

(Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Catharer! - Part 1

by Leonard Verduin

The Constantinian change led to conductal-averagism, and the Church used the charge of dualism to discredit dissenters, including the Cathars and the Anabaptists.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Galatians 6:9, Ephesians 4:1, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Church History", "Christian Conduct"

Description

Leonard Verduin preaches about the impact of the Constantinian change on the Church, leading to a shift in conductal requirements. The sermon delves into the contrast between the unfallen Church, characterized by distinct deportment, and the inclusive Church where conductal-averagism blurs the line between Christian and worldly behavior. The Donatist rebellion is highlighted as a resistance to this leveling-off and a protest against the decline in moral rectitude and puritanical beliefs. Verduin emphasizes the importance of maintaining righteousness and purity in the Church, addressing the dangers of conductal-averagism and the need for believers to lead lives worthy of repentance.

Transcript

A people zealous of good works Titus 2:14

WE HAVE OBSERVED IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS THAT IN the Constantinian change the Church of Christ came to be viewed as coextensive with the empire. The side effects of that change were many. We shall be dealing in this chapter with the side effects which the Constantinian change had in the area of conduct, or more correctly, of conductal requirement.

In the unfallen Church, those who belong to it contrast with their environment in the matter of deportment. It is written large in the New Testament that they who have accepted Christ no longer live as do the rank and file. They have begun to walk "worthy of the calling wherewith they have been called." They have begun to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." They have been "raised with Christ" and as a consequence they have begun to "seek the things that are above."a

[a. It seems that the moral rectitude of the early Christians was almost proverbial in their day. We find it said, without fear of contradiction, in the Octavius of Minuscus Felix, that "The prisons are crowded with your followers whereas they contain not a single Christian -- unless it be a renegade or one whose crime

is his religion."]

But if the Church becomes inclusive, so that "all in a given locality" are in it, then all this has to change; then a leveling-off takes place. Then the "world" is no longer something that lies around the Church but has become identical with the Church. Conductual-averagism is the inevitable consequence of the inclusive Church; when the premise of the Church as a body of the elect has been dropped, then most of the puritanical beliefs with which this concept is associated become obsolete. Then Christian behavior and ordinary human behavior become indistinguishable.

Conductual-averagism was the immediate result of the Constantinian change. And resistance to the leveling-off was instantaneous. It was plainly present in the Donatist rebellion.

As everyone knows, the conflict between the Donatists and the Catholics turned immediately about the question whether a worldly cleric can convey salvation; but this is only a refinement on the theme of conductual-averagism. The "fallen" Church, . already on its way toward substituting salvation by sacramental manipulation for salvation by response to the Word, was ordaining priests with little or no attention to the candidate's status as a believer. It was filling the countryside with clerics who gave no evidence of being regenerate and all sorts of evidence that they were not. It was against this alarming development that the Donatists protested -- saying that a cleric who lives in sin cannot convey salvation. In other words, Donatism was a protest against conductual-averagism and it brought that matter to a head at the level of the ordained man. Donatism was basically concerned for the perpetuation of the righteousness that had been a mark of the follower of Christ; it was particularly concerned about the perpetuation of priestly righteousness. It saw that the "puritanical beliefs" of primitive Christianity were becoming obsolete and it took steps to recover them. In this program it concentrated on the priesthood because the loss of the "puritanical beliefs" was especially serious at the level of the leader.

This Donatist concern, refinement and all, continued to be heard long after the Donatist rebellion had been suppressed. It runs, refinement and all, through the literature dealing with the "heretic" of the Middle Ages. So much was the "heretic" a man who harps on conductual requirements that any person who talked of the changed life was automatically suspect.^b

[b. The French writer Beuzart has observed, in his work on pre-Reformation heresy, that "le grave et l -- serieux de la vie .loin d' etre une sauvegarde devenaient plutot un motif de suspicion" Ralph of Coggeshall, a notorious inquisitor, himself relates the story of a virtuous young woman suspected of heresy because she resisted the amorous advances of a priest and who was also burned as a heretic (cf. Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, p. 35ff.). This inquisitor tells the story with the understanding that his readers will side with the priest rather than with the girl! That such situations were by no means unusual is apparent from the writings of Peter the Precentor, who speaks of "certain honest matrons, refusing to consent to the lasciviousness of the priests ... who have by such priests been written into the book of death, and accused as heretics and even condemned ... " (op. et loc. cit.).

So much was the issue of "a walk worthy of repentance" in the forefront of the clash between the sons of the "fallen" Church and the "heretics" that it gave to people of Germanic tongue their most common word for the "heretic" -- as we shall see in a moment.

All of this came to renewed expression in the age of the Reformation. The men of the Second Front were to the neo-Constantinians what the Donatists had been to the Constantinians twelve centuries earlier. The argument touching conductual requirements was very prominent in the sixteenth century scene. It is this

spectacle that we shall be observing in this present chapter.

The "fallen" Church in her effort to discredit the "heretic," who was incessantly nagging her concerning her conductual averagism, dug up an old term of reproach, the name by which an ancient dualistic heretic had been known, the name Cathar, a word meaning cleansed. The Church changed this proper noun into a common noun, so that she could use it of any and every "heretic." It was this Cathar, now as a common noun, that gave the Germanic languages their most common word for heretic; for the High German Ketzer is nothing but the word Cathar pronounced with High German vocal equipment, just as the Low German ketter is nothing but the word Cathar pronounced with Low German vocal equipment.^c

[c. Medieval man seems to have lost track of the etymological derivation of the word Ketzer. Luther derived it, erroneously, from Gotzen (idol) (cf. Werke, St. Louis ed., III, p. 1692). Bullinger, likewise in error, associated the word Ketzer with the idea of dividing (cf. John H. Yoder, in "Recovery," p. 207, quoting from Bullinger), so confusing it with heretic].

After the word had become a common noun, applicable to any and every person who dissented, it continued to be useful however in the smear campaigns to keep alive the insinuation that the Ketzer, or the ketter, was a dualist. The original Cathars had indeed been dualists; they had indeed taught that ultimate reality is dual, that there is an Evil Principle and a Good Principle; but it was a grave injustice to carry over this charge upon all who were later covered by the word after it had become a common noun. This injustice is the more serious in that it is committed still.

It was an injustice committed all through medieval times to lay the charge of dualism upon any and all who opposed "Christian sacralism." For, as that expert in medieval dissent, Herbert Grundmann,[!] has shown, there is from the beginning of heresy in the western world, as far as research has been able to make out, no addition to any dualistic traits. The reports in which the charge of dualism is made commonly begin with "It is said ... "; this is in and of itself evidence enough that the writers are dealing with a cliché, an ancient tradition, a legend. This puts all they say under suspicion.

When, to give but this one example, that great heresy-hunter Ekebertus of Schonau, charges his victims with dualism he, as Grundmann has shown, "copies from Augustine." Augustine had been obliged to fight dualists, in his contest with the Manicheans, also known as Cathars; and Ekebertus derives his image of the heretic, not from observation, but, in true medieval style, from the authorities, in this case from Augustine. And so Ekebertus belabors his contemporaries with the very same verbal lashings which Augustine long before him had constructed in his rounds with the Manicheans. It follows that we cannot take Ekebertus at face value.

The charge laid at the door of the medieval "heretic," the charge that he was given to a basic dualism, was a false charge, by and large. This is the more serious because men have not to this day escaped from it.

The charge of dualism, was taken over by the Reformers and continues to be heard among their followers to this day. Especially is this true in the Netherlands. For reasons which we shall discuss in another connection, in this area Anabaptism has always been considered a major threat to what is conceived to be Biblical Christianity. To this day the polemic against this Anabaptism is almost certain to begin with the charge of dualism.^d It is time to abandon this approach to the Stepchildren of the Reformation. They were not addicted to any intolerable dualism. -- unless it be dualism to insist that the rule-right that comes to expression in the State (which is a creature of common grace) and the rule-right that comes to expression in the Church (which is a creature of redemptive grace) are discrete, as discrete as are the universal

sonship and the redemptive sonship, general revelation and redemptive revelation.

[d. Dr. Berkouwer, for example, derives just about all that was characteristic of the Anabaptist vision (he mentions by name: doop, eed, Overheid, Staat, oorlog, incarnatie) from a "pronouncedly dualistic premise" (een uitgesproken dualistisch standpunt). (Cf. his Karl Barth en de Kinderdoop, pp.79ft)]

We are not saying that there were no groups in medieval times in whom traces of pre-Constantine dualism lingered on. There were such, perhaps more than what we have reproduced from Grundmann would seem to imply. There seem to have been dualistic tendencies among the Albigensians; but it also appears that these dualistic touches led to grave tensions between this variety of heretics and those whose system revolved about the repudiation of Constantinianism. We have the word of a medieval inquisitor for it that although all heretics saw eye to eye in regard to an aversion to the "fallen" Church they disagreed vehemently in regard to dualistic assumptions. Well has Professor Ebrard said, a century ago, that "The basic error in the prevailing representation is that when men hear the word Cathar they straightway think of a gnostic sect, whereas the more . . . honest of the medieval opponents of the Cathars themselves distinguish very clearly between two varieties of Cathars." It is certainly an error to think of dualism whenever one hears the word Cathar. The term was borrowed from one situation and applied to another -- in an effort to discredit.

The same dubious transfer of terms occurred at many junctures. For example, the Bogomils were Manichean or Manichean-like heretics that had their headquarters in the Balkans and who were for that reason known as Bulgars. This word became bougres on the lips of French-speaking peoples. And this word, at first a proper noun connoting a specific dualistic heretic, became a proper noun signifying a heretic of any description. e Here again is a word borrowed from one situation and applied to a quite different one -- in order to discredit.' It became a mere cliché, a feature of the stereotyped image of the heretic.

There were many such stereotypes and they were unbelievably persistent. For example, all through medieval times it was said that heretics were pale. We read of a medieval bishop who "when he looked at men he could tell by their pallor whether they had been to the Waldensians' conventicles." So much was pallor a mark of the heretic that when the city of Münster fell, the soldiers "killed on the spot all who were pale of face." The reason for this ascription of paleness is not expressly indicated. It may have a very natural explanation; who, knowing himself to be a "heretic," would not grow pale when an inquisitor spoke to him or even looked in his direction? Moreover, the "heretics" spent a great deal of their time in hiding, coming out mostly at night (for which reason they were often called turlupins, wolf-people. One reads the pathetic phrase "sad of heart -- like the child of a turlupin"); for this reason their visages were not tanned by the sun. In all events this cliché was extremely tenacious; one may hear to this day in rural France the expression "blanc comme un huguenot." So also with the ascription of a basic dualism. These clichés were features of the stereotype of the "heretic" and passed from father to son.

[e. The word bougre as a common noun designating a heretic überhaupt occurs twice in the quotation contained in note 17 of Chapter 1 of this volume. We read of a Dominican inquisitor, called Robert le Bougre because he was himself an ex-heretic, who brought about "a very great and acceptable holocaust to the Lord, in the burning of Bougres; for 183 Bougres were burned in the presence of the King ... and many prelates" (Coulton, Inquisition and Liberty, p. 113).]

[f. The expression bougre survives in the unsavory English word bugger. Just as the sacralist world of pre-Constantinian times had accused the Christians of unnatural vice so did the medieval sacralist world accuse the "heretic" of similar things. In Reformation times these ancient slurs were thrown after the Stepchildren. This old cliché seems to be hard to kill; when the present writer was in the Netherlands in 1950 he was informed, by a professional man, that when the Baptists celebrate the Lord's Supper the whole affair ends in an orgy of sexual abandon!]

Two considerations aided the "fallen" Church as it sought to discredit the Cathar by flinging at him the charge of dualism. One of these was the fact that he posed a threat to the monism which the Church had embraced. Although primitive Christianity had recognized the State as "an order of creation but emphatically not as an order of redemption," this distinction was blurred at the time of the "fall" of the Church, it being at once undigestible in a sacralist system. In sacralist Rome the emperor had been sacrificed to as soteer, dominus, et deus (savior, lord, and god) and men did not differentiate between the State and the Church. This monism recurred, now in a "Christian" version, when the Constantinian change took place. It comes to expression constantly in Roman Catholic theology. Perhaps the formulation in which Peter Damian (who died in 1076) put it is as succinctly as any we could quote: "Just as, in a mystery, the human nature and the divine flow together in Christ so, likewise in a mystery, do the rule of the magistrate and that of the priesthood flow together." The Restitutionists were chargeable with dualism, if by dualism is meant the views of him who rejects the monism on which the sacralist system rests.

Then too the Restitutionists attacked the monism that identified Volk Gottes with Volk. They held that society is composite, that it consists of believers and non-believers. This two-camp vision can be called a dualistic vision -- if by dualism is meant anything that cuts across the monism implied in the sacralist vision. The Restitutionists, early and late, have thought in terms of "those inside" and "those outside"; they have always thought of some as being in the category of "heathen and publicans" and some as being in the category of 'brethren in Christ.' No doubt this "dualism" aided the "fallen" Church in its policy of fastening the ancient label of dualism upon those who criticized its fallenness.

Still another matter that made the charge of dualism appear at least outwardly plausible was the fact that the Restitutionists had a tendency to down-grade the Old Testament (for reasons which we have already pointed out, namely that the Old Testament can be cited in favor of sacralism). It was well-remembered that the original Cathars had ascribed the Old Testament to the Evil Principle and the New Testament to the Good Principle. It was therefore possible to slide adroitly from the one down-grading of the Old Testament to the other down-grading thereof -- not precisely honest and fair, but highly effective. The Restitutionists' attitude toward the Old Testament and the Reformers' attitude toward it were an integral part of the Reformation scene; while the former looked upon the Old Testament as pre-Christian, and therefore outmoded now, the Reformers looked upon it as the ideal, reflecting a societal situation to which the apostolic Church had not at its inception been able to come, a situation to which it was, however, destined to come later, in the Constantinian change.

There is another thing that must be said here. It is that when the Cathars said that the Church consists of changed men and women, they were not saying that it consists of sinless men and women. It was easy, very easy, to slide from the "heretic's" censure of conductual-averagism to the charge that he was given to Perfectionism. But this would be quite unfair. The Reformers made themselves guilty of this unfairness, times without number.g

[g. Calvin also made himself guilty of this unfairness; in Institutes IV, 1: 23, he writes: "Long ago there were two kinds of heretics, Cathars and Donatists. These, the former as well as the latter, were in the same phantasy in which the contemporary dreamers are when they seek for a Church in which there is nothing to censure. They cut loose from Christendom so as not to be soiled by the imperfections of others. And what was the outcome? Our Lord confounded them and their understanding so presumptuous. Let this be proof for us all that it is of the devil, who under cover of zeal for perfection inflates us with pride and seduces us by hypocrisy so as to get us to abandon the flock of Christ. . . . For since there is no forgiveness of sins nor any salvation anywhere else, Acts 4: 12 [The reader will observe that Acts 4: 12 says nothing about the matter Calvin is treating here; it says that there is no salvation apart from Christ, which is quite a different thing from saying that there is no salvation apart from the everybody-embracing Church). Therefore even though we should have the appearance of a sanctity more than angelic, if by such a presumption we come to separate ourselves from a Christian society we have become devils." Calvin commits the same error, of ascribing Perfectionism to the Stepchildren, in Institutes IV, 8: 12. Like Augustine before him (who had sought to escape from the unwelcome fact that the Donatists excelled in the matter of conduct by calling it a "quasi laudabilis conversatio") and in chorus with the Reformers in general, Calvin speaks of an "apparent" (i.e., not real) sanctity.]

No one knew better than did the Restitutionists that a Church of wholly sinless people is unattainable; and it is historically not defensible to imply, much less to assert, that they visualized a Church of unambiguous saints.^h What they did say is that there are saints who fall into sin and sinners who live in sin -- a distinction that is essential to authentic Christianity. It may be difficult or even impossible to say in any given instance whether a man is a sinner living in sin or a saint falling into sin; but one cannot reject the distinction and retain the New Testament delineation of the Church.

It was by the formula of living in sin and falling into sin that the Stepchildren avoided on the one hand the quite unbiblical notion that the Church of Christ cannot be known by the conductual distinctiveness of its members and on the other hand the equally unbiblical idea of unambiguous saints. This middle way the Stepchildren walked; they rejected conductual-averagism and they rejected Perfectionism. Their most influential thinker, Menno Simons himself, made this clear enough. His assault upon conductual-averagism is known to all; but his rejection of Perfectionism is just as evident. Said he: "Think not that we boast of being perfect and without sin. Not at all. As for me I confess that often my prayers are mixed with sin and my righteousness with unrighteousness."ⁱ The charge of addiction to Perfectionism is therefore to be rejected. It was not derived from the Stepchildren's doctrine but was an inference, an unwarranted one at that. It arose in the heat of battle and was invented in the camp of the Reformers as an escape from the Stepchildren's assault on the idea that the Church consists of converted and unconverted alike.

[h. Balthasar H¹/₄maier, an influential leader among the Stepchildren, was well aware that the Reformers were twisting the "heretics'" clamor for the changed life so as to make it add up to Perfectionism. He rejected this in these words: "Sye giessen auch von uns ausz, wie wir uns ber¹/₄nnen, wir mogen nach dem tauff nymmer s¹/₄nden Wir wissendt, das wir vor und nach arm und ellend sunder seyent."²]

[i. In another connection Menno declared that "meyne gherechtigkeit gaarniet en is dan eenen vule beverlechte laken."]

Why, it may be asked, were the Reformers so quick to attack the Stepchildren for their puritanism? Surely an emphasis upon "fruits worthy of 'repentance'" is always in place; in those violent days it was doubly necessary. Why then did the Reformers raise their hackles when they heard about this emphasis?

Resistance to it was not prompted by a concern for theological correctness. It came up because it was felt that the idea of a Church to which only believers belong bites as a caustic into the sacralist system. After twelve centuries men still had, as it were, a sort of tribal memory whereby they recalled that once a troubled statesman had stood before the problem as to how to hold the empire together. Men remembered vaguely that then the solution had been found in binding the Church of Christ and the empire of the Caesars together. And they recalled distantly that this had been possible only by submitting to conductual-averagism. Men of Reformation times had the vague conviction that conductual-averagism was necessary to political peace and stability and that for that reason anyone who talked of terminating conductual-averagism was rocking the boat. That this was the motivation behind the angry cry that was raised when the Restitutionists clamored for a Church of believers becomes apparent when we hear Justus Menius, one of Luther's trusted associates say:

Like the Donatists of long ago, they seek to rend the Church because we allow evil men in the Church. They seek to assemble a pure Church and wherever that is undertaken the public order is sure to be overthrown, for a pure Church is not possible, as Christ cautioned often enough -- we must therefore put up with them.⁴

We are in position now to see through the oft-repeated assertion that the Stepchildren were political nihilists, that they, in the language of the Belgic Confession, "seek to overthrow the magistracy." This charge was a gross injustice; it did not rest upon observation but upon a syllogism. Only a sacralist society could have invented it, resting as it does upon the (mistaken) notion that society cannot hang together unless it is bound together in a common religion.

The rift between the Reformers and the Restitutionists first appeared in Luther's world in connection with the issue of conductual-averagism. As early as 1524 there were already signs that the Reformers and the Radicals were drifting apart in regard to conductual requirements. In that year a book appeared with the title *A Dialog between an Evangelical Christian and a Lutheran in Which the Offensive Life of Some Who Call Themselves Lutherans is Exposed and Fraternally Reproved*.

In the same year, 1524, Hans Hut, pioneer Radical, cautioned men against the Reformers because of their failure to attack conductual-averagism; said he: "whoever leans on them will be misled, for their doctrine is nothing but faith and goes no farther Oh, how lamentably do they in our times mislead the whole world . . . with their false and trumped-up faith, a faith from which no moral improvement follows."⁵

In a more positive vein, they said at the Second Front: "Christ has indeed died for us and has redeemed us; but no man is saved by this redemption unless he in his conduct follows in Christ's steps, does and has done to him what Christ did and had done to Him."

Another representative of the Second Front, Michael Sattler, one of the first to die for the Restitutionist cause, said that the Reformers "throw works without faith so far to one side that they erect a faith without works."

[⁵] Balthasar Hübmaier complained that in the camp of the Reformers men had learned only the first two of three pivotal doctrines of the Christian faith, that "das volckh nit mer denn zway stuck geleernet hat."

The first doctrine was "der gloub macht uns selig." (We are saved by faith.) The second was "of ourselves we cannot do any good" (wir mugen ausz uns selbs nichts guts thon). Both of these are true enough, says this teacher at the Second Front. But then he goes on to say that "Under cover of these two half-truths all evil, unfaithfulness and unrighteousness have gained the upperhand completely . . . so that the old saying is fulfilled "Ye alter ye bozer!" . . . "Everybody wishes to pass for a Christian and a good evangelical as far as taking a wife is concerned, eating flesh [in Lent], making no further sacrifice, fasting not, saying no prayers any more;" but otherwise one sees nothing but drinking, gourmandizing, blaspheming, practicing usury, lying, cheating, abusing, forcing, stealing, robbing, playing, dancing, flirting, loafing, committing adultery, tyrannizing, slaying, etc., etc. The third lesson, which men in the Protestant camp had not mastered, said this H¹/₄bmaier, is that faith without works is dead.⁵]

A famous leader of the sixteenth-century Restitutionists, the man who has given his name to their modern descendants, also rebuked Luther for his one-sided emphasis upon the forensic aspect of salvation and said reproachfully that "one does not find among Turks and Tartars such godless conduct as one sees in those so taught." He added glumly, "And if one rebukes such behavior he is dubbed a heaven-stormer, a Schw¹/₄rmer, a work-saint, or an Anabaptist."

In Zwingli's world some of the earliest signs of tension appeared in connection with the Stepchildren's demand concerning conductual requirement. Zwingli, who was at the first quite sympathetic toward them, turned against them when he heard of their agitation for a Church of people who contrast with their environment in the matter of conduct. It happened this way:

First of all Simon of Hongg [i.e., Simon Stumpf, who became a leader among the Stepchildren] had come to him and to Master Leo [i.e., Leo Jud, one of Zwingli's colleagues] and had belabored them to the effect that they ought to raise up a separated people and Church and embrace in it a Christian people leading non-offense-giving lives and adhering to the Gospel, a people not up to their ears in usury. They turned a deaf ear to this, albeit in a kind and friendly spirit. Afterward Grebel came to them exactly as Simon had done. Him they likewise turned down. Nevertheless these men went ahead anyway, holding meetings at night for to raise up a separated Church."

The constantly recurring reason given for the defection of the Restitutionists is this matter of conductual-averagism. We read the following account, penned in 1538 by one of the Stepchildren:

While we were still in the national church we obtained much instruction from the writings of Luther, Zwingli, and others Yet we were aware of a great lack in regard to repentance, conversion, and the true Christian life. It was on these things that my heart was set. I waited and hoped for a year or two, since the minister had much to say about amendment of life But I could not close my eyes to the fact that the doctrine which was preached . . . was not carried out; no beginning was made toward true Christian conduct . . . true repentance and Christian love were not in evidence Then God sent His messengers, Conrad Grebel and others, who had surrendered themselves in the doctrine of Christ by conversion. With their assistance a congregation was formed in which repentance was in evidence by newness of life in Christ."

Conrad Grebel, mentioned in this quotation, said as early as 1524 that "nowadays everyone thinks to attain salvation by a make-believe faith, one devoid of fruits . . . without Christian deportment."k

Luther was quite aware that protest against conductual-averagism had led to the exodus of the Schw¹/₄rmer. Wrote he:

From the beginning of the Church heretics have maintained that the Church must be holy and without sin. Because they saw that some in the Church were the servants of sin they denied forthwith that the Church was the Church, and organized sects This is the origin of the Donatists and the Cathars . . . and of the Anabaptists of our times. All these cry out in angry chorus that the true Church is not the Church because they see that sinners and godless folk are mixed in her and they have separated from her It is the part of wisdom not to be offended at it when evil men go in and out of the Church The greatest comfort of all is the knowledge that they do no harm but that we must allow the tares to be mixed in The Schwärmers, who do not allow tares among them, really bring about that there is no wheat among themselves -- by this zeal for only wheat and a pure Church they bring about, by this too great holiness, that they are not even a Church but just a sect of the devil.⁹

[k. In the argument that arose in connection with conductual-averagism, the Stepchildren's preference for the New Testament tame to expression also. According to the Reformer Bucer, they were wont to say "Es soll die christliche gemeynd reiner sein dann der alten. Darzue kame man basz, so nit iederman getauffet unnd in Christlich gemein, sonder allein die bekennenden eingenommen wurden."⁸ We shall in a later chapter, return to this idea of the Restitutionists, that baptism should not be done wholesale fashion but should be restricted to the believing element.]

So one could continue. Example after example leaves no doubt that one of the facets of the quarrel that had erupted at the Second Front was the disagreement as to the need for distinctiveness in conduct. Two things stand forth with unmistakable clarity. They are: (1) that in the camp of the Reformers there was no full-scale attack upon the conductual-averagism that is the inevitable corollary of sacralism; and (2) that the Stepchildren made serious work of challenging the old order with its laxity in the matter of conduct -- and, that they in a large way set a better pattern. Since both of these theses will strike some readers as being quite novel, we must document both of them at some length.

To begin with, Philip of Hesse, one of the sanest men of his times, wrote, to his sister, Elizabeth of Saxony, with reference to the Stepchildren, "I verily see more of moral improvement among them than with those who are Lutheran."

Capito declared in a letter that the Radicals "guard themselves against the offensive vices which are very common among our people."

Luther himself acknowledged that his Reform had done little to correct conductual-averagism, but had left things in the main as they had been before. It is a sad fact that he sought to justify this, moreover. In an attempt to get away from the evidently indisputable fact that the Stepchildren were doing much better, he said: "Doctrine and life are to be distinguished, the one from the other. With us conduct is as bad as it is with the papists. We don't oppose them on account of conduct. Hus and Wyclif, who made an issue of conduct, were not aware of this . . . but to treat of doctrine, that is to really come to grips with things."¹⁰

To Schwenkfeld (who had come to feel out Luther and his associates as to their sentiments in regard to the lineaments of the Church that was to be, and who had advocated the creation of a believers' Church with disciplinary techniques for expelling the impenitent) Luther acknowledged that "among us there is no betterment of life."

On the other hand the record leaves it unmistakably clear that the Restitutionists with their insistence upon "conduct becoming saints" were doing rather well. This fact came out in the court hearings quite constantly. We shall select a few of the almost endless list of examples.

When certain people were being investigated for suspected Anabaptist leanings, this testimony was offered: "Because their children are being so carefully and devoutly reared and because they do not have the practice of cursing and swearing, therefore they are suspected of being Anabaptists."¹¹ Similarly at the hearing of Hans Jeger, under similar suspicion, it was said: "Now because he does not swear and because he leads an unoffensive life, therefore men suspect him of Anabaptism He has for a long time passed for such, because he did not swear, nor quarrel, nor did other such-like things."

Conversely, we read of people cleared of Anabaptist leanings by their bad deportment. Of Casper Zachers it was testified in court: "He is not commonly by the rank and file thought to be an Anabaptist, because he is a churlish fellow who can't get along with others, starts fights and discord, swears and curses, disturbs the peace and carries weapons on his person."

The simple fact is that in the camp of the Restitutionists of the sixteenth century a "conversation such as becometh saints" was in evidence -- as everybody knew. The Reformed preachers at Berne admitted as much, in a letter which they sent to the City Council: "The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the other churches which in union with us confess Christ; and they avoid the offensive sins that are very common among us."¹²

Henry Bullinger declared, "There are those who in reality are not Anabaptists but who do have a pronounced aversion to the sensuality and frivolity of the world and for that reason reprove sin and vice and are as a consequence called or misnamed Anabaptists by petulant persons." Schwenkfeld complained that they were doing this very thing to him, saying, "I am maligned, by preachers and otherwise, with the charge that I am an Anabaptist, even as all who lead a true and devout Christian life are almost everywhere given this name." So much was an unusually good deportment a mark of Restitutionist "heresy" that as early as 1531 it was already said of the Protestants in general: "So far has their idea of Christian liberty carried them that any person who talks about God and the Christian way of life or who is seriously exercised concerning his own moral improvement passes with them for an arch-anabaptist."¹³

Similarly a Roman Catholic contemporary:

Among the existing heretical sects there is none that in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than do the Anabaptists. As to their outward life they are without reproach -- no lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating or drinking, no outward personal display; but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straight-forwardness, in such a measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God.

It is apparent that the undeniably good way of life of the Stepchildren was an uncomfortable fact to the Reformers -- so that they sought to escape it. In this mood Henry Bullinger wrote:

Those who unite with them will by their ministers be received into their church by rebaptism and repentance and newness of life. They henceforth lead their lives under a semblance of quiet spiritual conduct. They denounce covetousness, pride, profanity, the lewd conversation and immorality of the world, the drinking and the gluttony. In fine, their hypocrisy is great and manifold.¹⁴

The Reformers, in an attempt to get away from the mortifying fact that the Stepchildren were actually succeeding in their onslaught against conductual-averagism, resorted to the argument -- an old one -- that the good works were nothing but bait with which the devil baited his hook so as to catch a lot of fish.

Bullinger, for example, wrote that the exemplary lives of the Restitutionists "are hypocrisy, for ... even Satan can transform himself into an angel of light . . . he who wishes to catch fish does not throw out an unbaited hook." After granting that the Restitutionists, Pilgram Marpeck and his wife, were "people of devout and blameless lives" he added: "But this is an old trick of the devil, with which he has in all churches, from the days of the Apostle Paul, sought to catch his fish."¹⁵

Manifestly the changed life of the Restitutionists wore well. The saying was that the Restitutionist preachers carried a little bottle with them wherever they went; out of it each new convert was required to take a little swig, the result of which was to fix him forever in his "heresy." This story (which may have come up in connection with the fact that the Restitutionist preachers carried a wooden bottle of wine -- for use in their celebration of the Lord's Supper) even entered the Court records. When Leonard Schiemer was on trial he was told "what evil comes from this Anabaptism, also community of wives and of goods, and that it leads to shameful affairs and lusts, and that they give to drink out of a bottle containing I know not what, a matter contrary to God, and more such matters." To this the prisoner said simply, 'I verily don't know anything about any bottle nor of any evil allegedly coming out of it.' This bizarre idea of a "fixing" heresy potion is in itself an eloquent witness to the fact that after a man had become an Anabaptist he led a life of rectitude from which it was not easy to deflect him.

No one squirmed more painfully in view of the unwelcome fact that the Restitutionists were successfully attacking conductual-averagism than did Martin Bucer. He was constantly urging the magistrates to greater rigor in the use of the sword, saying with a glance at the Stepchildren:

Their most pointed argument is always this that we keep house so badly; with this argument they lead astray many people. God help us, so that we may one day be able to take this argument away from them, yes from our own conscience and from the Lord our God. Of a truth it is getting to be high time that on the day of Saint Catherine we deal seriously with the matter of our housekeeping . . . for if this is not considered and remedied all our counsels against this rod of the Lord will be in vain.!"

At another time this Reformer complained:

The magistrates are rather coarse and carnal men and the preachers are very neglectful; many of them frequently get drunk. Since the lords, and the council-men are that kind of people . . . they drive the poor people away with their wild way of life [mit irem $\frac{1}{4}$ berbolderens. The plain man cannot bring himself to recognize the Church of Christ among such wild persons, and, to distinguish correctly between doctrine and life.¹⁷

In writing about this, Bucer was able to remain composed and dignified -- more so than when he was talking to a Restitutionist face to face. Then he found it hard to keep his poise. To one of the Stepchildren, Leonhard van Maastricht, he cried out, in 1538: "How can the conclusion be good that 'it is an evil tree for I see no good fruit on it? How about the fact that the tree may be standing in Calcutta, whereas I am way out here, and see no good fruit on it? Does that prove that it doesn't have any? He, this Leonhard, hasn't seen everybody. Therefore he judges flippantly."

[I. At this point Bucer is dependent on Augustine, who had scolded the Donatists in very similar vein, saying: "They who say that they know for sure that specified men are wicked and unworthy of the communion in the Sacrament ... , whatever it is that they know, they will be unable to persuade the universal Church, spread out as it is throughout the nations, to give credence to their tale The unity of the Church dispersed through the whole world must on no account be forsaken because of other men's

sins." The idea of a "congregation," an ecclesiastical unit with autonomy sufficient to exercise discipline was not a part of Augustine's thinking, nor of the Church of the Middle Ages. The Christian world owes the recovery of the congregation to the Restitutionists, a fact that has led Ernest A. Payne to say (in his *The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century and Their Influence in the Modern World*, London, 1944, p. 13): "To the Anabaptists is due not only the machinery of a single congregation, which was presently taken over by Calvin in his Institutes, and put to practice in Geneva, but also the machinery for an alliance of congregations, adopted in France during 1559, and in Scotland the next year, and so well known as the Presbyterian scheme ... Early Anabaptist Church organization antedated and influenced that of the Calvinists But the 'Brethren' had one feature which was dropped by the French, Scotch, and the Dutch, an order of evangelists whose business it was to travel and propagate the faith." (We shall return to this item, which according to Payne the Reformers did not take over from the Anabaptists, in a later connection. For a discussion of the "daughter Church," i.e., the congregation, cf. Hämaier's views, in "Quellen IX," p. 478.)]

In his dialog with the Restitutionist Jorg Schnabel, Bucer said, likewise in the year 1538:

They are forever accusing us that things are getting worse instead of better. Now is this our teaching: "Repent and improve your way of life." It is not the doctrine's fault that nothing happens. In the Old Testament as well as in the New God's Word has always had this quality that it makes worse those who do not embrace it They who do not accept the doctrine after they have been sufficiently taught, these fall daily deeper; and these give occasion for the saying that "Since the new doctrine has been preached, many people have gotten progressively worse."¹⁸

Ever since the launching of "Christian sacralism" the "heretics" had been characterized by much emphasis upon a conduct whereby the believer is set off from the non-believer -- so much so that Bucer said, "This has always been Satan's nature and practice, to introduce false religion with strictness as to conduct This was proved in the case of the Manicheans and the rest who have distorted the holy religion very grievously."^m

[m. Back of this strange argument, used throughout the centuries by men of sacralist principles, lies the notion that theological correctness is infinitely more important than behavioral correctness, so much so that the Evil One impels men to righteous living in order to get theological aberration across. This scale of values does not comport with New Testament teaching, where doctrine without life is as bad as life without doctrine.

When one of the Stepchildren, Bernhard Knipperdollinck, had written that the true Church is the believers' Church, Urbanus Rhegius was commissioned to reply to him. At this point he wrote:

Aha, there Bernhard resorts to a genuinely Donatist trick. They condemned and abandoned Christendom on account of some evil and false Christians Nevertheless there have always been some true and devout Christians in the masses, and we hope they are present also with us. Moreover the fact that wicked rascals are present with us ... does not concern us; we haven't told them to drink and gourmandize, to be immoral or covetous We don't want to rend the net because there are some bad fish in it, as the super-saintly Anabaptist Bernhard is doing. He gives himself away at this point and shows that he has the Anabaptist devil in him which blinded also the Donatists in Africa. They also opened their eyes wide and saw with a hypocritical face that many wicked people were wearing the name of Christ, folk who were in reality genuine heathen; and they proceeded to go off by themselves, apart from Christendom, and made

off that they wanted to build up a truly reformed Church, one in which there were nothing but saints. And they were so pure in their own eyes that they declared the baptism performed in Christendom by evil priests to be no baptism, and baptized anew. By this method they thought to raise up genuine holiness. They scolded Augustine for abiding in the gathering of the wicked -- to which Augustine replied that there were indeed evil people in his fellowship . . . and saying that external fellowship of good with evil does not harm the former's salvation, seeing that they don't approve of the latter's evil and godless way of existing. We are not to cause a separation; he who separates from the Church becomes a heretic and a schismatic. Let Bernhard consider himself told off -- for he is a neo-Donatist who has taken offence at the evil lives and has . . . tried to raise up a holy and unspotted Church, one in which there are only saints, a pure net without a foul fish, he and his company, cut loose from Christendom I would forsooth prefer to be a coarse publican in the Christian Church, or a patent sinner, rather than be the most holy Pharisee of all in Bishop Bernhard's spelunk!¹⁹

This was an impassioned plea for a Church "including all in a given locality" without any such thing as entrance requirement. But our Stepchildren could be quite as impassioned. So for example, Hans Kuchenbacker, spokesman for their group at Marburg. Said he in connection with Ezekiel 22:26 ("Her priests put no difference between the holy and the profane "):

Here God complains that the priests make no difference between holy and profane . . . of which we poor people also complain. For this reason the Lord says in Malachi 3:18 'Return to me and make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.' This distinction the apostles as true servants of God observed; even though they spoke the Word to the masses, yet have they accepted only such as received the Word and turned to God and said farewell to sin, to be members of the congregation, to the breaking of bread, fellowship, and prayer. In this matter they remained constant and practiced brotherly love and no one 'else dared join himself unto them, as we see from Acts 2:38. From this it is clearly evident that even though good and bad are together in the gatherings where the Word of God is being taught, yet must a distinction among them be preserved We cannot believe that the present evil world, living as it does in darkness, in unbelief, and in accordance with the desires of the flesh, in deliberate blasphemy, in avarice, usury, pride, and intemperate eating and drinking, blasphemy of God's name -- that this is the Christian Church and congregation of God. And we hope that no one who fears God and has the mind of a Christian ... will forbid us this way of thinking or reckon it against us as an error.²⁰

Or take this passage, penned by Jorg Leinhardt and Peter Los from the jail at Marburg, concerning the sacralist practice of putting all men in the category of "Christian":

Very well then, then one man has as much to lose as the other . . . even though Saint Paul says (2 Cor. 5: 10), "We must all appear before the judgment seat of God in order that each may receive according to his deeds whether it be .good or bad"; even though Christ says (John 14:21), "He who keeps my commandments he it is that loves me"; and in chapter 15 vs. 9 and 10, "Abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love"; in 1 John 2: 4 the Apostle says, "If any man says that he knows God and keepeth not his commandments, the same is a liar and the truth is not in him." Therefore Paul says, in Romans 2:5-16, "You however, O man, after your own obstinate and impenitent heart, treasure up for yourself wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." Deeds it says, not according to an imagined or trumped-up faith but to each according to his works, namely "glory and honor and eternal life to him who by patient continuance in well-doing seeks after eternal life; but to them that are contentious and obey

not the truth but obey unrighteousness," what will God give him? The same as the scoundrel -- as the false apostles say? Paul says, No, but "displeasure and wrath, tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil." Oh God, that your Excellencies, yes all men, might ponder this testimony of Paul. Then the false apostles would not hold captive so many God-fearing souls in a lying comfort! Paul goes on to say that God will "give praise and honor and peace, in the day of His wrath, to those who have done the good ... whether they be Jews or Gentiles." But the false apostles revile those who in our day try to follow this, calling them hypocrites and comparing them with the man who stood in the temple bragging of his piety O what has become of the words of Christ (Matt. 12:36) "I say unto you, that every man will have to give an account in the day of judgment of every idle word!" And then the false apostles say that if a man can only say that he believes that Christ has paid for him, has suffered for him, has atoned for him before God, no matter how he lives, then all his sins are forgiven him and left behind -- which they deny in their deportment. If one takes account of their flock, their children whom they have begotten by their Word, you will find it to be as we say. Therefore we pray your Excellencies in all humility to ponder the Holy Scriptures and to judge our writings, our speech, and our deportment in their light.²¹

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/leonard-verduin/reformers-and-their-stepchildren-catharer-part-1/>

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