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LUTHER AND EVANGELICAL RADICALISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

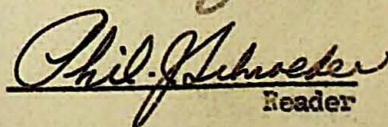
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June 1954

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Advisor



Reader

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The posting of Luther's Ninety-five Theses on October 31, 1517, was the beginning of a large-scale attack on the medieval Roman Church. This attack ultimately crystallized into three fairly well-defined groups: Luther and his sympathizers; Calvin, Zwingli, and John Knox with their followers; and the Evangelical Radicals. This latter group has come to include just about everyone who didn't fit into either of the other two. The radical element had so little cohesion that A. H. Newman distinguishes at least five distinct groups within it.¹ The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between Luther and this disparate radical element of the Reformation. For this purpose we must distinguish between two aspects of the Radical movement. Luther was forced to relate himself to Evangelical Radicalism as a historical phenomenon. This aspect of the relationship will be discussed in Chapter II of the thesis. Of greater importance is the theological relationship between Luther and Radicalism. Here we are concerned with a tendency rather than with a historical group.² While this tendency found expression in a historical group, it was also present in some of Luther's associates, in the medieval Roman Church, and in Zwingli. The theological conflict between

¹Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, c.1931), II, 156.

²Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, translated from the Danish by John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1953), p. 248.

Luther and the radical tendency will be discussed in Chapters III and IV. The relationship between Luther and the radicals poses a particular problem concerning the origin of the radical sects. This problem will be discussed in Chapter V.

The limitations of this study are evident from the Bibliography. The thesis is based chiefly on secondary source material. Only thirteen primary sources were consulted. However, many of the secondary sources are recognized as authoritative works on the life and thought of Martin Luther. In their analysis of this area of Luther research they are in substantial agreement with one another. In so far as their works have been compared with those of Luther himself there is also substantial agreement. For this reason there would probably have been very little difference in the essential conclusions of this study if only primary source material had been used.

The sense of tragedy with which one is overwhelmed in any study of conflict within the Christian Church and the essence of the sectarian spirit have been so adequately captured by Msgr. Ronald Knox that it would be difficult to compose a more appropriate introduction.

There is, I would say, a recurrent situation in Church history . . . where an excess of charity threatens unity. You have a clique, an elite, of Christian men and (more importantly) women, who are trying to live a less worldly life than their neighbors; to be more attentive to the guidance (directly felt, they would tell you) of the Holy Spirit. More and more, by a kind of fatality, you see them draw apart from their co-religionists, a hive ready to swarm. There is provocation on both sides; on the one part, cheap jokes at the expense of over-godliness, acts of stupid repression by unsympathetic authorities; on the other, contempt of the half-Christian, ominous references to old wine and new bottles, to the kernel and the husk. Then, while you hold your breath and turn away your eyes in fear, the break comes; condemnation or secession,

what difference does it make? A fresh name has been added to the list of Christianities.³

³Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1950), p. 1.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The force of the radical outburst extended over a rather short period of time, roughly from 1521 to 1535. Of course, there were traces of radical tendencies before 1521 and effects after 1535. But these dates can serve as convenient terminals for an analysis of Reformation Radicalism and its leaders. The years from the Diet of Worms to the end of the Peasants' War are of particular importance. These were the years when the radical movement especially affected Luther. This period largely shaped his attitude toward all of Evangelical Radicalism.¹ The purpose of this chapter is to sketch briefly the conditions under which the radical movement confronted Luther.

Carlstadt and Zwilling

Immediately after the Diet of Worms Luther spent approximately nine months in Wartburg Castle. During this time the actual leadership of the reform movement in Wittenberg fell to Luther's associates, especially to Philip Melancthon, Andreas Carlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling. Melancthon and Carlstadt were Luther's colleagues on the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg. Zwilling was an Augustinian friar. Melancthon introduced the first innovation on September 29 by celebrating the Sacrament and distributing in both kinds to a few

¹James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1929), IV, 57.

students.² The following week Gabriel Zwilling began to preach publicly against the mass.³ On November 1 Carlstadt celebrated, again distributing both kinds; and this time there were burghers present.⁴ Violence broke out as a result of this service, and for a month everything was in turmoil. However, Luther approved of the reforms that had been introduced up to this point.⁵ From December 5 to 9 he paid a secret visit to Wittenberg. Noting the unrest that was in the air he returned to the Wartburg to write "An Earnest Exhortation for all Christians, Warning Them Against Insurrection and Rebellion."⁶ Soon after Luther's visit Carlstadt announced publicly that he would celebrate in both kinds on January 1. When the Elector forbade this he calmly celebrated a week earlier, December 25. This was the signal for real violence. At Eilenberg Zwilling's followers plundered the parsonage and became involved in a brawl with adherents of the old faith.⁷ Now followed attacks not only on the mass, but on images, pictures, statues, and crucifixes.⁸ Carlstadt based his iconoclas-

²Heinrich Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Recent Research, translated from the German by Carl F. Luth, Jr. (New York: The Christian Herald, c.1916), p. 156.

³Ibid., p. 157.

⁴Ibid., p. 158.

⁵Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1950), p. 203.

⁶Boehmer, op. cit., p. 159.

⁷Ibid., p. 162.

⁸Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 207.

directly on the Old Testament.⁹ Music was not spared in this attack.¹⁰

In all of this Carlstadt not only acted in defiance of the Elector's will¹¹ but he adopted a Biblicism that involved new legalism worse than the old. Not only could a priest marry; he must! Not to partake of both kinds in the Sacrament became a sin; and the recipient had to take the elements in his hands, for Christ had said, "Take, eat." Art must be banished, as also confession and fasting.¹² All of this was to be accomplished by force if necessary.¹³

Luther, who had been informed by Melancthon of the course of events in Wittenberg, was greatly disturbed especially by the mob violence and legalism.¹⁴ He had enunciated his own reform principles as early as 1520. Force was never to be used in the interest of reform since the Gospel could clear a path for itself. Rebellion was never justified for this meant taking recourse to action which the government alone was authorized to take.¹⁵ Add to these principles the fact that Luther's approach to reform was essentially conservative¹⁶ and it is

⁹E. G. Schrieber, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1950), p. 536.

¹⁰Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 208.

¹¹Doehmer, op. cit., p. 164.

¹²Ibid., pp. 152 f.

¹³Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: The Beacon Press, c.1952), p. 65.

¹⁴Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation (New York: Henry Holt and Company, c.1920), p. 96.

¹⁵Doehmer, op. cit., pp. 148-151.

¹⁶Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, c.1950), pp. 41 ff.

not difficult to understand his concern over what was going on in Wittenberg. On March 6 he arrived in the city after absolving the Elector of all responsibility for his safety;¹⁷ and on March 9 he began to preach his well known "Eight Wittenberg Sermons" in which he advocated patience, charity, and consideration for the weak. "He was beginning to realize that perhaps after all he was closer to Rome than to his own sectaries."¹⁸ His plea was:

Give men time. I took three years of constant study, reflection, and discussion to arrive where I now am, and can the common man, untutored in such matters, be expected to move the same distance in three months? Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit wine and abolish women? The sun, the moon, and stars have been worshipped. Shall we then pluck them out of the sky? Such haste and violence betray a lack of confidence in God. See how much he has been able to accomplish through me, though I did no more than pray and preach. The Word did it all. Had I wished I might have started a conflagration at Worms. But while I sat still and drank beer with Philip and Amsdorf, God dealt the papacy a mighty blow.¹⁹

The effect of these sermons was tremendous. The town was won over; the disturbances were quieted. Even Zwilling confessed that "he had erred and gone too far."²⁰ Only Carlstadt remained sullen and aloof.²¹

Luther retained what was good in the reforms, but, as his Formula Missae of 1523 indicates, he was far from the radical spirit of his

¹⁷Karl Brandt, "Die Deutsche Reformation," Deutsche Geschichte, edited by Erich Marcks (Leipzig: Verlag Quelle and Meyer, 1928), II, 161.

¹⁸Sainton, Here I Stand, p. 214.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Boehmer, op. cit., p. 171.

²¹Ibid.

colleagues. Carlstadt continued his radical activities, transferring the scene of his labors to Orlamünde in 1523. His conflict with Luther continued, and in a short time he lost his pastorate. From 1524 until his death in 1541 he held a professorship at the University of Basel.²²

The Zwickau Prophets

Concurrently with the disturbances caused by Carlstadt and Zwilling the Zwickau Prophets arrived in Wittenberg adding a new element to the iconoclasm and legalism already at work: the concept of immediate revelation. The town of Zwickau, whose people were mostly weavers, had long been a hotbed of Waldensian heresy.²³ Thomas Muenzer's preaching there in 1520 led Nicholas Storch to organize a religious society dedicated to the renovation of church and state--by force, if necessary.²⁴ They were joined in this program by two students from Wittenberg, Markus Stuebner and Kellner.²⁵ The government persecuted the group and they were banished from Zwickau.²⁶ Storch, Stuebner, and Kellner eventually found their way to Wittenberg, arriving on December 27, 1521, while Luther was still at the Wartburg.²⁷ At least Stuebner

²² Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, c.1931), II, 159.

²³Smith, op. cit., p. 81.

²⁴Brandi, op. cit., p. 161, and Smith, op. cit., pp. 81 f.

²⁵Hackinon, op. cit., IV, 99.

²⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 81.

²⁷Doehmer, op. cit., p. 163.

was personally acquainted with Melancthon, so they gained a hearing. They claimed to have had familiar conversations with God,²⁸ and conducted a revival of sorts marked by considerable, though harmless, excesses.²⁹ Carlstadt accepted them at once and made common cause with them.³⁰ Melancthon, too, was impressed, or at least uncertain, and communicated with Luther about them. Luther's rejection was prompt, based on religious grounds. In his reply he wrote:

Those who are expert in spiritual things have gone through the valley of the shadow. 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 a 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.³¹

When Luther returned from the Wartburg the prophets were not in Wittenberg, but they returned to face him. During their interview with Luther Kellner launched into a tirade, while Stuebner claimed to be able to read Luther's mind. Luther demanded that they substantiate their claims to immediate revelation with miracles. Stuebner promised that miracles would be forthcoming. "My God," said Luther, "will forbid your God to work miracles." "God Himself," retorted Stuebner, "will not deprive me of my doctrine."³² The prophets, though driven from Wittenberg, continued their agitation elsewhere. Luther tolerated their activities as long as

²⁸Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 208.

²⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 82.

³⁰Newman, op. cit., p. 158.

³¹Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 208.

³²Mackinnon, op. cit., IV, 99.

their propaganda was peaceful; but when they began to advocate violence he requested the Elector to act vigorously against them.³³

Thomas Muenzer

Thomas Muenzer incorporated into his movement all the elements with which Luther had come to associate radicalism: revolution, violence, iconoclasm, legalism and immediate revelation. He was born about 1490 and educated at Leipzig and Frankfurt. He became Luther's friend and regarded him as "the example and light of the friends of God."³⁴ In 1520 with Luther's approval he went to Zwickau as pastor. Here he began working with the weavers and became the center of an attempt at radical reform, the leaders of which appeared in Wittenberg near the end of 1521.³⁵ He was extremely dissatisfied with what he considered Luther's half-way measures. He determined to form a pure church.³⁶ He attributed Luther's attitude to cowardice and called him "Dr. Easychair."³⁷ Forced to leave Zwickau, he fled to Prague where he preached "Kloster- und Bilder-stuerm."³⁸ In 1523 he became a pastor at Alstedt in Thuringia. Here he married a nun, prepared a German church

³³Smith, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁴Newman, op. cit., p. 157.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schmeisser," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 426.

³⁸Brandt, op. cit., p. 161.

service,³⁹ and intensified his denunciation of both church and state. He proclaimed a Gospel of violence by which alone the apocalyptic Kingdom of God could be established on earth.⁴⁰ By 1524 he was banished from Alstedt.⁴¹ All this time Luther refused to counsel the adoption of stern measures against him. Writing to Frederick in 1524 Luther advised the Elector to let the spirits fight it out. "They are not Christians who besides the Word resort to fists, be they filled to overflowing with 10 Holy Ghosts."⁴² But by 1525 Muenzer had joined the peasants' revolt. Here was a glaring example of religious radicalism issuing in social revolution, and Luther opposed it vehemently.⁴³ In May of 1525 Muenzer and his peasants fought a decisive battle at Muelhausen. Muenzer's inept leadership lost the battle. He was captured and executed on the battlefield.⁴⁴

Caspar Schwenckfeld

Luther's attitude toward religious radicalism was especially conditioned by his experiences with Carlstadt, the Zwickau Prophets, and Muenzer. However, he came into contact with a number of other men who

³⁹Newman, op. cit., p. 158.

⁴⁰Mackinnon, op. cit., III, 186.

⁴¹Newman, op. cit., p. 158.

⁴²Roland H. Bainton, "The Development and Consistency of Luther's Attitude to Religious Liberty," Harvard Theological Review, XXII (April, 1929), 115.

⁴³Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁴Newman, op. cit., p. 80.

were leaders of Evangelical Radicalism. Among these was Caspar Schwenckfeld. It was in conversation with him that Luther was reported to have expressed a desire to form a small congregation of earnest Christians who would gather apart from the great mass of people in the Volkskirche.⁴⁵ Schwenckfeld was born in 1490, educated at several universities including Cologne, and became an ardent student of evangelical mysticism. He was among Luther's early supporters, but broke with him in 1525, convinced that Luther had gone astray on baptism, the Lord's Supper, justification, and other points.⁴⁶ Schwenckfeld taught that only the enlightened can properly understand Scripture which contains, but is not identical with, the Word of God. He believed that faith involved the personal appropriation of Christ and the complete transformation of character. Baptism was a symbol that this transformation had taken place.⁴⁷ In 1529 he was driven from Silesia and settled in Strassburg. He was in close association with the Anabaptists, but never joined any evangelical party.⁴⁸

Huebmaier and the Anabaptists

Luther's opposition to the Anabaptists seems to stem from his experiences with Carlstadt and Kuenzer.⁴⁹ And there was some degree

⁴⁵John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, c.1942), pp. 27 f.

⁴⁶Newman, op. cit., pp. 181 f.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 183 f.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁹Mackinnon, op. cit., IV, 57.

of validity for believing that a man like Muenzer was normative for the radical movement. Within a few years after the Peasants' War the sober leaders of the Anabaptists had been either killed or imprisoned and leadership fell into the hands of extremists.⁵⁰ These new leaders stressed the continuity between the Old Testament and the New, and they revived the eccentricities of the prophets as well as the immoralities of the patriarchs.⁵¹ There were excesses of behavior which bordered on the lunatic.⁵² The ultimate manifestation of this was the Muenster kingdom founded by Jan Matthys and brought to its lowest level of debauchery of Jan of Leyden. The Muenster kingdom was exterminated by the joint efforts of Lutherans and Roman Catholics in 1535.⁵³

Muenster, however, was not normative for the Anabaptists as a whole. Most of them were what Newman called "soundly Biblical Anabaptists," whose leaders were Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, Wilhelm Reublin and Georg Blaurock.⁵⁴ The outstanding figure of this movement was Balthasar Hubmaier, and it was with him that Luther had most to do. These Anabaptists adhered strictly to Scripture, attempted to re-establish primitive New Testament Christianity, and made the Sermon on the Mount the norm for all human relationships. They believed in

⁵⁰Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 105 f.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 106.

⁵²Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1950), pp. 135 ff.

⁵³Newman, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

⁵⁴Newman, op. cit., pp. 166-174.

voluntary church membership, separatism, and adult baptism.⁵⁵ On this last point Luther felt obliged to write a tract against Hübmaier⁵⁶ which he published a few months before Hübmaier's death in 1528.⁵⁷

The historical background has demonstrated the fact that there was a consistent conflict between Luther and Evangelical Radicalism. In order to determine the precise nature of this conflict it will be necessary to examine the theological aspects in the two following chapters.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Martin Luther, "Von der Wiedertaufe, an zwei Pfarrherrn, 1528," Dr. Martin Luther's Saemtliche Werke (Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1830), XVI, 108 ff.

⁵⁷Philip Schaff, "The German Reformation," A History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1910), VII, 610 f.

CHAPTER III

THE THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

Luther's conflict with the radicals has been variously interpreted as a battle between kindred spirits due to misunderstanding¹ or to political and economic considerations² or to sheer struggle for mastery.³ All of these interpretations have ignored the fact that Luther's conflict with the radicals was in the main a theological conflict. In spite of the fact that other factors played a part in the Reformation, it was for Luther at least a religious movement. For this reason the conflict with the radicals must be viewed from a religious perspective. What Luther opposed was a religious tendency,⁴ a tendency which he discovered in the Pope⁵ and Zwingli⁶ as well as in Carlostadt, Muenser, and the Anabaptists. It was this opposition to a tendency that enabled

¹Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1950), pp. 130 f.

²Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, c.1931), II, 42.

³Maximin Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, translated from the French by the Rev. J. B. Howard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 20 f.

⁴Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, translated from the Danish by John M. Jonsen (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1953), p. 248.

⁵Martin Luther, "Smalcald Articles," Triglott Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 495.

⁶Martin Luther, "Dasz diese Worte Christi 'das ist mein Leib' noch fest stehon, wider die Schwaermgeister, 1527," Dr. Martin Luther's saemtliche Werke (Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1841), XXX, 14.

Karl Holl to apply Luther's critique of enthusiasm to George Fox although the two lived centuries apart.⁷

The whole conflict can be viewed in terms of Law and Gospel. Such a relatively unimportant area as ceremonies demonstrated this to Luther.⁸ He stated that a view of Law and Gospel was the central point at issue in his "Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus"⁹ and "Wider die himmlischen Propheten von den Bildern und Sacrament."¹⁰ The conflict involved a consideration of four principal areas: the use of the Bible, the ordo salutis and the "means of grace," the nature of the Church, and Christian piety. The first two areas will be discussed in this chapter, the last two in the next chapter.

The Use of the Bible

A comparison of Luther's use of the Bible with that of the radicals becomes involved in a complex situation. The radicals sought a revelation of God outside of the Bible and yet attempted to order their lives in strictest conformity with the Bible. In one case they refused to use it at all, and in another case they made it absolute authority. With Luther the situation is different. He was obedient to Scripture

⁷Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 439.

⁸H. H. Kraus, The Theology of Martin Luther (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1947), p. 123.

⁹Prenter, op. cit., pp. 249 ff.

¹⁰Martin Luther, "Wider die himmlischen Propheten von den Bildern und Sacrament, 1524-1525," Dr. Martin Luther's sämmtliche Werke. (Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Heyder, 1841), LXXIX, 136 ff.

as the sole authority; and yet he exercised a certain freedom in dealing with it. In order to relate this complex situation to the concept of Law and Gospel Paul Althaus has indicated the relationship between obedience and Law and between freedom and Gospel.¹¹

One of the chief characteristics of the radicals was that almost without exception they rejected Scripture as having anything to do with revelation. In its place they substituted immediate religious experience. The Zwickau prophets claimed to have held "familiar conversations with God" and hence to have no need for the Bible.¹² Carlstadt "lost himself in the clouds of mysticism and spiritualism"¹³ and appealed to immediate inspirations.¹⁴ Thomas Muenzer asserted that the source of authority is the inner Word.¹⁵ As the Holy Spirit came immediately to the prophets of old, so He could come to anyone with visions and revelations.¹⁶ At best, Scripture needed divinely inspired

¹¹Paul Althaus, "Gehorsam und Freiheit in Luthers Stellung zur Bibel," Theologische Aufsätze (Guetersloh: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsman, 1929), pp. 140-152.

¹²Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1950), p. 208.

¹³Philip Schaff, "The German Reformation," History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1910), VII, 380.

¹⁴Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), II, 280.

¹⁵Roland H. Bainton, David Joris, Wiedertauefer und Kaempfer fuer Toleranz im 16 Jahrhundert (Leipzig: M. Weinsius Nachfolger, 1937), pp. 6 ff.

¹⁶Holl, op. cit., pp. 431 f.

interpreters.¹⁷ For the most part it was actually a hindrance to true faith.¹⁸ Among Anabaptists this view found expression in men like Sebastian Frank¹⁹ and Hans Denck.²⁰ The doctrine of immediate revelation was articulated again by the English radicals²¹ and especially by George Fox with his doctrine of the "inner light."²²

Immediate revelation was often the source of fantastic excesses.²³ The ultimate depth of excess was reached by the Muenster radicals in their theocratic kingdom of 1534-35.²⁴ To be sure, the excesses were not normative. But the cause of the excesses, the belief in immediate revelation, was normative. The radicals declared themselves to be completely independent of the Bible for their revelation.

However, in matters of behavior, Radicalism bound itself to a slavish and legalistic observance of the letter of Scripture.

¹⁷Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 260.

¹⁸Holl, op. cit., p. 428.

¹⁹Heinrich Bornkamm, "Aeuszerer und innerer Mensch bei Luther und den Spiritualisten," Imago Dei, edited by Heinrich Bornkamm (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Toepelmann, 1932), pp. 105 f.

²⁰James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1929), IV, 44 f.

²¹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, c.1929), pp. 48 ff.

²²Holl, op. cit., p. 439.

²³E.g. "Inspiration" led radicals to howl like dogs, bellow like cattle and bray like asses during "worship." At St. Gall a man "under the influence of the Spirit" cut off his brother's head. In Amsterdam a group of Anabaptists stripped and ran through the streets crying, "See, the wrath of God," declaring themselves to be "the naked truth."

²⁴Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: The Beacon Press, c.1952), pp. 105 f.

Carlstadt instituted a program of reform which anticipated the legalism of English Puritanism. According to his reform everything not explicitly commanded in Scripture must be rejected.²⁵ Muenzer asserted that in proclaiming revolution he was following the Biblical example of David, Joshua, and others.²⁶ The Anabaptists went Carlstadt one better. Not only did they reject every ceremony and custom not commanded by Scripture; but they attempted to imitate customs and eccentricities described by Scripture.²⁷ In their subjection to the letter of the Bible they placed the Old Testament on the same level as the New.²⁸ The extent to which their veneration of the Bible could be carried was demonstrated by Swiss Anabaptist Wilhelm Keublin who carried the Bible in public procession crying, "Behold, this is your Venerable, this is the true sanctuary; all the rest is but dust and ashes."²⁹

This contradictory use of the Bible--rejection and subjection--received censure from Luther not much because of the excesses it

²⁵Heinrich Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Recent Research, translated from the German by Carl F. Huth, Jr. (New York: The Christian Herald, c.1916), pp. 152 f.

²⁶Sainton, David Joris, p. 8. It was this legalistic misuse of the Bible that called down Luther's wrath in his "Sermon vom Unterscheid zwischen dem Gesetz und Evangelio, 1532," Dr. Martin Luther's saemmtliche Werke (Erlangen: Verlag von Carl Keyder, 1929), XIX, 237.

²⁷Sainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 106, describes a man who put a hot coal to his lips in imitation of Isaiah.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Henry Elias Dosker, The Dutch Anabaptists (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, c.1921), p. 31.

produced, but because it involved a misuse and misunderstanding of Law and Gospel.³⁰ The substitution of immediate revelation for the Scriptures destroyed the Gospel altogether. The radicals in their rejection of Scripture failed to perceive the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ.³¹ And when they came to use Scripture apart from Christ they turned it into a new book of Canon law.³² They missed the point of Scripture. Their distorted use of Scripture involved them in a distortion of Law and Gospel.

Luther's own view of the Bible had two aspects.³³ For him the Bible was absolute authority, the inspired Word of God. Yet he was able to exercise a certain freedom over against the Bible. He had, in a sense, reversed the position of the radicals and rescued Law and Gospel from distortion.

Luther's teachers at Erfurt were exponents of the via moderna. By virtue of his education he stood in the Occamist tradition, a

³⁰Edger M. Carlson, The Reinterpretation of Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), p. 100.

³¹Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 124.

³²Carlson, op. cit., p. 100.

³³This point is frequently overlooked by Luther interpreters. Michael Neu, Luther and the Scriptures (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, c.1944) has pointed out, quite correctly, that the Bible, as Bible, was absolute authority for Luther. However, in his zeal to support this aspect of Luther's view he explains away many statements of Luther which seem to indicate another aspect, though he does mention Luther's Christological approach. Joseph Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), pp. 13-33, on the other hand, has operated exclusively with Luther's Christological principle: that which treats of Christ is Word of God. But Sittler attempts to make this Luther's total view and ignores the aspect which Neu presents.

tradition in which the Bible was absolute authority. He was opposed to any thought of revelation apart from the Scriptures.³⁴ He believed the Bible to be divinely inspired and therefore the divine source of truth.³⁵ Only the Bible establishes articles of faith, for

wo die heilige Schrift etwas gruendet zu glaeben, da soll man nicht weichen von den Worten, wie sie lauten, noch von der Ordnung, wie sie da stehet, es zwinge denn ein ausgedruckter Artikel des Glaubens die Wort anders zu deuten, oder zu ordenen. Was wollt sonst die Bibel werden?³⁶

Luther calls the Bible the Word of God and that because the Holy Spirit is the author. The Word of God is what is written whether it has anything to do with Christ or not. Acceptance of the Bible is a priori not because of the material (Christ) but because of the formal fact that it is Bible. There is no testimony of the Spirit involved; only submission to the written words as such.³⁷ Thus Luther can say of 1 Peter 4:7 that if it were not for the fact that an apostle had written it, we would say the man was lying.³⁸ This heteronomous aspect of Luther's thought is parallel to his understanding of Law. It is protection against every subjective approach to revelation. Every subjective approach, even that which uses Scripture, stands in danger of finding not God's Word but its own wishes and ideals. For this

³⁴Luther, "Smalcald Articles," p. 495.

³⁵Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, c.1950), p. 29.

³⁶Luther, "Wider die himalischen Propheten," p. 221.

³⁷Althaus, op. cit., pp. 140-142.

³⁸Ibid., p. 143.

reason a man must bow before Scripture even though he does not yet understand in what sense it is God's Word.³⁹

Luther also made statements which seem to indicate a view of the Bible contradictory to the foregoing. At the outset of the controversy with the radicals, for example, he warns against substituting for the tyranny of the Pope a literalism and legalism which lays stress on the letter rather than on the spirit of the Word.⁴⁰ He was conscious of the fact the Bible was historically conditioned. He could state that the Gospel accounts have chronological discrepancies;⁴¹ that the writings of the prophets were probably collected and compiled by their disciples;⁴² that Moses must have used sources;⁴³ and even that the prophets erred in predicting the course of human events.⁴⁴ He exercised critical judgment regarding the value of various books of the Bible. James, Revelation, Hebrews, and Jude are distinguished from the "real certain chief books."⁴⁵ The Gospel of John, Paul's Epistles

³⁹Ibid., pp. 145 f.

⁴⁰Martin Luther, "Eight Wittenberg Sermons, 1522," Works of Martin Luther, translated from the German by A. Steidle (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1943), II, 398 f. and 412 ff.

⁴¹Ibid., op. cit., p. 82.

⁴²Ibid., p. 111.

⁴³Erich Seeberg, Luthers Theologie in Ihren Grundzuegen (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), p. 140.

⁴⁴Ibid., op. cit., p. 148.

⁴⁵Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Books of the Bible," Works of Martin Luther, translated from the German by C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1932), VI, 476.

and First Peter are the real heart of the Bible.⁴⁶ All of this is indicative and descriptive of Luther's "free" attitude toward Scripture.

Luther's "free" attitude was possible just because he submitted to the authority of the Bible.⁴⁷ In his whole-hearted submission he discovered that the Bible was the bearer of definite content.⁴⁸ It was not another law book. Its content was Christ, the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins, and all that is related to these.⁴⁹ This became decisive for all of Luther's theology. "Never imagine," says Einar Billing, "you have rightly grasped a Lutheran idea until you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the forgiveness of sins."⁵⁰ Because Christ is the message and Lord of the Scriptures problems of history and chronology make no difference. Christ is the principle by which books are judged.

Derinne stimmen alle rechtschaffene heilige Buecher ubereins, dass sie allesamt Christum predigen und treiben. Auch ist das der rechte Pruefestein alle Buecher zu tadeln, wenn man siehet, ob sie Christum treiben oder nicht, sintemal alle Schrift Christum zeigt, Rom. 3 (v. 21.), und S. Paulus nichts denn Christum wissen will, I Korinth. 2. (v. 2.). Was Christum nicht lehret, das ist noch nicht apostolisch, wemns gelich S. Petrus oder Paulus lehrete. Wiederumb, was Christum prediget, das waere apostolisch, wemns gelich Judas, Hannas, Pilatus und Herodes thaet.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 300.

⁴⁷ Althaus, op. cit., pp. 146-149.

⁴⁸ Holl, op. cit., p. 448.

⁴⁹ Philip Watson, Let God be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), pp. 149-152.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵¹ Martin Luther, "Vorrede auf die Episteln S. Jakobi und Judae," Dr. Martin Luther's saemtliche Werke (Erlangen: Verlag von Heyder & Zimmer, 1854), LXIII, 156-157.

With this principle Luther had a freedom and a certainty which the radicals could not have. It was freedom and certainty in the Gospel. He, too, believed that there was an inner witness of the Spirit; but the Spirit witnesses to the Gospel by working faith in the heart.⁵² The witness of the Spirit must come through the Bible in order that the witness be not from our own spirit. There is no way around the Scriptures; but in submission to the Scriptures one finds Christ. There the Spirit is working and active to give us faith.⁵³

Luther's reversal of the radical view of the Bible set the Law and Gospel in a new perspective in relation to the Bible. The freedom of the radicals really was no freedom. It merely produced a worse legalism. Luther's submission to Scripture was the way to real freedom, to freedom in the Gospel. It is important to remember that this freedom was not final or arbitrary. Luther's view was dialectic, a constant moving back and forth from submission to freedom and back to submission again. Always he re-submitted his judgments to Scripture. The Word is of such a nature that we can never fathom it. Next to the light is a depth which no concept can penetrate. On earth the Christian is always "on the way," always involved in both Gehorsam und Freiheit.⁵⁴

⁵²Holl, op. cit., p. 450.

⁵³Althaus, op. cit., pp. 149 f.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 146-150.

The Ordo Salutis and the "Means of Grace"

The theological conflict involving the use of the Bible had its roots in a conflict which was even more basic. The use of Law and Gospel takes on crucial importance when we ask how God enters into relationship with men. Both Luther and the radicals were concerned about this question, and their answers involve the most vital area of Christian thought.

Evangelical Radicalism operated on the basis of a fundamental dualism in the relation between flesh and spirit. Carlstadt believed that the flesh could not convey the spirit, that the physical was an impediment rather than an aid to the spiritual.⁵⁵ Muenzer held a similar view, considering the Bible a hindrance to the spirit.⁵⁶ Luther's emphasis on external means aroused his bitter opposition.⁵⁷ According to the radicals, it was of the essence of the Spirit to belong to the invisible world. He was placed in sharp contrast to all things visible. Taking John 6:63 (the flesh is of no avail) as their cue they expressed distrust for everything outward and bodily.⁵⁸ This dualism led the radicals to look for internal experience apart from external means, the "inward" apart from the "outward." Muenzer asserted that the experience of God comes from the depths of our own

⁵⁵Dainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 65.

⁵⁶Holl, op. cit., p. 428.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 436.

⁵⁸Prenter, op. cit., p. 114.

heart.⁵⁹ That most of the radicals followed this view has been previously demonstrated.

Basically the radical doctrine of the ordo salutis was completely anthropocentric. The radicals believed that the relationship between man and God was established by man. He had to prepare himself through mortification of the flesh for the experience of the Spirit.⁶⁰ This belief made the Spirit not the source of mortification, but its effect. The Spirit became the crown of piety and the reward of the perfect.⁶¹ In effect it means a return to the religion of law, to the "heavenly ladders" of the Middle Ages.⁶² The Gospel lost all redemptive significance. The life of Christ became an allegory, an example of what must happen to each person if he is to achieve the "inner experience."⁶³ The sacraments were, for the radicals, not means by which God deals with men but signs that men had arrived at a certain moral goal. For this reason the radicals in general rejected infant Baptism. Only adults could be baptized because only adults could have mortified the flesh and received the "spirit."⁶⁴ Not only the way to God was conceived in anthropocentric terms, but the goal of salvation was similarly anthropocentric. God became a means to the goal of man's own salvation--

⁵⁹Holl, op. cit., p. 430.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 435.

⁶¹Prenter, op. cit., pp. 252 ff.

⁶²Watson, op. cit., p. 94.

⁶³Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 124.

⁶⁴Hackinmon, op. cit., IV, 61 f.

a goal no less egocentric than if man sought God for material gain.⁶⁵ When man operates in terms of Law, each individual is "on his own step on the ladder toward God." Christianity becomes something "for me only."⁶⁶ In the total radical view fellowship with God was dependent on man's achievement and was sought for man's own ends. God was the goal of man's striving and the answer to man's need.

Against this view Luther directed his criticism based on a concept of the ordo salutis and the relation between flesh and Spirit which he had developed long before the conflict with Evangelical Radicalism.⁶⁷ Luther's basic criticism concerned the nature of the inner experience. According to Kuenzer this inner experience was Gospel, a token that God really existed and that He was relating Himself to man.⁶⁸ Luther, too, knew an inner experience, but it was not Gospel. It did not reveal a "divine remnant," and "inner light." It revealed only the corruption of an evil will.⁶⁹ There is an inner experience of God, but it is God unveiled. The Spirit is present as autor legis, as God apart from Christ, as Deus nudus.⁷⁰ This is a terrible experience. Those who speak of transportation to the third heaven, who "talked to the high majesty of

⁶⁵Watson, op. cit., p. 35.

⁶⁶Prenter, op. cit., p. 261.

⁶⁷Prenter, op. cit., pp. 101 ff. and 205-224.

⁶⁸Bainton, David Joris, pp. 6-8. Holl, op. cit., p. 447.

⁶⁹Adolph Koeberle, The Quest for Holiness, translated from the German by John C. Mattes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 37.

⁷⁰Prenter, op. cit., pp. 216 and 260.

God like a shoemaker's apprentice," have not really experienced God. Apart from Christ He is a consuming fire.⁷¹ God in His nude majesty as autor legis brings man to the abyss of despair, to death and destruction.⁷² This is not simply part of a psychological development which leads to something better, not a negative role in a synthesis. Inner experience brings the sinner face to face with the nuda majestas, and that means nothing less than hell and death. "The path which leads from here is called resurrection."⁷³

Because of his own terrible inner experience Luther affirms that when God reveals Himself He not only does use means, but He must. In opposition to the radicals' claim that they had had an experience of God as Gospel apart from outward means Luther asserted that God confronts us as Gospel only through preceding outward means. God "has determined to give the inward part to no man except through the outward part."⁷⁴ "God does not deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and Sacraments."⁷⁵ "God has from the beginning of the world dealt with all the saints through His Word, and has given along with the same, external signs of grace."⁷⁶ With statements like these Luther rejected the dualism which separated "flesh" and "spirit." The Incarnation

⁷¹Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 208.

⁷²Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 230.

⁷³Prenter, op. cit., p. 219.

⁷⁴Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 280.

⁷⁵Luther, "Smalcald Articles," p. 497.

⁷⁶Watson, op. cit., p. 161.

abolished forever such a separation.⁷⁷ Luther re-affirmed the finitum canax infiniti principle, for God does make use of elements of this world and its history in order to reach men.⁷⁸ The Reformation was a vehement denial of every attempt at spiritualization of the Christian faith and Gospel. God always comes to man through means.⁷⁹

Not only does God use means, but He must. The deus nudus brings terror and death.

Only hidden behind the veil of the sign of revelation is it possible for God--without ceasing in the fullest sense to be God--to be personally and truly present with us. The sign of revelation is therefore not something in addition to the Gospel but it is the Gospel itself in the actualized form.⁸⁰

The attempt to separate God from means, deus nudus from deus incarnatus, is an attempt of the devil seeking to render God's salvation ineffective for us.⁸¹ Christ's humanity is the one way by which God is able to come with life and comfort. And the means of Grace--baptism, the Lord's Supper, the verbum vocale of preaching--belong to that humanity. They are all the one place where God is redemptively present for us.⁸² In Luther's own words: "Christ is of no benefit to thee and thou canst

⁷⁷Prenter, op. cit., p. 273.

⁷⁸Kraam, op. cit., p. 52.

⁷⁹Anders Nygren, editor, This is the Church, translated from the Swedish by Carl C. Nassussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1952), p. 244.

⁸⁰Prenter, op. cit., p. 264.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 220.

⁸²Ibid., p. 288.

not know anything about him, unless God put him into words that thou mayest hear and thus learn to know him."⁸³

Luther reversed the ordo salutis of the radicals by asserting that God deals with us inwardly only through preceding outward means.

Because of this he was also able to reverse their anthropocentric way of salvation. The external means of revelation are always means of God's own choosing. God is not God where our flighty thoughts or works might decide to place Him. He is to be found in the concrete outward signs which He Himself has chosen, as Luther says:

[God] is everywhere, but He does not desire that you should seek Him everywhere but only where the Word is. There if you seek Him you will truly find, namely in the Word.⁸⁴

This reverses the anthropocentric view of the radicals because it blocks all our own ways to God and leaves open only His way to us.⁸⁵

Basic to Luther's whole theology is the concept that the way to fellowship with God is not our way to God but God's way to us.⁸⁶ God

will not have thee thus ascend, but He comes to thee and has made a ladder, a way and a bridge to thee. . . . He comes to us and we do not first mount up to heaven to Him, but He sends His Son down into the flesh. . . . He speaks: This way, brother, "The Father is in Me, and I in the Father;" keep thine eyes fixed on Me, through My humanity is the way to the Father.⁸⁷

Prenter describes Luther's ordo salutis as found in the "Deuterotion Mesi cum annotationibus" of 1525. The Spirit confronts us as

⁸³Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 279.

⁸⁴Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 224.

⁸⁵Prenter, op. cit., p. 260.

⁸⁶Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 230.

⁸⁷Watson, op. cit., p. 94.

autor legis in order to convict us of sin and destroy our self-trust. Then He brings us to life by the Word of the Gospel. When the Word is heard, the Spirit comes as a gift working justifying faith. The struggle against world and flesh is carried on by the Spirit within us. He likewise causes the good works of love to the neighbor. The whole process is theocentric, one single, concrete act of God.⁸⁸ Zwingli's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is dangerous just because it is an attack on the theocentric nature of salvation. Zwingli questions whether God really was present in Christ and thus attempts to block God's way to us. Zwingli, too, is a radical.⁸⁹ Christ is the only ladder to heaven which God has given us, the only sign by which He draws us to Himself.⁹⁰ God's forgiveness is sheer unmerited love. It is God acting in Christ to establish fellowship with us.⁹¹ In his whole ordo salutis Luther is concerned to "let God be God," to let Him do His work, to let Him give us an alien righteousness in Christ.⁹²

Luther places the sacraments into his theocentric perspective. They are not signs that we have arrived at a certain point of moral or religious development. They are actions of God. He is the acting subject in Baptism⁹³ and is always "honestly serious in what he does

⁸⁸Prenter, op. cit., pp. 249 ff.

⁸⁹Luther, "Das diese Worte Christi. . . ," pp. 17 ff.

⁹⁰Prenter, op. cit., p. 109.

⁹¹Watson, op. cit., p. 26.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 61 f.

⁹³Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (Muenchen: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, c.1931), I, 260.

through Baptism."⁹⁴ The means of grace are not something standing between God and men, obstacles which man must brush aside in his reach toward God. They are God's own offer to man, God Himself laying hold of man.⁹⁵ God personally acts and confronts us in the means which He has chosen.⁹⁶ In this way the Sacraments are God's own guards against any attempts on our part to "climb up into heaven."⁹⁷

However, in all his polemic against the radicals Luther never lost sight of the fact that the Spirit--though He uses means--is Lord of the means. The Spirit does not want us to seek God outside the means; but we are not able to manipulate the means in such a way that we can again use them as anthropocentric instruments for our own goals. The ex opere operato use of the means of grace makes the Pope a schwaermer.⁹⁸ The ordo salutis of the radicals is that of a pious legalism. The ordo salutis of the Pope is that God works ex opere operato in the means of grace. One is subjective, the other objective. But Luther sees the same anthropocentric emphasis in both. Against the radicals he asserts that God does not work without means. Against the Pope he maintains the principle Ubi et quando visum est Deo.⁹⁹

We are always referred to the definite Word. But we are not referred to it as our guaranteed possession, but as the place where

⁹⁴Koeberle, op. cit., p. 71.

⁹⁵Carlson, op. cit., p. 119.

⁹⁶Prenter, op. cit., p. 164.

⁹⁷Watson, op. cit., p. 161.

⁹⁸Luther, "Wider die himalischen Propheten," p. 138.

⁹⁹Prenter, op. cit., pp. 292-298.

we expect the Spirit to make Jesus Christ present for us. Where Christ is merely present as the ideological content of the Word . . . there the Word is dead. Where he is present as a living person . . . there the Word is alive. And whether Christ is in the Word in the one way or the other, depends solely on the Spirit. . . . But this free intervention of the Spirit is . . . an event promised by the Word itself. For the Word and the Spirit are separated . . . as promise and fulfillment, as prayer and the answer to prayer . . . 100

100 Ibid., pp. 106 f.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT (Continued)

The Nature of the Church

The view of the church held by most radicals was consistent with their general anthropocentric, legal way of salvation. The essence of Christianity, they said, was the transformation of life through discipleship.¹ This was the way of the law described in the last chapter, involving mortification of the flesh and imitation of Christ. It was inevitable that this should lead to a highly individualistic conception of salvation. For "when we are under the law each one finds himself on his own step on the ladder toward God." The emphasis is on personal piety, each person seeking a corner where he is able to work out his own salvation.² Man and his pious aspirations are the central point.³

The individualistic conception of salvation made the church a voluntary gathering of individuals.⁴ Membership in the church came about in the same way as the gift of the spirit. First man is regenerated; then he voluntarily joins the church.⁵ Membership comes after

¹Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," Church History, XIII (March, 1944), 22 f.

²Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, translated from the Danish by John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1953), p. 261.

³Ibid., p. 298.

⁴Bender, op. cit., p. 17.

⁵Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Protestant Thought before Kant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 101.

the experience of the Spirit.⁶ Baptism is the symbol that man has already arrived at newness of life and now wishes voluntarily to associate himself with others who have likewise arrived.⁷ The Church is a creation of people.

The voluntary principle presupposed that those who had the experience of regeneration could recognize one another. That such recognition was possible became basic to the radical view of the church. The elect themselves constitute the visible element of the church. The saved are able to recognize each other by the tests of spiritual experience and moral achievement.⁸ Indeed, there is no such thing as an invisible church.⁹ Kuenzer was the first to enunciate this principle¹⁰ and to take the lead in matter-of-factly considering his group the elect people of God.¹¹ The three tests which Kuenzer imposed--inner experience, moral achievement, and adult baptism--became normative for Evangelical Radicalism.¹² The Church was a visible organization because

⁶Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1950), p. 262.

⁷Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, c.1931), II, 151 f.

⁸Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: The Beacon Press, c.1952), pp. 66 ff. Here I Stand, p. 267.

⁹M'Ciffert, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁰Roland H. Bainton, David Joris, Wiedertaeufer und Kaeempfer fuer Toleranz im 16 Jahrhundert (Leipzig: H. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1937), pp. 8 f.

¹¹James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1929), III, 182.

¹²Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 451 f.

the elect could be recognized and gathered into a community.

The holiness of the church was linked with moral achievement. When the radicals spoke of the church as a communion of saints they meant that people were saints by virtue of their own morality.¹³ The church was considered holy only in so far as the people in the church were holy.¹⁴ The moral view of holiness in part undergirded the separatistic tendencies of the radicals. They separated themselves both from the Volkskirche--whose members had a piety inferior to their own-- and from the world--which was completely unholy.¹⁵ Moral holiness was the basis for all church-discipline. The church was to be kept pure by purging from it all whose lives did not measure up to the pattern of Christ's conduct.¹⁶ A view of Law and Gospel is inherent in the whole radical idea of the church. The Gospel finds little place, except as a record of the example of Christ. The Law is the basis for the salvation of the individual, for the recognition of the elect, and for the holiness of the Church.

Luther's view of the church is in total opposition to the radical conception. He begins with a fundamental reversal of radical anthropocentricity regarding the origin of the church. The church, Luther

¹³Herbert Olsson, "The Church's Visibility and Invisibility According to Luther," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated from the Swedish by Carl C. Rasnussen (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1952), p. 239.

¹⁴Prenter, op. cit., p. 300.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 261 and 300.

¹⁶Bender, op. cit., pp. 17 ff.

¹⁷Sainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 99.

asserts, is the creation of God. The initiative does not lie with man but with God.¹⁸ It is God Who called the church into being through the Gospel¹⁹ and sustained it even during the Middle Ages.²⁰ In both Catechisms Luther affirmed that the Holy Ghost calls men into the fellowship of the Church.²¹

Luther's theocentric view of the origin of the church was the basis of his opposition to the individualism of the radicals. The God Who called the church into being so operates upon the members of the church that they are welded and united into one community.²² The Gospel creates an internal fellowship²³ so that Luther can speak of men being "incorporated" into the church.²⁴ He interpreted the church not as a voluntary collection of individuals whose only common factor was their religious experience, but as a "people" integrated into a fellowship of self-giving love.²⁵ Thus, while he carefully emphasized

¹⁸Edgar K. Carlson, The Reinterpretation of Luther (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1948), p. 130.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 131.

²⁰Anders Nygren, editor, This is the Church, translated from the Swedish by Carl G. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1952), p. 190.

²¹Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," Trilob Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 545. "The Large Catechism," p. 691.

²²Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), II, 291.

²³Carlson, op. cit., p. 131.

²⁴Luther, "The Large Catechism," p. 691.

²⁵Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, c.1950), p. 26.

the personal nature of faith and the fact that membership in the church involves personal commitment, Luther was ever mindful that in the Christian community

no one is ever left alone. So he assured his congregation also of the comfort which would come to each one of them in his hour of death, for then, so he said, all the angels and the saints, yea, the whole Church would be with him. In this same spirit he proclaimed the glorious teaching that each believer, having become a son of God by virtue of his faith must be a priest to his fellowmen, a mediator between God and man.²⁶

Although Luther speaks of the Church as people they are not for him the visible element of the Church. Luther speaks of the Church as both visible and hidden (abscondita). He also says that the Church is constituted by the Word and the Sacraments and that the Church is the communion of saints. One interpretation of these expressions links the Word and Sacraments with the larger, visible Church and views the invisible Church as the communion of saints hidden within this larger outward Church.²⁷ However another interpretation is possible in which the Church, constituted by Word and Sacraments, is hidden and revealed in terms of Law and Gospel; and the Church as the communion of saints is hidden and revealed in terms of faith and love.²⁸

Luther, in contrast to sectarian separatism, states that God does not hide Himself in a corner, but comes publicly in the signs of revelation, the Word and Sacraments.²⁹ The Church is not founded upon the

²⁶Ibid., p. 5.

²⁷Herman A. Preus, The Communion of Saints (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1949).

²⁸Oleson, op. cit., p. 231.

²⁹Prenter, op. cit., p. 261.

pious, but upon the Word of God;³⁰ or as Elert describes it, "Nicht die Gläubigen also bilden die 'Substanz' der Kirche sondern das Evangelium."³¹ Thus Luther asserts that God's people are to be identified by the oral preaching of the Word, by Baptism, by the Lord's Supper, by the use of Holy Absolution, by the consecration of the clergy, etc.³² According to Luther, God Himself is at work in the public signs. As long as man has to do with God here on earth he has to do with a God Who is both hidden and revealed, Who comes as Law and Gospel.³³ In this sense we can view the Church, constituted by the Word, as both hidden and revealed. When the Word is preached, it is preached as Law and Gospel. As Law it confronts men with God's real judgment and condemnation. "It is hidden from men that God really purposes to save men, that He has power to awaken and build the Church by the Word which is preached in the Church."³⁴ In this sense, writes Elert, the Church is "nicht im platonisch-idealistischen Sinne 'unsichtbar,' sondern im evangelisch-realistischen Sinne abscondita."³⁵ God is also present in the preaching of the Gospel which reveals His willing and acting to save men. Faith is that which clings to God's promise of grace in spite of the condemnation

³⁰Erich Seeberg, Luthers Theologie in Ihren Grundzügen (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), p. 175.

³¹Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, c.1931), I, 227.

³²Martin Luther, "On the Councils and Churches, 1539," Works of Martin Luther, translated from the German by C. H. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1931), V, 270 ff.

³³Olsson, op. cit., p. 229.

³⁴Ibid., p. 233.

³⁵Elert, op. cit., p. 229.

of the Law. Thus the Church is revealed, perceptible, to faith; for faith sees in the preaching of the Gospel God's will and power to awaken and sustain faith, to build the Church.³⁶ Hence the Church, constituted by the Word, is both hidden and revealed as Law and Gospel hide and reveal God's redemptive purpose. Faith, in spite of appearances, believes the Church.³⁷ The Word as Law also reveals the Church to the unbeliever when it judges him and when it drives him to perform certain external deeds.³⁸ There is one additional aspect to a consideration of the Church as hidden and revealed. When Luther speaks of the Church as people, as the communion of saints, these people too are both hidden and revealed. But in this instance they are hidden to faith. For it is the nature of faith to be suspicious, not to be deceived. A man's salvation is hidden even for faith. According to faith we can call no man saved except by immediate revelation from God. "This means that it is both impossible and wrong to pick out" those who have faith. God only knows them.³⁹ However, by the criterion of love all who are baptized are to be called saints. In love we relate ourselves to men as did Christ, who came to save not the righteous but sinners. Therefore in love we believe that through Christ God will save those in whom He has begun His work.⁴⁰ In this sense the saints are both hidden and revealed. But these are never people separated from Word and Sacraments.

³⁶Olsson, op. cit., pp. 236 f.

³⁷Alert, op. cit., p. 300.

³⁸Olsson, op. cit., pp. 236 f.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 237 f.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 240.

The Word truly constitutes the Church, and its proclamation alone makes the Church perceptible.

Luther's final critique of the radical conception of the Church concerns its holiness. The radicals gathered only those who could be shown to be saints. They did not perceive that the saints are hidden⁴¹ and that only in love can sinners be called "saints."⁴² To allow experience and piety to occupy a determinative position is to rob the Gospel of its rightful dominion in the Church.⁴³ The Church becomes holy, said Luther, "when the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ."⁴⁴ The holiness of the Church consists "in the Word of God and true faith,"⁴⁵ and does not at all depend on the holiness of the members of the Church.⁴⁶ The Church has an alien holiness coming to it through the Gospel, the holiness of Christ. Hence Luther emphasizes repeatedly that forgiveness of sins is the chief activity going on in the Church,⁴⁷ for this is God acting through the Word of the Gospel to make the Church holy.

Against this presentation of Luther's ecclesiology it has sometimes

⁴¹Ibid., p. 239.

⁴²Ibid., p. 240.

⁴³Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴⁴Luther, "On the Councils and Churches," p. 267.

⁴⁵Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 499.

⁴⁶Olsson, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁴⁷Luther, "The Small Catechism," p. 545. "The Large Catechism," pp. 691 and 695.

been urged that he, too, conceived of a small, gathered Church of true believers, an ecclesiola in ecclesia. It is true that in the preface to the Deutsche Messe Luther considered such a possibility.⁴⁸ But he was very reluctant to carry it into practice, even when he had a chance to do so in Hesse that same year (1526).⁴⁹ It was too sectarian for him, says Mackinnon,⁵⁰ and after 1527 the suggestion disappeared altogether.⁵¹ The radicals, with their idea of immediate revelation, claimed to be able to distinguish the saints from other men. But according to Luther "it is both impossible and wrong to attempt to pick out in the church a group of people who have faith, as against others who are thought not to have it."⁵² Luther's view of the Church is related throughout to a use of Law and Gospel which is both theocentric and evangelical.

Christian Piety

The piety of Evangelical Radicalism rested on a legal framework. The radicals were not so much opposed to the motivation for holy works within the Roman Church as to the fact that not enough holy works were being done. In the last analysis the radicals had nothing with which

⁴⁸Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service, 1526," Works of Martin Luther, translated from the German by A. Steimle (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1932), VI, 173.

⁴⁹H. H. Krahn, The Theology of Martin Luther (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1947), p. 135.

⁵⁰Mackinnon, op. cit., IV, 37.

⁵¹Carlson, op. cit., p. 135.

⁵²Olsson, op. cit., p. 238.

to oppose Rome other than more human works done on the same legal basis.⁵³ The radical view of piety was thoroughly legal.⁵⁴ Muenzer's criticism of Luther was that his reform was not producing enough results.⁵⁵ The English radicals placed almost their entire religious emphasis on obeying the demands of God, civil righteousness, and the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁶ The radical ordo salutis was built on the view that mortification of the flesh was a task which man had to perform in order to merit the presence of the Spirit. The radicals were in rather substantial agreement with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the freedom of the will and the necessity of earning salvation as a reward.⁵⁷ The piety of the radicals involved three chief characteristics: the imitation of Christ; the Sermon on the Mount as the norm for all human relationships; and piety as a process of gradual transformation and progress toward perfection.

Imitation of Christ was of the essence of radical religion and piety.⁵⁸ Their concern was with the earthly life of Christ, with the ideal of Christ.⁵⁹ He was the great prophet and teacher of a new righteousness, a myth (in the sense that His life was to be typical of

⁵³Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 225.

⁵⁴McGiffert, op. cit., p. 105.

⁵⁵Holl, op. cit., p. 426.

⁵⁶ibid., pp. 440 f.

⁵⁷Newman, op. cit., pp. 153 ff.

⁵⁸Bender, op. cit., p. 22.

⁵⁹Prenter, op. cit., pp. 117 ff.

universal human experience) and a symbol.⁶⁰ His life and death were supreme manifestations of divine love to which man has the capacity and necessity to conform. Christ's purpose was to show us how to suffer rather than to save us by suffering for us. Hans Denck stated, "Christ has fulfilled the law, not to free us from it, but to show us by His example how to obey it."⁶¹

In radical piety the Sermon on the Mount became the norm for every human relationship. It seemed to be most expressive of the character of Christ's piety.⁶² Hence its precepts were made incumbent upon all Christians.⁶³ Many radicals thought of them as laws to be enforced by the secular government.⁶⁴ Thus God's kingdom was to be established on earth.⁶⁵

In harmony with a view of revelation based on experience was the radical concept of piety based on experience. Piety was measured by the degree to which a man had mortified the flesh. Faith was regarded as a great transforming process to bring a person into conformity with Christ.⁶⁶ Indeed, the inner transformation of the individual was the

⁶⁰Erich Seeberg, op. cit., p. 87.

⁶¹Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 45.

⁶²Bender, op. cit., p. 21.

⁶³Newman, op. cit., pp. 153 ff.

⁶⁴Carlson, op. cit., p. 100.

⁶⁵Nygren, op. cit., p. 304.

⁶⁶Newman, op. cit., p. 154.

purpose of the imitation of Christ.⁶⁷ This led, in many instances, to some sort of perfectionism.⁶⁸

The radical view of piety involved a legal motivation, regarded the work of Christ as an example, set up the Sermon on the Mount as the basis for all human relationships, and made the inner experience of transformation the measure of piety. The framework was legal and anthropocentric throughout--and received criticism from Luther for that reason. As in the other areas of conflict the piety of the radicals was opposed to the whole structure of his theology.

Luther's opposition to the radicals centered in the basic relation of man to God. The relationship is absolute. There is no gradual process of improvement by which a man can merit the experience of the Spirit, by which he mortifies the flesh and becomes more "spiritual." The total man apart from faith in Christ is under the judgment and condemnation of God. The total man in Christ is regarded as righteous.⁶⁹ Righteousness is a view of God, not an experience of man. Only God sees the whole new man behind the whole old man.⁷⁰ The righteousness of a man before God is always an alien righteousness. Man may experience it, but it does not belong to him.⁷¹ Above all he dare not

⁶⁷Bender, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶⁸Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm* (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1950), p. 135. See also Heinrich Bornkamm, "Aeuszerer und innerer Mensch bei Luther und den Spiritualisten," *Imago Dei*, edited by Heinrich Bornkamm (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Topelmann, 1932), pp. 107 ff.

⁶⁹Bornkamm, *op. cit.* pp. 88 ff.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 94.

believe it because he experiences it, but rather because it comes from God.⁷²

The basis of the alien righteousness is the redemptive activity of Christ. Luther's determined attack on imitation piety arose because Christ must be more than myth and symbol. What He did was done in relation to God for our redemption.⁷³ In Him God was acting to save us. The imitation piety is really an attack on the Trinity, on the deity of Christ, for it limits the scope of His work.⁷⁴ The essence of faith is not, as Denck says, to become like Christ; it is rather man in flight away from all his own works to Christ, to the Spirit, to grace.⁷⁵

Alien righteousness, the presence of the Spirit, involves mortification and the expulsion of sin; but this is always the work of the Spirit, not the work of our increasing piety.⁷⁶ The presence of Christ necessarily means an attack on sin; but this attack on sin, the struggle against the old man, is carried on by the Spirit.⁷⁷ And the sin to be expelled is the total old man,⁷⁸ the ego which seeks to supplant God.⁷⁹

⁷²Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 225.

⁷³Erich Seeberg, op. cit., p. 87.

⁷⁴Prenter, op. cit., p. 179.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 117 f.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 249.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁹Carlson, op. cit., p. 75.

The expulsion of sin is not an "evolution of our indwelling religious and moral strength by which the meaner tendencies in us are being checked;" but a daily repetition in us of Christ's death and resurrection.⁸⁰ It is Christ being daily victorious in us.⁸¹

Redemption always means ethical action; but the point over which Luther is here concerned is not the nature of the action so much as the motivation. He regards the Sermon on the Mount as a disposition rather than a code.⁸² The radicals, by trying to make it the norm for all human relationships, have not only lost sight of reality but are guilty of turning the Gospel into Law.⁸³ The Spirit's work in man is not complete until it includes the performance of works of love.⁸⁴ But the motivation for works of love is the indwelling Christ, not the exemplary Christ.⁸⁵ It is the Spirit's work when we conform to Christ. Hence, the resignatio ad infernum of imitation piety is not a proof that man is now ready to receive the Spirit but an indication that the Spirit is already present and at work.⁸⁶

Luther could come to terms with reality precisely because he realized that piety centers in the Gospel rather than the Law and that

⁸⁰Prenter, op. cit., p. 225.

⁸¹Carlson, op. cit., p. 75.

⁸²Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 100.

⁸³Nygren, op. cit., p. 300.

⁸⁴Prenter, op. cit., p. 300.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 10.

man's relationship to God is determined by forgiveness rather than morality. He gave much ethical advice which seems shocking. He never claimed that God's law could be set aside; but as a realist he recognized the vast complications which are created by sin. Often the best one can do in any situation involves sin. In such situations Luther affirmed that sin could be cured not by following correctly a precept of the Law but by hearing the Gospel word of forgiveness.⁸⁷

Again Luther represented a thoroughly theocentric and evangelical viewpoint over against one that was legal and anthropocentric. His conflict with Evangelical Radicalism involved a fundamental difference in terms of Law and Gospel.

⁸⁷Kraus, op. cit., p. 63.

CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEM OF RELATIONSHIP

In a discussion of the relationship between Luther and Evangelical Radicalism a problem arises concerning the nature and origin of that relationship. It is asserted that the reformation sects arose as a logical and inevitable outgrowth of the work of Luther, that they simply carried out principles for which Luther had laid the foundation, that the sects are of the same essence as the Lutheran movement--perhaps just a bit intensified. Msgr. Ronald Knox claims that the pre-reformation sectarian movements were "freaks of religious history," that sectarianism did not really come into its own until the Reformation.¹ The reformers really did not know their own genius or they would have been more sympathetic to the radicals.² Luther and the radicals are so much of the same essence, according to Maximin Fiette, that their conflict really involved nothing more than rivalry for leadership of the movement.³

The radicals themselves claimed to be completing what Luther had begun.⁴ They felt that the reformers had surrendered their

¹Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1950), p. 4.

²Ibid., pp. 130 f.

³Maximin Fiette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, translated from the French by the Rev. J. B. Howard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 20 f.

⁴Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 423.

original purpose. The Anabaptists claimed to have retained this original vision, enlarged it, given it body and form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience.⁵ Both John Horsch⁶ and A. H. Newman are in agreement with these claims. Newman has written that

the Anti-pedobaptist movement was little more than a consistent carrying out of the principles that lay at the basis of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, both of which, repudiating tradition and all human authority, made the Bible the only rule of faith and practice and aimed at the restoration of evangelical Christianity in its primitive and unadulterated form.⁷

Even Mackinnon declared that the sectarians "developed in a more radical direction the evangelical teaching of Luther and Zwingli."⁸

However, Newman has suggested that perhaps the sects have most in common with certain types of medieval piety. They represented "the best in medieval evangelical thought."⁹ Many Baptist and Mennonite historians trace the sects of the Reformation back to medieval sectarian movements,¹⁰ while Reinhold Seeberg links them with the piety of the mystics and ascetics.¹¹ In view of the conflict that existed

⁵Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," Church History, VIII (March, 1944), 10-12.

⁶John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, c.1942), pp. 28 f.

⁷Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, c.1931), II, 151.

⁸James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), IV, 39.

⁹Newman, op. cit., pp. 153 and 168.

¹⁰Bender, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), II, 280.

this last suggestion seems to have merit. A fundamental difference was apparent in the theological comparison. It would seem that the radicals had affinities with mystic doctrine and ascetic practice that would place them closer to Rome than to Luther.

There seem to be large areas of similarity between the radicals and the medieval mystics. Both hoped for immediate experience of God,¹² Both expected to achieve this experience by mortification of the flesh and looked for a coming of the Spirit as a result of their piety. However, it has been asserted that Luther, too, was closely related to mysticism, and that the radicals could have derived their mystical tendencies directly from him.¹³ It is true that Luther twice, in 1516 and again in 1518, issued editions of the Theologia Germanica and that he expressed warm admiration for Johann Tauler.¹⁴ However, what he found helpful in them was not the mystical way to God, but a discussion of internal tribulation, the sense of sore oppression, distress, fear and unrest, the complete despair which precedes regeneration and rebirth.¹⁵ He had tried the mystical way to God, the ladder which was to lead to the nude majesty of God; and he found that any attempt to approach the deus nudus apart from the deus incarnatus led to despair

¹² Philip Watson, Let God be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 94.

¹³ Newman, op. cit., pp. 48 f.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Heinrich Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Recent Research, translated from the German by Carl F. Huth, Jr. (New York: The Christian Herald, c.1916), p. 104.

and destruction.¹⁶ Luther, may have used mystic terms, but he had completely rejected the mystic system.¹⁷ The whole structure of his theology was in revolt against mystic piety.¹⁸ The relationship between the radicals and the mystics does not pass through Luther. The continuity is more direct.

Bender reports Albrecht Ritschl's opinion about the similarities between the radicals and medieval ascetic piety.¹⁹ They were concerned about self-denial,²⁰ about "dying to the world;"²¹ and they insisted upon separation of the believers from the ungodly.²² They were committed to the principles of simplicity, poverty, sobriety and meekness.²³ The expression of the monastic ideal in Protestantism was left to the radicals without support from Luther.²⁴ He was in complete disagreement with monastic piety.²⁵ The ideal of separation was to him

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 95 f.

¹⁷Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, translated from the Danish by John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1953), p. 9.

¹⁸Erich Seeberg, Luthers Theologie in Ihren Grundzuegen (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), pp. 30-33.

¹⁹Bender, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁰Newman, op. cit., p. 153.

²¹Reinhold Seeberg, op. cit., p. 280.

²²Newman, op. cit., p. 151.

²³Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: The Beacon Press, c.1952), p. 107.

²⁴Umphry Lee, The Historic Church and Modern Pacifism (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1943), p. 148.

²⁵Ibid.

"a devilish advice against the two great commandments."²⁶ In this area also the radicals seemed closer to Rome than to Luther.

The theological conflict between Luther and the radicals highlighted the fundamental difference in their approach to reform. The chief concern of the radicals was moral and ethical.²⁷ They were attempting to observe literally the commandments of Jesus and to follow his example.²⁸ If the Roman Church had improved its morals they might not have found it too difficult to return.²⁹ Luther's concern, on the other hand, was religious rather than moral. The basic difference between Luther and the radicals can be illustrated by their views on the Anti-Christ. The radicals identified specific popes as Antichrist on moral and ethical grounds. Luther declared that even the most exemplary popes were Antichrist because the whole institution they represented was religiously opposed to Christ.³⁰ The outlook of the sectarian radicals, like that of the papacy, was basically anthropocentric; while Luther's religious thought was theocentric. Thus Luther could excoriate both the Roman Church and radicals on the same grounds.³¹ The sectarian concept of rebaptism, he

²⁶Preserved Smith and Percival Gallinger, translators and editors, Conversations with Luther (New York: The Pilgrim Press, c.1915), p. 153.

²⁷Bender, op. cit., p. 11.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 96.

³⁰Ibid., p. 42.

³¹Watson, op. cit., p. 57.

said, placed them right back in the Roman religion of works.³²

The fundamental difference between Luther and the radicals in their approach to reform had its practical consequences. The radicals stood close to Erasmus in their attempt to re-pristiniate the Christianity of the New Testament.³³ Their emphasis on externals, on iconoclasm, on the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, on the imitation of Christ, were the result of their failure to attempt a religious and theological reform. Luther, having attacked the Roman theological structure at its root, could properly evaluate the heritage and the tradition in which he stood. He did not attempt a re-pristiniation of New Testament Christianity.³⁴ His whole reformation was essentially conservative.³⁵

Thus, in spite of the fact that the radicals were farther from Rome than Luther with regard to external rites, their theological position and their piety places them close to Rome and united with Rome in opposition to the religious thought of Luther. Theologically Rome and the radicals were anthropocentric and legal. Luther's theology was theocentric and evangelical. The relationship between Luther and

³²Mackinnon, op. cit., IV, 61.

³³Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 69. See also Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1950), pp. 257 ff. Note that the radical movement originated as an effective force in Switzerland, the land of Zwingli, pupil and fellow-humanist of Erasmus. Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 41, and Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 77 f.

³⁴Watson, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁵Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, c.1950), pp. 41 ff. and 52 f.

the radicals seems to have been casual and superficial.³⁶ The relationship between Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Radicalism was basically close and deep; for as Luther himself observed: "The papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm."³⁷

³⁶Newman, op. cit., p. 75.

³⁷Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 495.

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