

(Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Sacramentschwärmer! - Part 1

by Leonard Verduin

The sermon discusses the clash between the early Church's conception of preaching and sacralist thinking, which emphasizes sacramental manipulation over the preached Word.

Scripture: Matthew 26:26, John 4:23, John 6:53, Acts 2:47, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 10:20, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 2:5, 1 Peter 3:21

Topics: "Sacramental Theology", "Church Reformation"

Description

Leonard Verduin delves into the clash between the Stepchildren of the Reformation and the Reformers, known as 'Sacramentarians,' highlighting the fundamental difference in conviction regarding the delineation of the Christian Church. The early Church emphasized preaching the Gospel and baptism for salvation, contrasting with the pre-Christian world's lack of religious dialogue. Verduin explores the early Church's belief in responding to God's controverting speech, emphasizing the importance of faith as saying yes to God's yes and no to His no. He discusses the shift towards 'Christian sacralism,' where salvation by sacramental manipulation replaced salvation by the preached Word, leading to the emphasis on acts over personal faith.

Transcript

So then faith cometh by hearing Romans 10: 17

THE STEPCHILDREN OF THE REFORMATION WERE FREQUENTLY given the spiteful name of Sacramentschwärmer, or, more simply, "Sacramentarians." It is with this term of reproach that we shall be engaged in this chapter -- or, more correctly, with the aspect of the clash between the Stepchildren and the Reformers which earned them this name. We shall see that this clash was but another feature of the basic difference of conviction as to the delineation of the Christian Church.

Primitive Christianity had had as its primary stock in trade the preaching of the Gospel. It had preached the Good News to all and had then baptized those who responded believingly to it, so that there were "added daily to the Church such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

This was a great innovation. The pre-Christian world had known nothing like it. In the pre-Christian world there was no religious dialog between "those within" and "those without." All were in the same category;

how could there be dialog? In so far as there was speech at all it was in the form of the monolog.

The early Church was convinced that it had heard a voice from the beyond, a speech that ran counter to the speech of man, specifically counter to his speech on the religious level of life. It was a controverting speech, one that said no to man's yes, and yes to man's no. And with this controverting speech it sought the ear of all whom it could reach. At the heart of this controverting speech was the skandalon of the Cross, God's fiercest no to man's yes, His most emphatic yes to man's no.

The early Church considered the act of faith to consist, in the first place, in saying yes to God's yes and no to His no; it looked upon the moment of salvation as that moment when the hearer of the Word begins to speak in the idiom of that Word, God's controverting speech to man. In the authentic Christian tradition, the Christian man is the man who has been led to say Amen to the controverting voice from the beyond.^a

[a. The question has been raised in our times, and discussed with considerable ardor, whether it is with "Proposition" that the Church confronts the world or with "Person." Related to this question is the question whether the Church has a "propositional" confession. It must be granted that the New Testament knows nothing of a non-propositional faith; nor of a non-propositional revelation. The historic Christian faith has looked upon the act of faith as credere from one point of view and fidere from another point of view; the former one does vis-a-vis Proposition and the latter one does vis-a-vis Person. Actually therefore this is not a matter of entweder-oder; it is a matter of both-and. There can be no encounter with person except through the medium of speech. One must be Schriftgläubig before he can be Christgläubig. The Word-incarnate is not dissociable from the Word-inscriptured. In the light of this, our assertion, that the main stock in trade of authentic Christianity was the Word, must be seen.]

And these amen-sayers, these men and women who chime in with the controverting speech of God, by that very act become just as controversial as is the oracle of God. Small wonder that it has been said that the true Christian is one who stands in tension with the world as it exists apart from the redeeming act of God. This is his calling; and in this he rejoices. For it is each time a reminder of his own metamorphosis and a proof of its genuineness. He knows how serious it is "if all men speak well of you" -- for that implies that his yes is not as yet God's yes and his no not yet God's no -- and he knows the joy of "having been counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

The ethnic world, that is, the world without benefit of the redemptive revelation of the Judeo-Christian heritage, had no speech from the beyond -- for the quite sufficient reason that it had no recognized beyond. It did not have the terminology of the Maker and the made; much less did it have the concept of the Fall, the event that made the controverting speech of God necessary. Needless to say, it did not have, and could not have, the dialog of the yes-sayers and the no-sayers. It knew only consensus on the themes of religion, not the two-way speech that the Christians demanded and thrived on.

Seeing how radical was early Christianity's concept of its preaching mission, and how novel and different, we must not be surprised to see this concept of the preaching mission assailed. We must not be surprised to witness an atavistic retrogression here, a return to things as they are apart from the voice from the beyond. Here, as much as at any other point, the Church will have to be on its guard to hold fast that which it has, for there are always spirits abroad that would like nothing better than to turn back the hands of the clock and go back to the unanimity of pre-Christian times.

The early Church's conception of its preaching mission with its corollary, the formation of two camps, is ill-suited to the sacralist ambition. This preaching eventuates in two camps, the camp of those who have

begun to speak in the idiom of the speech from the beyond and the camp of those who continue to speak as men spoke before it came. But two camps are precisely what the sacralist does not want. He must have all men in one and the same visible receptacle,^b and he looks to religion as a prime contributor to the achievement of the homogeneous society. Therefore it must not surprise anyone that with the coming of "Christian sacralism" a heavy hand was laid upon the Word and the preaching thereof. It was but natural that something else should come in the place of the preaching technique. One could even predict what that something else would be, namely, transaction, manipulation, act, ritus.

[b. Authentic Christianity's firm conviction that at the terminal point of history there are two camps, the "saved" and the "lost," was embarrassing to sacralists. Men who think in terms of one category in the here find it hard to live with the idea of two categories there. It seems that the concept of purgatory found its way into the world of "Christian sacralism" so readily because it offered a convenient way out of the embarrassment. It opened up the possibility of one category even in the beyond. It gave men accustomed to thinking of saints and sinners as undifferentiable here a chance to think of them as undifferentiable also in the hereafter. In this light the idea of purgatory is an elongation of sacralistic thinking. And it is not at all surprising to find the "heretics" hostile to the idea of purgatory. Generally speaking, they rejected it forthrightly. But they found still another way of combatting the idea of a single receptacle at the terminal point, by means of the concept of "the sleep of the soul," the idea that at death the souls of men enter into a state of complete lethargy, until the judgment day, when they are revived and go to their respective destinations. This notion of the "sleep of the soul," technically called Psychopannyehism, was, as George H. Williams paints out in his recent book on the Radical Reformation, a common feature of "heresy." It recurred, as did so many of the features of medieval dissent, in the camp of the Anabaptists.]

For sacral society is act-bound society. In sacral society religion is rite, act entered into by all. And as such this act is then a device whereby the tribe is bound together. The Navajo medicine-man conducts an act; he makes the sand painting, and in it the tribe is bound together. And so it is in sacral society everywhere. The place and function of religion in a sacral society is such that there is virtually no room for personal religion; so much is religion a matter of society as a whole that it becomes hard to fit the private practice of religion into it. Plato has written this in his Laws:

Let this then be the law. No one shall possess shrines of the gods in private houses, and he who is found to possess them and to perform any sacred rite not publicly authorized, shall be informed against in the ear of the guardians of the law; and let these issue orders that he is to carry his private rites to the public temples; and if he does not obey, let such a penalty be inflicted as to make him comply. And if a person be proven guilty of an impiety, not merely from childish levity but such as grown-up men may be guilty of, let him be punished with death.

Not only is private religion hard to control, but private devotions are, as this heathen thinker sees things, essentially asocial. To be religious in private is to deflect religion from its most important function, that of tying the tribe together. That is why Plato pleads for laws that render non-public religious ritual illicit.

It will be observed that for Plato religion is rite, as it is for all who write from a pre-Christian point of view. Plato is not worried about any words spoken, any message brought. It is not for such activity that he wants laws enacted, but for ritual, act. For him religion is act. And act loses its point, if done in private. This is typical of ethnic thinking in the matter.

Knowing the pre-Christian evaluation of religious act, we will not be surprised to find adherents of "Christian sacralism" everywhere and always ready to take up arms when they hear of non-public sacrament; a baptism applied merely to some and a sacramental table spread only for an element in society make the sacralist think the end of the world has come.c (We shall see that the Stepchildren were the victims of this sacralist thinking.)

[c. This throws an interesting light upon the fact that at the end of Zwingli's reformatory career in Zurich no one was eligible for public office who did not go to the Lord's Supper (although it was added that this "was not to involve his honor"); attendance at Church had become obligatory. To make this coercion really effective it was further forbidden to attend mass in a neighboring town, a privilege granted in earlier times. (Cf. Farner, op. cit., P: 125.)]

It was therefore inevitable that with the coming of "Christian sacralism" preaching was crowded aside by act. In the place of salvation by believing response to the preached Word came salvation by act, by sacramental manipulation. The two have been in competition with each other ever since.d

[d. In sacramental churches preaching atrophies; in preaching churches the sacraments are secondary. Attempts have been made to combine the two "means of grace," but one or the other is always primus inter pares. No Church has been able to achieve in practice the equality to which it in theory holds. As the one increases the other decreases. Just now we witness a heightening of Sacrament in many Protestant Churches; this could be illustrative of what we say; the Word has been discredited (we do not say rightly discredited); hence the Sacrament receives the attention which once went to the Word.]

The proponents of "Christian sacralism" in their search for act did not have to be altogether inventive. The authentic Christian tradition already had its acts. These needed only to be appropriated and magnified.

There was the Agape or love-feast, the Lord's Supper, a solemn performance intended to keep alive in the memory of Christ's followers the event of the suffering and death of Christ, as well as to remind them of the fact that He would come again. Moreover it was also a communion, a ritual in which the unity of the body and the Head was eloquently portrayed (as well as the unity that exists between member and member), set forth by the very human act of eating from a common loaf and drinking from a common cup. This already existing institution needed only to be accommodated a bit to make it serve the purpose which act has regularly served in sacral Society. (There was also the act of baptism -- which, as we shall see in a later chapter, the drafters of "Christian sacralism" were also able to bend to their purpose.)

Nor did the proponents of "Christian sacralism" have to be altogether inventive as they adjusted the Agape to their program. There was a precedent by which they could go. The minds of men in those times were already acquainted with terms and institutions to which the Agape could be made to conform.

There is a lingering suspicion, frequently uttered in Protestant circles, to the effect that Roman Catholicism is a hybrid form, authentic Christianity crossed with the pagan faith of pre-Christian Rome. At no point is the hybrid character of this offspring of the Christian mother and the ethnic father more apparent than in the "mass," as the Agape came to be called after the Constantinian metamorphosis.

What was the ancient institution, to which the Agape could be made to conform as men drifted toward "Christian sacralism?"

It will be recalled that in the days of Decius every householder' had been instructed to fill out a formulary reading as follows: "I, N.N., have always sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence I have, in keeping with the directive, sacrificed . . . and have tasted of the sacrificial victim; and I request that you, a public servant, certify the same." This formulary was intended to do two things. On the one hand it was part of a frantic effort to infuse new life into the dying religion of ancient Rome; on the other hand it was a device whereby each individual Christian could be located and taken in hand.

It would be most gratifying if we could know more about the evolution of the rite which is here described, the item about "tasting the sacrificial victim." That it was a feature of the practices associated with the cult of the so-called "mystery religions" is quite apparent. In these mystery religions (the only religious forms that had any vitality in those final days of pagan Rome), one partook of deity by ingesting a morsel of a sacrificial victim.^e By such ingesting, something of the elan of the god was said to be infused into the devotee, in a transaction known as a mysterion -- the word that has given us the expression "mystery religion." This word mysterion was by the Latins rendered sacramentum -- the direct antecedent of our word "sacrament."

[^e. It seems that in John 6:53-56 we have Christian truth stated in terminology borrowed from contemporary mystery religions.]

The important thing to notice, for our present purpose, is that in the formulary of Decius we have an attempt to procure religious homogeneity by the use of sacramentum.^f It must also be observed that mysterion or the sacramentum intended to bring about religious uniformity in the scheme of Decius, was a sacrifice, something done on an altar.

[^f. That the word sacrament is of ethnic origin is of course not open to question. The religion of pagan Rome was a sacramental religion. In 1 Corinthians 10:20f., Paul points out that it is incongruous to participate in the heathen sacrament and also in the Christian Agape or "table of the Lord."]

It did not require a great deal of ingenuity for the fashioners of "Christian sacralism" to realize that with a few adroit alterations the Agape could be put in the place of the sacramentum and then serve the function which Decius had in mind, namely, the function of providing the monolithic society. A few alterations, a gather here and a tuck there, and the love-feast was all ready, ready to perform the function in the new sacralism which the pagan sacramentum had performed in the old.

The first thing that had to be done was to appropriate the pagan word sacramentum (recall that it occurs nowhere in the Scriptures) and to let it replace the word Agape of the authentic tradition. This was a clever stroke; every Roman citizen knew what a sacramentum was, and what it was supposed to do and achieve; he needed only to hear the word to know the theology, that of "tasting the sacrificial victim," a transaction signifying the participants' solidarity with the society of which he was a part.

A second thing that had to be done was to move the table out and the altar in. This would automatically make of the officiating minister a sacrificateur, a sacrificer, a priest; and this would as automatically change the viands, the bread and the wine that had stood on the table of the Agape, into the flesh and the blood of "the sacrificial victim."

A third thing that needed to be done was to eliminate as much as possible the "Take, eat" of the original ritual. This "Take, eat" was far too reminiscent of the voluntarism that was so much a part of the authentic Christian vision; it portrayed too manifestly that in regard to the good things of the Christian faith there is

always the take it or leave it. The determinative act of taking had to be eliminated and in its place had to come an act of imparting. Instead of a ritual in which the partaking was the central idea, there came a ritual in which the imparting was the central thing. The Constantinian change therefore made the "Take, eat" obsolete. Henceforth the sacrificateur would lay a morsel of "the sacrificial victim" upon the tongue of the recipient. All the recipient had to do in the new order was to let his mouth hang open -- which requires less of an act on his part than to keep it shut.

With these changes the love-feast was suitable to the role in the new sacralism which the pagan sacramentum had played in the old sacralism.

It is not at all surprising that all through medieval times and on into Reformation times, and beyond them, Corpus Christianum was thought of as a thing held together by "sacrament."^g That is what the function of the sacramentum had been in the days of the old sacralism; and that was the function of the "sacrament" in the new sacralism.

[^g Augustine taught, and all adherents of "Christian sacralism" repeated after him, that society cannot hang together unless it be bound by a common religion. And he taught that it is in the Sacrament that the cohesive power of religion resides. Calvin in his day endorsed much of this, saying, in Institutes IV, 14: 19, that "Men cannot be welded together in any name of religion, whether true or false, unless they be bound in some partnership of signs or visible sacraments." It was the Anabaptists' assault upon the sacraments as binders of society that made them so odious in the sight of the Reformers.]

As we have already intimated, and as we shall see in some detail in a later chapter, the fashioners of "Christian sacralism" laid a hand also upon the lustration that was a part of the Christian heritage, made of it also a sacralism-serving thing. Moreover, the Constantinian change led to the creation of several brand new sacraments -- all of them very handy instruments for him who would bring into being, and keep it there, some "Christian" version of the pre-Christian monolithic, noncomposite society.

When the Constantinian change was complete the technique of salvation by Sacrament had effectively replaced the older technique of salvation by the preached Word. The predicateur had been replaced by the sacrificateur. All through medieval times and on to the eve of the Reformation, the typical priest of the Empire-Church was a stranger to the word. (Luther discovered the Bible -- after he had already for some time worn the cloth. The same thing is true of Menno Simons and of countless others.) The priest of whom this was not true, if indeed there was such, was a rare exception. The typical priest knew the ins and outs of the technique of salvation by sacramental manipulation; he was a novice in the technique of salvation by response to the preached Word.

The logic of salvation by sacramental manipulation leads straight to the idea of *ex opere operata*, the name given to the view that the transaction to which the Sacrament points is "done in the doing." It is the innate power of the Sacrament as the conveyor of grace that assures the mediation of salvation, this rather than the state or the attitude of the dispenser -- or of the recipient, for that matter.^h

[^h How essentially medieval Luther could be at times in regard to the sacrament, how dangerously close he sometimes walked along the brink of *ex opere operata*, may be gathered from these his words: "Wie konnte man die Taufe hoher schanden und lastern, denn dasz es keine wahrhaftige gute Taufe sein sollte, die einem unglaubigen gegeben wirt? ... Darum, dasz ich nicht glaubte, so sollte die Taufe nichts sein? . . . Was konnte doch der Teufel Aergeres und Lasterlicheres lehren oder predigen? Noch sind die Wiedertauffer und Rottengeister mit dieser Lehre erhilt. Aber ich setze, das ein Jude die Tauf annahme

(wie es oft pflegt zu geschehen) und glaubte nicht, so wollest du sagen: Die Taufe ist nicht recht denn er glaubt nicht? Das hiesze nicht allein mit der Vernunft genarrt, sondern auch Gott gelastert und geschandet" (Werke, St. Louis ed., VII, 990)].

Small wonder that with those who resisted the Constantinian formula, the attitude of the recipient remained the one thing that mattered. Small wonder also that among those who deplored the Constantinian change, it was said that a priest who lives in sin is not competent to convey salvation and that the recipient must believe in order to receive the good thing symbolized in the Sacrament.

The idea of salvation by sacramental manipulation also leads straight to the idea of transubstantiation and the notion that the officiating priests "makes" (this is the word that was in common use in medieval times) the body and the blood of Christ, "makes" them as he utters the words "Hoc est enim corpus meum"ⁱ (for this is my body). To take the place of the "sacrificial victim" of the pre-Christian sacramentum, the elements of the Supper had to be made to cease being what they were, bread and wine, and begin to exist as another substance, flesh and blood. Hence the sacrificateur was empowered to transubstantiate.

[i. Medieval man, unable to understand the Church's jargon (it was all done in Latin) did know this much, that at the sound of the words "Hoc est enim corpus meum" something pretty mysterious was allegedly taking place. So he began to refer to any mysterious going-on as another case of hocus-pocus -- that is what the words of the priest had sounded like.]

Sacramentalism also leads to sacerdotalism. If salvation comes by sacramental manipulation, then the manipulator becomes extremely important; in fact, he becomes indispensable. The Church was extremely jealous of the priestly office, understandably so; for in it was lodged a great potential toward the realization and the perpetuation of "Christian sacralism." The Church created the "sacrament of Orders," an act whereby power to transubstantiate was allegedly transferred from the officiating priest to the head of the one being ordained. In this way the Church had its company of trusted officials, its hard core of "card-carrying party members," who strictly speaking constitute the ecclesia.^j By this, sacerdotalism revisionism was effectively precluded. By it the masses were effectively disfranchised. Only he really "runs" who has been "sent" -- and the Church saw to it that she "sent" only those whom she could trust.

[j. In Roman Catholic theology the Church is, to speak strictly, the teaching Church" the ecclesia docens, the ordained ones; it is only in some loose sense that the hearing Church, the ecclesia audiens is included in the concept Church.]

In this ordination procedure the important thing was not the candidate's status as a believer and a converted man; the important thing was apostolic succession, an unbroken line of empowerment, a pedigree that ran back without a hiatus, supposedly all the way back to the Apostles. It was this that made the priest.

Such predication as accompanied the sacramental manipulation was done in Latin -- even though to the common man this was unintelligible. In a system of salvation by sacramental manipulation this is no difficulty; it poses a difficulty, an insuperable one, only to the man who thinks in terms of salvation by believing response to the preached Word. The Latin was the official language of the Empire; for that reason it was the prescribed language of the Empire-Church.

We see then that the eclipse of the Word, the usurpation of its place by the Sacrament modeled after the pre-Christian sacramentum, the heavy emphasis upon the manipulator, transubstantiation, the doctrine of

ex opere operata, partiality toward the Latin language in the Church's activities -- are all of them related phenomena. They are so many developments inherent in the Constantinian change; they are so many props of "Christian sacralism."

It is therefore not at all surprising that in the vision of the "heretics" there was a negative attitude toward this whole complex of ideas and institutions. In fact, a chorus of protest resounds across the ages, contesting all that feeds the idea of salvation by sacramental manipulation, and sustaining all that which belongs with the formula of salvation by believing response to the preached Word.^k

[^k. Those who adhered to the idea that salvation is by sacramental manipulation came to be known as Sacramentalists, and those who opposed this idea and held to the formula that salvation comes by believing response to the preached Word came, by a strange quirk of language, to be known as Sacramentarians. In this way, two words that have the same meaning etymologically came to stand for two radically different ideologies. In our further usage, a Sacramentalist will be one who has the high view of the Sacrament that came in with the Constantinian change, whereas a Sacramentarian will be a person who had a correspondingly low view of the Sacrament, giving it a place below that of the Word. The Sacramentarians were also called Sacramentschwärmer.]

Let us pick out a few voices in this chorus. In the year 1025 some "heretics" were located in the vicinity of Liege, where they had migrated in order to escape the wrath of the "fallen" Church, coming as they said from Italy. Fleeing from Liege they came to Arras, where they were arrested, just as they were taking to the road once more to escape the inquisitor. During their trial they asserted that "The mystery of baptism and of the body of the Lord is nothing." (The reader will recall that "mystery" and "sacrament" are synonymous.) They said that "There are no sacraments in the holy Church by which one can attain unto salvation." Their faith, we are told, consisted in "leaving the world behind, keeping from fleshly lusts, earning their livelihood by the work of their hands, doing harm to no one, showing charity -- if this righteousness is observed, say they, then the work of baptism is nothing; if the truth is falsified, then baptism does not help unto salvation."^m This was Sacramentarianism, pure and simple, a flat denial of salvation by sacramental manipulation, uttered with the insinuation that the "Truth" had gone into eclipse in the camp of the Sacramental Church, a loss that no amount of sacrament could make good.

[^l. The medieval "heretic" was decidedly Word-oriented. So thoroughly versed in the New Testament Scriptures were the "evangelical Cathars" (who after 1179 were generally called Waldensians) that Walter Mapes, a well-equipped son of the Catholic Church, said at Rome that he dreaded a disputation with them in the area of the Word. In one of the Waldensian tracts, the Word is called "salvation for the soul of the poor, a tonic for the weak, food for the hungry, teaching for the true, comfort unto the chastened, the cessation of slander and the acquisition of virtue." In another of these literary remains of these "heretics," the so-called Cantica, we read that "Even as they who are assailed by the enemy flee to a strong tower so do the assailed saints betake themselves to the Holy Scripture. There they find weapons against heresies, armor against the assaults of the devil, the assaults of the flesh, the glory of the world."]

[^m. In all likelihood the word "truth" stands here for "the Word" or "Scriptures." We know that the Restitutionist "heretics" stood for the idea that the Scriptures are the sole rule of faith and conduct. We read; in a medieval inquisitor's delineation of the "heretic" that one of their "errors" is that "They scorn all that whereof they read not in the Gospel" (Cf. Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, p. 190, quoting.) The fact that this inquisitor was himself an ex-heretic makes this testimony all the more significant; he had lived with the "heretic."]

These views were already old in 1025. In that same year Berengarius, a "heretic" who tried to sit it out within the prevailing Church, taught that "the body of the Lord is not so much the actual body as a shadow and figure of the Lord's body." In so teaching, said the outraged Church, "he seeks to introduce ancient heresies into modern times."! (It may be observed, in passing, that the Stepchildren of Reformation times counted this Berengarius among those who "had a good beginning in the truth.")

This Sacramentarianism was never absent from the medieval scene. In the year 1112, we find, the Church locked horns with "persons who deny that the substance of the bread and of the wine which is blest by the priest at the altar is actually changed into the body and blood of Christ."² (These Sacramentarians are also said to have held "that the sacrament of baptism does not help little ones unto salvation.")

In the early part of the twelfth century there was a veritable avalanche of Sacramentarianism in Flanders, that fertile mother of generation upon generation of "heresy." In the vicinity of Antwerp the "heretic" Tanchelm arose, who "dared to agitate against the sacraments of the Church" and who said openly that "It is nothing that the priests make on the altar." He warned his followers against the sin of "gazing on the sacramental body and blood of the Lord." This was indeed Sacramentarianism. It was also Restitutionism; for Tanchelm held that "only with him and his following does the true Church exist."

[n. Although the enraged Church gave currency to many bizarre and even ugly tales about this Tanchelm, so that it has become difficult to distinguish the true from the false, it is certain that he maintained that the Church gathered around him was the only true Church (he was therefore a Restitutionist); also, that he rejected the whole sacerdotal system of the prevailing Church and its system of salvation-conveying Sacraments. Like so many "heretics" before him and after him, he frowned on auricular confession, saying that one ought to confess in the ear of God and not in that of a mortal man. We find with him the formula, almost a constant with the medieval "heretics," that "In quacumque hora peccator ingemuerit, salvus erit, nee recordabar amplius peccatorum ejus, dicit Dominus." (In the very same hour in which the sinner sighs he is saved, neither will I make mention of his sins anymore, saith the Lord.) In this view of things the sacrament as well as the sacerdos become quite dispensable.]

So great was the following of this early Sacramentarian that almost the whole bishopric of Utrecht followed him and would certainly have defected from the fold of the "fallen" Church had it not been for the fact that the Church's trouble-shooter, Norbertus, managed to get things somewhat straightened out. Norbertus was no doubt aided by the fact that one dark night as Tanchelm was crossing the Schelde River (so a faithful son of the "fallen" Church informs us), "a faithful cleric, driven by a pious zeal, bashed him in the head so that he died" (the original has in cerebra percussit).³

Tanchelm's ideas could not be so easily dispatched however. Half a century later, in 1163, a band of Restitutionists were burned at Cologne, "followers of Tanchelm," whose errors were:

that they consider all men who are not of their sect to be heretics and infidels; that they spurn the sacraments of the true Church and say that they only have the true faith and that all others are worldly men and under condemnation. They say that the body and blood of the Lord is nothing, ridiculing the Mass and calling it by awful names, for which reason they do not patronize it . . . They deride the Confessional, saying that one ought to lay bare his heart to God and not to any man. They contemn indulgences and penances, quoting the prophet to the effect that "in the hour in which the sinner sighs he is saved; nor will I make mention of his sins anymore, saith the Lord."!

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

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