

# (Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Sacramentschwärmer! - Part 2

by Leonard Verduin

---

*The sermon explores the history and significance of Sacramentarianism, a movement that rejected the Church's sacerdotalism and emphasized the importance of the preached Word in the vernacular language.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 19:12, Romans 10:14, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:3, Hebrews 4:12

**Topics:** "Sacramental Theology", "Church History"

---

## Description

Leonard Verduin delves into the historical context of Sacramentarians and Restitutionists, highlighting the anti-Sacramentalism present in Europe before the Reformation. He explores the resistance against Sacramentalism and the emphasis on salvation through believing response to the preached Word rather than sacramental manipulation. Verduin discusses the struggles faced by those who opposed the prevailing Church's sacerdotalism and the importance of vernacularism in the Anabaptist movement. He sheds light on the tension between Sacramentarians and the Reformers, as well as the persistence of anti-Sacramentalism among the Stepchildren, who repudiated salvation by sacramental manipulation.

---

## Transcript

Plainly we are concerned here with folk who were both Sacramentarians and Restitutionists.

In 1516, on the very eve of the Reformation, a man writing about this Tanchelm asserted that at Tanchelm's death his "heresy" had been "sown by the devil in various places, most of all in Bohemia, Thuringia, and Alsace -- where to this day those who believe thus have by no means ceased to be." There were heavy deposits of such anti-Sacramentalism in all parts of Europe prior to the Reformation and it is from these areas that the people came whom Luther had in mind when he spoke of those "who in earlier times had been suppressed by the tyranny of anti-Christ." Of these deposits C. A. Cornelius, the first to attempt an inductive study of Anabaptism and himself a Catholic, was thinking when he said: "To Luther came others who, before his activity, had already abandoned the doctrine of the official Church, men who were encouraged by his activity to give expression to their ideas and to organize them into systems."5 It was of these deposits that Zwingli was thinking when he reminded his fellow Reformer, Luther, in 1527, that "There have been men, not a few, who have known the sum and substance of the evangelical religion quite as well as you; however, out of all Israel no one took the chances involved in stepping forth to do battle, for all feared yon mighty Goliath, standing there in the fearful weight of his weapons and in

challenging stance."<sup>6</sup>

It may be said with confidence that in the centuries that went before 1517 there never was absent from the scene a murmuring against the Sacramentalism that had swept in with the Constantinian change. One could not live out the span of an average human life without experiencing at first-hand that not all people believed in the so-called miracle of the mass.

Each successive wave of protest against the order that had begun with the Constantinian change no doubt bore the impress of its own times; but every eruption of "heresy" was like every other eruption in the matter of salvation by sacramental manipulation. During the frightful times of the Black Death, for instance, "heresy" reflected the times. It was not typical of "heresy" in other, more normal, times; it was probably not as evangelical, but it was just as anti-sacramental as any other wave of dissent. The "heretics" of that age "did not kneel before the holy sacrament when it was raised aloft and sacrificed in the holy mass." Nor did they "doff their hats" as the custom was, to greet the host. That this was a matter of great import is apparent from the fact that the custom arose to specify that at one's burial one's hat was not to be removed -- a final gesture telling the world that the one who was being laid away had never made himself guilty of the idolatry involved in bowing to a morsel of bread. How serious this was may be measured by the fact that the bishop of Utrecht, Jan van Arkel, forbade, "upon pain of excommunication, to any priest under our jurisdiction to officiate at a burial of any corpse wearing a hat, or bearing the staff, or any other item of the attire of the Flagellantes."<sup>7</sup>

[O. Manifestly these Flagellantes were also staff-carriers, of whom we spoke in an earlier chapter. It seems that whenever and wherever men grew critical of the "fallen" Church one of the first things to come under fire was her involvement in the sword-function. This in turn made the critics of this involvement inclined to carry a staff by way of contrast.]

What was said of some "heretics" apprehended at Trier in the thirteenth century could be predicated of countless other eruptions of dissent:

Many of them are well-versed in Scripture, which they possess in Teutonic translation; others repeat baptism; others do not believe in the body of the Lord; others say that the body of the Lord can be constituted by any man or woman, ordained or otherwise, in any dish or goblet and at any place; others hold that extreme unction is not necessary; others minimize the pontificate and the priesthood; others say that the prayers for the dead do not help; others neglect the feasts and work on the Church's festivals and eat meat in lent."

This may sound like a series of loose and disjunct items but they are not that. Rather are they so many features of rebellion against the "fallen" Church's fallenness. The Church knew very well that "heretics are like Samson's foxes; they may present diverse faces but at the tail they are all joined together." And when she said this, she added dolefully that the commonality consisted in this, that they "have an aversion to the [Catholic] Church."

The Waldensians, too, were Sacramentarians. They began their own celebration of the Lord's Supper with the prayer, "We beseech Thee Lord, thou who hast thyself borne our sins and our iniquities because of thy mercy .... " -- a theology in which there is no impanation, no transubstantiation, no consubstantiation, not even an unusual and specific presence. One of their leaders, Martin Houska of Bohemia, spoke disdainfully of "kneeling before that morsel of bread?" Such transubstantiation as there is, said these Sacramentarians, takes place "not in the hands of the priest but in the heart of him who

receives it worthily."

[p. Anastasius Veluanus, that intriguing evangelical of early Reformation times in Holland (he assumed this name because after he had recanted under torture he returned to his Restitutionist convictions, dropping his real name, which was Versteeg, and assuming, in an area where he was not heretofore known, the name Anastasius Veluanus, the "Resurrected One from the Veluwe," his native province), tells us, as he speaks of the denial of transubstantiation: "Dese menong is oick gewest by den waldensen van den iar elffhondert und LXX bis noch toe." (This view was adhered to by the Waldensians, from the year 1170 to the present time.)]

It was, of course, frightfully dangerous to be a Sacramentarian. To be one required of one to be absent whenever the mass was celebrated -- the mass, around which the whole religious cult revolved, and on which the continuation of "Christian sacralism" depended. One could hardly be a Sacramentarian and so remain away and then continue unknown; many a "heretic" was spotted in this way. One can readily understand that all sorts of schemes were invented by the Sacramentarians to get around this difficulty. We read of one who, when it was time to "gaze adoringly," was found to have in his eye-sockets the two halves of the outer husk of the fruit of the walnut tree -- a trick that earned him banishment for life. So much a principle was it with this man that to "gaze adoringly" on a morsel of bread was plain and simple idolatry, that he sought to ease his conscience by holding before his closed eyes the most opaque thing he could find. Another medieval Sacramentarian fell into the clutches of the inquisitor when it was noticed that whenever it was time to "gaze adoringly" he absented himself to heed a call of nature. Sometimes the Sacramentarian would hold the wafer on his tongue -- until he had the chance to spit it into his handkerchief or into a thicket.

[q. He was banished "L jaer uuten lande van Vlanderen, omme diewille dat thelich sacrament lijdende up de strate hy in derisie ende versmaetheden van dien gheset heeft twee . . . noodscalen in zijne ooghen ende eenen in zijnen mont en de also knielende voor tzelve heleghe Sacrament, dat zaken zijn van quaden exempele, niet te lijdene zonder pugnacie." (See Corpus, II, 279f.)]

[r. This practical solution to a very difficult problem seems to have been bequeathed from one eruption of Restitutionism to the next. We find the followers of Tanchelm doing it and it became a part of the legacy of the Stepchildren. (This usage indicates that the "heretics" sometimes attended mass feignedly, for purposes of survival, a policy that has misled some investigators to conclude that these "heretics" were still "good Catholics.") We find one of the Anabaptists, Georg Leurle of Weilheim, saying, during his trial in 1530, that "Die Kindertaufe, das sacrament des altars und die Messe und Ohrenbiechte seien nichts, die Monche und Pfaffen seien nichts als BlindenfÃ¼hrer," and acknowledging that he had "auch einmal das Sakrament empfangen und es in seinen Hut bias en wollen, a strategy that didn't work in his case "weil es ihm zu rasch hinabgerÃ¼tscht sei." He had swallowed it involuntarily.]

What irked the Church particularly was that Sacramentarianism posed a threat to the monolithic society, the very end for which its own Sacramentalism had been devised. The Church was not driven by theological concerns in the first place; nor even for the salvation of men; its prime consideration was the threat which the Sacramentarians posed to its dream of Corpus Christianum. In the words of William of Newburgh, the heretics "when questioned one by one of the articles of the faith answer correctly as to the substance of the Physician on high, but perversely as to medication by which He deigns to heal human infirmity, namely the Holy Sacraments. They solemnly renounce baptism, the eucharist, and matrimony [s] and dare wickedly to derogate from the Catholic unity supported by these props."<sup>9</sup> This shows us

precisely where the shoe pinched. The "heretics" were orthodox as to sin and grace, but they were intolerably unorthodox as to salvation by sacramental manipulation -- which the Church had devised as "props" for "Christian sacralism."

Nowhere, as we have already said, was Sacramentarianism more a part of the very soil than it was in Flanders. Here there were in existence, a century before Luther, underground anti-Catholic Churches -- "Hussite Churches," as they were called in those days. They had all the features of what we would today call Protestant congregations -- their own ordained men, catechism classes for prospective confessions of faith. They even maintained a kind of presbyterial organization, for they recognized and admitted to their pulpits ministers of their persuasion who pastored sister congregations.

[s. Throughout medieval times it was rumored that the "heretics" entertained very unorthodox ideas and practices in regard to marriage. They would have nothing to do, of course, with marriage as a sacrament. When they cohabited nevertheless the Church conveniently accused them of flouting the institution of marriage as such, an accusation that we do not need to take seriously. The Stepchildren had to hear these same charges, charges which we likewise must not take too seriously. (Which, of course, is not to say that there were not some weird ideas as to marriage entertained at the lunatic fringe of Anabaptism.)]

[t. It is an interesting fact that George H. Williams, although belonging to the school of thought, generally speaking, that sees in the rise of Anabaptism the fruitage of 1517, does say of the southern Low Countries that here Anabaptism drew from older movements (see p. 398 of his *The Radical Reformation*). In this he is, of course, on the right track. It seems to us that what Williams grants at this point and for this area must be granted for all other areas.]

How many such churches there were we shall never know; were it not for the fact that a few were liquidated we would not know about them at all, so secret were they. One was betrayed by an undercover spy who posed as a convert, in 1423. The minister, Ghillebert Thulin (the name is also spelled Thurin), was jailed because he was from Valenciennes and so under the jurisdiction of Douai. The local pastor, Jehan de Hiellin, was sentenced to life imprisonment but escaped, only to be recaptured as he made his way in flight to Germany. It is reported that the central feature of the doctrine of these occult Churches was "that the substance of the bread and the wine continue materially the same after consecration."<sup>10</sup>

Medieval Sacramentarianism commonly went hand in hand with a rejection of the Church's sacerdotalism. As Herbert Grundmann has said, "The heretics challenged the legitimacy of the churchly ordination and on the basis of their own insights constructed a rival church, one composed of 'good Christians.'"<sup>u</sup> The leaders among these "heretics" were selected because of their spiritual qualities; it was these qualities that made them to be promoted to the rank of "elders," or whatever it was they were called. Sometimes this policy was singled out as the outstanding characteristic of the "heretic"; Alanus of Lille for example, a loyal son of the prevailing Church, defined a heretic as "one who asserts that merit achieves more toward consecration and the giving of the benediction and the binding and the loosing than does the ordination or official status." Alanus added that the "heretics" by pursuing this policy, "go greatly against the Church and show themselves averse to her.

[u. The expression "good Christians" points to the assault by the "heretics" upon the conductal averagism that prevailed in "Christendom." For their insistence upon "a walk worthy of the calling," they were called by such names as "bons gens," "boris garcons," "bons valets," etc. A "heretic" burned on the eve of the Reformation was popularly called "de rechtvaerdige Jan," "honest John," no doubt because he too lived an

exemplary life.]

The "heretics" countered the Church's sacerdotalism with laicism, that is, with lay performance of all the things the ordained cleric did. There were frequent occurrences of lay administration of the Lord's Supper, lay shriving too, lay marriages, lay burials. But this laicism came to expression most commonly in the form of lay preaching. This emphasis on lay preaching is not surprising in view of the fact that the "heretics" believed in the formula of salvation by believing response to the preached Word. They had only a secondary interest in the many ritual performances that priests engage in; their primary interest was in the Word.

Small wonder that the Church turned her heavy artillery upon this lay preaching. We read of one directive after the other aimed at the suppression of this practice, so dangerous to the Church's pretention. We read, in a directive issuing from Trier in 1277: "We command, firmly and strictly, that preaching is not to be permitted to the untaught, such as the Beghards or Conversi, or any other . . . , in villages or streets . . . ."11 From Verona, in 1184: "Since some folk under a kind of piety joined to a denial of the apostolic dictum 'How shall they preach unless they be sent!'v sustain their right to preach, therefore we place under anathema all who whether forbidden or unbidden . . . make bold, whether in private or in public, to preach."12

[v. With this stereotyped formula, that no one is to preach who has not been "sent" (and only she "sent," assisted in this by the civil power) the Church sought to exercise complete thought-control; and she succeeded, too, to a frightening extent. Those who preached without being so "sent" were said to "run of themselves." Naturally this included every "heretic." The "fallen" Church did not wait to see what such a one taught; it was enough that he taught "unsent." By the time the Reformation had come full circle the Reformers were saying the same things that the earlier sacralists had said. We hear Zwingli, for example, asserting that "neman sol leeren, weder der gesendt wirdt" (no one is to teach except those who have been sent). (Cf. Werke, IV, 383.)

Just as the Church's sacerdotalism was joined with a partiality toward the Latin, so was there in the camp of the Sacramentarian "heretics" a partiality toward the vernacular. The Church left no stone unturned in an effort to keep the Bible in the vernacular out of the hands of men. In 1203, for instance, the bishop of Liege (where "heresy" was endemic) decreed that "All books containing the Scriptures in Romance or Teutonic tongue are to be delivered into the hands of the bishop, who will then return those which in his judgment should be given back." The Council of Bezieres, held in 1233-34, forbade the Bible in the vernacular to lay persons. So also the Council of Terracona in 1234. In 1369 the Emperor (Charles IV, who because of his menial subordination to the papacy was nick-named Pfaffenkaiser Karl) issued an edict (dictated to him in the papal palace at Lucca) prohibiting all books in german treating of the Holy Scriptures "especially since to lay-folk of either sex it is by canonical usage forbidden to use books of the Sacred Scriptures in the vernacular."

The Church's fulminations were all in vain. Hand-copied exemplars of the Scriptures in the vernacular continued to be made and used. When printing from movable type came into use, a veritable Hood of Scripture in the vernacular poured across the land. According to Ludwig Keller (who had a good chance to know since he was a professional librarian) there were twenty-five editions of the Gospels prior to 1518; the Psalms had been done thirteen times; parts of the New Testament times without number, all in the vulgar tongue.

Since it was frightfully dangerous to possess such a copy of the Word, the "heretics" played it safe by storing the Word in a place to which the inquisitor had no access, namely, in human memory. One finds it almost impossible to believe what an inquisitor, Etienne de Bourbon, a Dominican monk who had spent his life running down "heretics," tells us about this:

They know the apostles creed excellently in the vulgar' tongue; they learn by heart the Gospels and the New Testament, in the vernacular and repeat them aloud to one another . . . . I have seen a youthful cow-herd who had lived but one year in the home of a Waldensian heretic who had attended so diligently to all that he heard that he had memorized within that year forty Sunday Gospels not counting those of the feast days .... I have seen some lay-folk so steeped in their doctrine that they could repeat by heart great portions of the Evangelists, such as Matthew and Luke, especially all that is said in them of Christ's teaching and sayings, so that they could repeat them without a halt and with hardly a word wrong here or there."<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes we find this vernacularism closely joined to the laicism that marked the "heretic." We read:

They say that the Holy Scripture hath the same effect in the vulgar tongue that it hath in Latin; for this reason they celebrate [the Lord's Supper] in the vulgar tongue and give the sacrament . . . . They read the Gospels and the Epistles in the vernacular, explaining and applying them in their own favor and contrary to the statutes of the Roman Church .... They teach that every saint is a priest."

The extent to which the faith of the "heretics" was centered around the preached Word may be gathered from a passage that occurs in one of the Waldensian tracts, the *Alcuns colon ligar* ("Some Desire to Read"):

The priests cause the people to perish of hunger and thirst to hear the Word of God ... , not only do they themselves refuse to hear and receive the Word of God but ... they, in order that it may not be preached make laws and orders as it pleases them, just so the preaching of the Word is obstructed. The City of Sodom will be pardoned before these."

So averse was the "fallen" Church to the Word that it actually implied that those who became intimate with the Book deserved to die; it bent the passage in Exodus to its purpose, the passage that provides that "every beast that touches the mountain shall be thrust through with a dart." When in Reformation times the Bible in the Spanish vernacular was put on the market a leading cleric of the prevailing Church actually said that in the event the King would let the Word be preached he and his colleagues would run him out of his realm! Indeed, salvation by believing response to the preached Word and salvation by sacramental manipulation lay in mortal combat with each other all through medieval times.

There was then a lengthy tradition of anti-sacramentalism when Luther began his reformatory endeavor. It is also apparent that this anti-sacramentalism was not an unrelated phenomenon, but was intimately related to the rest of the Restitutionist vision: It would be quite unrealistic to imagine that all this agitation had not conditioned men and made them ripe for action.

Whether it was because the Reformers were themselves conditioned by these ancient rebellions against the Sacramentalism that had so long served the cause of "Christian sacralism," or whether they in an understandable desire to have a following went out of their way to cater to men so conditioned, or whether it was due to their fresh examination of the New Testament, the fact seems to be that, at the outset, the Reformers spoke, at times at least, in the idiom of the ancient protest. w Bucer seems to have preached in

Sacramentarian vein at the outset; for when the Second Front had been opened, those who had regrouped there said of him: "Bucer has for years preached the sacrament correctly and properly; now however he has gone back on this and preaches a different view." Bucer had cast the die for neo-Constantinianism; and this made him retrench in the matter of the Sacrament.

[w. There is large truth in the assertion made by a recent writer that, "It must be admitted that not only Zwingli but also other Swiss and South German Reformers originally held views similar to the Anabaptists" . (Wilhelm Hadorn, *Die Reformation in der Deutschen Schweiz*, p. 104.) There is no need to confine this remark to the Swiss and the South German Reformers. It holds for other areas as well.]

It seems that Luther also expressed himself, early in his career, in a way that cheered the hearts of the heirs of the old anti-Sacramentalism. The Waldensians at any rate thought they had heard him say that "the body of the Lord is not actually present in the Lord's Supper." Luther's earliest followers stood very close to the ancient Sacramentarians. Hendrik Voes and Johannes Esch, who were burned at Brussels in 1523 and who were looked upon by Luther as the first martyrs for' his Reform, although themselves ordained men, taught that "all men are priests in God's sight." They doubted seriously "whether there is a difference between a sacerdos and a laicus in the matter of the consecration of the Eucharist and whether such consecration is the prerogative of the priesthood." They said that "Lay people are priests, as much as those who have been ordained by the bishop; we do not understand it that way that the bishop bestows a new ability to consecrate." We can agree with Professor Pijper, the man who in our times has edited the hearings of these Antwerp martyrs, when he says: "These views remind me of the teachings of the Waldensians."

There can be no doubt, however, that when the Reformation had crystallized in the pattern of neo-Constantinianism it was all over with this conciliatory attitude toward Sacramentarianism. In its final version, Reformation theology attempted a combination of the formula of salvation by sacramental manipulation with the formula of salvation by believing response to the preached Word. This swing to the right precipitated the exodus of those adherents who had been too much under the influence of the ancient anti-Sacramentalism to go along with this retrenchment. They withdrew, regrouped, and opened the Second Front.

Here the ancient Sacramentarianism lived on, unabated and undiminished.x Although the believers of the Second Front came to be called Anabaptists, they could with equal propriety have been called Sacramentarians. One finds it impossible to say which was more definitive of the Stepchildren, their deviating views as to baptism, or their deviating views as to the other sacrament. Sometimes whole groups of them were sentenced for their Sacramentarianism, with not a word said about unacceptable views concerning baptism. Anabaptists were simply Sacramentarians who had been rebaptized. The name "rebaptized Sacramentarians" actually occurs in the sources. One can understand why Cornelius Krahn should say that "certain basic elements of the Anabaptist movement . . . of the Netherlands[y] . . . grew out of the Sacramentarian movement . . . ."14 There is no reason however to single out the Netherlands, for what can be predicated of this area can be predicated of any other area in which Anabaptism erupted. Wiedertäufer and Sacrametuschwärmer are Restitutionists looked at from slightly different angles.

[x. How thoroughly opposed to the Sacramentalism of the sacralists the Stepchildren were is apparent from the writings of such a man as Balthasar Hübmaier. He wrote that "the third error" of the prevailing view was that the water of baptism and the elements of the Supper had been transformed into "sacraments"

("Das wir das Tauffwasser eben wie auch brot und wein des altars haben ein Sacrament gehaissen und es dar fur gehalten haben." He said, moreover, "Mezs ist nit ein offer, sunder ein widergedechtnyss des todts Christi; derhalb sie weder f¼r tod noch f¼r lebendig mag uff geopfert werden." With a play on the word they called the mass a missbrauch and lamented the day when "des herren nachtmal im missbrauch und offer verwandelt ward." ("Mass" is mis in Low German; hence the play on Missbrauch.)]

[y. 'The Dutch expert in things Anabaptist, Van der Zijpp, has said in a similar vein that "The so-called Sacramentarians or evangelicals in the Netherlands, the number of whom must have been large in many towns, are known to have been averse to Roman Catholic doctrine and practice . . . Why did the majority of these now decide for Anabaptism? No satisfying answer has been found." As we see it, no answer is needed, seeing that no problem exists. These people were inclined to an ancient insight, had been conditioned by pre-Reformation Restitutionist agitation, before, during, and after, their alleged "decision for Anabaptism."]

It was typically Anabaptist to say that "Christ is not really in flesh and blood in the holy sacrament of the altar or consecrated host of the mass. This is an idol and the mass is an abomination or disgusting thing in the sight of God. One commits idolatry when one listens to the mass or adores the sacrament of the altar." The Anabaptists would have nothing to do with salvation by sacramental manipulation; nor would they have anything to do with "gazing adoringly." One of them, Sauermilch by name, spoke quite derogatively of the Sacrament of the prevailing Church, calling it "an other God, called by them the Sauberment," a pun that yields its meaning when we render Sauberment as "sorceryment."!

Nor were the Anabaptists in any sense tolerant of the sacerdotalism of the prevailing system. They had their own leaders, men whom they called "elders"; but they did not recognize any wide discontinuity that separates the lay-man from the cleric. In fact, they were content to practice laicism whenever it was necessary. We read, at any rate, of the earliest Anabaptists in the Wassenberg area, that they baptized in unhallowed precincts and by the hands of laymen: "Diederich Jurgens baptized a child with his own hands, buiseew" der kercken" (outside the Church, or, without the Church's knowledge) .

Nor were the Stepchildren at all concerned about apostolic succession. They were not interested in any continuity with the Church of the past; for them that Church was a "fallen" creature. Not some reformation of this "fallen" creature was their objective but a new beginning, a Restitution. They were not interested in carrying coals from a fire that had been smouldering and smoking for so many centuries; they were out to kindle a new blaze.

Needless to say, the Anabaptists were confirmed vernacularists. For them the Latin tongue was not a hallowed tongue. Hardly a line was written by them in that medium and what they did write in that language was for the outside, for export, as it were. They spoke the words of baptism in the vulgar tongue, preached and prayed in it. Their Bibles were in the common language.z

[z. The thoroughgoing vernacularism of the Stepchildren may be seen in the words of one of their leaders, Balthasar H¼bmaier: "Der todts des herren soli nach eins yeglichen lands zungen gepredigt werden . . . Es ist viel besser, ein eynigen versz eins Psalmen nach eyns yeden Lands sprach dem volck zu vertolmetschen, dann f¼nff gimz Psalmen in frembder sprach syngen und nit von der kyrchen verstanden werden" (Quellen IX, p. 73).]

The Reformers by and large did not go along with the anti-Sacramentalism of the Stepchildren. In the early days, it is true, they had often expressed themselves in a way very similar to that of the later Stepchildren;

those were the days when Luther was still toying with the possibility of having some day a Church of believers;<sup>a</sup> those were the days when Zwingli challenged the idea that the mass had a sacrificial dimension; those were the days in which Bucer talked about the sacrament in a way that was quite acceptable to the Sacramentarians. But that phase went by. The Reformers, after the exodus of the radicals had drained away the more ardent foes of the old Sacramentalism, veered to the right. They began to espouse views that resembled those of the earlier "Christian sacralism." Not all of them went equally far in that direction; Luther went farther than did Zwingli; but all of them took up a position critical of the Sacramentarians. Calvin drifted farther toward the old sacramentalism than the sons of the native Protestantism of the Low Countries liked, so that these cautioned him against a view behind which the ubiquitousists (i.e., the Lutherans) could hide.<sup>b</sup>

[a. In May of 1522 Luther expressed the hope that "We who at the present are well-nigh heathen under a Christian name, may yet organize a Christian assembly." (Cf. Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, p. 359.) The irony of the situation is that when two years later the radicals set out to do that very thing, Luther turned on them with sore displeasure. The difference between the two programs was that, whereas the Stepchildren were willing to let go of Corpus Christianum in order to attain unto the believers' Church, Luther and the rest of the Reformers were not thus willing.]

[b. How dangerously close to *ex opere operante* the Reformers could sometimes come may be gathered from the following. The Anabaptist, Hans Braun, said that he "didn't like what he saw here" [he was a recent refugee from other parts] "dann es gehen huren und buben zum sacrament." His opponents said, in criticism of his criticism: "gleich als wolt er sagen, dieselben dorflten des sacraments nit, so sie es doch am meisten bedorffen; dan je krancker einer ist, je notter jm der artzt thut." (Cf. *Quellen VIII*, p. 442.) As if the mere reception of the elements could do the impenitent sinner any good!]

Far to the right are the Episcopalians, among whom, especially among those that are "High Church," we find a sacramentalism that is hardly distinguishable from the sacramentalism of the Catholic tradition, for which reason they are also known as "English Catholics."

As we have said in passing, the Reformation left undecided the question whether salvation is by believing response to the Word or is by sacramental manipulation. There is a tendency to believe the former without rejecting the latter. Sometimes it would seem that the sacrament is the thing that really matters, as for instance when a person "under discipline" is forbidden to take a place at the Lord's Table, with nothing said about participation in the other means of grace.<sup>c</sup> Most Protestant churches would permit a layman to preach, would even applaud such a venture; but most Protestant churches would raise an eyebrow at the report of lay administration of baptism. Protestant seminaries allow their senior students to "preach" (some do insist on the quotation marks) but not to administer the Lord's Supper (not even with quotation marks). It is only in the churches that trace their ancestry back to the Stepchildren that salvation by sacramental manipulation has been consistently repudiated.<sup>d</sup>

[c. It is interesting to note that among the Bohemian Brethren, with whom there was such a fine Church order that the Reformers were deeply jealous, a member who was "placed under discipline" was denied not only the sacrament but also attendance at the preaching of the Word. Here was an attempt at least to keep the one "means of grace" from crowding the other one aside.

[d. It is an interesting and significant fact that among the Protestant Churches wherever the formula of salvation by believing response to the preached Word has been recovered, there establishment and the

view that somehow society and Church are coextensive have gone in eclipse. Conversely, among Churches that still hold to establishment, there preaching is atrophied. There is almost no preaching in High Church areas of Episcopalianism; it is here that we get the closest to "Christian sacralism." Conversely, Fundamentalist Churches are very nearly a-sacramental; it is here that we find the most wholesale repudiation of "Christian sacralism."

In this connection it is perhaps useful to point out that although the Stepchildren plainly owed a debt to earlier Sacramentarians they were often loath to acknowledge the fact. Apart from the fact that in their vision institutional continuity was not important, this loathness can be easily explained. The medieval world had heaped so much of opprobrium on the "heretic" that it was highly undiplomatic to acknowledge indebtedness to these "children of hell," as they had been denominated.

To this day we find a certain hesitation, even on the part of Christians who plainly owe a debt to the pre-Reformation "heretics," to acknowledge the fact. The time has come to desist from this. The time is coming, if it is not already here, when people will be proud to acknowledge that they stand in a tradition that leads back to the medieval "heretic."

The "heretics" were folk "of whom the world was not worthy." An integral part of their total vision was that salvation comes by believing response to the preached Word rather than by sacramental manipulation. In a word, they took at face value the New Testament doctrine that "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). They asked the question, in all seriousness, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Because they believed that salvation comes by way of believing response to the preached Word, they opposed any and all forms of Sacramentalism. It was this that earned for them the derogatory name of Sacramentschwärmer.

---

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

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**