther accuses Schwenckfeld of preaching and teaching where no one has sent him. "And the mad fool," he continues, "possessed of the devil, does not understand anything; does not know what he is babbling. But if he will not cease, so let him leave me unmolested with his booklets which the devil excretes and spews out of him."<sup>38</sup> Luther concludes the short

letter by pronouncing a final judgement on his adversary:

"The Lord punish Satan in you, and your spirit which has called you, and your course which you are following."<sup>39</sup> The Reformer's wife counselled not to be so harsh and coarse in his expressions, but Luther replied that these fanatics teach him to be vulgar, and that one must thus speak with the devil.<sup>40</sup> Schwenckfeld replied to this abusive letter in his An Answer to Luther's Malediction,<sup>41</sup> in which he attempted to clear himself of some of the charges against him. The language of the pamphlet as well as Schwenckfeld's attitude towards Luther, speak well for this nobleman, who expresses genuine sorrow for his opponent.

After coming in touch with the Spiritualists, Luther began to realize the danger of emphasizing the Spirit or the Inner Word over the letter of the Bible. He saw, as the Anabaptists did,<sup>42</sup> that this emphasis destroyed the concept of an organized church and undermined the belief in the sacraments, particularly in the Real Presence. Moreover, to his horror he suddenly saw his subjective conversion experience without a sure foundation; he needed a touch-stone for his faith in Christ and thus he increasingly began to emphasize the Outer Word.<sup>43</sup> "What a precious thing it is," he wrote in 1533, "to have the Word of God on our side in everything we do! For such a person is safe, however much he may be tried."<sup>44</sup> Again he wrote: "God has always worked with something physical. . . . Whenever He wanted to do something with us, He did it through the Word and matters physical."<sup>45</sup>

Even the fanatics, Luther continues, received the knowledge of Christ as Saviour, not through direct revelations, but through the external Word of God. Elsewhere he stated that the letter is not a dead thing, as the enthusiasts assert, but it is "the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. When the Word is read, the Spirit is present."<sup>46</sup> Those who believed in the divine spark in man, the Reformer answered:

Men who are accursed say that first the internal word must be present. But God does not reveal Himself in the heart except through the external Word. This is why the external Word must be the beginning of your consideration and enlightenment.<sup>47</sup>

Every one should flee, Luther advised, as from the devil himself, "the sects and enthusiasts who lead us away from the Word and Scripture to human ideas. . . ."<sup>48</sup>

#### Luther's Struggle with the Antinomians

The Antinomians pushed Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone to its logical conclusion, asserting that, as good works do not promote salvation, so neither do evil works hinder it. Moreover, "as all Christians are necessarily sanctified by their very vocation and profession, so, as justified Christians, they are incapable of losing their spiritual holiness, justification, and final salvation" by any violation of God's Law.<sup>49</sup>

To appreciate more fully the Antinomian controversy, we must review briefly Luther's earlier conception of the Law and the Gospel. It cannot be said that Luther in his earlier life disregarded the Law or the Decalogue completely. But his

emphasis on justification by faith alone often led him to belittle the Old Testament emphasis on good works and legalism. In 1524 he stated that the Law has no part in the life of a Christian, for he is ruled by the Gospel of Christ; yet for the sake of the unregenerate man, the Law must remain in force.<sup>50</sup>

In his Against the Celestial Prophets (1525) Luther defined his meaning on the subject a little clearer. The Decalogue, which corresponds with God's natural law, he wrote, is valid for all Christians, but the ceremonial law, such as the keeping of Sabbath, has been abrogated by Christ.<sup>51</sup> In a sermon on March 18, 1525 Luther divided man into two parts with regard to his relationship to the Law. The new man in Christ is not in need of the Law, for he is governed by Christ himself; the old man, however, remains wicked, and he, therefore, needs the Law to restrain him from doing evil.<sup>52</sup> In 1527 Luther asserted that for a Christian the Old Testament existed only to give him examples of people who lived and were justified by faith, as well as to convey to him God's wonderful promises.<sup>53</sup> As far as the law of Moses is concerned, it is a school of discipline for rebels only.<sup>54</sup> Although it is evident from this that Luther's teaching on the relationship between Law and Grace is not too clear, his emphasis on the freedom of Christians stands out profoundly. The reason for this lay in the Reformer's conception of God as an Old Testament despot, who, had Christ not imputed his righteousness to man, would strike the sinner with damnation.<sup>55</sup>



Luther's joy in having found an escape from this angry God, led him, naturally, to overemphasize a Christian's freedom, which in turn led to moral inconsistencies, as the Anabaptists and Spiritualists had feared,<sup>56</sup> and gave rise to, or at least encouraged, a particular theology in some of Luther's closest followers.

The leader of the Antinomian party during Luther's time was John Agricola, a one-time table companion of the Reformer. A man of great ability, Agricola was at first professor at Wittenberg and later was transferred to Eisleben, the place of his birth. Smarting under his removal from the headquarters of the Reformation, probably caused by the professional jealousy of Melancthon,<sup>57</sup> Agricola soon began to oppose the Wittenberg theologians. Around 1535 he suddenly appeared in Wittenberg and published a series of theses, advocating the abolition of the Law from all preaching. With Dr. Jacob Schenk, also an Antinomian, Agricola believed that the Gospel only must be preached in all its sweetness, without any reference to the Decalogue; and the godless must be admonished in private and not criticized from the pulpits.<sup>58</sup> It is not The Law that must cause a person to repent and change his way of life, but the Gospel of Christ must bring about this change.<sup>59</sup> Agricola is also reported by Luther to have stated that Moses should be hanged, that St. Peter knew nothing of Christian freedom, that no matter how bad a person may be, if he believes in

Christ his salvation is certain, and so on. These statements, however, are of doubtful authenticity.<sup>60</sup>

This Antinomian onslaught the Reformer took very hard, and he despaired of his life, for, as far as he was concerned, there was no peace to hope for any more.<sup>61</sup> Several storms caused by the devil, he wrote in 1539, had raged against him with the intention of blowing out the light of the Gospel: There had been first the papacy, then Muentzer, then Carlstadt, then the Anabaptists, and now the Antinomians who seem to be worst of all.<sup>62</sup> Apparently this weighed so heavily upon Luther because there was so much affinity between him and the Antinomians, and he must have detected his own spirit in them.<sup>63</sup>

Between 1538 and 1540 Luther held six disputations against the Antinomians without, however, mentioning the names of his adversaries. In the disputation of September 13, 1538 he admitted of having favoured antinomianism in his earlier years; but at that time the Christians were weak and in need of comfort, whereas now they need the strong hand of the Law.<sup>64</sup> In this year Luther also emphasized the facts, that the abolition of the Decalogue from all preaching would discredit the Gospel, ruin all governments and church life, do away with all repentance and salvation, and result in Muentzerism and complete anarchy.<sup>65</sup> Even Christians need to observe the Law:

We, too, who are now made holy through grace, nevertheless live in a sinful body. And because of this remaining sin, we must permit ourselves to be rebuked, terrified, slain, and

sacrificed by the Law until we are lowered into the grave.<sup>66</sup>  
 In the end, Luther advised the magistrates to take action against the law breakers.<sup>67</sup> "Those are absolutely not to be tolerated," the Reformer stated, "who hold that the teaching of the Law is to be thrown out of the churches, for this plane is necessary for tough and knotted logs."<sup>68</sup>

Luther's disputations seemed to make a favourable impression on Agricola; he submitted a partial recantation of his errors, but it proved unsatisfactory to both Melancton and Luther. Melancton revised the recantation to his own liking, but Agricola hesitated to sign the revised version, upon which Luther in 1539 published a pamphlet entitled Against the Antinomians.<sup>69</sup> In this tract Luther laments over his enemies' audacity in appealing to his earlier writings, attempts to refute their errors, and charges the Antinomians with a diabolic obstinacy. As a result, Agricola was compelled to leave Saxony. When he in 1542 sought a reconciliation with his former friend and co-worker, Luther refused to receive him unless he was willing to acknowledge that the Reformer was right and he wrong, and to abjure his errors without any conditions.<sup>70</sup> Agricola chose to persist in his heresy.

#### Luther and the Antitrinitarians

Toward the end of his life, Luther also came in contact with persons who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. The assertion of E. M. Wilbur that Luther himself at first doubted

the scripturalness of the doctrine, shows little, if any, historical evidence. The Reformer, Wilbur says, disliked the term homousios, as being a human invention and not found in Scripture; he rather preferred to say "oneness", for the word Trinity had a cold sound to him.<sup>71</sup> For these reasons Luther apparently omitted the term from his Catechism and Litany. To avoid being called an Arian by the Catholics, however, Wilbur continues, and to keep the support of the princes, who would not have tolerated any disturbances from such unorthodox views, Luther was cowed into retaining the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>72</sup>

It is true, Luther stated, that human terms are inadequate to explain the mystery of the Godhead, but he never expressed any heretical views on the subject. Concerning human terms employed to designate the Trinity he wrote: "To be sure, it is not very good German and does not sound well to designate God by the word Dreifaltigkeit (threefoldness). Even the Latin Trinitas does not sound very well. But since we have nothing better, we must speak as we can."<sup>73</sup> In a sermon in 1538 he stated:

We should stay with the true, ancient belief that there are three distinct persons--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--in the eternal Godhead. This is the most sublime and the first article of Christian faith. . . . But to say that God is threefold is very poor language, for in the Godhead the highest Oneness exists.<sup>74</sup>

After showing that St. Augustine also had difficulties with defining the Trinity, Luther concludes quite puzzled: "I cannot

give this Being a fitting name."<sup>75</sup> If Wilbur refers to passages such as these, he may indeed find Luther's dissatisfaction with the terms describing the divine mystery, but there is certainly no trace of doubt in these references.<sup>76</sup> In fact, Luther went so far as to state that even the Prophets of the Old Testament "believed and clearly understood this article of faith. Yet because of the stiff-necked, unbelieving, wicked people they did not come out with it so clearly as the New Testament does."<sup>77</sup>

It is not clear when Luther first came in touch with Antitrinitarianism. Wilbur states that this heresy appeared in Protestant circles in Nuernberg as early as 1524.<sup>78</sup> When asked by the Council of Nuernberg as to what to do with people who deny the doctrine, Luther ascribed this heresy to the influence of Carlstadt and Muentzer,<sup>79</sup> and counselled to regard the persons involved as Turks and apostates.<sup>80</sup> Martin Cellarius seems to have been the first Protestant to express some Antitrinitarian views in a pamphlet. After a heated quarrel with Luther, according to Wilbur, he left in 1525 for East Prussia, where he carried on a literary activity.<sup>81</sup> But Luther's real contact with this heresy was in the person of John Campanus from Maeseyck in Belgium, who in 1528 enrolled as student in Wittenberg. Campanus denied the divinity of Christ<sup>82</sup> and the personality of the Holy Spirit, attacked Luther's doctrine of justification and the sacraments, and believed he had rediscovered

the truth which since the time of the Apostles was lost.<sup>83</sup> In 1532 he published a book entitled Against the Lutherans and the Whole World after the Apostles, in which he condemned the Reformer as a liar and charged him with not teaching Scripture aright.<sup>84</sup> According to Sebastian Franck, who sympathized with this heretic, Campanus in this book made "two persons of Christ and the Father, but of one Spirit, just as husband and wife are one flesh."<sup>85</sup> Campanus was thus a Binitarian. Melancthon suggested that Campanus be hanged on the highest tree, but Luther counselled that no attention be paid to this blasphemer, lest he become puffed up over his own importance.<sup>86</sup> However, as all the other heretics before him, Campanus had to leave Wittenberg.<sup>87</sup>

In 1531 Michael Servetus published in Strassburg an attack against the doctrine of the Trinity, but it is not known whether Luther learned about this at the time the pamphlet appeared.<sup>88</sup> In 1539, in his tract against the Antinomians, Luther mentions the names of Servetus and Campanus, and refers to them as heretics who oppose both him and the pope.<sup>89</sup> In a disputation of 1544, which dealt principally with the doctrine of the Trinity, the Reformer again referred to these two persons. In this disputation Luther pinpointed his conception of the mystery more precisely, stating that "in what manner the Person differs from the Godhead itself is not the province of reason to inquire. . . . In fact, it is a dangerous undertaking, and we

must avoid assuming any distinction, because each Person is the very God and God in His entirety."<sup>90</sup> To speculate concerning this mystery is, according to Luther, the highest blasphemy and heretics who dare to deny it must be silenced, for to tolerate Antitrinitarians means to undermine salvation itself. In 1538 he wrote: "This is a matter either of believing or of being lost."<sup>91</sup> And as early as 1529 he explained:

. . . we could never attain to a knowledge of the Father's favour and grace except through the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of His Father's heart. Outside Christ we see in God nothing but a wrathful and terrible Judge. But about Christ we could know nothing if the Holy Spirit had not revealed it to us.<sup>92</sup>

The two heresies penalized by death in the Codex Justinianus, were the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity and the repetition of baptism. This legislation directed against the ancient Arians and Donatists was revived in the sixteenth century and applied to both, the Antitrinitarians and the Anabaptists.<sup>93</sup> Even Luther, who at one time had pleaded for tolerance and religious liberty on behalf of his own cause, later appealed to this imperial law against the dissenters. The reasons for this change in Luther's attitude are obvious from the preceding chapters; the purpose of the next chapter is to trace this change more precisely and to consider the question of tolerance in the sixteenth century.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IX

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>4</sup>For more details see Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup>This is in line with Thomas A Kempis who wrote: "Blessed is the soul that hears the Lord speaking within it, and receives comfort from His Word. Blessed are the ears that hear the still, small voice of God. . . ." And again: "Let not Moses or any of the Prophets speak to me, but rather do You speak, O Lord God, who inspire and enlighten the Prophets. You alone can perfectly instruct me without their aid, but without You they can do nothing." The Imitation of Christ, trans. and with an introduction by Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin Books, 1952), pp. 89-90.

<sup>6</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1471. Cf. SWEA, XLV, 215 f.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in W. Wiswedel, "The Inner and the Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Doctrine of the Scriptures," MQR, XXVI (1952), 172.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>11</sup>Good biographies of Denck are, Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, and Coutts, Hans Denck.

<sup>12</sup>Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 20. Fellmann, however, questions whether Denck ever made personal contacts with Muentzer as Coutts assumes. Hans Denck Schriften, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup>"Persecution," he wrote, "has severed me from a few men, but my heart has not been severed from them. . . ." Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>For details see Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, pp. 46-51.



<sup>15</sup>For a copy of Denck's Confession see Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, pp. 20-26.

<sup>16</sup>For his views on the Last Supper and baptism see Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, pp. 23-26.

<sup>17</sup>Concerning his views on good works see Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Wiswedel, MQR, XXVI (1952), 183-184.

<sup>19</sup>See Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, pp. 51-52.

<sup>20</sup>Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>This should clear the evangelical Anabaptists of the charges that they held to the conception of the Inner Word. On this see Wiswedel's excellent article in MQR, XXVI (1952), 171-191.

<sup>23</sup>Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup>SWEA, LIII, 283-284.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Coutts, Hans Denck, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>There is a good section on Sebastian Franck in Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 46-63.

<sup>28</sup>Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 760.

<sup>29</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 159.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-159.

<sup>32</sup>Luther would rather be torn to pieces and burned a hundred times than be of one mind with Schwenckfeld. SWEA, XXXII, 401.

<sup>33</sup>Of. Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup>J. Loserth (ed.), Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte

der oberdeutschen Taufgesinnten, etc. (Wien: Kommissionsverlag der Verlagsbuchhandlung Carl Fromme Gesellschaft m. b. H., 1929), pp. 8-9. Schwenckfeld, however, did not want to be called an Anabaptist, because the Anabaptists were biblicists and believed in exclusiveness and intolerance. Ibid., pp. 12-19.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19. Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup>SWEA, LXV, 219-220; Loserth, Quellen, pp. 18-19.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 163. The language, it must be noted, has been moderated in translation. To read an average pamphlet of Luther, written to confute some adversary, and then to turn to the writings of Denck, Hubmaier and Schwenckfeld, "is like escaping from the mephitic odours of a slum into a garden of spices." Vedder, Balthasar Huebmaier, p. 158. Cf. Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup>SWEA, LXV, 220.

<sup>41</sup>For a copy of the Answer see Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, pp. 163-181.

<sup>42</sup>On the Anabaptists' opposition to the Spiritualists see Littell, The Free Church, pp. 31-33.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, pp. 12-13.

<sup>44</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1466.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 1462.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 1466.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 1467.

<sup>49</sup>The Catholic Encyclopedia, I, 564.

<sup>50</sup>SWEA, LI, 294. Cf. Ibid., XXIX, 140.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., XXIX, 156.

<sup>52</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 768-770.

<sup>53</sup>SWEA, LXI, 218-219.

<sup>54</sup>See Gerdes, Luther's Streit mit den Schwaermern, pp. 71-73.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup>Hubmaier wrote in 1528: "Faith alone is not enough for salvation. We must prove faith with works of love toward God and our neighbor. . . . Since mere faith does not suffice for salvation, good works must also be added to it. . . . Whoso permits his faith to stand by itself and does not prove it by good works, he changes Christian liberty into liberty of the flesh." Quoted in Kaufman, MQR, XXV (April, 1951), 94. See also Hans Denck on the question of Law and Grace in Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, pp. 48-66.

<sup>57</sup>See Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 148.

<sup>58</sup>SWEA, LXI, 37-49.

<sup>59</sup>See introductory note in SWEA, XXXII, 1.

<sup>60</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, I, 199.

<sup>61</sup>SWEA, LXI, 32.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., XXXII, 10-11.

<sup>63</sup>See Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, II, 1133.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>SWEA, LXI, 28-52.

<sup>66</sup>Flass, What Luther Says, II, 770.

<sup>67</sup>SWEA, LXI, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup>Flass, What Luther Says, II, 770.

<sup>69</sup>German title: "Wider die Antinomer" (SWEA, XXXII, 1-14).

<sup>70</sup>With tears in her eyes Agricola's wife pleaded with Luther to give in somewhat and the Elector of Brandenburg spoke for Agricola, but all was to no avail. SWEA, LXI, 123-124.

<sup>71</sup>Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-18.

<sup>73</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1382.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Wilbur also charges the Anabaptists with Anti-trinitarianism, but R. Friedmann shows that the men he lists were not Anabaptists. See the article, "The Encounter of the Anabaptists and Mennonites with Anti-Trinitarians," MQR, XXII (July, 1948), 139-162.

<sup>77</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1383.

<sup>78</sup>Wilbur may think of Hans Denck who was not too concerned about this article of faith.

<sup>79</sup>There is no evidence that Muentzer or Carlstadt ever expressed doubt concerning the Trinity.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism, pp. 23-24.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>82</sup>His Christology, however, is somewhat obscure. See note 85.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 282.

<sup>84</sup>SWEA, LXI, 5-7.

<sup>85</sup>Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 158. According to Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, I, 1442, Campanus "sieht im Sohne den Erstgeborenen des Vaters, im Hl. Geist ein gemeinsames Wesen von Gott und Christus."

<sup>86</sup>Luther: Diesen verfluchten Unflath und Buben, Campanum, soll man nur verachten und sobald nicht wider ihn schreiben; denn da man wider ihn schriebe, so wuerde er deste kuehner, stoelzer und muthiger. . . ." SWEA, LXI, 5.

<sup>87</sup>It is of interest to note that Campanus influenced the Wassenbergers in several ways, who in turn influenced B. Rothmann in Muenster. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 220 n. 52.

<sup>88</sup>See Tillmanns, The World and Men Around Luther, p. 283.

<sup>89</sup>SWEA, XXXII, 11.

<sup>90</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1385.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 1389.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>See Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 18.

## CHAPTER X

### LUTHER AND THE RADICALS ON TOLERANCE AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

#### Luther Advocates Tolerance

That Luther in his earlier works advocated tolerance, that is, patience and fairness toward those whose religious opinions and practices differed from the accepted dogma of the Church, is obvious; but his early language on behalf of religious liberty was dictated by his constant fear of persecution, assassination, poisoning and murder.<sup>1</sup> Only later, when he had passed from the status of a fugitive to that of a builder of a church, did he express his true views on the question of religious liberty. In his youth, Luther had been intolerant as an inquisitor, declaring he would have been willing to bring a fagot for the pyre of John Huss,<sup>2</sup> and when he broke with the Catholic Church he was in temper more intolerant than Pope Leo X.<sup>3</sup> When Luther, then, at the beginning of his reformation work pleaded for clemency towards heretics, it must be accepted that it was done primarily on his own behalf and that of his cause.

One of the paragraphs in the Ninety-Five Theses stated, that the "burning of heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>4</sup> and a little later Luther must have thought of himself when he explained that "there has never been a heresy that has not stated some truth."<sup>5</sup> In 1520 he wrote in his To the Christian Nobility: "One should overcome heretics with Scripture and not with

fire. If it were scholarly to overcome heretics with fire, then the executioners would be the most learned doctors on earth."<sup>6</sup> In the same year he wrote in his Babylonian Captivity:

I say, then, neither pope nor bishops, nor any man whatever has the right of making one syllable binding on a Christian man, unless it be done with his own consent. Whatever is done otherwise is done in the spirit of tyranny. . . . I cry aloud on behalf of liberty and conscience, and I proclaim with confidence that no kind of law can with any justice be imposed on Christians, whether by men or by angels, except so far as they themselves will; for we are free from all.<sup>7</sup>

In a Pentecost sermon in 1522, Luther taught that the sword has no power over the hearts of men, and heresy cannot be fought with carnal weapons. No magistrates ought to meddle in spiritual things, but the ministers of the Word of God must capture the love and delight of the human heart and thus win men for the truth. "Therefore you see," he concluded, "that our princes and bishops are mad and foolish when they use force in an effort to press and compel people to believe."<sup>8</sup> This is so because the "soul's thoughts and feelings can be known to none but God."<sup>9</sup>

In a letter to the councilmen of Prague in 1523, Luther went still further. He wrote:

For the doctrine of another, be it true or false, will neither damn nor save you; your faith alone will certainly do one or the other. Therefore let a man teach whatever he pleases, you must look to what you believe, because you believe at your own supreme peril or to your own profit.<sup>10</sup>

Even Carlstadt and Muentzer, he wrote in 1524 to the princes of Saxony, should be allowed to preach as much as they wish; the Word of God must go to battle: "Let the spirits burst and clash one with the other. If some meanwhile are misled, very well,

that is what happens in the real course of war; where there is strife and battle, there some must fall."<sup>11</sup> He then suggests that the idea of burning false prophets comes from the fear of being unable to overcome them with the Word of God. If these heretics, however, attempt to overthrow the established governments, Luther warns, "there your Excellency shall attack, be it we or they, and let them be at once expelled from the country."<sup>12</sup>

When in 1525 some Anabaptists in Switzerland were drowned in mockery of adult baptism, Luther still did not approve of such severe measures.<sup>13</sup> In fact, he welcomed sects who attacked the Christian faith; they cause Christians to search their own souls and to become well grounded in Scripture.<sup>14</sup> As late as 1528 in a letter to two pastors, he expressed uneasiness concerning putting Anabaptists to death. It is not right, he wrote, and I am deeply troubled that these people are so cruelly put to death, burned and slain. Let every one believe what he likes, for if he is wrong he will have punishment enough in hell. Unless there is sedition and outright rebellion on the part of the fanatics, one should oppose them with the Word only.<sup>15</sup> In another letter written in the same year, he advised:

You ask whether the magistrates may kill false prophets. I am slow in a judgement of blood even when it is deserved. In this matter I am terrified by the example of the papists and the Jews before Christ, for when there was a statute for the killing of false prophets and heretics, in time it came about that only the most saintly and innocent were killed. . . . I cannot admit that false teachers are to be put to death. It is enough to banish.<sup>16</sup>



### Luther's Changed Views on Tolerance

When Luther came to realize that the struggle of the spirits may turn to his own disadvantage, he called on the arm of the flesh to assist him. His increasing intolerance, therefore, must not only be looked upon as an assertion of his true views, but also as a weapon for self-defense in his struggle for existence.<sup>17</sup> When the Diet of Speier in 1529 passed the cruel decree that the Anabaptists be executed by fire and sword without distinction of sex, and even without first hearing them before the spiritual judges, Luther raised no protest.<sup>18</sup> The more significant this becomes when it is remembered that this was the same Diet at which the Lutherans protested against the Catholic majority, and their attempt to restrict the activity of the Lutherans.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to one Metsch in the same year, the Reformer expressed the ruling of the Diet when he wrote: "In order to avoid trouble we should not, if possible, suffer contrary teachings in the same state;" even unbelievers should be compelled to attend church and conform at least outwardly to the Christian religion.<sup>20</sup>

To justify his severe measures against the radical reformers, Luther charged them with sedition and blasphemy, attaching to these terms the widest possible meaning. In the Middle Ages blasphemy was defined as an offense against God or a saint; to speak against God, to swear falsely, to use God's name abusively, or to damage images was regarded as blasphemy,

and the punishment ranged all the way from fines to death.<sup>21</sup> Sedition was defined as disobedience and rebellion against the constituted authorities, which was punished with certain fines, if it was a mild offense, and torture and beheading in the case of heavier crimes.<sup>22</sup> Luther and Melancthon interpreted blasphemy to mean rejection of an article in the Apostolic Creed,<sup>23</sup> rejection of infant baptism, denial of hereditary sin, and dissent from the established Church.<sup>24</sup> Sedition was defined as mere refusal to participate in war or to serve as a magistrate, and the belief in community of goods.<sup>25</sup> These two offenses, according to Luther, were to be dealt with by the state, while the Church was to deal with purely doctrinal matters according to Christ's directives.<sup>26</sup>

Once he was persuaded that he acted in accordance with God's will, Luther shrank from no encouragement of using the sword against dissenters and Catholics alike.<sup>27</sup> To Menius and Myconius, who in 1530 were writing against the fanatics and Anabaptists, Luther wrote that he was very pleased with their arguments against the enthusiasts, and urged the publishing of their tracts as soon as possible. "As they are not only blasphemous," he added, "but highly seditious, urge the use of the sword against them by right of law." God, according to Romans 13, is against those who resist the governments, and we, therefore, may not "mete out better treatment to these men than God Himself and all the saints."<sup>28</sup> To the objection of some, that by advocating the

use of force against heretics the door would be opened for the persecution of even true Christians, Luther replied in an exposition of Psalm 82, that this mattered little, for a minister of God ought to preach Scripture rightly even though it might mean danger for his own cause. And, after all, these heretics are not punished for what they believe but for blasphemy and rebellion.<sup>29</sup>

In response to a request from Prince John of Saxony, Melancthon in 1531 delivered a memorandum on the subject of punishing dissenters, in which he advocated the use of the sword. Luther endorsed the document as follows:

I, Luther, approve. Though it may appear cruel to punish them by the sword, yet it is even more cruel of them to condemn the preaching office and not to teach any certain doctrine, to persecute the true doctrine, and, over and above all this, to seek to destroy the kingdom of this world.<sup>30</sup>

From this time on to the last year of his life, the Reformer did not fail to admonish and warn by letters, sermons and pamphlets against all "corner-preachers" and self-appointed ministers.<sup>31</sup> In 1532 he wrote to the Duke of Schlick "to keep a diligent eye on the seed of the devil," for a small spark, caused by these sneakers, may turn into a great fire.<sup>32</sup> In 1533 he advised a pastor as to how to treat dissenters: "We threaten those who despise the services of the sanctuary and neglect to partake of the Lord's Supper, with our Prince's wrath, and with being denounced as blasphemers of God."<sup>33</sup> To the King of Denmark in 1536 Luther expressed delight for his zeal against heretics and

Catholic bishops "who are always persecuting God's Word and intriguing in worldly matters."<sup>34</sup> In the same year Philip of Hesse asked the Wittenberg theologians as to what to do with heretics who return after having been banished from the country. The answer was that those who abjure their errors are to be pardoned, but "those who persistently refuse are to be punished with the sword, on the double ground of sedition and blasphemy."<sup>35</sup> To the Elector John Frederick, Luther wrote in 1538, not to set free Magister John Karg, who was suspect of heresy, "until we have sifted the matter thoroughly."<sup>36</sup> Fritz Erbe, an Anabaptist, suffered incarceration for nine years in the castle of the Wartburg, and when he died in captivity, the Reformer never expressed one word of sympathy, respect or regret for such harsh treatment.<sup>37</sup> As late as 1545, one year before Luther's death, the Reformer advised the Elector and Philip of Hesse not to release Henry of Brunswick, a heretic, "because everything depends on doctrine."<sup>38</sup>

The anti-Anabaptist writings of the Wittenbergers not only had their dreadful effect on Electoral Saxony, but also in other areas of the empire. In justification of the execution of Anabaptists and other sectaries, the rulers constantly appealed to Luther's teaching on the subject.<sup>39</sup> The Catholic Count of the Palatinate, Ludwig V, and Philip of Hesse were the only rulers who did not resort to harsh measures

against the radical reformers.<sup>40</sup> Philip did not see in the Anabaptists rebels and blasphemers, but only poor people who were erring concerning their faith. As late as 1545, Philip was unable, on the basis of certain New Testament passages,<sup>41</sup> to persuade himself to inflict the death penalty on the radicals, "since over night a man may be instructed and turn from his error. If we should condemn such a one so summarily to death we fear greatly that we should not be innocent of his blood."<sup>42</sup> In his last will, this prince distinguished between the peaceful and rebellious Anabaptists--something Luther never learned--and advised the educated to win the dissenters back to the true doctrine, for to "kill anybody because he's of false belief, this we have never done and wish also to warn our sons against it."<sup>43</sup>

Thus aside from Philip of Hesse, nothing was further from the minds of Luther and his followers, than the toleration of doctrines other than their own; the Reformer emphatically asserted the freedom of his own opinions, while taking little interest that his opponents should be ensured the same measures of liberty. It now remains to be seen whether the radical reformers, against whom the darts of persecution were hurled, were true champions of liberty of conscience as some reputable scholars have suggested.

### The Radicals and Tolerance

Most Lutheran and Reformed theologians and historians do not believe that there was any religious group in the sixteenth century that was genuinely tolerant towards creeds other than their own. H. H. Kramm, for example, states it was only over two hundred years later that the German poet and critic, Lessing, fought for complete tolerance towards non-Christian and other confessions of faith.<sup>44</sup> Others see the institution of freedom and religious liberty coinciding with the inauguration of the American constitution in the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to these there are those writers, mostly descendants of the Anabaptists, who see the birth of religious liberty in some of the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. R. J. Smithson feels that an "unprejudicial examination of the work and teaching of the Anabaptists reveals them as outstanding pioneers in the struggle for religious liberty. . . ."<sup>46</sup> E. H. Harbison states that the Anabaptists first caught the vision of religious freedom.<sup>47</sup> C. H. Smith makes Anabaptism "the essence of individualism."<sup>48</sup> Littell looks upon the Anabaptists as people who consistently championed religious liberty in the modern sense.<sup>49</sup> And Harold Bender emphatically asserts:

There can be no question but that the great principles of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion, so basic in American Protestantism, and so essential to democracy, ultimately are derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them, and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice.<sup>50</sup>

The question arises whether these divergent views can be harmonized, or whether only one of them must be accepted as historically sound.

It must be stated at the outset that certain groups and persons within the radical reformation knew nothing, as we have seen, of tolerance and religious liberty for people and doctrines other than their own. Muentzer and the Muenster Anabaptists can certainly not be cited as examples of tolerance, for they advocated the employment of the sword, killed off the "godless", and compelled people against their will to be baptized and to accept their religious views. This leaves us to investigate whether certain Spiritualists and the evangelical Anabaptists were truly tolerant, that is, patient and indulgent towards people with other faiths.

That the Anabaptists advocated tolerance and abstinence from any use of force in religious matters, there is no question. From the letter of Conrad Grebel to Muentzer we have learned that the Swiss Brethren repudiated all force, believing in excommunication as the only weapon against spiritual offenders.<sup>51</sup> While Balthasar Hubmaier was persecuted as an evangelical preacher he wrote a pamphlet entitled, Concerning Heretics and Those who Burn them (1524), which is one of the earliest pleas for complete toleration of all dissenters.<sup>52</sup> Menno Simons also wrote against the persecution of heretics; he even went so far as to challenge the moral basis of capital punishment.<sup>53</sup> One Hans Mueller of

Medikon, before the Zurich magistrates beautifully stated:

Do not lay a burden on my conscience, for faith is a gift given freely by God, and is not common property. The mystery of God lies hidden, like the treasure in the field, which no one can find but he to whom the spirit shows it. So I beg you, ye servants of God, let my faith stand free.<sup>54</sup>

According to Heinrich Bullinger, an enemy of the Anabaptists, the Swiss Brethren taught that one cannot and should not employ force to compel anyone to accept the faith; that it is wrong to put to death anyone for the sake of his erring faith; that the secular kingdom should be separated from the Church, and no secular ruler should exercise authority in the Church; that the Lord has commanded simply to preach the Gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it; that the true Church of Christ has the characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution, but does not inflict persecution on others.<sup>55</sup>

Pilgram Marbeck, another Anabaptist, when accused of refusing to recognize other religious groups as scriptural, defended himself by stating:

It is not true that we refuse to count as Christians those who disagree with our baptism and reckon them as misguided spirits and deniers of Christ. It is not ours either to judge or condemn him who is not baptized according to the command of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

This almost seems like a readiness to admit that there is more than one way to God, a disposition which Bainton calls an "ingradient of Renaissance religion".<sup>57</sup>

While these testimonies appear to be convincing, in reading them one cannot help thinking of Luther's earlier



utterances on behalf of religious liberty, which he later, when in power, neutralized. One is almost inclined to believe with Philip Schaff, that persecution was present in all religions, churches and sects which had the power, while on the other hand, all persecuted religions and parties were advocates of tolerance and freedom.<sup>58</sup> Although the problem cannot be fully solved, there seem to be traces within the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, as well as in its subsequent history, which may point to at least a partial solution.

According to the records, Anabaptist tolerance did not extend to those who remained true to the state churches, whether Catholic or Protestant. An anonymous Anabaptist writer in a tract, Christian Baptism, condemns vigorously the state churchmen of his day, regarding them as instruments of Satan because they uphold an unscriptural state church.<sup>59</sup> Another anonymous tract, Concerning Evil Overseers, even warns against ministers like Hans Denck, who regard infant baptism as an insignificant point, not worth causing strife on account of it.<sup>60</sup> In another pamphlet, The Hearing of False Prophets or Antichrist, the writer seriously warns against listening to Luther and other state church ministers, for it is like drinking poison which true Christians must guard against.<sup>61</sup> Although Menno Simons believed there were Christians in all church affiliations, he was unwilling to tolerate sects such as the Muensterites, men

like David Joris,<sup>62</sup> and the state churches in general. After reviewing in one of his writings some of the doctrines of the Catholics, the Lutherans, and the Zwinglians, Menno comes to the conclusion that all of these three groups must rightly be considered as sects, because their teachings and lives are contrary to God's Word.<sup>63</sup> In his plea for tolerance toward his persecuted followers, Menno tells the Catholics, Lutherans and Zwinglians, quite ironically, "that your office and service are not of God and His Word but issue from the bottomless pit. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

In answer to passages such as these, John Horsch replies that the Anabaptists and Mennonites did not define liberty of conscience as to mean a general tolerance of all creeds, but took "liberty of conscience to imply the separation of church and state and the rejection of all persecution."<sup>65</sup> It is true that theoretically the Anabaptists and early Mennonites taught that no Christian should take part in government in any way nor become a magistrate, but this, as Bender points out, "was purely a theoretical conclusion because in those days no Mennonite could have become a magistrate even if he had wanted to do so."<sup>66</sup> Heretics were automatically excluded from all governmental offices and privileges; they were not even considered to be full citizens of the state. When religious liberty was granted first in Holland, then in Switzerland and lastly in Prussia, the Mennonites in Europe began to participate freely in state affairs, some of them even becoming generals in the army.<sup>67</sup> As for the

use of force in matters of faith on the part of the Anabaptists, even the sixteenth century provides some drastic examples. Hans Hut, a somewhat overly zealous Anabaptist, was for a time imprisoned for his enthusiasm by a fellow Anabaptist, Leonard von Liechtenstein, whose seat of government was the ancient city of Nikolsburg near the Austrian border.<sup>68</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier approved of the action, setting forth his views in a pamphlet entitled, On the Sword, which argues in support of the actions of the magistrates in matters of religion.<sup>69</sup> In their later history when the Mennonites in Russia were in control of their own local government, persecution, although on a smaller scale, of dissenting persons and groups was not alien to the movement.<sup>70</sup>

Yet among the Spiritualists or mystical Anabaptists there seems to have been at least one person who advocated as well as practised genuine tolerance. Hans Denck, for example, believed in extreme nonresistance and the separation of Church and state, yet this did not prevent him from cooperating and having fellowship with Balthasar Hubmaier who did not share his views concerning the sword and the state.<sup>71</sup> This did not mean that Denck would associate with godless men and pronounced heretics, as he himself testified, but he realized that he could err concerning an article of faith, and consequently others, who did not share his belief, could be right in certain points as well.<sup>72</sup> Against his persecutors Denck did not vituperate like

Menno Simons and some of the other Anabaptists, but he expressed his affection towards them, stating that nothing could separate his heart from them.<sup>73</sup> Before his death he even went so far as to express genuine sorrow for having caused strife and divisions by his unwise zeal, for, after all, even his adversaries worship the same God and honour the same redeemer in Christ.

In conclusion, then, among the radical reformers only Hans Denck, who had much to lose in the eyes of his fellow Anabaptists for holding to absolute tolerance, and among the Lutherans, Philip of Hesse, who had little to profit from tolerating dissenters in his own province, seemed to be the only worthy champions of religious liberty among the Protestants of the sixteenth century. Aside from a few individuals like these, Europe in the Reformation period knew little, if any, true religious liberty.<sup>75</sup> Advocates of tolerance and liberty of conscience there had been from the very beginning of Christendom. Church Fathers like Tertullian and St. Augustine spoke for religious toleration when the Christian Church was in the minority and generally oppressed; when the Church became accepted in society, these very men counselled coercion and even punishment of body, since, as was believed, the salvation of soul was at stake.<sup>76</sup> The medieval Church and the Reformers followed the same course.<sup>77</sup> The Anabaptists, who remained a minority group, cannot be taken as a conclusive example of

tolerance, because in the sixteenth century they had little opportunity, as Luther and the other Reformers had, of putting their theory of religious liberty to the test. If the Anabaptists have contributed at all to the modern concepts of liberty, tolerance and the separation of Church and state, they have done this indirectly through suffering persecution, which, as time went on, convinced the authorities of its uselessness for achieving the desired objectives.<sup>78</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER X

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Acton, Essays on Freedom and Power, p. 93.  
In 1523 when Luther learned of the burning of two Augustinian monks in the Netherlands, he exclaimed: "I thought I myself should be the very first one who should be martyred for the sake of the Holy Gospel; but apparently I was not worthy of that." Quoted in Stauffer, MQR, XIX (July, 1945), 183. In 1524 he wrote to the suffering Lambert Thorm in the Netherlands: "I might deem this a misfortune, for it was I who first brought this teaching. . . . I fear I shall not be counted worthy to suffer such tribulation as you three for Christ's sake." Luther, The Letters of, pp. 118-119.

<sup>2</sup>Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>This tolerance in the opening decades of the 16. century was not due to indifference on the part of the Catholic Church, but due to the security which the Church enjoyed; the menace of the Moors had passed, as Bainton points out, and the danger of Protestantism was not apparent as yet. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 418.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in J. S. Oyer, "The Writings of Luther Against the Anabaptists," MQR, XXVII (April, 1953), 107.

<sup>7</sup>Luther, First Principles of the Reformation, p. 196.

<sup>8</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, II, 644-645.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 418.

<sup>10</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 418.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 419.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup>SWEA, LI, 308.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., XXVI, 256.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Oyer, MQR, XXVII (April, 1953), 107.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Schraepler, Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Täufer, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>See Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden, pp. 118-119.

<sup>20</sup>SWEA, LIII, 97-98.

<sup>21</sup>Schraepler, Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Wiedertäufer, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>23</sup>The Anabaptists did not reject any article in the Apostles Creed. See The Mennonite Encyclopedia, III, 421.

<sup>24</sup>SWEA, XXXIX, 250. See comment in Schraepler, Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Wiedertäufer, pp. 24-29.

<sup>25</sup>SWEA, XXXIX, 250.

<sup>26</sup>Matt. 18:16 ff.

<sup>27</sup>"It will lie heavy on your conscience," Luther wrote in 1530, to the duke of Saxony, "if you tolerate the Catholic worship; for no secular prince can permit his subjects to be divided by the preaching of opposite doctrines. The Catholics have no right to complain, for they do not prove the truth of their doctrine from Scripture and therefore do not conscientiously believe it." Quoted in Acton, Essays on Freedom and Power, p. 102. And concerning heretics in general he wrote in the same year: "Heretics are not to be disputed with, but to be condemned unheard, and whilst they perish by fire, the faithful ought to pursue the evil to its source, and bathe their hands in the blood of the Catholic bishops, and of the Pope, who is a devil in disguise." Quoted in Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup>SWEA, XXXIX, 257-258. When Felix Manz was drowned in Zurich, Zwingli also insisted that he had not been punished for his Anabaptism, but because of sedition and blasphemy. See Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, II, 447.

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, pp. 180-181.

<sup>31</sup>They were called "corner-preachers" or sneakers because they did not preach openly, and self-appointed ministers because

they were not ordained by the established churches. But, it may be asked, when were they ever permitted to hold public worship services?

<sup>32</sup>SWEA, LIV, 54.

<sup>33</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 294.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 181. Being uneasy concerning the matter, Luther adds: "Yet Your Serene Highness, needless to say, may at all times allow justice to be tempered with mercy, according to the circumstances." Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>36</sup>Luther, The Letters of, p. 354.

<sup>37</sup>See Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 64.

<sup>38</sup>Plass, What Luther Says, I, 416.

<sup>39</sup>Grisar, Martin Luther, p. 501. During the Reformation era between four and five thousand persons were executed as Anabaptists by fire, water and the sword. In this work of extermination both Protestant and Catholic governments were equally guilty. See Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup>Ludwig V was lenient until the Diet of Speier in 1529. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup>Matt. 13:30; Luke 9:55; Romans 14.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in R. H. Bainton, "The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century," Church History, I (June, 1932), 87.

<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 33. Philip's tolerance paid off well; as a result in his territory many Anabaptists were brought back to the Lutheran fold. Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>44</sup>Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther, p. 149.

<sup>45</sup>Pfeffer, Church, State and Freedom, p. ix.

<sup>46</sup>Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>Harbison, The Age of Reformation, p. 65.



- <sup>48</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 21.
- <sup>49</sup>Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 66.
- <sup>50</sup>Bender, MQR, XVIII (April, 1944), 68.
- <sup>51</sup>For details see Bender, "The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the 16th Century," MQR, XXIX (1955), 88.
- <sup>52</sup>For complete text see Vedder, Balthasar Huebmaier, pp. 84-88.
- <sup>53</sup>Bender, MQR, XXIX (1955), 94.
- <sup>54</sup>Quoted in Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, II, 441-442.
- <sup>55</sup>For full quotation see Bender, MQR, XVIII (April, 1944), 68-69.
- <sup>56</sup>Quoted in Smithson, The Anabaptists, p. 127.
- <sup>57</sup>R. H. Bainton, "Interpretations of the Reformation," The American Historical Review, LXVI (October, 1960), 80.
- <sup>58</sup>Schaff, History of the Christian Church, VII, 51.
- <sup>59</sup>John C. Wenger (trans. and ed.), "Three Swiss Brethren Tracts," MQR, XXI (October, 1947), 282-284.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 280-281. For Denck's views on baptism see Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, p. 109.
- <sup>61</sup>Wenger, MQR, XXI (October, 1947), 276-278.
- <sup>62</sup>David Joris was a visionary and enthusiast in the early Mennonite Church who was excommunicated by Obbe Philips, a co-worker of Menno Simons.
- <sup>63</sup>Menno, Complete Writings, pp. 332-355.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 207.
- <sup>65</sup>Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 323.
- <sup>66</sup>Bender, "Church and State in Mennonite History," MQR, XIII (April, 1939), 89.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 89 f.

<sup>68</sup>Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup>The New Cambridge Modern History, II, 123. The Baptists trace the origin of their movement to Hubmaier, while the Mennonites are not on too good terms with this man because he believed in bearing arms for the government.

<sup>70</sup>When the Mennonite Brethren Church was organized in Russia in 1860, the ministers of the Old Mennonite Church complained to the civil authorities--who were also Mennonites--and as a result threats, arrests and actual punishment were carried out against the dissenters. The new group appealed to the Russian Tzar who induced the Russian government to recognize the dissenting body as a legal religious denomination. See Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 279.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, II, 442.

<sup>72</sup>Fellmann, Hans Denck Schriften, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 105. This is a far cry from Luther who stated that whoever tolerates the fanatics must know that he has before him the devils themselves. SWEA, XXXI, 226.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Pfeffer, Church, State and Freedom, pp. 26-27.

<sup>76</sup>A. F. Carrillo de Albornoz points out that for this reason "the modern Catholic defenders of religious freedom emphasize the favourable tradition of the early Fathers before Augustine." Roman Catholicism and Religious Liberty (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 1959), p. 67. The book is a scholarly study of Catholic views on, and arguments for and against religious tolerance.

<sup>77</sup>See Pfeffer, Church, State and Freedom, pp. 26-27. Yet W. K. Jordan feels that the Reformation did contribute indirectly to toleration of other religions: "The claims of the right of private judgement could not indefinitely be denied by a system of thought which owed its existence to the triumph of that principle." The Development of Religious Toleration in England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), I, 32. Secondly, Jordan goes on to say, the brunt of persecution was taken out of Protestantism since it had rebelled itself against a well founded ancient institution. Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>78</sup>It was believed, as Bainton points out, that persecution would bring about the salvation of the heretic's soul, vindicate

the honour of God, as in the case of Calvinism, and bring about orthodoxy and unity within the Church. As time went on, this proved ineffective, and the Enlightenment undermined some of the principles underlying the theory of persecution. Bainton, The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 17 ff.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

#### Vindication of the Dissident Sects

As a result of Luther's and the other leading Reformers' hostile attitude towards the dissident sects, the radical reformers not only had to endure persecution in the sixteenth century, but they also had to bear suspicion, ridicule, reproach and enmity for almost four hundred years. Especially Lutheran Protestantism, to which the radicals had constantly appealed, has sinned against them most, for it failed to appreciate that they simply endeavored to follow Luther's early principles to their logical conclusion and live in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel as they understood it. As late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the descendants of the radical reformers were compelled to leave their soil, country, home and property only in order to be able to live their lives according to the dictates of their conscience. The attitude towards them, however, was bound to change for the better. In 1905 the Baptist historian Henry C. Vedder wrote: "The time is rapidly approaching when the Anabaptists will be as abundantly honoured as, in the past four centuries, they have been unjustly condemned."<sup>1</sup> Since that time the radical reformers have been sufficiently vindicated.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic scholar, Dr. C. A. Cornelius, as has been

mentioned, was one of the first in the middle of the nineteenth century to speak an effective word in mitigation of judgement upon the radicals and declared that their real history had yet to be written.<sup>3</sup> Others soon followed Cornelius to the Anabaptist sources, something which had been largely neglected until then, and they found what Sebastian Castellio had found already in the sixteenth century. In a manuscript addressing Beza, Castellio writes:

With regards to the Anabaptists I would like to know how you know that they condemn legitimate marriage and the magistracy and condone murders. Certainly it is not in their books and much less in their words. You have heard it from their enemies, . . . . I do not believe what you say about the Anabaptists. Those at Muenster did not reject the magistrate and they retained Knipperdollinck as magistrate. As for marriage, their enemies say that each had more than one wife. Very well, but that is not having wives in common. There are some persons who certainly are not Anabaptists who testify that in Bohemia the Anabaptists hold marriage in such reverence that if any among them is guilty of adultery he is rigorously excluded from their community. Neither should people be held responsible for a position which they have themselves repudiated, any more than you, Beza, should be reproached for the amatory verses of your youth.<sup>4</sup>

Not a single group or person against whom Luther fought so violently, has been left undefended by scholarly research. Herman Barge has demonstrated that the Wittenberg radicals, especially Carlstadt, were not mere lunatics, whose sole ambition was to destroy what Luther had carefully built up.<sup>5</sup> The revolutionary Spiritualists, such as Thomas Muentzer, have been shown, although somewhat unconvincingly, as complimenting Luther in his reform drives. Walter Nigg, for example, states that Muentzer rightly

stood up for the socially and politically oppressed, whose sufferings he sought to alleviate in accordance with Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Historical writings in vindication of the peaceful Spiritualists and mystical Anabaptists, such as Denck, Schwenckfeld and others, abounds in quantity as well as in quality.<sup>7</sup> And Mennonite historians and theologians have not failed to do their part in acquitting the evangelical Anabaptists of the charges laid against them.<sup>8</sup> Today the radical reformers in general enjoy a greater reputation than they ever have; Mennonite, Protestant as well as Catholic scholars acknowledge their contribution to western civilization. Only a few excerpts from their writings shall be cited here.

In speaking for the Anabaptists, E. A. Payne, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, states:

The doctrine of the church as a fellowship of believers, free from the control of the state . . . ; emphasis on the spirit of man as the candle of the Lord; the claim for toleration and freedom of conscience; the recognition of the obligations resting on all Christians to charity, community and evangelism; these ideas, with varying degrees of emphasis, have become influential in all parts of the world.<sup>9</sup>

R. H. Bainton, although also feeling that the radical reformers may have advocated tolerance because they were persecuted, nevertheless observes:

. . . the Anabaptists anticipated all other religious bodies in the proclamation and exemplification of three principles which are on the North American continent among those truths which we hold to be self-evident: the voluntary church, the separation of church and state, and religious liberty.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning the radical reformers in general, Philip Hughes, a Catholic historian, writes:

They were the means of preserving what, in the nature of things, would seem to be the aim and the first justification of Luther, Calvin, and of all the other successful Reformers who were their deadliest foes: the principle, that is to say, that men have the right to form their own religious groups, to join a group or not to join, to leave it when they choose; that these groups are equal in their rights and subject to no authority but what they themselves choose; that the groups are free to choose the way they shall worship; that every individual is free to choose what he shall believe.<sup>11</sup>

Hans George Fischer, a Lutheran, confesses: "Only too often have we reviled the alleged works-righteousness of the Anabaptists while we ourselves have been all too forgetful and negligent concerning the divine commandment of brotherly love. Over all the joy and satisfaction of justification by faith alone, we have forgotten the call for sanctification of our lives."<sup>12</sup> Even the question of infant versus adult baptism did not die with the radicals of the sixteenth century. Reformed theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner have raised several questions with regard to this subject, and what they have said has caused anxious debate in various circles.<sup>13</sup> Even distinguished scholars like the late Dom Gregory Dix and Dr. Kenneth Kirk, both of the Anglican Church, "have come to feel that the rites of baptism and confirmation must be brought more closely together again."<sup>14</sup>

#### An Attempt at Synthesis

Inasmuch, however, as the radical reformers have been abused and misunderstood in the past, some historians of the

twentieth century have gone in the other extreme by heaping all the praise on the radicals and most of the blame on Luther.<sup>15</sup> Our survey of Luther's struggle with the dissenters has been an attempt to understand both the Reformer and the sects, as well as to synthesize these two approaches to the subject. We have seen that Luther's attitude towards the radicals did not spring merely from his capriciousness, or because of a mere difference of opinion concerning the principle of justification by faith; the heart of the problem lay in Luther's deep conversion experience. Not to realize this, is to fail understanding fully the life and death conflict which the Reformer waged with his enemies.<sup>16</sup> For Luther the doctrine of justification by faith alone was of such importance, that not to accept it was to blaspheme God and to repudiate the Christian religion. In view of this, the radicals' emphasis on outward piety, the freedom of the Spirit, the separation of Church and state, and social reform, was in the opinion of Luther, who was mainly concerned with establishing a right relationship with God, missing the core of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> True, as a result of his conversion experience, Luther at first loudly proclaimed his principles of sola fide and sola scriptura and even advocated full religious liberty, but when he realized what these principles did in men like Muentzer, Carlstadt and later the Muensterites, he became terrified at his own former course and writings, and he had no choice but to attack those who perverted his gospel. But Luther's fury, of course, did not prevent the



"enthusiasts" from continuing to interpret Scripture according to the dictates of their own experience and conscience.

Another point to remember is the fact--or tragedy--that Luther first came in contact with the most extreme of the radical reformers, which established from the outset his attitude towards the whole movement. Had the Reformer first met some of their radical ideas in the evangelical Swiss Anabaptists instead of in men like the "Zwickau Prophets", he would have perhaps been more lenient and tolerant towards the whole left wing of the Reformation.<sup>18</sup> When in addition to the appearance of these fanatics the social problem degenerated into the Peasants' Revolt and later into the Muenster madness, Luther suddenly saw his cause threatened with extinction; in self-defense he reacted violently against the fanatics whom he held responsible for these calamities. Payne observes correctly when he states that the revolts were the "main cause of Anabaptism's passing under a cloud of obloquy and shame, thus preventing any honest facing of the basic issues raised by the Swiss Brethren and their more responsible followers."<sup>19</sup> And, after all, the distinction between the various groups of the dissident sects was not as obvious to Luther as to most twentieth century historians of the movement; that there were several points of contact between the various bodies has been demonstrated.

Finally, it must not be left out of sight that to Luther as well as to sixteenth century society, the dissenters were

radicals in the true sense of the word, who proposed to turn the established order upside down. Philip Hughes is correct when he comments:

Let it once be believed in any society that a particular group is really threatening to overthrow the distribution of property, to introduce a new conception of right and wrong, to prohibit and to crush all ways of life but its own, and the society will react savagely.<sup>20</sup>

To this may be added that the idea of a free Church, the general lay movement of the sects, and their opposition to official Christendom, were so harshly opposed to the still dominant medieval idea of a social order as expressed in the concept of the Church and the empire, that most men could see in the radical movement "nothing less than the destruction of the very basis of society itself."<sup>21</sup> And there is good reason to believe that this fear was well founded. The documents indicate "a real possibility that Anabaptism, if unimpeded by the sword of the magistrate, might have become the prevailing form of the church in Germany."<sup>22</sup> Had this come about, what would have happened to the state, the principles of nonresistance and religious liberty, and to the idea of a free Church? This did not happen. But the question points out the fact that it was persecution that turned the radical reformers into what they became, and many of the positive traits which we today praise in the movement, were the result of its hardships and hostilities towards it. All of these considerations show that we cannot view the radicals of the sixteenth century through Luther's eyes, as

has too long been done, nor must we tip the scale in favour of Anabaptism without sympathetically considering Luther's position. The truth lies somewhere in between.

NOTES TO CHAPTER XI

- <sup>1</sup>Vedder, Balthasar Huebmaier, p. 21.
- <sup>2</sup>For changing reputation of the Anabaptists see Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, pp. 138-161.
- <sup>3</sup>Cf. Williams, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 26.
- <sup>4</sup>Quoted in Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 319.
- <sup>5</sup>Barge, Andreas Bodenstein.
- <sup>6</sup>Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzler, pp. 359-360. Cf. Zschaebitz, Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung.
- <sup>7</sup>See e.g. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, Keller, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer, Coutts, Hans Denck, etc.
- <sup>8</sup>The Mennonite Quarterly Review, with H. S. Bender of Goshen College its general editor, is the leading voice of Anabaptism in America.
- <sup>9</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 315.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 317.
- <sup>11</sup>Hughes, A Popular History of the Reformation (Image Book edition; Garden City, New York: A Division of Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960), p. 143.
- <sup>12</sup>Fischer, "Lutheranism and the Vindication of the Anabaptist Way," MQR, XXVIII (1954), 38.
- <sup>13</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 315.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 316.
- <sup>15</sup>See e.g. Vedder, The Reformation in Germany; John Horsch, The Hutterian Brethren 1528-1931: A Story of Martyrdom and Loyalty (Goshen, Indiana: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1931), and his Mennonites in Europe, as well as some of his articles in the MQR.
- <sup>16</sup>Cf. Zeeden, The Legacy of Luther, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>17</sup>Cf. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, II, 756.

- <sup>18</sup>See Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden, pp. 279-280.
- <sup>19</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 307.
- <sup>20</sup>Hughes, A Popular History of the Reformation, p. 140.
- <sup>21</sup>Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,  
II, 704.
- <sup>22</sup>Hershberger, The Recovery, p. 321.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Source Material

- Braght, Thielem. J. v (ed.). Maertyrer-Spiegel der Taufgesinnten oder Wehrlosen Christen, etc. 2 vols. Translated from the Dutch into German. Berne, Indiana: Verlag Licht und Hoffnung, 1950.
- Enders, Ernst Ludwig (ed.). Dr. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel. 10 vols. Calw and Stuttgart: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1884-1903.
- Fellmann, Walter (ed.). Hans Denck Schriften: Religioese Schriften. Vol. II. (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, XXIV) Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1956.
- Hillerbrand, Hans J. (ed.). "An Early Anabaptist Treatise on the Christian and the State," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXII (January, 1958), 28-47.
- Kerr, Hugh Thomson (ed.). A Compend of Luther's Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943.
- Kidd, B. J. (ed.). Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1911.
- Luther, Martin. First Principles of the Reformation or the Ninety-Five Theses and the Three Primary Works. Translated and edited by Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim. London: John Murray, 1883.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Letters of. Selected and translated by Margaret A. Currie. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1908.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Reformation Writings. 2 vols. Translated by Bertram Lee Woolf. London: Lutterworth Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Saemmtliche Werke. 65 vols. Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1826-1855.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Werke. 8 vols. Herausgegeben von D. Dr. Buchwald, et al. Dritte Auflage. Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1905.
- Loserth, J. (ed.). Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der oberdeutschen Taufgesinnten im 16. Jahrhundert. Pilgram Marbecks Antwort auf Kaspar Schwenckfelds Beurteilung des

Buches der Bundesbezeugung. Wien: Kommissionsverlag  
der Verlagsbuchhandlung Carl Fromme Gesellschaft  
m. b. H., 1929.

Menno Simons: The Complete Writings of. Translated from the  
Dutch by Leonard Verduin and edited by John Christian  
Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender. Scottdale,  
Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1956.

Flass, Ewald M. (ed.). What Luther Says: An Anthology. 3 vols.  
Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Wenger, John C. (trans. and ed.). "The Schleithem Confession  
of Faith," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XIX (October,  
1945), 244-253.

\_\_\_\_\_. (trans. and ed.). "Three Swiss Brethren Tracts,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXI (October, 1947),  
276-285.

Williams, George Huntston (ed.). Spiritual and Anabaptist  
Writers. (The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXV)  
London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1957.

Zieglschmid, A. J. E. (ed.). Die aelteste Chronik der Hutterischen  
Brueeder. Ein Sprachdenkmal aus fruehneuhochdeutscher Zeit.  
Ithaka, New York: The Cayuga Press, Inc., 1943.

#### Books

Acton, J. E. E. Essays on Freedom and Power. Selected, with an  
introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb. Glencoe, Ill.: The  
Free Press, 1948.

A Kempis, Thomas. The Imitation of Christ. Translated and with  
an introduction by Leo Sherley-Price. Penguin Books, 1952.

Albornoz, A. F. Carrillo de. Roman Catholicism and Religious  
Liberty. Geneva: The World Council of Churches. 1959.

Bainton, Roland H. The Age of the Reformation. (An Anvil Original  
under the general editorship of Louis L. Snyder) Princeton,  
New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956.

\_\_\_\_\_. Here I Stand. A Life of Martin Luther. (A Mentor Book)  
New York: The New American Library, 1950.

\_\_\_\_\_, Quanbeck, Warren A., and Rupp, E. Gordon. Luther Today.

- (Martin Luther Lectures, Vol. I) Decorah, Iowa:  
Luther College Press, 1957.
- . The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century. Boston:  
The Beacon Press, 1952.
- . The Travail of Religious Liberty. Nine Biographical  
Studies. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1951.
- Barge, Hermann. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. 2 vols.  
Leipzig: Friedrich Brandstetter, 1905.
- Bax, E. Belford. The Peasants War in Germany 1525-1526. London:  
Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1899.
- . Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists. London: Swan  
Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1903.
- Bender, Harold S. Conrad Grebel c. 1498-1526 The Founder of the  
Swiss Brethren, Sometimes Called Anabaptists. Scottdale,  
Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1950.
- Boehmer, Heinrich. Martin Luther: Road to Reformation. Translated  
from the German by J. W. Doberstein and T. G. Tappert.  
(Living Age Books) New York: Meridan Books, 1957.
- Bornkamm, Heinrich. Luther's World of Thought. Translated by  
M. H. Bertram. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House,  
1958.
- Brentano, Franz-Funk. Luther. Translated from the French by E. F.  
Buckley. London: Jonathan Cape, 1936.
- Brons, A. Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der altevangelischen  
Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten. Dritte Auflage, neu bearbeitet  
von E. M. ten Cate. Amsterdam: Verlag von Johannes Mueller,  
1912.
- The Catholic Encyclopedia. 15 vols. Edited by Charles G.  
Herbermann, et al. New York: The Universal Knowledge  
Foundation, Inc., 1907-1912.
- Coutts, Alfred. Hans Denck 1495-1527 Humanist and Heretic.  
Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1927.
- Crous, E., et al. Gedenkschrift zum 400-jaehrigen Jubilaeum der  
Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten 1525-1925. Herausgegeben von  
der Konferenz der Sueddeutschen Mennoniten. E. V. Ludwigs-  
haven a. RH., 1925.



- D'Aubigne, J. H. Merle. History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century. 5 vols. Translated from the French by H. White. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1846.
- Dallmann, William. Martin Luther. His Life and his Labor. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1951.
- Dieckhoff, A. W. Luthers Lehre von der kirchlichen Gewalt historisch dargestellt. Berlin: Verlag von Gustav Schlawitz, 1865.
- Dix, Gregory. The Shape of the Liturgy. Second edition. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945.
- Elton, G. R. (ed.). The New Cambridge Modern History. Vol. II. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1958.
- Fife, Robert Herndon. The Revolt of Martin Luther. New York: Columbia University, 1957.
- Geiser, Samuel, et al. Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden. Eine kurzgefasste Darstellung der wichtigsten Ereignisse des Täuferniums. Karlsruhe, Baden: Heinrich Schneider, 1931.
- Gerdes, Hayo. Luthers Streit mit den Schwaermern um das rechte Verstaendnis des Gesetzes Mose. Goettingen: Goettinger Verlagsanstalt, 1955.
- Gerdtehl, Ludwig von. Die Revolutionierung der Kirchen. Schoen-eiche bei Berlin Friedrichshagen: Diesseits-Verlag (G. m. b. H.), 1924.
- Goeters, Gerhard J. F. Ludwig Haetzer (ca. 1500-1529) Spiritualist und Antitrinitarier. Eine Randfigur der fruhen Täuferbewegung. (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, XXV) Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1957.
- Grisar, Hartmann S. J. Martin Luther: His Life and Work. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1930.
- Harbison, E. Harris. The Age of Reformation. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955.
- Hershberger, Guy F. (ed.). The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1957.
- Horsch, John. The Hutterian Brethren 1528-1931: A Story of Martyrdom and Loyalty. Goshen, Indiana: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1931.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Mennonites in Europe. Second edition, slightly revised. (Mennonite History, Vol. I) Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950.
- Huch, Ricara. Das Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltungen. Berlin und Zuerich: Atlantis-Verlag, 1937.
- Hughes, Philip. A Popular History of the Reformation. Image Book edition. Garden City, New York: A Division of Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960.
- Hyma, Albert. The Brethren of the Common Life. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950.
- Jones, Rufus M. Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries. (First published in 1911 by the Macmillan Company) Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- Jordan, W. K. The Development of Religious Toleration in England. Vol. I. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Jungmann, Joseph A. The Mass of the Roman Rite. Its Origins and Development. Translated by F. A. Brunner and revised by Charles K. Riepe. New revised and abridged edition in one volume. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1959.
- Keller, Ludwig. Die Anfaenge der Reformation und die Ketzerschulen. (Vortraege und Aufsaeetze aus der Comenius-Gesellschaft. Vierter Jahrgang. 1. u. 2. Stueck) Berlin: R. Gaertners Verlagsbuchhandlung, Herman Heyfelder, 1897.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ein Apostel der Wiedertaeufer. Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1882.
- Kiwiet, Jan J. Pilgram Marbeck. Ein Fuehrer in der Taeuferbewegung der Reformationszeit. Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957.
- Knox, R. A. Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Koestlin, Julius. Martin Luther. Sein Leben und seine Schriften. 2 vols. Dritte Auflage. Erberfeld: Verlag von R. L. Friderichs, 1883.
- Krahn, Cornelius. Menno Simons (1496-1561) Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten. Karlsruhe i. B.: Heinrich Schneider, Druck und Verlag, 1936.

- Krajewski, Ekkehard. Leben und Sterben des Zuericher Taeufers Felix Manz. Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957.
- Kramm, H. H. The Theology of Martin Luther. London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1947.
- Langton, Edward. History of the Moravian Church. The Story of the First International Protestant Church. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1956.
- Lecler, Joseph. Toleration and the Reformation. 2 vols. Trans. by T. L. Westow. New York: Association Press Longmans, 1960.
- Lilje, Hanns. Luther Now. Translated by Carl J. Schindler. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952.
- Lindsay, Thomas M. A History of the Reformation. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907.
- Littell, Franklin H. The Anabaptist View of the Church. A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism. Second edition, revised and enlarged. Boston: Starr King Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Free Church. Boston: The Starr King Press, 1957.
- Lueker, Erwin L. (ed.). Lutheran Cyclopedia. Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1954.
- McGriffin, A. C. Martin Luther. The Man and his Work. New York: The Century Company, 1914.
- Mackinnon, James. A History of Modern Liberty. Vol. II. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Luther and the Reformation. Vol. III. Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1929.
- The Menmonite Encyclopedia. 4 vols. Edited by H. S. Bender, et al. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Menmonite Publishing House, 1957.
- Moyers, Elgin S. Great Leaders of the Christian Church. Chicago: Moody Press, 1951.
- Murray, John. Christian Baptism. Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952.
- Newman, Albert Henry. A History of Anti-Pedobaptism. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897.

- . A Manual of Church History. 2 vols. Revised and enlarged. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1931.
- The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. 12 vols. Edited by S. Macauley Jackson. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1908-1912.
- Nigg, Walter. Das Buch der Ketzler. Zuerich: Artemis-Verlag, 1949.
- O'Rafferty, Nicholas. Instructions on Christian Doctrine - The Sacraments. New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1939.
- Peachey, Paul. Die Soziale Herkunft der Schweizer Täufer in der Reformationszeit. (Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins, No. 4) Karlsruhe: Buchdruckerei und Verlag Heinrich Schneider, 1954.
- Pfeffer, Leo. Church, State and Freedom. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953.
- Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. 5 vols. Herausgegeben von Hermann Gunkel und Leopold Zscharnack. Zweite, voellig neubearbeitete Auflage. Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1927.
- Ritter, Gerhard. Luther. Gestalt und Tat. 6. Auflage. Muenchen: F. Bruckman Verlag, 1959.
- Schaber, Will (ed.). Weinberg der Freiheit. Der Kampf um ein Demokratisches Deutschland von Thomas Muentzer bis Thomas Mann. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1945.
- Schaff, Philip. History of the Christian Church. Vols. VII and VIII. Reproduction of the second edition. Revised. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953.
- Schraepler, Horst W. Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Täufer in der Deutschen Schweiz, Suedwestdeutschland und Hessen, 1525-1618. Bearbeitet von Dr. Ekkehart Fabian. (Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins, Heft 5) Tuebingen, 1957.
- Schwiebert, E. G. Luther and His Times. Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.

- Smith, C. Henry. The Story of the Mennonites. Third edition revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn. Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publishing Office, 1950.
- Smith, Preserved. The Life and Letters of Martin Luther. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914.
- Smithson, R. J. The Anabaptists. Their Contribution to our Protestant Heritage. London: James Clarke and Co., 1935.
- Stupperich, Robert. Das Muensterische Taeufertum. Ergebnisse und Probleme der neueren Forschung. Muenster in Westfalen: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958.
- Thiel, Rudolf. Luther. Wien: Paul Neff Verlag, 1935.
- Tillmanns, Walter G. The World and Men Around Luther. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959.
- Torbet, Robert G. A History of the Baptists. Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1950.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. 2 vols. Translated by Olive Wyon. (Halley Stewart Publication, I) London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1931.
- Tumbuel, Georg. Die Wiedertaeufer. Die sozialen und religiösen Bewegungen zur Zeit der Reformation. Bielefeld und Leipzig: Verlag von Velhagen und Klasing, 1899.
- Vedder, Henry C. Balthasar Huebmaier the Leader of the Anabaptists. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Reformation in Germany. New York: Macmillan Company, 1914.
- Wappler, Paul. Die Taeuferbewegung in Thueringen von 1526-1584. (Beitrag zur neueren Geschichte Thueringens, Band II) Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1913.
- Warns, Johannes. Baptism. Studies in the Original Christian Baptism, its History and Conflicts, its Relation to a State or National Church and its Significance for the Present Time. Translated from the German by G. H. Lang. London: The Paternoster Press, 1957.

- Watson, Philip Saville. Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949.
- Wenger, John Christian. Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine. Second edition revised and enlarged. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1947.
- Westin, Gunnar. The Free Church Through the Ages. Translated from the Swedish by Virgil A. Olson. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958.
- Wilbur, Earl Morse. A History of Unitarianism. Socinianism and its Antecedents. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945.
- Wiswedel, Wilhelm. Bilder und Fuehrergestalten aus dem Täuferertum. Vol. III. Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1952.
- Wolf, Gustav. Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationszeit. 3 vols. Gotha, 1914.
- Zeeden, Ernst Walter. The Legacy of Luther. Translated from the German by Ruth M. Bethell. Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1954.
- Zschaebitz, Gerhard. Zur Mitteldeutschen Wiedertaeuferbewegung nach dem grossen Bauernkrieg. Berlin: Ruetten und Loening, 1958.

#### Articles and Periodicals

- Bainton, Roland H. "Interpretations of the Reformation," The American Historical Review, LXVI (October, 1960), 74-84.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Left Wing of the Reformation," The Journal of Religion, XXI (April, 1941), 124-134.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century," Church History, I (June, 1932), 67-87.
- Bender, Harold S. "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (January, 1950), 25-32.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Anabaptist Vision," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XVIII (April, 1944), 67-88.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the 16th Century," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIX (1955), 83-100.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Church and State in Mennonite History," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XIII (April, 1939), 83-103.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Die Zwickauer Propheten, Thomas Muentzer und die Täufer," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 262 ff.
- Be Vier, William A. "Modes of Water Baptism in the Ancient Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 116 (July-September, 1959), 230-240.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Summary and Conclusions Concerning Water Baptism in the Ancient Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 116 (October-December, 1959), 317-321.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Water Baptism in the Ancient Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 116 (April-June, 1959), 136-144.
- Blanke, Fritz. "Täuferforschung: Ort und Zeit der ersten Wiedertaufe," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (Januar-Februar, 1952), 74-76.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Zollikon 1525. Die Entstehung der ältesten Täufergemeinde," Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 4 (1952), 241 ff.
- Dollar, George W. "The Lord's Supper in the Second Century," Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 117 (April, 1960), 144-154.
- Fast, Heinold. "The Dependence of the First Anabaptists on Luther, Erasmus and Zwingli," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXX (1956), 104 ff.
- \_\_\_\_\_. and Yoder, John H. "How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXIII (April, 1959), 83-95.
- Fischer, H. G. "Lutheranism and the Vindication of the Anabaptist Way," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVIII (1954), 27-38.
- Fretz, J. Winfield. "Mennonites and their Economic Problems," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XIV (October, 1940), 195-213.
- Friedmann, Robert. "Anabaptism and Protestantism," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (January, 1950), 12-24.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Encounter of Anabaptists and Mennonites with Anti-Trinitarians," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXII (July, 1948), 139-162.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Example of the Spirit of Early Anabaptism," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXX (1956), 289 ff.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Schleithem Confession (1527) and other Doctrinal Writings of the Swiss Brethren in a Hitherto Unknown Edition," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XVI (April, 1942), 82-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Muentzer's Relation to Anabaptism," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXI (April, 1957), 75-87.
- Garret, James Leo. "The Nature of the Church According to the Radical Continental Reformation," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXII (April, 1958), 111-127.
- Garside, Charles. "Ludwig Haetzer's Pamphlet Against Images: A Critical Study," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXIV (January, 1960), 20-36.
- Geiser, Samuel. "An Ancient Anabaptist Witness for Nonresistance," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXV (January, 1951), 66-69, 72.
- Grimm, Harold J. "Luther Research since 1920," The Journal of Modern History, XXXII (June, 1960), 105-118.
- Hershberger, Guy F. "Christian Nonresistance: Its Foundation and its Outreach," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (April, 1950), 156-162.
- Hillerbrand, Hans J. "Anabaptism and the Reformation: Another Look," Church History, XXIX (December, 1960), 404-423.
- Horsch, John. "The Character of the Evangelical Anabaptists as Reported by Contemporary Reformation Writers," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, VIII (July, 1934), 123-135.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Inquiry into the Truth of Accusations of Fanaticism and Crime Against the Early Swiss Brethren," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, VIII (January, 1934), 18-31; Ibid. (April, 1934), pp. 73-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Menno Simons' Attitude Toward the Anabaptists of Munster," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, X (January, 1936), 55-72.



- . "Persecution of the Evangelical Anabaptists,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XII (January, 1938), 3-26.
- . "The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists of Muenster,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, IX (April, 1935),  
92-103; Ibid. (July, 1935), 129-143.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. "Some Theological Emphases of the Early Swiss  
Anabaptists," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXV (April,  
1951), 75-99.
- Kreider, Robert. "Anabaptism and Humanism: An Inquiry into the  
Relationship of Humanism to the Evangelical Anabaptists,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVI (April, 1952), 123-141.
- Littell, Franklin H. "The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution  
of the True Church," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV  
(January, 1950), 33-52.
- Meihuizen, H. W. "Spiritualistic Tendencies and Movements Among  
the Dutch Mennonites of the 16th and 17th Centuries,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVII (October, 1953),  
259-304.
- Mueller, John Theodore. "A Survey of Luther's Theology,"  
Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 113 (April, 1956), 153-161;  
Ibid. (July, 1956), pp. 227-238.
- Oyer, John S. "The Writings of Luther Against the Anabaptists,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVII (April, 1953),  
100-110.
- Pinomaa, Lennart. "Die Heiligung bei Luther," Theologische  
Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (Januar-Februar, 1954), 30-50.
- Schaff, Harold H. "The Anabaptists, the Reformers, and the  
Civil Government," Church History, I (March, 1932), 27-46.
- Schiff, Otto. "Thomas Muentzer und die Bauernbewegung am Oberrhein,"  
Historische Zeitschrift, Band 110. Muenchen und Berlin:  
Druck und Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1913.
- Stauffer, Ethelbert. "The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,"  
The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XIX (July, 1945), 179-214.
- Verduin, Leonard. "The Chambers of Rhetoric and Anabaptist Origins  
in the Low Countries," The Mennonite Quarterly Review,  
XXXIV (July, 1960), 192-196.

Waltner, Erland. "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXV (January, 1951), 5-16.

Williams, George Huntson. "Studies in the Radical Reformation (1517-1618): A Bibliographical Survey of Research Since 1939," Church History, XXVII (March, 1958), 46-69; Ibid. (June, 1958), pp. 124-160.

Wiswedel, Wilhelm and Friedmann, Robert. "The Anabaptists Answer Melancthon," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIX (July, 1955), 212-231.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Inner and the Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Doctrine of the Scriptures," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVI (1952), 171-191.

Wray, Frank J. "The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the Church," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXVIII (July, 1954), 186-196.

Zuck, Lowell H. "Anabaptism: Abortive Counter-Revolt Within the Reformation," Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 211-226.