

THE RADICAL REFORM THEN AND NOW

by

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For many reasons 1521 was a memorable year for the history of the Reformation. On January 3rd of that year, Martin Luther was excommunicated by the papal bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*¹. This bull was issued by Pope Leo X to enforce the excommunication with which Luther was threatened in the Bull *Exsurge Domine* of 1520². Later, on May 25, the recently elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, promulgated the Edict of Worms against Luther. With this document Luther was declared a fugitive and heretic, and with this, the rupture between the Lutheran Reformation and Roman Catholicism became official. From that moment on, owning any of Luther's books was considered a crime.

The Edict did not respect the prior agreement that guaranteed Luther's safe return to his home. On the contrary, it stipulated that he be arrested and sentenced as soon as possible. On the way home, and in order to protect him, Prince Frederick the Wise organized a mock kidnapping and hid him in the Wartburg Castle for eleven months. During that time, from December 1521 to March 1522, Luther translated the New Testament into German.

However, there is another event to take into account, that happened this same year. We refer to the official manifestation of a dissident movement of the Reformation that historians have called «THE RADICAL REFORM». How did it come about?, What are its postulates? What effect did it have on the church then and now? These are some of the points that I will consider in this essay titled: «RADICAL REFORM, THEN AND NOW».

ORIGINS OF RADICAL REFORM

How did the Radical Reformation come about? Where did it come from? To answer this question we need to know that in the early Middle Ages a religious movement emerged in the eastern church (apparently founded in 750 AD by the Armenian Constantine Silvano of Manamali), which was characterized by its adoptive Christology and its rejection of the use of images of Mary and the saints, as well as promoting Manichaeian ideas. In the 8th century the movement enjoyed the protection of the Emperor Constantine Copronius (741-775). But in the ninth century it suffered many persecutions, most of them from the Empress Theodora. The Paulites, in their flight, established colonies in Thrace, Armenia, Asia Minor and the Balkans. By the end of the 10th century they had established themselves in Europe.³

¹ For more detail see: <http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1521.htm> or <http://asv.vatican.va/es/doc/1521.htm> (for Spanish)

² <http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1520.htm>

³ Ramos, M. A. (2000, c1998). *Nuevo diccionario de religiones denominaciones y sectas* (electronic ed.). Nashville: Editorial Caribe.

The relation between the paulicianos and the emergence of Anabaptism is explained by the writer George Huntston Williams with these words:

«From an analogical, if not a genetic, point of view, the close relationship between Greek (and Armenian) Paulism and Anabaptism is astonishing, except for pacifism. But even here Paul's insistence on the cross of personal suffering and probable martyrdom, in connection with the baptism of believers, makes us think of the Anabaptists. The Paulites argued that the age of thirty years was adequate to receive baptism, and practiced it in the form that Servetus would later defend. Repudiating the baptism of the Greek Orthodox Church, the members of that ancient Eastern sect, which has survived to modern times, also practiced rebaptism. His whole theology was centered around baptism in the Jordan, which was the basis for his adoptive Christology and his insistence on the baptism of believers.»⁴

After Luther posted his 95 theses, many longed to end right away everything that had to do with Roman Catholicism. Luther, on the other hand, was more moderate. «Everyone knew about the moderation of Luther, who was slow to let go of his habits of an Augustinian friar, of the Latin Mass, of being contrary to violence and haste. He was afraid that his message, which only had to do with the personal relationship between man and God and with solving the problem of salvation, was going to be used to subvert the social order. Now, not everyone agreed with such patience.»⁵

In 1521, while Luther was hiding in the Wartburg Castle, Thomas Müntzer, a German preacher of the Lutheran Reformation who was in charge of the working parish of St. Catherine in Zwickau, began to promote radical reform. The radical reform movement did not seek to correct the abuses that Catholicism committed in the church. On the contrary, he proposed a total break with any practice that had no precedent in the Bible or any new revelation. The Lutheran Reformation was focused on doctrine, the church, and the believer. The radical reform went further. He sought to reform society and transform it into the earthly Kingdom of God.

While in Zwickau, Müntzer became a follower of a secular trio of charismatic preachers founded by the weaver Nikolas Storch, which is the reason why they were known as the storchites. They were also called Schwärmgeister, meaning enthusiasts, in the sense of fanatical spirits, and Luther called them «Prophets of Zwickau.» The other members of the trio were Thomas Drechsel and Mark Thomas Stübner (the only one with a university education). This group was influenced by the doctrines of the Taborites⁶ and the Waldenses and some of the Pauline errors. They taught that the

⁴ Williams, George Huntston. (1983): *La Reforma Radical*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. México., pág. 354

⁵ Egido, Teófanos. (1992): *Las Reformas Protestantes*. Editorial Síntesis, S.A. Madrid. Pág. 168

⁶ Radical branch emerged from the followers of John Hus (Hussites) «They announced the coming of Christ and assembled in a mountain that they named Tabor, hence their name.» (Ramos, M. A. (2000, c1998)

Millennium would be preceded by the rise of the Antichrist,⁷ practiced possession by the Spirit and held that God still used direct revelation in visions and dreams. The influence of the Zwickau Prophets arrived in Wittenberg due mostly to the influence of Gabriel Zwilling, who worked to spread his ideas among the believers who had embraced the Reformation and won the sympathy of the spiritual authority of the city, Dr. Andreas Rudolph Bodenstein von Karlstadt (also known as Carlstadt) friend and colleague of Luther. Soon the success of the Zwickau prophets was radically exposed in Wittenberg: «The iconoclastic direct action soon came: students, bourgeois, enthusiastic people, invaded temples, expelled papist priests, destroyed liturgical books, burned altars and shot down images, all with a clatter and arms.»⁸ The Radical Reformation had begun.

Luther, aware of such events, left the castle where he was hiding on March 6, 1522 to prove that he did not agree with the radical reformation. From the 9th to the 16th of March he preached a series of sermons that served to reestablish order in the city.

Although Carlstadt was not directly involved in the acts of vandalism, he was blamed because a few days earlier he had published a book (titled: Von Abtueung der Bilder) in which he presented arguments based on the Old Testament for the destruction of images which were considered to promote idolatry. Carlstadt gave up preaching in Wittenberg and went to Orlamünde where, after being installed as pastor of the congregation, he continued his departure from the principles of Lutheran reform by refusing to baptize newborn children and immersing himself further in the ideas of radical reform. Carlstadt's theories alarmed Luther. In September of 1524 Carlstadt was expelled from the dominions of the elector of Saxony when he already had prepared for printing eight of his most radical writings regarding the sacraments.

On the other hand Müntzer was expelled from his parish in Zwickau and in 1521 he fled to Prague. After trying unsuccessfully to convince the inhabitants there to adopt his ideas of establishing the kingdom of God through a peasant revolution, he decided to go to Allstedt (Saxony). He stayed there for two years and sang his German Mass with popular songs that served to incite the struggle against the ungodly (that is, those who did not think like him) and managed to form the «League of the elect» to establish the true kingdom of God.

Faced with opposition to his radical communist ideas Müntzer emigrated and arrived in the free city of Muhlhausen (Thuringia) where he encouraged the poor peasants, who had rebelled against the princes, to fight to establish the Kingdom of God. He convinced them that the end of the wicked was near and that God himself would come to support the peasant rebellion. His prophecies did not have the desired impact as only 300 responded to the call. With «The Sword of Gideon» (a title that he gave himself), his very small army launched into an almost suicidal battle, singing the

⁷ Williams, p. 68

⁸ Egido, p. 169

hymn «Come Holy Spirit». On May 25, 1525 the peasants were defeated. Müntzer was captured and two days later was beheaded as an example to others. Thomas Müntzer is now considered a hero by many socialists and communists, and as a precursor of socialism in Germany.

The main characteristic present in the adherents of the radical reform is their rupture with the basic principle of the Reformation, SOLA SCRIPTURA. Although they generally base their doctrines on the Bible, they ultimately rejected the «external Word» and in its place stressed the “inner word.” «At the time of Luther’s Reformation, the “heavenly prophets,” the Anabaptists and Schwenkfeldians, rejected the “external Word” and in its place stressed the “inner word,” stigmatizing obedience to Scripture as “letter service” (*Buchstabendienst*;) while in modern times the Christian Church must cope with the enthusiasm of such religious organizations as the Quakers, Swedenborgians, Irvingites, and others. In addition to these visionaries it must oppose also those who separate the operation of the Holy Ghost from the Word of Scripture and rely on private revelations as the norm of their faith»⁹

THE CHILDREN OF RADICAL REFORM

The ideas of the prophets of Zwickau, Müntzer, and Carlstadt echoed in different places and people, as a result of mutations of the radical reform, that we can call "Sons of Radical Reformation". The greatest of these are undoubtedly the so-called Anabaptists, and closely related are the Spiritualists and the Evangelical Rationalists.

THE SPIRITUALISTS

Within the radical Reformation a peculiar tendency constituted the so-called spiritualism. Spiritualists taught that the church is invisible and that visible practices such as sacraments or ecclesiastical discipline were unnecessary. They believed that God spoke to believers apart from the Bible. Contrary to the forensic justification taught by the Lutheran Reformation the spiritualists proposed an experiential redemption that consisted in a progressive divinization of the believer through suffering. Spiritualism had many important leaders. Two of those who stood out during the time of the reformation were Sebastian Franck von Wörd (1499-1542) and Kaspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig (1489-1561)

Sebastian Franck

He was a mystic, book printer, translator, theologian and German historian, who, though impressed by the ideas of Luther and Zwingli, largely followed his own theological proposal. He is author of the *Chronicle: book of time and historical Bible* and more than 20 books, including comments on other authors. Although he exhibited with almost missionary zeal his spiritualist theology, which he claimed to have received from God, he never attempted to organize a sect. His work titled *Paradoxes*

⁹ Mueller, John Theodore. (1999, c1934). *Christian Dogmatics* (electronic ed.). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. p. 95

(1534) is the one that best exposes his thought. In it he affirms that the true divinity only reveals itself in intimacy and that outer religion is not important and that therefore one must be tolerant of those who profess another faith. Franck, who is also nicknamed Glüber (dreamer) believed that God communicates with human beings through a portion of divinity that remains in each individual.

Franck, at the beginning of 1518, began his theological studies with the Dominicans in Heidelberg. He was ordained a Catholic priest. But in 1525 he went to join the Reformation. He began his ministerial activities as a Lutheran preacher at Ansbach-Bayreuth in 1526. Shortly afterwards he was called to be a pastor in the town of Gustenfelden (dependent of Nuremberg, in the same margraviate). His first work was a translation into German in 1528 (with certain additions), of the first part of the Latin Diallage of Andres Althamer, (Diallage, hoc est conciliatio locturaum Scripturae qui prima facie inter se pugnare videntur), which opposed the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists. In his introduction to the German version of the Diallage, in a paragraph in which he speaks of spiritualism, Franck declared himself in favor of ecclesiastical pluralism, stating: «Every home [should] have its own faith, as is the custom in Bohemia.»¹⁰ In the same year he renounced the pastorate and the Lutheran Reformation.

The Schwenckfeldians

Diplomat Kaspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig (1489-1561) was a German nobleman, knight of the Teutonic Order, who joined Lutheranism in 1518 and by 1522 became one of the main exponents of the Lutheran Reformation in Silesia, where he owned large properties. However, on June 11, 1524, he published a treatise entitled «*Warning to All Silesian Brethren*» in which he expounded his own doctrine on the sacraments, evidencing his adherence to the spiritualist wing of radical reform. In 1540 he severed his relationship with the Lutheran Reformation.

«His supporters organized several congregations and a group reached the Thirteen Colonies of North America in 1734 [...] The most important publication of the movement is the Grosse Confession (1540) in which it presents its doctrine of the deification of the humanity of Christ.»¹¹. The Book of Concord explicitly condemns the heresies of Schwenckfeld and his followers (Formula of Concord XII: 20-17)

The characteristic distinction that spiritualists make between the text of the Bible, which they call the external word, and a personal and subjective religious experience, which they call the internal word, is notorious. «[Spiritualists] with a spirituality codified in the direct experience of God, known and felt through freedom. By their internalization, by their individualism, by their incompatibility with any of the official and state confessions, almost all of them were precursors of freedom of

¹⁰ Williams, p. 301

¹¹ Ramos, M. A. (2000, c1998)

conscience, of tolerance, and their attitudes would be assumed by the later pietistic movements.»¹²

THE ANABAPTISTS

Within the radical reform movement, different groups had their common denominator: denying the validity of the baptism of children who had not reached the age of the use of reason. They were called Anabaptists (from Greek *aná*, again, and *baptistēs*, the one who baptizes) for practicing re baptism.

The book of Concord explicitly condemns the heresies of the Anabaptists (Formula of Concord XII - 2-11)

The German Anabaptism

Hans Hut was a bookbinder and traveling bookseller between Wittenberg and Erfurt who admired Müntzer, whom he met in 1524 when he was invited to stay in his house for a day and a night. On May 31, 1525 Hut preached against the baptism of children, the idolatry of using images and against the mass. It was then that he said: «The citizens must confront the authorities with a knife, for the opportune time has come: the power is in their hands.»¹³ By these words Hut was identified as a follower of Müntzer. But in the court of Augsburg he declared that he was never a true follower of Müntzer because he did not understand him. Hut was renamed Pentecost, on May 26, 1526 by Hans Denk, a humanist scholar and former associate of Zwingli, who in 1525 organized an Anabaptist church in Augsburg, along with Melchor Rinck, Luis Haetzer and Jacobo Kautz.

Hut was a passionate missionary of Anabaptism and considered himself an apostle (sent) by God and, based on Daniel 12 and apocalypse 13, prophesied that the second coming of Christ would happen on Pentecost of 1528. In 1526 he preached a sermon rebuking the peasants for having taken up arms instead of waiting for the time of God.

Hut was quite successful in implementing Anabaptism in Austria where he became known as «the Apostle of Austria.» There three of his converted, Leonardo Schiemer, John Schlaffer and Ambrose Spittelmaier, who later died as martyrs, rigorously emphasized the three featured doctrines of Anabaptism. «Common features to the three were a much greater insistence on the imminence of the second coming of Christ than that proclaimed by the Swiss brothers, a much higher insistence on personal suffering as confirmation that they have followed the way of Christ in this world, and a greater emphasis also on the need to share possessions, a feature which was later intended to fully develop into communism. Another group was the Christian refugees in Austrian Moravia, also known as the Hutterites [Jakob Hutter].»¹⁴

¹² Egido (1992, pág. 187)

¹³ Williams, p. 104

¹⁴ Williams, p. 197

On the other hand, the doctrines of these anabaptists were very heretical and their move away from the Lutheran reformation is remarkable. «The conviction to be prophets and apostles was extremely rooted in them. One of the evangelists, referring to Christ himself, said he was a Prophet like any other, and that only from the time when he received the Holy Spirit (in the Jordan), was he (adopted) as "a true God ... like his father in heaven.»¹⁵

In August, 1527 the Anabaptists called a Synod to which Hutter, of Austria and Denk from Worms, after crossing Switzerland, attended in order to discuss a document in which seven decrees had previously been prepared, especially those relating to the Kingdom of the Heaven, to the manner and to the expected date of Christ's advent and the role that the Anabaptists would have in it. «A second purpose of the Synod was the management of a greater number of apostles, so that they would proclaim the Anabaptist gospel and organize what Hutter, Denck and their colleagues believed would be the "third" reformation, ie the end reformation.»¹⁶

About 70 Anabaptists attended this meeting which came to be known as "The Synod of Martyrs" because so many of them assembled that it alarmed the leaders of the city who proceeded to arrest both Hutter and the patrician Langenmantel. Hut died in prison in June of 1527 when a fire broke out in his cell. His body, tied to a chair, was taken to the court which ruled that it be burned at the stake. After the Synod, Denck was astonished by the sudden collapse of the Synod's plans. Banished from Nuremberg, he went to Basel and came to the conclusion that radical reform was a tremendous mistake that he needed to repent of. That same year, shortly after writing an autobiography of his life, he died of the plague in Basel before he was 32 years old.

The German Revolutionary Anabaptism

Müntzer was a disciple of Nicholas Storch, the founder of the Zwickau prophets. Another person who was influenced by Storch was Furrier Melchior Hoffman, a man who resembled Müntzer in many ways, to the point that he was considered to be his direct successor. Hoffman presented himself as a prophet announcing that the year 1533 would be the end of time, giving rise to the beginning of Christ's Millennial Kingdom. By his constant reference to the ministry of Enoch and Elijah at the end of time it was easy for many to see in him the prophet Elijah. He was associated with Leonardo and Ursula Jost, a marriage that claimed to have prophecies and visions, and with another supposed prophetess named Barbara Rebstock. Hoffman called the city of Strasbourg «The New Jerusalem» where one day the 144,000 spoken of in the book of Revelation would congregate and that behind a bloody site would be the seat of the royal priesthood. To support his claims he cited the apocryphal book 4th of Ezra.

¹⁵ Williams, p. 204

¹⁶ Williams, p. 206

Faced with such speculation, the reformers living in Strasbourg advised Hoffman to return to his fur trade. But he was convinced that theological preparation was a hindrance and he hoped that the Holy Spirit would make up for any shortcomings he had. At the appointed time, Hoffman's prophecy failed notoriously and instead a synod was held which ended up condemning various religious agitators who promoted radical reform. Hoffman was sentenced to life imprisonment. He died ten years later.

Baker John Matthys took Hoffman's place among his followers. He assumed the command, stating that God had revealed to him great things that he was not allowed to tell anyone, and that he was Enoch, the other witness of the book of Revelation (with the understanding that Hoffman was Elijah). In 1533 he arrived in Amsterdam with great pretensions where he heard that they already identified themselves with Cornelio Polderman or with Gaspar Schwenckfeld similar to the Enoch successor of Hoffman. Matthys reacted with great fury, and with great and desperate curses condemned to hell for all eternity all those who refused to hear his voice and did not acknowledge and accept him as the true Enoch. Angered by such threats some went into rigorous fasting and prayer, after which they finally accepted the prophet. Matthys did not intend to confine himself to waiting for the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom. On the contrary, he maintained that it was necessary to impose its coming by the violence of the sword. With that in mind he proclaimed the city of Münster as the «New Jerusalem.» The tailor Juan de Leyden, one of his followers, implanted revolutionary Anabaptist doctrines among its inhabitants. After winning the elections in February of 1534 Matthys established a regime of totalitarian government above the burgomaster and the council. "In the short time of a month and a half all properties were declared to belong equally to all. Private possession of coins, food and everything necessary for daily sustenance was prohibited. The doors of the dwellings had to be permanently open, though carefully so that the cattle would not escape."¹⁷ Those who did not agree with the new regime were invited to leave. Catholics and Lutherans quietly left the city. Those who remained had to adapt to the new regime of a communist and polygamous nature that did not last long. In this way Müntzer's ideal ended in complete failure.

The Swiss Anabaptism

The anabaptist and revolutionary ideas proclaimed by Müntzer crossed the German territory from Saxony to Thuringia, reaching even France, Swabia and as far as the Swiss border. One person who was strongly influenced by Müntzer's ideas was a former priest named Baltazar Hubmaier. In 1523 in Switzerland Hubmaier (then pastor in Waidhust, Austria), Felix Manz and others, discussed with Zwingli the need to reject infant baptism. Before this proposal a dispute was organized in Zurich on January 17, 1525 in which Zwingli rejected Anabaptism. But he was opposed by many of his former associates, including the capable and respected Conrad Grebel. The city

¹⁷ Egido, p. 184

council, acting as judge, declared that Zwingli had won the debate and ordered that all children be baptized. The Anabaptists were to be exiled or imprisoned. A second dispute in November ended the same way. In March of 1526 the order was given to drown the Anabaptists if they persisted in their heresy. Felix Manz, Jacobo Faulic, and Enrique Riemon were the first upon which this sentence fell.

However, from 1525 to 1529 this movement grew rapidly in Switzerland. Its leaders, being exiled, took their doctrines to other countries and even to the south of Germany. Such is the case of Hubmaier who in June 1526, fled to Nickolsburg, Moravia, after being persecuted in Austria and Switzerland. There he had instant success, gaining between six and twelve thousand followers in a single year. Hubmaier in place of baptism established the custom of presenting newborns to the congregation, and after reading in the Gospel according to Mark, verses 13-16 of chapter 10, entrusted them to the prayers of believers. It should be noted that Jesus did not have children presented as an alternative to baptism.

Hutterites, Mennonites and Amish

Other prominent leaders of Anabaptism were Jakob Hutter (1500-1536) and Menno Simons (1496-1561), a former Catholic priest and Jacob Amman (1644-1730).

In 1528 Hutter founded, , an Anabaptist church in Moravia. His followers were known as Hutterites or as Huterian brethren. Eventually they moved to Ukraine, Canada and South Dakota, seeking freedom and facilities to develop their lifestyle.

Menno Simons followed the moderate tradition of the original Swiss Anabaptists and was the organizer of Anabaptism in northern Germany and Holland. His followers are known as Mennonites. They are currently the largest branch of Anabaptism. They have numerous members in North America and several European countries, as well as missions in numerous countries, including several Latin American republics.

Jacob Amman is the Mennonite who established the Amish.

EVANGELICAL RATIONALISM

Within the radical reformation there was a rationalistic tendency that placed reason far above biblical revelation. The most notorious exponent was Michael Servetus (1511-1553) who at the age of 20 was already a radical reformer. Servetus denied that the Trinity was a biblical doctrine, considered that «The Papist Trinity, baptism of infants and the other sacraments defended by the papacy are doctrines of demons.» He also rejected the doctrine of predestination and infant baptism, and believed that the millennial kingdom of Christ was about to begin. Servetus was arrested in Geneva and tried for heresy. Being found guilty he was executed on the October 27, 1553 by order of the city Council that arranged for him to be burned in the bonfire. "Servetus is a fascinating figure because he brought together in one

person the Renaissance and the left wing of the Reformation. He was at the same time a disciple of the Neoplatonic Academy of Florence and of the Anabaptists”¹⁸

Lelio Sozzini, (Socino, 1525-1562), and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604), who were followers of the Servetus doctrine, are considered to be the forerunners of Unitarianism (denying the trinity). The followers of Socino formed "The Reformed Minor Church" (officially called the Socinians) that flourished in Poland for nearly a hundred years. At its height it claimed to have up to three hundred congregations. They established a colony in Rakov, northeast of Krakow, and set up a printing press and founded a university. In 1658 the king decreed that all members of the minor Reformed church should leave Poland within three years; otherwise, they would be executed. Hundreds of them preferred exile. Brutal persecutions erupted. A few small congregations of exiles survived for a time in Transylvania, Prussia and the Netherlands, but these isolated groups also gradually disappeared.

The most well-known unitarianism is English, whose pioneers were the Protestant ministers John Biddle and Teofilo Lindsey, who in 1774 founded the Essex chapel in the city of London. Joseph Priestly, a famous scientist, was a proponent of unitarian congregations in various places until his exile to the United States to support the French Revolution. In 1813, it was recognized as the unitarian movement that was organized like the British and Foreign Unitarian Union in 1825.

In the United States, Priestley organized a church in Pennsylvania. For a time the Unitarians controlled the chair of Theology at Harvard.

DOCTRINE OF RADICAL REFORM

The radical Reformation did not have a homogeneous doctrine, however some of its common emphases need to be mentioned.

CONCERNING THE WORD OF GOD

- 1) In addition to the Bible, they taught that there is another word of God, an inner word written in the hearts of people:

«Thomas Müntzer finally attributed to "all Scripture" a purely propaedeutic value, saying that what he did was "kill" the believer so that he could awaken the Word within and respond to the Spirit»¹⁹

«Far less radical than Müntzer, rational and evangelical spiritualists were content to say that the written Word, with all its paradoxes and all its apparent contradictions, could not be grasped without the Holy Spirit,

¹⁸ Roland H. Bainton, (1973) *Servet, el hereje perseguido (1511-1553)*. Madrid: Taurus.

¹⁹ Williams, p. 907

virtually identified with the Inner Word. Fearing that men would revere the letter of the Bible in such a way that they would forget the living God from whom it came, Sebastian Franck, Cierneme Ziegler, Gaspar Schwenckfeld, the "epicurean prelate" Wolfgang Schultheiss (of Strasbourg) in a minor measure, certain contemplative or spiritualist Anabaptists such as John Denck and the Hutterite Ulrich Stadler tended to regard Scripture as a witness of the faith or as nourishment of an already formed faith»²⁰

From there they have considered their own subjective conclusions as having the same authority as the Word of God. In the case of the rationalists it is clear that reason was the final authority in matters in which the Scriptures seemed to be unreasonable.

Williams summarizes the radical reform view of the Bible with these words: «We can make a similar characterization of the three extremes that were at the heart of the Radical Reformation. The temptation of spiritualists, for example, was to identify the biblical Word and the inner spirit to the extremes of experiential subjectivism and violence inspired by the Maccabees. The temptation of the evangelical rationalists was to impose on the biblical Word the canons of reason and conscience (scruple), transforming religious worship into study and the church into a school of ethics. Finally, the great adventure of the Anabaptists was to identify the saving Word of Scripture, valid for them as evangelical Christians, with the words of the New Testament converted into a new law.»²¹

The Augsburg Confession

«Our churches condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that through their own preparations and works the Holy Spirit comes to them without the external Word.»²² (Art. 5)

- 2) They deny the power of the gospel in the sacraments as means of grace.

From this view of the Radical Reformation we note three important errors in its doctrinal perspective:

- a. An Anthropocentric Soteriology: Salvation has to do mostly with what man does and little with what God did. In this regard Professor Lange points out:

²⁰ Williams, p. 908

²¹ Williams, p. 912

²² Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. 2005 (Edited by Paul Timothy McCain) (33). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

«The Anabaptists of Luther's time taught that *the Holy Spirit spoke directly to people; denied that he used means of grace to convert*. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), the Swiss reformer, also taught this error. *The assurance of salvation, then, had to be derived from subjective experiences of the person, rather than the objective promises that God gives in His Word.*» (Emphasis added)²³

- b. Another source of revelation that has equal authority as Scripture. This idea joined to another that holds that holy life is part of salvation, elevates the concept that they have of man as a being that has the power to be perfect, arriving at the extreme of being like God.

«By insisting on the [anabaptism or] baptism of believers, or on the possession of the gifts of the Spirit, or on the experience of regeneration, and by being very often indifferent to the general political and social order, the various spokesmen of the Radical Reformation not only tactically opposed the Magisterial Reformation, but also clearly distinguished themselves from sixteenth-century Protestants as to what constituted experience and the concept of salvation. They preferred instead to insist on other concepts: regeneration, the new being in Christ, the energy of the Spirit, the revival of the moral conscience or, in a veiled language, deification.»²⁴

- c. The diminution of the attributes and nature of Christ and his work.

«The Anabaptists of Luther's time held that Jesus was less than God; Men like Hans Denck (d. 1527) and Ludwig Hetzer (m. 1529) followed in the footsteps of Paul of Samosata. Socinianism denies the deity of Christ.»²⁵

- 3) Consistent with their anthropocentrism, they have their hopes placed on this earth. They are millennialists.

«Millennialism appeared at the time of Luther in the teachings of Carlstadt, Zwingli, and the Anabaptists of the time, including Thomas Muenzer and the Zwickau prophets: Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel, and Marcus Stuebner. Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession condemns millennialism.

«The Mennonites, who come from the Anabaptists, adopted millennialism, as did the English Congregationalists. Philip Spener (1635-1705), the father of Pietism, a movement that emerged in German Lutheranism, was also a millennialist. Johann Loehe of Neuendettelsau, Germany, who contributed

²³ Lyle W. Lange. De Tal Manera Amó Dios Al Mundo. P.234

²⁴ Williams, p. 7

²⁵ Lange, p.244

to the founding of the Iowa synod, was amillennialist. Since the Iowa Synod was one of the participants in the formation of the American Lutheran Church in 1930, millennialism has always been tolerated in the ALC. Dr. Michael Reu (1869 - 1943), the leading theologian of the Iowa Synod and author of *Lutheran Dogmatics*, was amillennialist. The Lutheran Church in America and its early bodies have tolerated millennialism. So it is not surprising to find that today's ELCA also sees millennialism as a pending issue.»²⁶

- 4) Although not all adherents of the radical reform were Anabaptists, all were opposed to infant baptism.
- 5) They taught that man had free will in spiritual matters.

The Radical Reformation considers that man can, by his own power, work for his salvation. Consequently, they separated the Spirit from Scripture by denying the power of the gospel in the means of grace. Müntzer wrote: «I preach a Christian faith which does not agree with Luther's, but which is in conformity with the hearts of the elect throughout the world. Every man, although born Turkish, can have the beginning (Ankunft) of this same faith. That is the movement (Bewegung) of the Holy Spirit, as it is written of Cornelius [in Acts 10]». It is obvious that these statements go against Scripture and agree with Pelagianism. Already in those days this situation was denounced by William Turner in his work: *A preseruatiue or triacle agaynst the poyson of pelagius lately renewed and styrred up agayn by the firious secte of the anabaptistes* (Londres, 1551) with quite strong terms:

«This monstre [the Pelagianism] is in many poyntes lyke vnto the watersnake with seuen heades. For as out of one bodye rose seuen heades: So out of Pelagius rose vp these seuen sectes: Anabaptistes, Adamites, Loykenistes, Libertines, Swengfeldianes, Daudianes, and the spoylers.»²⁷

- 6) They prefer to be called simply «brothers» avoiding as far as possible the term «church». In that sense, for the Radical Reformation, it is possible to have fellowship with those who have different doctrines.
- 7) Since, according to the Radical Reformation, man has the power to do good works, has a free will before he is a believer so that he actively collaborates in his conversion (sometimes taking the decision to follow Christ («decisionalism»)) and believe that man himself receives merit for his works

²⁶ Lange, p.244

²⁷ The quotation from Turner's book in the text comes from Champlin Burrage (1912) *The Early English Dissenters In The Light Of Recent Research (1550— 1641)* Cambridge. vol. 1, p. 59. A facsimile can be consulted at: <https://archive.org/details/earlyenglishdiss01burruoft>

of sanctification, it is not strange that part of the Radical Reformation has promoted the doctrine of the deification of man.

These false teachings are contrary to the principle of faith alone because they have as their center the work of man in justification by faith. In this way radical reform is more humanism than Christianity. The best hopes of the radicals are oriented to an earthly kingdom of God that corresponds well with millennialism and postmillennialism.

Radical Reform Today

The radical reform movement at that time had two urgent goals:

1. Restore Christianity to its original form (the one proposed by them)
2. Prepare the world for the imminent coming of the Kingdom of Christ.

The urgency for both shows that more than a reformation this movement was a social revolution, or as someone described it, was «a counter revolution aborted in the heart of the Reformation»²⁸ The historian Williams is in agreement with this when he states: «Of course, it can be stated of all the Radical Reformation that it was an aborted movement.»²⁹

However, that does not mean that it was extinguished because, like leaven in a batch of dough, its doctrine and purpose survived through the centuries to impregnate much of what is contemporary Protestantism. Although today we can point to the Mennonites and the Moravian Unitarians as direct descendants of the Radical Reformation, there are also ideological heirs. Among these we find in first place the German pietism that emerged from the ministry of Philip James Spener (1635-1705), who gave the movement its name with his book «*Pia desideria*» («Pious desires») and with the meetings of his «Colleges of Piety». They emphasized the work of the believer over and above the grace of God.

In England, at the beginning of the 17th century, Baptists arose who not only practiced re baptism but also taught that the only valid way to baptize is by «immersion.» This group is one of the fastest growing in the United States of America. Some of its notable members were billionaire John Davison Rockefeller and preacher William Francklin «Billy» Graham.

A group of similar growth is the one originated by George Fox. «Their groups were convinced that they were directly enlightened by the Spirit and that clergy, sacraments, temples, and places of worship were to be left behind. They called

²⁸ Louwell H. Zuck (1957) *Anabaptism: An Abortive Counter-Revolt within the Reformation*. *Church History*, vol. 26. Nº 3. pp.221-226. (See online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3161743>)

²⁹ Williams, p. 957

themselves friends, but they soon became known to others as "Quakers," by the inarticulate guttural sounds they uttered, and by the bodily tremors that agitated them when they believed that the Spirit made himself present in their meetings.»³⁰

Another group that was not so relevant in its beginnings is the one that arose from the preaching of John Wesley (1703-1791), the son of an Anglican minister and university graduate. Methodism, as this group became known, incorporated both Scripture and reason, religious experience and tradition as having equal authority over faith.

Later all of these movements resulted in the formation of Pentecostalism and Neo Pentecostalism, which at present are the living expression of the same errors of radical reform. We affirm this based on the facts. Here are some examples that show that radical reform remains in evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

«One of the main purposes of the Bible is to correct man's elevated opinion of himself, but is currently being interpreted by Christian leaders as seeking the exact opposite. How can it be that creatures whose capital sin is that they think too well about themselves have been convinced that their problem is actually poor self-esteem?» (Hunt, Dave. *Más allá de la Seducción*. pág. 18)

All of these movements that descended from radical reform have gradually introduced another authority as being on the same level as the Scripture which is honored as the Word of God. This new authority is the apostolic authority that at present has already been officially organized to the point that it recommends forgetting names such as Neo-Pentecostalism or post-denominationalism because the name chosen by them is the New Apostolic Reformation. C. Peter Wagner has formed what he now calls the «International Coalition of Apostles» over which he personally presides. He has also formed the «New Apostolic Round Table» where he functions as the «apostle convener» and Chuck Pierce as «apostle counselor». Wagner sees the Coalition as the vehicle to summon and assemble apostles from all over the world in a vast network that initially must consist of 500 or 1000 apostles. Membership will be strictly by invitation. The offices, in the suburbs of Dallas, Texas, are run by John Kelly, «executive apostle.» There will be «apostolic summits» in different parts of the United States and around the world.

Wagner explains the reason for the name of the movement in this way: «I use the term 'Reform', because [...] these new wineskins seem to be at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost five hundred years ago. 'Apostolic' denotes a strong approach to reach out, coupled with a recognition of the apostolic ministries of the present time. 'New' adds a contemporary twist to the name.»³¹

³⁰ González, J. L. (2003). *Historia del cristianismo: Tomo 2* (2:336). Miami, Fla.: Editorial Unilit.

³¹ Peter Wagner "Una nueva reforma apostólica", en: H. Caballeros & M. Winger. *El poder transformador del avivamiento*. Buenos Aires: Peniel, 2005, p. 179.

Wagner acknowledges that this new reform is linked to radical reform when he says: «My point of departure is that the necessary theological foundations were laid in the Protestant Reformation: the authority of the Scriptures, justification by faith alone and the universal priesthood of all believers. The Wesleyan movement introduced the demand for personal and corporate sanctity. The Pentecostal movement outlined the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in a variety of ministries of power. The office of intercessor was restored in the seventies, and the office of the prophet was restored in the eighties. The final piece arrived in the nineties with the recognition of the gift and the office of the apostle. The New Apostolic Reformation is the present form in which God is rescuing the theocratic government of the Church»³²

An example of what the present titles of apostles and prophets imply in neo Pentecostalism can be seen in the statements of its most famous preachers:

«Kenneth Hagin argues that: "Man was created on an equal basis with God, and can stand before the presence of God without any awareness of inferiority ... God has made us as close to Him as He could [...] He made us the same kind of being as He is ... Man lives in the domain of God. He lives on equal terms with God [...] (He who believes is called Christ [...]) That is what we are ... we are Christ)»³³

«Morris Cerullo Vocifer: Did you know that from the beginning of time God's fundamental purpose was to reproduce Himself? Who are you? Let's see, who are you? Let's say it: Sons of God! Repeat! What works within us, my brother, is the manifestation of the expression that all that God is and all that God has is ours. And when we stop here, my brother, you're not looking at Morris Cerullo; You are looking at God. You are looking at Jesus »³⁴

As Paul Crouch, president of TBN, said: «I am a little god! Critics, get out!»³⁵

CONCLUSION

Martin Luther, when in 1521 was summoned to give his point of view regarding the initiatory prophets of the Radical Reformation, warned against the carnal origin of the movement and finally «Luther would characterize in the future all of its evangelical components, although they were so diverse from each other, like Ulrich Zwingli, John Agricola, and Gaspar Schwenckfeld, with a single formula: men animated by the same demonic spirit that had possessed Carlstadt, the Zwickau prophets and Müntzer».³⁶

³² Peter Wagner, citation taken from: Daniel Oliva "La nueva reforma apostólica y la apostolicidad de la iglesia", in: Signos de Vida Nº 33, Quito, 2004, pp. 28-29.

³³ Hanegraaff, Hank. (1993) *Cristianismo en Crisis*. Editorial Unilit. Miami. P.113

³⁴ ibidem

³⁵ Hanegraaff, p.117

³⁶ Williams, P. 108

Heinrich Bullinger, the man who took the most care to study the Radical Reformation, concluded that «the origin of the Radical Reformation was, after all, Satan»³⁷

Our Lord and Savior Jesus said: «For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.» Mt. 14:24

The Radical Reformation was a tool of Satan to inject his venomous false doctrine among thousands of believers who fled the fountain of Catholic apostasy but then fell into the flames of fire of the radical errorists. The Radical Reformation extended from 1521 to 1527, but its leaven impregnated Protestantism 500 years ago.

Considering that Jesus Christ was already our double substitute and to protect the pure gospel we will want to fulfill the following biblical demands:

«Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. [...] save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh» (Jude 3, 23)

³⁷ Williams, P. 108