

(Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Slabler! - Part 2

by Leonard Verduin

The sermon explores the tension between the Reformers' acceptance of civil power in religious matters and the Stepchildren's commitment to freedom of conscience and voluntary faith.

Scripture: Matthew 22:21

Topics: "Church And State", "Religious Liberty"

Description

Leonard Verduin discusses the historical struggle between Christian sacralism and the principles of freedom of conscience and voluntary affiliation with Christ's cause. He highlights the Reformers' collaboration with the secular power, leading to a resurgence of coercive culture in the Church, contrasting it with the beliefs of the Stepchildren who advocated for a voluntary Church, separation of Church and State, and religious liberty. Verduin emphasizes the importance of realizing that coercion in matters of faith corrupts religious practices and that the essence of the Gospel lies in voluntarism, a principle championed by the Stepchildren and crucial for the development of human freedom.

Transcript

The advocates of "Christian sacralism" fared extremely less well in the light of the New Testament, which failed to provide a decent argument. When a Restitutionist, Leendert van Maastricht, maintained that evil men persecute the good but that the good persecute no one, Bucer came back with "That evil men persecute the good we grant; but that the pious do also persecute evil men, this the Scripture teaches. What did Christ do in the temple-cleansing and what did Paul do to Ananias?"⁹ This was the best they could find in the New Testament, a lamentably weak support.

To arguments drawn from the Old Testament the Restitutionists turned a deaf ear. One of them, who had been imprisoned for his anti-Constantinianism, said as follows:

We are right in saying that the magistrate is not commanded with so much as a single word to rule in matters of the faith, no matter how many in our day scream that it is so and give the sword into the hand of the ruler to judge in matters of faith, supporting their contention with reference to the Judges and Kings of Israel. They do so without warrant; for although we were to grant that it was commanded to some rulers in Israel to punish idol worship and such like, this was because Israel was a servile people of the law (ein knechtiseh volck des gzet) among which everything was by constraint, also their religion. Now however

.in the free doctrine of the Gospel of Christ all coercion has ceased, so that it is not proper either by the use of force or the secular rule to saddle anyone with the faith against his will; nor is it proper for the magistrate to penalize anyone for lack of faith; for this is the prerogative exclusively of the Son of God and of no creature on earth -- as indeed some have acknowledged who now fight against this with all their might, this because they were then, the only ones who opposed the bad situation, until others began to resist their erroneous notions and their doctrines (just as they had resisted those of the Pope), then it was that the trouble began. They forgot their former teachings; they began to speak a different language and persuaded the magistrates to sustain their false teaching; they sustained then that against which they had earlier written and clamored, as namely whether the magistrates should keep their hands off matters of religion -- all of which we shall leave to God to punish, seeing that it is something that was done to us.¹⁰

The reader will have noted the Restitutionist complaint, heard at the Second Front constantly, that the Reformers had gone back upon their earlier selves, that although they had at the outset spoken against coercionism they were now defending it. This shift of position was inevitable once the Reformers had accepted the hand of the civil power. The Stepchildren however never accepted such a hand, and for principal reasons. When the Reformers went back to the doctrine of coercion in matters of faith, the Stepchildren remained convinced that freedom of conscience and voluntary affiliation with His cause are of the very essence of the teachings of Christ. This is something which the sacralists, whether early or late, did not and do not fully realize.ⁱ

[i. Abraham Kuyper, for example, wrote: "If coercion by the State only worked we would not for one moment hesitate to employ it" (Baatte staatsdwang we zouden geen oogenblik voor staatsbemoeying terugdeinzen) (Ons Program, p. 325). Kuyper also wrote: "I do not draw back if someone should say, 'Then you desire and propose that if need require it idolatry and similar sins be punished capitally!' If need be, very certainly . . ." (Dictaten Dogmatiek, Locus de Magistratu, pp. 420f.). Evidently Kuyper was still sufficiently caught up in the toils of sacralism to see no principal reason for opposing the use of force, only practical ones.]

It was their failure to realize this that caused the Reformers to write those things that now embarrass their followers. The embarrassment which Article 36 of the Belgic Confession causes virtually all who have to do with it is well known. Men have tried by various devices, radical surgery included, to get rid of what it plainly says. But said Article 36 is symptomatic of a deep-seated ideology; to "doctor up" the symptoms is not enough; much more drastic treatment is needed if the embarrassment is to cease.

Article 36 is not alone in vexing us. Who is not similarly vexed by Calvin's rejoinder to the Stepchildren's idea that the magistrate has no assignment inside the Church: "Let us remember the rule laid down. by Paul, to the effect that each must remain in the calling in which he was called, and that we are one body in our Lord, so that the arm cannot say to the eye, nor the hand to the feet 'I have no need of you:'"¹¹ Who among Calvin's spiritual children does not wish that the great Genevan had not said that? What -- the magistracy by definition a member of the body of Christ? The magistrate's office one of the organic functions of His Body? Related to the other functions and agencies of it as the hand is related to the foot and the arm to the eye?

We are likewise embarrassed by the things Calvin said when the Stepchildren asserted that the rule-right of the magistracy is "of the flesh" and the rule-right in the perfection of Christ is "according to the spirit." Even if we should grant that this terminology is subject to improvement (let it be remembered that the Stepchildren were struggling to create a vocabulary: the words, to which we are accustomed, "Church"

and "State," were as yet unintelligible), they can be given a sense that is at least traditional. Has it not always been the custom to refer to the regime of the magistrate as the "temporal power" or the "secular arm"? Why then did Calvin have to belabor the Stepchildren with:

Just as a drunkard after he has belched then vomits out the vile stuff that lies heavy on his stomach so do these miserable ones; after they have spoken evil of this holy office which our Lord honored altogether, they vomit up blasphemies much more out of order; the government of the civil ruler, say they, pertains to the flesh and that of the Christian company pertains to the spirit But. this is as nothing in comparison with that which follows, namely, that the seat of the magistracy is confined to the earth [the Latin text has *tantummodo in hoc mundo est*] but that of the Christians is in heaven. In God's name, I pray you, all faithful believers, and admonish you, to consider well that which Saint Paul and Jude have said about those who in their day already perverted the faith of the simple.

One could wish that Calvin had not written that; at least not in those words. In his haste, so it seems to us, to reprimand the Stepchildren for distinguishing between the rule of God that comes to expression in the magistrate and the rule of God that comes to expression among those who are of the household of faith, he himself gets too dangerously close to identifying the two. If, as we say today, the State results from common grace and the Church from special grace, then what the Stepchildren were saying was not blasphemous, as Calvin would have us believe. Then his own confusion of the two alarms us.

Calvin continued his attack upon the Restitutionists with:

The principal purpose of the office of the magistrates is not this, to maintain their subjects in peace as to the body, but rather this, to bring about that God is served and honored in their lands and that everybody leads a good and honest life We see how that the devil speaks through their mouths, in order to turn the Princes from their course and keep them from their duty They show that they are enemies of God and of humankind.

One can only wish that Calvin had never written that; it is of a piece with the Article 36 that has caused his followers great embarrassment. Calvin's thinking at this point reflects the medieval monism which saw in the magistrate and in the priest two complementary arms of one and the same body; the time was ripe for someone to call attention to the fact that a new dimension is reached when we come to "the perfection of Christ:" They are not "enemies of God and of humankind" who point this out. The civil magistracy is indeed of God (as the Stepchildren said in words of one syllable) but it is not good to say (as Calvin said) that "The civil magistracy is a calling not only holy and legitimate but by far the most sacred and honorable in human life."¹² Does the burgomaster hold down a position more sacred and honorable "by far" than that of a minister of the Gospel? Then one finds it easier to accept Schlatten am Rande, with its: "The sword is an ordinance of God outside the perfection of Christ; thus the Rulers of the world are ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for putting to death."

How did Calvin come to write all these things which we who in so many matters are his followers find it impossible to repeat after him? The answer must be sought in the fact that Calvin, beset by the same dilemma that tortured Luther, attempted the same impossible solution, that of combining two irreconcilable views of the Church of Christ. Like Luther he had learned to see that the New Testament delineates the Church as the company of believing folk; like him he had on the other hand inherited the medieval concept of the Church, in which the Church embraces all in a given locality.

As we have already intimated, the favorite device for keeping the one from cancelling out the other was the device of "Church visible" and "Church invisible." Calvin's visible Church is the Church of Constantinianism; his invisible Church is the Church of the New Testament. The latter is for Calvin infinitely smaller than the former, "a small and contemptible number hidden in a huge multitude, a few grains of wheat tucked away in a pile of chaff."^j The picture is that of many "christians" among whom there is a sprinkling of "Christians."^k This whole concept of "Church visible" and "Church invisible" is foreign to the New Testament; it was fashioned in order to provide a formula whereby men could escape from the Stepchildren's clamor for a Church of believers; it was invented in order that men might be excused from repudiating the inclusive Church of het historisch gewordene.

[j. We submit that the New Testament nowhere envisions a Church in which a tiny ecclesiola lies hidden in the folds of a massive ecclesia. To sustain this idea of ecclesiola in ecclesia sacralists of all ages have been obliged to go back to the Old Testament situation, where one can indeed find a mere "seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal," of true Israelites, hidden away in the masses of an outward Israel. In the New Covenant they "do not teach every man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord' for all [in that company] shall [already] know me " (Hebrews 8:11).]

[k. The category of "Christian," i.e., a person who is neither a heathen man nor a Christian is foreign to the New Testament. One would expect that people who have had occasion to witness the rise of the reign of terror under Nazism would let go of the notion of a "Church" that embraces a total society; one would expect that men who can themselves recall how that when these Nazis began to say "Gemeinschaft des ganzen Volkes hat die Kirche zu sein, nicht Gemeinschaft fur sich in separativer Bildung," the clergy had no objection (until it was too late -- so accustomed were they to this sacralist representation); one would expect that they would review their theological heritage which made this possible. But instead we find men toying still with the sacralist formula. In the Netherlands, Noordmans pleads for an enlargement of the structurization of the Church so as to make room in it for believer and disbeliever alike, "een uitbouw van de gemeentelijke inrichting, waarin de schare meer betrokken is dan tot dusverre." He thinks that the time has come for us to ask whether "next to the presbyterial structurization of the Church in which they are served who are consciously of the Church there is not room for an organizational form over and above this, whereby the masses which are now but loosely connected may have their place." But Noordmans will be unable to eat his cake and have it, as unable as was Luther, who also toyed with this very notion.

If Calvin wrote things we cannot digest, Theodore Beza satisfies even less. In support of the killing of heretics he wrote:

After God had launched Christianity by unarmed apostles He afterward raised up kings by whose wisdom He intended to protect His Church They do not like it that civil laws are enacted against their wickedness, saying that the apostles have asked no such thing of kings -- but these men do not consider that those were different times and that all things agree with their own times. What emperor had at that time believed in Christ, in days in which Psalm 2 was still in effect: 'Why do the nations rage' When we invoke lawfully and divinely instituted protection against stubborn and incorrigible heretics we only do what the Word of God and the authority of the holy prophets assert.¹³

This is undiluted Constantinianism. It accepts without question Augustine's notion of the "larger fulfillment." It breaks a lance for coercive procedures in the cause of Christ's Church.

Actually Beza outdoes even Constantine. His only criticism of Constantine is that he was not severe enough in his repressive techniques. Hear Beza say:

Will not Constantine be judged to be guilty in this matter? He would have been wiser if he had defended more sternly the majesty of Christ so wickedly and stubbornly attacked While the imperial protection was still a novel thing in the Church it is really no wonder that the more lenient use of it as the first pleased both emperor and bishop.

Beza took it ill of Augustine that he had at the first been of the opinion that the Donatists should not be put to death.

It was this hyper-Constantinianism, fostered by Beza, that became regulative in the Low Countries. Small wonder that Dutch Protestantism, when it encountered the Stepchildren, drew the sword with a vengeance. And small wonder also that, when Reformed clergymen scanned the world of publications for material that would serve their purpose, their attention went at once to Beza and his book written in support of the killing of heretics. As has already been said, Bogerman reprinted it, in Dutch translation, in 1601.

He also added to it a lengthy introduction or preface, which was even more Constantinian than was Beza -- if that is possible. The occasion was this. During his pastorate at Sneek it had come to Bogerman's attention that there were Anabaptists in his city, people who were holding meetings by themselves. Although these religious gatherings were being held off the street and in the quiet of private homes, without the faintest hint of seditious intent, Beza, accompanied by the local police, came, uninvited, into these meetings. Unmasked, he began to recite a lengthy prayer and to offer an exposition of Scripture. Subsequently the local authorities were prevailed upon to publish stern prohibitions against any further "non-reformed" services.

[I. We shall, in Chapter 5, discuss the Reformers' attitude toward the unauthorized religious gatherings of the Stepchildren, their Winckelpredigten, as these gatherings were spitefully called.]

All this we have from Bogerman's own pen. He recited his exploits with manifest confidence that his Reformed contemporaries would applaud his actions. He complained that the Restitutionists had had the "temerity" to quote (before the city hall some years earlier) from Matthew 22, the passage about "rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," and from Acts 4, the passage about "obeying God rather than men," in order that the magistrates might know that they were not to make men's religion their business. Bogerman cried out at this point, "Imagine aconscience so seared! ...or what does more to break down the ...kingdom of Satan ...than when the Church with its spiritual weapon and the civil rulers with their physical ones join hands" -- as they had done, literally, when Bogerman and the constable, walking arm in arm, had invaded the meeting of the "heretics."

When Bogerman had moved to Groningen (it was here that he translated Beza's work) he came upon the same kind of situation -- more Anabaptists and more illicit gatherings. Naturally he acted on the same insights. He and his Reformed colleagues prevailed upon the local magistrates to publish the notorious Groninger Edict. It begins: "Burgomaster and Council hereby decree that henceforth no religion other than the Reformed shall be permitted in their city; he who attends any meeting of the papists or the Anabaptists shall be fined" Then follows a list of civil penalties adequate to liquidate any opposition to the sacralism that had entrenched itself in the city.

To the Restitutionist argument, that the magistrate "must not assume responsibility in matters of religion but must leave it to the ministers of the Word working by themselves ... to achieve whatever is achievable by spiritual means," Bogerman put forth the remarkable wisdom that "nothing is more useful toward health on the political scene and the prevention of commotion than the practice of a single religion, seeing that no bond of unity and of fidelity occurs among human beings who are committed to diverse religions." (In passing the reader will observe that here again, as when "Christian sacralism" was first launched, it is concern for things political that determines the policy.)

To the Restitutionist distinction between infractions punishable by the magistrate and infractions punishable by Church discipline, Bogerman turned a deaf ear, adding, "If we follow this ... then what remains but to spare all culprits -- just so they add the offence of heresy to their other misdeeds" -- not being exactly fair to his opponents. One could wish that Bogerman had taken to heart what the "heretics" were saying, for the distinction they were making was valid enough.

To the Restitutionists' argument that "It does not appear that there was a magistrate's office in the apostolic Church, for it is written in Ephesians 4 that he 'set some to be shepherds and teachers etc.' if He had also instituted a magistrate's office in the Church then the apostles would not have omitted a reference to it," Bogerman replied, "If from this silence it follows that the office of the magistracy has no place in the Church then these heretics must reject all the offices not mentioned in Ephesians 4." This was not a very telling rejoinder, if we may say so.

Although there were individual voices that spoke a different piece -- so that here again we are reminded of the Belgic Confession's "little traces" -- the position taken by Bogerman was the position taken by the Reformed Church of the Low Countries. Of this there should be no argument. If the enactment of Article 36 of this Confession is not enough to settle the matter, we could point to an almost endless array of evidence.

The Groninger Edict was duplicated in other cities. At Deventer, for example, the following was decreed in 1620, as the result of Reformed pressures:

The magistrates of the city of Deventer instruct all citizens and residents of their city that no Mennonites, etc., shall hold any secret or public assembly . . . where any preaching . . . marriage, or any other exercise of religion, is practiced, under whatever pretext ... on pain ... of perpetual banishment Any person found at such a place or in such an assembly shall forfeit his upper garment plus 25 florins; the second offence, the upper garment plus 50 florins; the third offence to be followed with arbitrary punishment. He who lets his house be used for such a gathering shall forfeit 100 florins; the second time, 200; the third time perpetual banishment.

It may be said that the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands were officially committed to the Constantinian formula. At the Disputation held with the Stepchildren at Emden in 1578, Menso Alting, official spokesman for the Reformed Churches declared:

The civil authority is an ordinance and vocation of Almighty God, one which he has instituted within the Christian Church The Church of the New Testament has certain special promises in the Old Testament touching the office of the magistrate; such as Isaiah 49:23 ("Kings shall be your nursing fathers"). Therefore the office of the magistrate cannot and may not be excluded from the New Testament Church -- otherwise the promises of God touching this office are made null and void. And so this office belongs in the Christian Church; and they who serve in it must themselves be Christians And so we have proved

from Scripture . . . that the magistracy is an ordinance of God that of right belongs in the Church.¹⁴

This illustrious exponent of the Reformed State Church reinforced his idea of the sword as a legitimate weapon in the Church with these words:

Even the heathen, although unacquainted with the true God, when they wished to make political ordinances felt that their first duty was to institute their religion, erroneous though that religion was. By this it becomes apparent that the law of nature taught them that they were responsible for religion in connection with their vocation.

Little did he realize, it seems, that this only proves that the sacralist formula is pre-Christian and therefore pagan.

From all of this it is apparent that the theology of the Reformers remained entangled in the medieval synthesis of "that which is Caesar's" and "that which is God's." They continued in the signature of such a man as Peter Damian -- who drew a parallel between the "mystery" whereby the human and the divine flow together in Christ and the "mystery" whereby the civil rule and the ecclesiastical flow together. This entanglement continued until the forces of erosion had whittled down the medieval world and its sacralist Weltanschauung.⁴

[m. There were two forces in history which contributed heavily toward the eroding away of the neo-Constantinianism of the Reformers; they are the French Revolution and Anabaptism. It is significant that both of these are "black beasts" in the estimation of those Calvinists in the Netherlands who still have not sloughed off their Constantinianism. It is significant that the political party that seeks to continue much of the old sacralism calls itself anti-Revolutionair, that is, anti-French Revolution; for it was the French Revolution that put an end to the world which this party would recover. Needless to say, Calvinists in the New World do not take such a dim view of the French Revolution, feel that there was much good in the cry "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." It is likewise in the circles of the anti-Revolutionairen that the Anabaptists continue to be looked upon as nihilists. This too is not surprising, seeing that the Anabaptists contributed significantly to the eroding away of the world-view which the anti-Revolutionairen would like to recover. Nor is it at all surprising that in the New World the Anabaptists are being given a new and sympathetic hearing.]

It will hardly be necessary to marshal more evidence that the Reformed Church of the Low Countries was Constantinian. Was not the Synod of Dordt a civil gathering first of all? Assembled by the States General (upon the insistence of the consistories of course), presided over by a person from City Hall? And were not the sentences pronounced upon the defeated party civil in nature -- banishment from the land?

It is part of the record that hardly a meeting of classis or Synod in the southern Low Countries was held without passing a resolution to pressure the local government officials to put an end to the practice of any religion save the Reformed. Measures were taken against the Anabaptists and others. Especially, however, did the new Reformed sacralism put forth efforts to squelch the remnants of the Catholic cult. At the Classis meeting held at Breskens on October 2, 1582, it was decided "to send a request to the city authorities to bring about the extermination of the papists" ("om te vercrijghene uuytroeynghe der papen"). Similar action was taken at the classis meeting held at Sluys in 1582; at Ramscapelle, action was taken to have the "duyvelsche afgodische dienst" of the papists obviated as well as to procure the extermination of the catholic priests ("vuytrouynghe vande eerloose ende goddeloose papen"); so also at the meeting held at Sluys on April 12, 1583; likewise at the meeting of November 3, 1578, scheduled to be held at

Deinze but held at Ghent because the plague was raging at Deinze.

[n. For example, in the Acts of the Provincial Synod of the Flemish churches, held at Ghent on March 8, 1581, one of the Churches asked the question: "Hoe end -- op wat maniere die doopers ende dierghelijcke kettters moghen geweert worden?" To this the Synod replied: "dat men dien angaende niet beter doen can, dan achtervolgens die articulen des Dordrechen Synodi; ende indien zulcke ende dierghelijcke middelenniet souden helpen, dat alsdan de Christelicke overheyt haeres officii stichtelijck zal vermaent worden " See H. Q. Janssen, *De Kerkhervorming in Vlaanderen*, Part IIj p. 75.]

It appears that the civil magistrates were not very cooperative in this matter of suppressing all religious exercises but the Reformed. We read that at a meeting of Classis, held at Brugge on February 13, 1582, it was decided: "in view of the fact that we get no support from the magistracy, to send a request to every Classical gathering to supplicate the civil rulers, along with us, to get the services of the papists stopped, following the precedent of Holland and Zeeland."¹⁵

This was the situation commonly, the leaders of the Reformed Churches putting forth every effort to get the civil power to suppress all other religious factions and the magistrates refusing to cooperate in this illiberal program. We find, for example, the States General administering a severe rebuke for the city of Aerdenberg, which was walking in the treadmill of the Reformed pastors:^o

We have learned with surprise that contrary to our resolution announced to your honorable body by our clerk, Jan Bogaerd, you still hinder the members of the fellowship of the Anabaptists . . . in the freedom of assembly and exercise of their religion. Whereas we desire that the aforesaid shall be allowed to enjoy just as much freedom . . . in their mind and conscience and assembly, in Aerdenberg as elsewhere ... therefore we instruct you to govern yourselves accordingly.

The Prince of Orange had to come to the rescue of these Anabaptists in a similar way in 1578; a second time in 1579. His successor, Maurice of Nassau, had to repeat the orders in 1593.

We see that whatever tendency there was toward religious toleration in the areas where Protestantism was "established," this tendency characterized the secular power rather than the consistories. This situation has led a modern investigator to declare that "It is certainly wrong to attribute to any of the Reformers an attitude of religious voluntarism which modern countries take for granted.^p The Reformers can hardly be quoted in support of religious liberty They were horrified by the implications of the free Church."¹⁶

[o. In these years the Reformed Church leaders addressed an admonition to King Stephen of Poland, urging him to suppress the Catholic religion, an admonition to 'which that liberal monarch replied with a firm refusal, saying that one of the things he refused to reign over was men's consciences. His reply, a classic of liberal thought, has been printed and discussed by H. Q. Janssen in *Bijdragen tot oudheidkunde en geschiedenis, inzonderheid van Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen*, Deel III.

[p. There is sound truth in the words of William Warren Sweet as he asserts: "There is a widespread notion among Protestant groups that the separation of Church and State, and thus religious liberty, was one of the immediate products of the Reformation, that the early Protestants were advocates of a large tolerance, and that religious liberty was but the logical development of the principles held by all the reformers. Just where this notion arose is difficult to say, and no reputable historian of our times would endorse it. The fact is that the rise of Protestantism was accompanied by an unprecedented outburst of

intolerance . . . " (Religion in Colonial America, p. 320). One can and should tone down the idea of an "unprecedented" intolerance, for there had been outbursts of intolerance far more ruthless, but one can hardly quarrel with the assertion that the Reformers were not protagonists of religious liberty. For that we must go to the camp of the Second Front.]

This is a strange situation indeed -- the magistrate preparing to give the societal compositism of the New Testament a try and the clergymen resisting it! Yet that is the situation. Hear the Reformed pastor at Middelburg, Johannes Seu, declare as he urges the local ruler to "do his duty" by enforcing religious uniformity:

How can there be a quiet and a peaceful life and how can a country flourish if its citizenry is divided by diverse conceptions of religion? There is nothing so baneful for the community as disunity, diversity, and contention in matters religious. Therefore a magistrate must stand guard diligently that false doctrine and heresy are precluded and eliminated, for these are the well-springs of all disunity among the citizens It is as clear as the noon-day sun that unity achieved by the sword of the magistrate is the one and only beginning, the middle, and the end, of peace and prosperity in the land.¹⁷

There were also some, happily, who continued in the spirit of the days before the coming of neo-Constantinianism. One such was Huibert Duifhuis, a native son of and minister in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. He had declared in a sermon, "Let the civil rulers permit no one to mislead them so as to employ force in matters of faith and of conscience, nor to persecute any for such matters, seeing that these things belong to God." For this the prevaillingly sacralist Church took action against him. At the meeting of Classis in 1578, they read for his benefit from Beza. Duifhuis listened just long enough to identify the work. Then he interrupted with, "If those are your sentiments then my soul may not linger in your council; with such I do not care to be identified." Thereupon he walked out of the meeting unceremoniously. One of the leading ministers, Hendrik Alting, asserted that the forty-seven-year-old Duifhuis was "a wolf in sheep's clothing, whom men should first resist in private and who, that failing, should be brought to the attention of the magistrates." In due course of time Duifhuis was deposed.

His views are taken for granted among Protestants everywhere today; they are part of the heritage of freedom, so that it has been said:

These views are on the North American continent among those truths which we hold to be self-evident: the voluntary Church, the separation of Church and State, and religious liberty. From the days of Constantine ... these principles, to us so cardinal, had been in abeyance.¹⁸

How came these "self-evident truths" to be held on the North American continent? That is a study by itself. No doubt the erosion of sacralism in the New World was -- like all erosions -- the result of a variety of causes; but among these the pioneering by the Stepchildren deserves a prominent place. No one has seen this more clearly than that great student of social history, Ernst Troeltsch, who wrote of the New World: "Here those Stepchildren of the Reformation have at long last had their history-making moment Here the end of the medieval idea of culture was effected and in the place of the coercive culture of the State-Church came the beginning of modern culture separate from the Church."¹⁹

As another German scholar has put it in this century: "To a modification of the Protestant conception of the State the Anabaptists drove the Protestant State-Church proponents; and in so doing they have rendered the Reformation a stupendous service, a service for which they have not as yet been given the praise which in the forum of history is rightly theirs."²⁰ Certain it is that the arguments employed by the men of

the Second Front had much to do with the development on these shores of the "self-evident" truths of the voluntary Church, separation of Church and State, religious liberty. When one reads, for example, William Penn's "The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience once more briefly debated" (1687) it is as if one hears voices from the past, the voices that emanated from the Second Front.

History seems to have established beyond reasonable doubt that, as a recent Calvinist authority has pointed out: "Every religious cultus that gets tied up with coercion must of necessity become corrupt." The Reformers' collaboration with the secular power, the consequent resurgence of "Christian sacralism," was a thing fraught with much evil. And certain it is that we today will be increasingly embarrassed by it. Equally certain is it that in our embarrassment we will find ourselves judging very differently concerning the "Stepchildren of the Reformation" than did our forebears. As we speak of Anabaptists we find ourselves unable to digest what our Reformed fathers wrote about them. We find ourselves adjusting our evaluation of them as did one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, Olivianus, who had also been taught that the Anabaptists should be exterminated, but who, when he had listened to them, changed his mind quite radically concerning them.^q

[q. In the year 1598 the Oberrat of the city of Heidelberg testified that he "Weisz sich sonst wohl zu erinnern das D. Olivianus der meinung gewesen, inen die kiipf herunder schlagen zu lassen; ist aber uf dem creuzenachischen hofgericht einer andern und miltern meinung worden."²¹ He was referring specifically to the Stepchildren.]

The American Protestant is certain that the magistrate is out of bounds when he with his coercing sword invades the area of religion -- just as certain as were the Reformers that he belongs there. We are certain that such physical coercion is principally wrong. Even more passionately confirmed in this belief were the Stepchildren, who because of this conviction went by the spiteful name of Stabler.

We have discovered anew that voluntaryism is of the essence of the Gospel. This discovery has brought us close to the position held by the Stepchildren in their day. We live in a world -- where by legal enactment the only structurization of Christ's Church that is permissible is the structurization for which the Stepchildren agonized. And as we become acquainted with the Stepchildren as they really were we find ourselves saying what Castellio reportedly said to Beza:

With regard to the Anabaptists I should like to know how you know that they condemn legitimate marriages and the magistracy and condone murder. Certainly this is not to be found in their books and even less in their words. You have heard these things from their enemies, Beza; but if enemies are to be believed then know . . . that it is being said of your Farel that he has as many devils in his beard as hairs, and that whenever he eats he feeds the crumbs to these devils. Beza, I do not believe what you say about these Anabaptists.

America calls itself the "land of the free" and has shown itself to be willing to give all it has to preserve its "freedoms." One of these is the freedom to believe and to disbelieve. This is the fruitage of the vision for which the Stepchildren agonized; it is, as even foreign observers have noted, "not the progeny of the Enlightenment but rather the ripe fruit of the Freechurchism of the Left-wing reformers." If this seems far-fetched let it be recalled that the first voice to be raised against another variety of coercionism, human slavery, was a voice from the sector of the Stepchildren. As early as 1688 the son of a German-speaking Restitutionist, an immigrant who had come to these shores to find freedom of conscience, wrote back to his people in Europe: "Here there is freedom of conscience, as is right and proper; what there should be

moreover is freedom from slavery." This was but an inference drawn from the voluntaryism for which the Stepchildren pioneered. Nor is it in any sense a mere coincidence that the State that took such a leading part in the abolition of slavery was that State that had been influenced greatly by the ideas of the Stepchildren -- Rhode Island. When it is recalled that bond-service was officially approved (in the case of Saracens and other non-members of "Christendom," of course) in the heyday of "Christian sacralism," we begin to see a pattern, namely that the voluntaryism of the New Testament begets human freedom, even as the coercionism of "Christian sacralism" spawns servitude. The people who were spitefully called Slablers had a point to make. And they made it, even though it took a long time.

[r. It is refreshing to see a European scholar, Emil Brunner, recognize that the end of Constantinianism with its Zwanggleichschaltung was not in the New World simply occasioned by the Aufklärung but that back of this development was "zum Teil auch die christliche Kirche selbst." (See Brunner's pamphlet on Die Christusbotschaft und der Staat, p. 45f.) Brunner says in this connection that "der erste Toleranzstaat ist bekanntlich eine christliche Gründung, der kleine Neu-England-Staat Rhode Island." It is significant that it was precisely this "kleine Neu-England-Staat Rhode Island" that had been most deeply influenced by the heritage of the Stepchildren.]

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

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