

(Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Catharer! - Part 2

by Leonard Verduin

The sermon discusses the two irreconcilable delineations of the Church and the importance of Church discipline in maintaining the purity of the Church.

Scripture: Matthew 13:24, Matthew 18:15, John 17:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Corinthians 5:6, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 1 Corinthians 5:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 2 Peter 2:13

Topics: "Church Government", "Sacramental Theology"

Description

Leonard Verduin discusses the historical conflict between two delineations of the Church: one emphasizing personal faith as the basis for a confessional Church, and the other focusing on including all in a given locality. The Restitutionists in Hesse believed in a Church of regenerate Christians born again by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, while Protestant pastors emphasized the importance of the pure preaching of the Word and administration of Sacraments. The debate over Church marks and discipline led to a divergence in views on Church membership and conductual patterns, with the Restitutionists advocating for a Church of believers with inner renewal and discipline, contrasting the inclusive Church concept of the sacralists.

Transcript

As has been said earlier here are two irreconcilable delineations of the Church. The one camp wanted to raise up a "confessional Church based on personal faith," and the other camp was determined to keep a Church "including all in a given locality." For the former, one's way of life sets him off as a Christian; for the other, the happenstance of being an inhabitant of a given locality qualifies him, and conductual patterns are not definitive.

In the course of the conflict, the Restitutionists in Hesse recited what they believed to be the proper description of Christ's Church: "We believe and confess one holy Christian Church, a fellowship of the saints, namely of all believing regenerate Christians and children of God, born again from above by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit." To this the Protestant pastors raised serious objection. Said they:

When men talk about the marks of the Christian Church, the characteristics by which men may find it, so as to be joined to it, then we call the Church that mass among which the Word of God is purely preached and the Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. Where these two marks are in

evidence there we are not to question it but that God has most certainly, among this unwieldy mass [diesem grossen haufen] of called ones, His own little group [sein heuflein] of true believers, let them be few or many Christ has taught in parables how it stands with Christ's Church on earth: "The kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed on his field but "n

[n. The portion of Scripture to which these Protestant pastors go to sustain their sacralism, the Parable of the Tares, has been cited so often in support of the idea of a Church embracing all in a given locality that it may well be called the locus classicus of the sacralists. These teachers take this passage to support the idea of togetherness within the Church, the togetherness of good and bad alike. The "heretics" have quoted it quite as frequently, contending that this Parable supports their position, namely that the togetherness of which the passage speaks is a togetherness in the world: It must be pointed out that in this disagreement over the essential meaning of the Parable the "heretics" plainly had the better of the argument, for Jesus' own commentary on the Parable indicates specifically that the scene of the togetherness is "the world," not the Church. The Parable does not teach that compositism is right and proper in the Church; it teaches that compositism is right and proper in the world. The Parable sustains the idea of societal compositism, not that of sacralism. The sacralist use of this Parable spawned two evils; on the one hand it gave the totally unspiritual man a comfortable place within the Church; on the other hand it deprived the dissenter of any place for the hollow of the foot in the society of which he was a part.²²]

Since so much was hung on this recital of the marks whereby the true Church may be known and since it is still current in the Reformed Churches, it may not be amiss to notice that it was manifestly invented to serve as a rebuttal to the Stepchildren's delineation of the Church. It is not patently Biblical. It is not the outcome of exegesis of the New Testament. The idea that the Church is delineated according to these marks is a piece of polemics, devised in order to have something with which to escape from the Stepchildren and their patently correct delineation of the Church.

The New Testament delineation of the Church is not that of a tiny constituency, lost, as it were, in the massive crowds. Perhaps we would want to splice out the Restitutionists' definition of the Church; we might want to make room in it for the children of believing parents. (The Restitutionists would have been willing to make this adjustment once their criticism of the territorial Church had been granted.) The Restitutionists would have been quite willing to grant that as men see the Church, there may be an admixture of hypocrites (they said plainly enough that such was likely to be the case). But they were dead set against the Church as described in the Constantinian vision, as "including all in a given locality," without any reference to a conduct "such as becometh saints."

In the light of this Restitutionist emphasis on inner renewal the remark attributed to a Restitutionist pastor becomes highly significant; he is reported to have said to his audience, "Go home and die first; I never bury living people." The reference, of course, is to baptism. Just as it would be premature to offer to bury a man who had not as yet died, so was it premature to offer to baptize a man who had not as yet died unto sin.^o

[o. The story is told, of the Anabaptist leader Leendert Bouwens, by Guido de Bres in his book against the Anabaptists. Needless to say, de Bres tells the story rebukingly. The Reformers were not sympathetic toward the idea that' one must have died unto sin if he is to be a fit candidate for baptism. The doctrine of "presumptive regeneration" which developed later is a left-handed acknowledgement that the Stepchildren had been right in their insistence that where baptism is rightly administered there regeneration is presumably present.]

The Church as seen by the Restitutionists is an organization with entrance requirements. One has to qualify in order to be admitted, not in the sense of being in possession of earned credits but in the sense of having submitted willingly to the humbling concept of grace. And since no one can go through this experience without being inwardly renewed, the Church looks for signs of this inner renewal. In this sense a "walk worthy of the calling" is a prerequisite for membership.

Knowing full well that in her evaluation of men the Church is not omniscient and that therefore she must always be prepared to scrutinize her holdings, she must check to see whether her lists need to be revised. If it then becomes apparent that there are unfruitful branches, the Church is confronted with the pathetic task of removing the manifestly dead timber.

This implies discipline, Church discipline, the kind of thing Jesus was talking about when He said something about "Let him be unto you as a heathen man or a publican," the kind of thing Paul had in mind when he laid it upon the Church at Corinth to "put away that wicked man from among you." Although the New Testament leaves the impression that such drastic action is called for rather infrequently, it plainly teaches that such disciplinary action must in extreme cases be resorted to. Needless to say, if the Church exists by voluntary association the incidence will be much lower than it would be otherwise. If, as is the normal situation, a certain amount of opprobrium attaches to the Christian confession, then the incidence will be low indeed. But conditions are never such that the Church is allowed to drop the keys into the well, as it were.

Needless to say, sacralists will be embarrassed at this point. They have no receptacle into which to put a person who can no longer be carried on the church's rolls. If he is to be put out of the Church, he will also and simultaneously have to be put out of society, that is exterminated (from the Latin *ex* and *terminis*) -- that is, put "outside the boundaries."p If the ecclesiastical community and the societal community are one and the same thing, merely seen from different vantage points, then he who is expelled from the former cannot be allowed to remain in the latter. Church discipline as set forth in the New Testament is impossible in "Christian sacralism."

[p. It is doubtful indeed that the Church ever intended the word extermination in its etymological sense merely. Certain it is that very early indeed it was already being used and intended in its modern connotation, namely, that of liquidating. The word seems to have been one of the many euphemisms which the medieval Church used so freely and so cleverly to enhance its own "image."]

It is a fact that Church discipline was in a hopeless mess ever since the Constantinian change was affected. In the first place, there was no discipline for aberrations in conduct. Men could live in sin and debauchery, dissipate to the full extent of their physical powers, and never come to know that the Church of Christ has keys with which it is supposed to lock out such rough-necks.

The Church stirred not a finger -- unless and until someone challenged the sacralist formula. This was the one "sin" which made the "fallen" Church reach for her keys. In her catalog this was the unpardonable sin; this was the sin of the "heretic," the "sectary," the "schismatic," the Carthar -- all of them names that hark back to this quarrel. When the "fallen" Church saw or heard of anyone who was "rending Christ's robe" then, and only then, did the wheels of discipline begin to turn. With a fury that reminds one of that of the twentieth-century communistic world when it hears of revisionism -- and no wonder, for it was similarly inspired -- the Church bared its claws when men challenged the sacralist formula.

When the "fallen" Church did discipline, it went much too far; for it then expelled not only from the company of the redeemed but from the company of men as such.^q

[q. This monism-inspired confusion -- this failure to see that punitive measures in the area of society lie on a different plane than do punitive measures in the area of faith -- receives its classic expression in the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, with whom we read that heresy is a thing for the perpetration of which the guilty one deserves "not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication but also barred from the world by death" (non solum ab ecclesia per excommunicationem separari sed etiam per morte a mundo excludi, cf. Summa, II, 2, Q. 11, Art. 3).]

Church discipline was in dire need of a major overhaul at the end of the Middle Ages.

It was with the Stepchildren that the idea of the restoration of such discipline as the New Testament requires was first set forth.^r Men who are accustomed to hearing that the Church has a third note ("where Church discipline is observed"s) will find it hard to believe that time was when this was not only absent from the Reformers' delineation of the Church but was looked upon as a piece of Anabaptist fanaticism. The record however, speaks plainly.^t

[r. There had been hints in the earliest years of the Reformers' careers that they were not insensitive to the need for the recovery of Church discipline. But their views were at best ambiguous. When thereupon the Restitutionists waved all ambiguity aside, also in the matter of discipline, the Reformers drew back. This development has lead Farner to say of Zwingli that with him "tritt seit dem Jahre 1526 der Bann zurück" (op. cit., p. 18).]

[s. The quotation is from the Belgic Confession's Article. When it was written, in 1559, the idea of the exercise of discipline as the "third note" of the Church had become a part of de Bres's thinking. In that same year, however, the French Confession, which had Calvin's approval, did not as yet include it.]

[t. It was the medieval image of Donatism that stood across the Reformers' path as they contemplated the restoration of Church discipline as portrayed in the New Testament. It was looked upon as a piece of Donatist fanaticism. When the Stepchildren broached the idea of a return to Church discipline the Reformers said "Shades of Donatism!" Calvin, for instance, wrote "The Donatists who when they observed faults in the Church which the bishops reprovved in words but did not punish with excommunication . . . inveighed fiercely against the bishops as betrayers of discipline, and in an impious schism separated themselves from the flock of Christ" (Institutes IV, 12: 12). He added in the same breath that the Anabaptists of his day "act in the same way."]

Conrad Grebel is usually looked upon as the man about whom the Restitutionists first rallied, and his letter to Thomas Müntzer, who he thought could be won for the Restitutionist cause, may be looked upon as one of the earliest writings originating among the Stepchildren. In this letter, dated 1524, we read:

Try with the Word to create a Christian congregation, with the help of Christ and his rule, as found in Matthew 18 and as we see it in practice in the Epistles He who refuses to reform ... resisting the Word and the work of God, and who continues in that way, such a man, after Christ and His Word and rule have been preached and after he has been admonished by two or three witnesses and the congregation . . . such a man must not be put to death but classified as a heathen man and a publican and be let alone.²³

With this Grebel was proposing a procedure whereby such discipline as was currently known in Christendom -- a discipline which ended in death for the victim -- would be discontinued; and a new discipline -- one in which excommunication is the ultimate in punishment -- would be introduced. Grebel's program was calculated to terminate the Church as it had been known for twelve centuries and to substitute for it the Church of the New Testament. This put the whole issue between the ideals of the Restitutionists and those of the neo-Constantinians in sharpest focus. During the course of his trial, Grebel stated his position on Church discipline thus: "no avaricious person, no usurer, no gambler, none other of the sinners set forth in Scripture, shall have a place among the Christians -- rather are they to be excluded by the ban."

Grebel's companion, Felix Manz, spoke Similarly of the Restitutionists' ideal: "As to the Church, my understanding has always been and is now that all those who live in revilings and sin, such as drunkards, fornicators, adulterers, gamesters, fighters, usurers, arid such like, are to be excluded from it." (He added here, "If however a person should carry on in this way without people knowing it and without revealing himself, these we would allow to remain.")

As the leaders spoke, so spoke also the followers in the camp of the Stepchildren. Some who had been jailed in Hesse, in the year 1538, spoke as follows:

If the Christian ban were exercised according to the institution of Christ and the Apostles then we would not in any sense distance ourselves Yes, as soon as we shall see that all that is feasible is done, in keeping with the wisdom and power of Christ, the exercise of the ban as ordained by Christ and the Apostles, then we will be prepared with all our hearts to betake ourselves to that communion.

Bernard Wiek, a plain man from these circles, said during his trial, "In New Testament times there was a punishment among Christians for those who misconducted themselves, a thing that is not in evidence now." Testimony like this could be extended to great length.

Needless to say, the matter of Church discipline engaged the attention of the Restitutionists who had gathered at Schlatten am Rande. In the manifesto drawn up there (which we have already mentioned) it was declared: "The temporal sword is an ordinance of God outside the perfection of Christ; the princes and rulers of the world are ordained to punish the wicked and put them to death. But in the perfection of Christ excommunication is the utmost penalty, not physical death." It would seem that this would find acceptance with all right-minded people. As a formula it is actually very good. It puts the sword and its function where they belong, and it points to a second kind of disciplinary power, one that is within the Church, and according to which excommunication is the maximum penalty. This formula prepares a division of labor, a much needed one, whereby the State has its function (which in extreme cases leads to capital punishment) and the Church has its function (which in extreme cases leads to expulsion from the society of believers). As such, this formula puts an end to much that was evil. One would expect Bible-believing folk to agree with it.

The articles goes on to say that "Excommunication ought to be practiced upon those who profess to be Christians, having been baptized, but who nevertheless fall into some sin by inadvertance and not deliberately. These ought to be exhorted and pleaded with in private, once and again. At the third time they are to be publicly banned before the entire congregation, to the end that we may be able in one mind and one zeal to break the bread and drink the cup." This also has much to recommend it. It proceeds upon the assumption that a believer may fall into offensive patterns of behavior, from which he is then to be

reclaimed by pastoral visits. This failing, he is moved from the category of one who has fallen into sin and is placed in the category of those who live in sin. Since such are not to be considered part of Christ's Church, they are to be officially read out of the company. This article provides for leisurely procedure -- by arranging for repeated visits. It provides for secrecy in the early stages. It gives, as the first objective to which the disciplinary action looks, the improvement of the offender, and, as a second objective, a concern for the dignity of the Sacrament. Surely this would not be opposed by Reformed men!

But to think that would be to minimize the strangle-hold which the sacralist tradition had upon the minds of men, the Reformers included. For this plan would create islands of "outsiders" right in the sea of Christendom. It would be to reach back of the Constantinian change. It would be as radical as the Constantinian change had been in its time -- albeit in opposite direction. In the light of the revolutionary implications of the Restitutionists' proposal to raise up a believers' Church kept that way by Church discipline, Calvin's reaction to it becomes at least understandable.

He set himself to refute Schlatten am Rande. He wanted no part in the idea that "excommunication has come in the place of the physical sword in the Christian Church, in such a way that instead of punishing a crime by death we must now punish the delinquent by depriving him of the company of the faithful."

It is true that Calvin in his refutation says that excommunication is a good and necessary policy. In fact, he says that "it is from us that these poor ingrates have learned whatever it is that they know about the matter; they by their ignorance or presumption corrupt the doctrine which we teach in its purity."u

[u. It is hard indeed to figure out how Calvin could accuse the Stepchildren of being "ingrates" who had pilfered the idea of Church discipline from "us." If by the "us" he means his own person then we must find a way to explain how the believers of Schlatten am Rande could, in 1527, appropriate from Calvin, at that time a lad in his teens. Moreover, it must be recalled that as early as 1524, in the letter to Müntzer, Grebel already set forth a well-articulated doctrine of Church discipline, In 1524 Calvin was but fifteen years old! And if we take the "us" to refer to the Reformers then we are still in a quandary. For in 1527, to say nothing about 1524, the Reformers had not as yet published anything looking to Church discipline; what was there for "ingrates" to pilfer? Moreover, when the Reformers came across Church discipline, as practiced among the Bohemian Brethren (it was in 1540), they gasped in surprise and envy at what they heard. How they were in position to teach prior to 1527 (or 1524) what they were themselves amazed to see in 1540 remains [, mystery. It seems that what Calvin says here is just another example of the misrepresentations to which the Stepchildren were constantly exposed.

He asserts that it is a "great fault and vice" if discipline is neglected. However, he disagrees with the people of the Second Front when they say that a Church without discipline is no church. "The first question," says he, "is whether or not we are to consider a company which does not practice discipline to be the Church." Calvin points to the congregation at Corinth to find the answer to this question. Discipline was lacking there, but Paul honored them with the name of Church. Calvin says that if there is no excommunication, "the form of the Church is thereby disfigured but it is not destroyed altogether."

Against the Restitutionist position that the Church has room in it for believers and for them only, Calvin urges that "we must think so highly of the Word and the Sacraments that wherever we see them we are to conclude without a doubt that the Church is there, regardless of how much vice, and evil there may be in the corporate life of men."v Manifestly Calvin held, along with Luther, that the Church of Christ cannot be empirically known and that conductual distinctiveness is not definitive of her. How this can be harmonized

with Christ's maxim "By their fruits shall ye know them" is indeed hard to see.

[v. ", . . . nonobstant les vices et macules qui pourront estre en la vie commune des hommes." The reader will observe that Calvin does not say "en la vie des gens confessants" or "en la vie des gens d'eglise" or some such expression; no, he says "des hommes," for in his system the two are coextensive, "les hommes" are the Church.]

Calvin in his refutation is particularly offended by the Restitutionist position that if there is no discipline, and knaves and scoundrels are therefore in attendance at the Lord's Supper, the true believer must withdraw lest he be polluted along with the rest. To organize a rival Church for this reason is intolerable -- no matter how bad the situation is. Did the prophets of the Old Testament have "an altar or a temple apart?"²⁴

To support this idea Calvin says that when Paul speaks of not eating or drinking with men of scandalous lives (1 Cor. 5: 11) "this has to do with private association and not at all with the public communion. If the Church puts up with an unworthy person then let him who knows it keep himself from that man in his private contacts . . . but he is not to make a schism nor separation in regard to the public communion." The plain implication is that it is normal to sit at the communion table with a man of such evil report that one would not want to be seen in his company on the street!

This idea, that one may have to avoid the company of people because of their wicked lives but have no qualms about sitting at the communion table with them, Calvin endorses with an example:

There is a man still alive who, because he was infested with this error, so that he feared to receive communion with us because of some men's imperfections, deprived himself of the communion of the Church. And all this while he had two servants in his house of very wicked and slanderous lives. I being informed thereof declared to him that he ought certainly to endeavor to purge his own house, of which he had charge, if he thought of being defiled by the faults of people over whom he did not have governance. He thereupon realized how foolish he had been.

Calvin also defended the inclusive Church (as Constantinians had done for twelve centuries, beginning with Augustine) with the Parable of the Tares in the Wheatfield. It is a field, said Calvin, "in which the good grain is so mixed with the evil that frequently you can't see it at all."w

[w. Calvin asserts in Institutes IV, 1:2 that "often no distinction can be made between God's children and the ungodly, between His own flock and wild beasts." This was said, of course, of that entity which Calvin chose to call the visible Church, a term invented in order to make room for a civilization-wide Church. To the extent that the Reformers swerved to the right did the concept of the "visible" Church find acceptance with them. This fact has led Farnier to say of Zwingli that the concept of the visible and the invisible Church "characteristisch ist fur die zweite Periode von Zwingli's Kirchenbegriff" (op. cit., p. 5, n. 7). The Restitutionists would of course have nothing to do with the distinction.]

Calvin, like all who before him had argued in favor of the Church as a body "including all in a given locality," read right over the fact that according to Jesus' own commentary on the parable the terrain on which the two kinds of plants are growing side by side is the world and not the Church. The medieval sacralists had always used this parable to justify the inclusive Church and Calvin did not correct this faulty exegesis.

Manifestly Calvin was being pulled in two directions: caught in the same dilemma that troubled Luther, the dilemma of a believers' Church and an all-inclusive Church. He can settle for neither because he will not let go of the other. Because of this he could not live in peace with those who assailed conductual-averagism.

Luther likewise. He too wished to preserve the inclusive Church, even if that implied a latitudinarian attitude as to conduct. With the Anabaptists in mind, Luther said:

When they look at us and see the offensive defects with which Satan distorts our churches then they deny that we are a Church and they are unable to lift themselves over this. In like manner were the Donatists minded. They put under discipline those who had relapsed and forbade them their Churches In the same way have the Manicheans and others behaved -- as though the Church were already in glory and not in the flesh. Men ought not to dispute about the Church that way . . . whatever remains of sin this verily offends these spiritual Donatists . . . but it does not offend God, seeing that for the sake of faith in Christ He excuses it and forgives.²⁵

[x. The resulting ambiguity in Calvin's doctrine of the Church was, of course, the result of his monistic attempt to combine the Church of medieval sacralism with the Church of the New Testament. One could also say that it resulted from Calvin's attempt to combine the Church of the Old Testament with the Church of the New. In all events, one finds himself agreeing with Arthur Cushman McGiffert as he asserts that "Calvin's doctrine of the Church was a composite of many diverse and inconsistent elements, and, because of this, confusion concerning the meaning, place, and the purpose of the Church has since his day reigned almost everywhere in the Reformed wing of Protestantism." (Cf. McGiffert's "Calvin's Theory of the Church," in *Essays in Modern Theology and Related Subjects*, p. 225.) It was the Reformers' muddled doctrine of the Church that drove away the Stepchildren and caused the Second Front to shape up.]

Luther also tried to meet the New Testament's ideal, that of a believers' Church, with the formula of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a little Church of true believers, apart from, but not separate from, the Church of the masses. Early in his career, in 1523, before the Second Front had formed, Luther wrote to his friend, Nicolas Hausmann, "My intention is, in days to come, not to admit any when communion is held save such as have been interrogated and who have given acceptable answers as to their personal faith. The rest we are going to exclude." (If Luther had acted on this insight consistently there would in all likelihood never have been a Second Front.) In his *Deutsche Messe*, composed in 1526, Luther wrote that:

They who seriously want to be Christians and want to confess the Gospel in word and deed, these ought to inscribe their names in a book and assemble in a house by themselves for purposes of prayer, the reading of Scripture, the administration of baptism, the reception of the sacrament and to engage in other Christian activities . . . but I neither can nor may as yet set up such a congregation; for I do not as yet have the people for it. If however the time comes that I must do it, so that I cannot with a good conscience refrain from it then I am ready to do my part.²⁶

At this point Luther was haunted by the same fear that had led to the creation of "Christian sacralism" many centuries earlier, the fear that to organize a believers' Church would terminate civil quiet and occasion civil commotion.

[y. When in Hesse, where Anabaptist pressures were particularly strong, the leaders of the Reform there gave evidence that they were thinking of meeting the Anabaptist threat by introducing discipline into the

Lutheran Churches of Hesse, Luther wrote to them: "Euren Eifer für Christum und die chrichtliche Zucht habe ich mit sehr grosser Freude erfahren; aber in dieser so trüben Zeit, die auch noch nicht genugsam geeignet ist, Zucht anzunehmen, mochte ich nicht wagen, zu einer so plit:itzlichen Neuerung zu rathen. Man musz furwahr die Bauern lassen ein wenig versaufen, und einem trunkenen Mann soll ein Fuder Heu weichen." (Cf. Werke, St. Louis edition, Vol. XXIb, col. 1827.)]

This the Stepchildren later threw in his teeth, asserting that he was by his own admission not sufficiently khun (that is, bold) to do what his better insights dictated.²⁷ It was in these private gatherings, in these meetings of the believers' Church, that Luther saw a chance to introduce the discipline required by the New Testament. But he was dead set against any such discipline in the Church of the masses. When he heard that at Zwickau (where Restitutionist influence was strong) such discipline in the Church of the mass was contemplated he warned:

....such reprimanding of specified persons is not in place except in the gathering of the Christians . . . , in a public preaching where Christians and non-Christians alike sit together, as is the case in our churches, there the rebuke is to be general ... no one being delineated in particular. For it is a general preaching and general it must remain, where no one is shamed before the rest or made to blush, until they have drawn apart and have come into the separate gathering where in orderly fashion petition, punishment, and admonition, may take place.²⁸

This adds up to an inclusive Church in which there is no discipline, plus a believers' Church in which there is -- a palpably impossible combination! Manifestly Luther was trying to eat his cake and have it, was trying to do the things the Second Front wanted done without undoing the things it wanted undone.

Nowhere did Luther show more plainly how he was tom between the two alternatives of a believers' Church versus an everybody-embracing one than he did when, in 1526, Caspar Schwenkfeld called on him. Schwenkfeld reports on the conversation:

I talked at length with him about the Church of the future, how this was the only way in which the genuine Christians could be separated from the false and that otherwise the situation was hopeless. He knew all right that the ban must always accompany the Gospel and that where it is not instituted there things could not improve but only get worse and worse, for it is apparent how it goes everywhere . . . everyone wants to boast of being a Christian. To this he replied that he was greatly grieved at it that no one was showing any moral improvement. With the future Church, he said, he had not as yet had much experience, although he was minded to make a roster, listing the Christians, wanted their behavior scrutinized, and was thinking of preaching to these in the cloister, a chaplain addressing the rest of the Pfarr of the Church . . . ; I kept asking about the ban but he refused to reply. I pointed to 2 Peter 2, where we read about "spots and blemishes ... feasting with you:" I asked him what "believing with one heart and one mind" might be. To all this he replied, "Yes, Caspar dear, genuine Christians are not yet too common, I'd love to see two of them together, I don't know where I could find so much as one."²⁹

Here was a man keenly aware of the evil situation he had inherited, that of the everybody-embracing Church. He was especially aware of the incongruity when he was standing before the Sacrament. In his Gründonnerstag sermon, preached in 1523, he had said that to administer the elements to every comer, good and bad alike, was "not very unlike chucking it down the gullet of a sow." And he fought, in word at least, against the inherited evil of asking no questions of would-be communicants. But this Luther was lost in the shuffle. The exodus of the Stepchildren resulted in the abandonment of the fond ambition of having

some day a believers' church kept that way by the exercise of discipline, Luther never -- even in his thinking, to say nothing about putting it into practice -- abandoned the inclusive Church; and that put his fancy idea about ecclesiola in ecclesia into cold storage.

When the Stepchildren worked out in practice the ideals which Luther had once cherished but which had seemed too formidable for him, he became the more impatient with them. His pupil, Justus Menius, spoke disapprovingly of the very practice Luther had hoped to adopt but had not. He chided the Anabaptists because "before they celebrate the Lord's Supper it is their custom to exercise discipline first; and those who have conducted themselves in a disorderly fashion . . . as well as those who have recanted under pressure, are required before they are again admitted to the Sacrament to repent of their specified sin, to the end that the brotherhood may by all means be pure and without defect."³⁰

We see then that the wavering attitude toward Church discipline that came to expression in the camp of the Reformers caused the radicals to abandon the ship; and that, when these went ahead with the matter, the Reformers stiffened their opposition. It took years and years for the Reformers to consider the idea a second time, and then the fact that they had once opposed the Stepchildren in the matter stood in their way. As late as 1569 there was still opposition to the introduction of discipline in some Protestant circles and that because the practice had come to be known as an Anabaptist excess. In the same year, the men of Zurich "reject the Bann and excommunication from the Lord's Supper, citing their dealings with the Anabaptists, who considered this to be a prerequisite of a true church. Where a heathen government functioned, the Bann may have been needful, but this discipline . . . brings about divisions and nourishes Pharisaism. Therefore the Lord's Supper must be accessible to all comers."^z

[z. These sentiments indicate that in the Protestant camp the Constantinian change was still looked upon as an advance upon earlier times. The idea of a "larger fulfillment," of which we spoke earlier, was still part of their thinking. The acquisition of the "other arm" had rendered Church discipline in its New Testament delineation obsolete; so the men in the Reformed camp were still implying].

We see then that the difference of opinion that existed concerning the kind of discipline that should be exercised in Christ's Church was but a facet of the difference of opinion as to the delineation of the Church. For men who think of the Church as "including all in a given locality," discipline as it had been distorted ever since Constantine was right and proper; for those who thought of the Church as a society of believers, some very radical changes were in order. The spokesman for the Reformed camp put it very neatly and concisely at the Disputation held at Emden in the year 1578:

Our view of the Church of God is diverse from that of "the men" [a very derogatory appellation]; they exclude the office of the magistrate from the Church and they refuse to ascribe to the civil power any punitive function in the Church of God.· But we, in keeping with the Word of God include the office of the magistracy in the church of God. For this reason they say that in the Church punishment over and above that of excommunication shall not and may not be employed. To the question whether a minister and a Church are bound by the Word of God to admonish the civil government to pursue the heretic and put him to death we say yes, but they say no.³¹

We see then that, although there were in the early utterances of the Reformers hints that they might introduce Church discipline after the style of the New Testament, this came to nought in the battle against the Anabaptists. When it re-entered the stream of Reformation thought it could with justice be called an Anabaptist heritage. This situation has led a recent investigator to assert, with specific reference to

Anabaptism:

Although Calvin was hostile to most of its ideas it supplied Calvinism with the ingredient of the concept of the Church as a community of convinced believers in which a rigorous discipline and holiness of living were prominent requirements for membership.³²

It is apparent then that the Reformers were not minded to discard the Constantinian formula, they sought to reform the Church on the last of "Christian sacralism"; this restrained them from launching a full-scale attack upon conductual-averagism; it likewise kept them from re-instituting Church discipline according to the New Testament blue-print. The liquidation of Servetus is of and by itself enough to point this up. The Reformers sought to construe the New Testament Church after the lineaments of the Old Testament, a thus reversing the forward movement of God's affairs in history by an atavistic stroke which coincided with the Constantinian change.

In this whole area the Stepchildren blazed a new trail, by repudiating the Constantinian change, by re-instituting the Church of believers with conductual distinctiveness, by driving away the sword function out of the Church, by re-introducing Church discipline in which excommunication is the ultimate penalty. This program earned for them the incriminating appellative of Catharer.

[a. Cornelius Krahn has written, with a fine insight: "Im Alten Testament wurzelnd kann Calvin mit ruhigem Gewissen bei der Anwendung des Bannes auch der Todesstraffe beipflichten, wahrend fur Menno nach Christus Moses ausgedient hat und jetzt nur noch 'christliche' Mittel zur Sauberung der Gemeinde geboten sind." (Cf. Krahn's biography of Menno Simons, p. 117.) This unique inSight as to the preliminary character of the Old Testament is one of the many features of the Anabaptist vision that was not derived from 1517, but dates back to pre-Reformation dissent against "Christian sacralism." The Waldensians, for example, were wont to speak of the Old Testament as *ley velha* and of the New Testament regime as *ley novella*; and they pointed to the fact that the *ley novella* "does not kill the sinner as did the Law of Moses but compassionately leads him to repentance; both the *ley velha* and the *ley novella* are from God but given for diverse objectives."]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/leonard-verduin/reformers-and-their-stepchildren-catharer-part-2/>

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