

# (Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Slabler! - Part 1

by Leonard Verduin

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*The sermon explores the historical and theological implications of coercionism versus voluntarism in the Church, particularly during the Reformation era.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:39, Luke 14:23, John 18:36, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1

**Topics:** "Church History", "Christian Liberty"

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## Description

Leonard Verduin delves into the historical context of the Constantinian change, highlighting the introduction of coercion into the Church's affairs and the subsequent loss of voluntarism in the cause of Christ. He explores the resistance of the 'heretics' who advocated for voluntarism and opposed coercionism, symbolized by carrying harmless staffs. Verduin contrasts the ideologies of coercionism versus voluntarism, tracing the roots of this theological debate from early times through the Reformation era. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the Church's transition from a voluntary association to a mass held together by the symbol of coercion, shedding light on the struggles faced by Reformers in choosing between 'Christian sacralism' and the rebellion against it.

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## Transcript

Else would my servants fight .... John 18:36

WE HAVE SEEN, IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, THAT "THE SWORD was welded to the cross" at the time of the Constantinian change. From this point on the cause' of Christ had the benefit, if benefit it was, of a second sword, one made of steel. And we have begun to point out that the Reformers were not minded in their day to sweep this alien weapon out of the Church. The men of the Second Front, however, were convinced that the Constantinian change had perverted the Gospel, had by bringing the sword into the Church and its affairs admitted a foreign body into the tissues of Christ's Church, a foreign body that had to be removed if suppuration were to cease.

The sword of steel is basically a weapon with which to coerce. The Constantinian change, therefore, caused the technique of coercion to be imported into the affairs of the Church. Because of it the cause of Christ lost the dimension of voluntarism, which is native to true Christianity, and with it the cause of Christ picked up the dimension of coercionism, which is foreign to the true faith. It is with this matter of coercionism versus voluntarism that we shall be engaged at the present time.

Quite understandably the "heretics" made an issue of this change. They assailed coercionism and advocated voluntarism. As they sought to reconstitute the Church, they -- like the rebuilders of the temple in the day of Nehemiah -- worked with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other; the sword, to banish, coercionism; and' the trowel, to rebuild voluntarism.

In this program the "heretics," in some instances at least, adopted a distinguishing badge. In protest against the sword-wielding ones they themselves carried a harmless staff such as shepherds use.

For this they were, in Reformation times, sometimes referred to as Stabler,[a] staff-carriers. So widely was the carrying of such a harmless cane thought of as a mark of "heresy" that we find this feature mentioned in the sixteenth century as prima facie evidence of addiction to the "heresy" that characterized the Second Front,b

Such cane-carrying was not invented in the 16th century, however; it seems to have been a distinguishing feature of the "heretic" from very early times. We read that the Waldensians taught men not to confess their sins save to a cane-carrying cleric. This was apparently taken over by an element among the Bohemian Brethren, as a mark testifying to the conviction that the sword of steel is not a proper weapon in the hands of a follower of the Christ.c The innovation caused one of the leaders of the Bohemian evangelicals, Lucas of Prague, to say angrily, "I highly disapprove of these vain Pharisees wandering around with staffs, who display their righteousness."1

The Scotch-Irish, who long resisted the "Constantinian change" in northwest Europe, carried a staff, known as a gambutta, to differentiate between themselves and the Rome sent clerics. Here the issue seems also to have been the matter of voluntarism versus coercionism.

The Donatists may have been the first staff-carriers. They carried a harmless cane, which they called their "Israel," a term that in all probability is of Semitic origin (it will be recalled that there was considerable Semitic influence in Northwest Africa), possibly a corruption of "Azael," meaning "strength of God." If this is accepted then the man who carried such an "Israel" was contrasting himself with those who were making the arm of flesh (the emperor) their strength. It would then again be a matter of the propriety or impropriety of coercion.

[a. At the root of the German word Stabler lies the word Stab, meaning staff; with the suffix el it becomes little staff. Stabler, then, are people who carry a little staff.]

[b. At a hearing, held in 1590 to ascertain whether there had been any Anabaptists in the area, a witness based his testimony, that there had indeed been some, on the fact that he "had met them often enough when with their little staff . . . they were on their way to their preachings or whatever it is they do."]

[c. Sometimes the anti-coercionism of the Restitutionist vision came to expression in the practice of carrying a wooden (and therefore harmless) sword. So, for example, among some of the Bohemian Brethren. This symbol of anti-coercionism also occurred among Restitutionist groups in Poland and Lithuania, especially among the followers of Peter Gonesius.]

However common or uncommon the carrying of a staff may have been, we shall in this study let the term Stabler stand for the "heretic" as he resisted the encroachment of coercionism in matters of the Faith.

It was Augustine, he perhaps more than any other, who supplied the Constantinians with arguments from the scriptures ( or rather with arguments fastened upon the Scriptures) whereby coercion was rendered

theologically respectable. The expression found in Luke 14:23, "Constrain them to come in," rendered in Latin *Compelle intrare*, was exactly what he needed in his running battle with the Donatists.

The followers of Donatus were offering to secede from the "fallen" Church and to go their own way, a step which the advocates of "Christian sacralism" could not permit, for it would strike at the very heart of their dream of a faith common to all in the empire. Hence they let it be known, early in the conflict, that schism would not be permitted but would be opposed, if need be with arms. Thereupon the Donatists pointed out that this would be to deviate from the policies of the Master, who had not raised a finger, much less a sword, to restrain people from going away. More than that, when a sizable group walked out He had confronted His disciples with the wistful question, "Do you not also want to go?"

To this line of thought -- the cogency of which had not escaped him -- Augustine replied:

I hear that you are quoting that which is recorded in the Gospel, that when the seventy followers went back from the Lord they were left to their own choice in this wicked and impious desertion and that He said to the twelve remaining 'Do you not also want to go?' But what you fail to say is that at that time the Church was only just beginning to burst forth from the newly planted seed and that the saying had not as yet been fulfilled in her "All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve him." It is in proportion to the more enlarged fulfillment of this prophecy that the Church now wields greater power -- so that she may now not only invite but also compel men to embrace that which is good.<sup>2</sup>

Here we have an early representation of the notion that the Church of Christ was intended by its Founder to enter into a situation radically different from the one depicted in the New Testament. Here we have the beginnings of the notion, which reigned supreme in the minds of men all through medieval times, that part way into the Christian era a change was intended by the King of the Church himself -- a change whereby the world of apostolic times would become obsolete. This change was identified with the Constantinian innovation. This idea set forth by Augustine controlled the thought and the theology of European man all through medieval times. It led to all sorts of theological absurdities -- as, for example, that the Great Commission was intended for the pre-Constantinian era and had with the Constantinian change been fulfilled. Here is the beginning of the un-Protestant deference to *het historisch gewordene*, to which we have called attention earlier. Augustine's notion of a new regime that coincided with the Constantinian change and that constituted a "larger fulfillment" continues to be in vogue wherever men have not sloughed off their Constantinianism.<sup>d</sup>

[d. In the year 1953 the present author wrote an article for *The Reformed Journal* (October issue, article entitled "Biblical Christianity and Cultural Compositism") in which the idea was set forth that the New Testament anticipates a composite society. The contents of this article did not seem right to those of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands who feel that separate and antithetical social organizations are implied in the Christian vision. Several meetings were held to refute the idea of societal compositism and a series of articles appeared in the periodical *Patrimonium*, which regularly speaks for that faction. In these articles we read (I translate) : "We must point out with emphasis that any proof from Scripture becomes extremely dangerous if historical development is lost sight of. We all are acquainted with the shadow-boxing of the sects, who seize upon random texts to 'prove' their theses, forgetting that there is such a thing as history and the unfolding of human existence. What is really the value of recourse to texts in the New Testament? Does Verduin not know that in the as yet diversified culture of those times the situation was altogether different from our own, that moreover a different [The italics are by us; but they are called for by the accent mark in the original] task was laid away for those early Christians -- the Church

had still to explode, as it were, in the world . . . I should think we should first of all get together to discuss the use of Scripture as such." Here, as the reader will see, we have Augustine in modern dress, the "greater fulfillment" having rendered the New Testament obsolete as it stands, so that its texts become "extremely dangerous" if quoted without being filtered through "het historisch gewordene." Needless to say, this is a "Protestant" equivalent of the Catholic notion of "tradition" and wholly unacceptable.]

For this notion of the 'larger fulfillment" Augustine had managed to find "Scriptural warrant" -- with the help of exegetical form that is not much short of acrobatic stunting. For he goes on to say:

This He shows [namely the "enlarged fulfillment" idea which now puts the Church in position to coerce] plainly enough in the parable of the wedding feast; after He had summoned the invited ones ... and the servants have said "It has been done as you ordered and yet there is room" the Master said "Go out in the highways and hedges and compel them to come in in order that my house may be full." Now observe how that with reference to those who came in during the former period it was "bring them in" and not "compel them," by which the incipient condition of the Church is signified, during which she was but growing toward the position of being able to compel. Since it was right by reason of greater strength and power to coerce men to the feast of eternal salvation therefore it was said later . . . "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in."

Here then is the vision, regnant from Augustine to Reformation times and beyond them, that the "fall" of the Church was a fall upward. And here, at the very outset we find it worked out that one of the features of this fall upward was the acquisition of the power to coerce.

Fully confident of himself, Augustine concluded tauntingly:

And so if you [Donatists] were strolling quietly outside the feast of eternal salvation and the unity of the holy Church then we would overtake you on your "highways"; but now that you verily by many injuries and cruelties which you perpetrate upon our people, are full of thorns and spines, now we come upon you in your "hedges" to compel you. The sheep which is compelled is coerced while it is unwilling, but after it has been brought in it may graze as its own volition wills.

Augustine managed to overpower[e] still another scripture passage that he could turn to suit his purpose, great allegorizer that he was. He found it in the family situation of Abraham, where there were two wives; one a free-woman and the other a bond-servant. The former lived her life in the climate of voluntarism and the latter lived hers in that of coercionism. In this way Augustine justified the presence of two kinds of Christians in the Church, one there by choice and the other by coercion. Moreover, the allegory also justified it that the former afflicted the latter -- had not Sarah pommelled Hagar?

This bit of sophism also became a part of the panoply of the medieval exponent of "Christian sacralism." It was repeated in Reformation times, as we shall see.

[e. The length to which Augustine went in his effort to find New Testament warrant for coercionism is almost unbelievable. In his letter to Vincentius he wrote: "have you not read how Paul . . . was compelled by great violence ... to embrace the truth? For, the light of men's eyes, more precious than money or gold, was suddenly taken away from him . . . He did not get it back until he became a member of the Holy Church. You think no coercion should be used to deliver a man from his error; and yet you see ... that God does this very thing." In a sermon on Luke 14:16 Augustine puts these words into the mouth of Christ: "Whom thou shalt find, wait not until they choose to come, compel them to come in. I have prepared a

great supper . . . , I cannot suffer any place to remain vacant in it. The Gentiles come from the streets and lanes; let the heretics come from the hedges .... For those who make hedges have as their object to make divisions. Let these be drawn away from the hedges, plucked up from among the thorns. They have stuck fast in the hedges, unwilling to be compelled. 'Let us,' say they, 'come in of our own volition'; but this is not the Lord's directive. He says, 'Compel them to come in.'" In his *De Correctione Donatistorum* Augustine comes back once more to this passage in Luke: "Wherefore if the power, which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season through the religious character and faith of kings, be instrumental in compelling those who are found in the highways and hedges -- that is, in heresies and schisms -- then let these not find fault for being thus compelled."]

All through medieval times the "fallen" church, acting on the teachings of Augustine and others, resorted to the use of force wherever it went. When, for example, Amandus came to what is now Flanders, early in the seventh century, he began his "missionary" efforts with a visit to the local king, Dagobert II. His request for aid granted, to the extent of coercion by the king's sword, he went to his task, carrying papers on which it was stated for all to know that the king's orders were: "If anyone does not of his own accord have himself regenerated by baptism he shall be coerced to it by the king." This Amandus a little later complained to his superiors in Rome that he had once and again been obliged to pick himself out of the Schelde River -- the explanation for this not very kind reception seems to be that this was the way the natives sought to pay him back in his own coin, replying to his forced baptisms by a forced baptism of their own.g

[f. We place this word in quotation marks because it is anomalous to refer to these activities as "missionary." As we shall point out at a later juncture, missions in the New Testament sense of the word did not and do not occur in the Constantinian climate.]

[g. Zwangtaufe, baptism by force, was common enough in medieval Europe. We shall see that the Stepchildren were in their times exposed to this indignity.]

Amandus' colleague Winfrid, ( who was beatified as St. Boniface for his many services rendered in the interest of Constantinianism), was similarly' committed to the idea that coercion by the secular arm was right and proper. He went so far as to say that "Without the patronage of the Frankish princes we are unable either to rule the Church or defend the priests and clerics, the monks and the nuns; nor can we without their orders and authority prevent the pagan rites and the idolatrous sacrilege of the Germans."

Quite in keeping with this doctrine, taught him by the "fallen" Church, Emperor Charles, who for his many services in the Constantinian scheme came to be known as Charlemagne (i.e., Charles the Great) helped the "missionaries" by decreeing that "all who stubbornly refuse Christian baptism shall be put to death."

Among the "heretics" this philosophy whereby coercion was justified was from early times under attack. This attack became an integral part of the total vision of men of Restitutionist convictions. The following description of medieval "heresy" makes this quite apparent:

The heretics preach much from the Gospels and the Epistles and say among other things that a man should do no evil, should not lie nor swear. When they preach from the Gospels and the Epistles they corrupt them with their explanations -- as masters of error who know not to sit at the feet of truth, teaching and expounding the Scriptures being altogether forbidden to lay-folk. They say that their Church is the true Church and that the Roman Church is no Church but a Church of malignants. They reprobate Church wealth and ecclesiastical regalia, the high privilege of bishop and abbot, they seek to abolish all

ecclesiastical privilege. They maintain that no one is to be coerced to the faith. They condemn the Church's sacraments and say that a priest living in mortal sin cannot make the body of the Lord. They hold that transubstantiation takes place not in the hands of the priest but in the heart of him who receives worthily."

Similarly a man of "heretical" bent in faraway Poland, Peter Chelcicky, was saying a century before the Reformation:

By the use of force no man is brought to faith in Christ, as little likely as that a man can learn Bohemian by studying German .... By means of the secular power Anti-Christ has pulled all power to himself under cover of the Christian faith. Since we believe that it was by meekness and humility unto the Cross that Christ delivered us from the power of Satan we cannot allow that the perfecting of our faith comes by worldly power; as if force is a greater benefit than is faith .... When Emperor Constantine in his heathen mode of existence was taken up into the Church by Pope Sylvester and the latter in turn was fitted out with external power -- it was then that the destruction of the Church was inevitable.

These were voices that issued from men who had broken with the "fallen" Church; there were also some individuals who remained in it but repudiated its ideas as to voluntarism and coercionism. Just as, according to the Belgic Confession, the Fall in Eden left some "little traces" of the glory that once was, so also did the "fall" of the Church leave some such small vestiges of the former state of rectitude.

Outstanding among these was Hilary of Poitiers, who wrote in 365, when the Constantinian change was taking place:

The Church now terrifieth with threats of exile and dungeon and she who of old gained adherents in spite of dungeons and exile now brings men to faith by compulsion. She who was propagated by hunted priests now hunts priests in her turn .... This must be said in comparison with that Church which was handed down to us and which now we have lost; the fact is in men's eyes and cries aloud.

Similar evidence of the "little traces" occurred off and on throughout medieval times. Here is Wazo, bishop of Liege, who in the eleventh century replied to his colleague, who was prodding him to proceed against certain "heretics" that reportedly were sojourning about Liege:

Although the ideas of these heretics have been condemned by the Church long ago yet should these men be dealt with gently and in the spirit of Him who cautioned against pulling up the tares. We ought not to resort to the judgment of power to put out of the way those whom the Creator lets live. Nor must we think that upon our ordination as bishops we come into possession of a sword, the sword of the civil ruler; we are anointed unto making alive not unto putting to death. The faithful must of course be warned against the heretics seeing that he who handles pitch gets his fingers soiled.

These were sentiments uttered by individual men, men in whom the darkness had not become complete. But officially the "fallen" Church thought and taught and wrought otherwise -- all through medieval times. The Church of the Middle Ages was not a company of believing folk joined in voluntary association; it was a mass of human beings brought together and held together by the symbol of coercion, the sword of the secular power. The official doctrine was, as Pope Pelagius was putting it as early as the year 553, "unto the coercing of heretics and schismatics the Church possesses the secular arm, to coerce in case men cannot be brought to sanity by reasonable argument."

When the medieval Church called these Restitutionists "heretics" it used that word in its etymological sense. In this sense the word does not connote theological deviation, as it does in modern usage. The "heretics," as we have said, were not off the beam theologically; and yet they were "heretics." The word "heretic" is derived from the Greek verb *hairein* which means "to exercise option in the presence of alternatives." Those who saw the Christian life to be a matter of choice between alternatives were for that reason called "heretics," by those who thought in terms of a "choiceless Christianity." For this reason the word "heretics" was used interchangeably with "schismatics" -- as the quotation just recited from Pelagius illustrates.

We see then that the Reformers had to choose between two alternatives, to continue in the tradition of "Christian sacralism" or to go in the tradition of the long rebellion against that concept. The latter alternative was fraught with very great difficulty. It would mean to go it alone, without the help of the princes. This would expose the reformatory movement to almost insuperable danger -- for, over against it stood the Catholic order, armed to the teeth with weapons which, as history had shown for a thousand years, it was not loath to use. How oppose such a power? With empty hands? That would be similar to fighting against army tanks with bare fists -- as the Hungarian rebels did in Budapest in 1956. The alternative was to make a deal with the local rulers. This would give the reformatory movement its own sword and the promise of success. After all, what had become of John Hus? And what was there to save Luther from a similar fate? The wits of the day were already referring to him as "the German goose" (i.e. the German Hus, for the Slavic word for goose is *hus*). Luther had a decision to make, a hard decision. Let no one belittle the extremely cruel nature of the dilemma which he and his fellow Reformers faced. Humanly speaking, the only thing that offered any hope was to construct a rival Constantinianism, a new territorial Church, which could then offer the older Constantinianism some formidable competition. There seemed to be no workable alternative.

But Luther also had his other moments, when he was more in accord with the New Testament. Then he spoke from the point of view of the old Restitutionists. "Heretics must be converted with Scripture and not with fire!" In these early days, in 1523, Luther gave voice to the following: "The soul's thoughts and reflections are revealed to no one but to God; therefore it is impossible to compel one with physical force to believe this or that. It takes another kind of compulsion to accomplish this; physical force is incapable of it." In these moments Luther stood close to Tertullian, who had said in his day that "It is a fundamental right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions. One man's religion neither helps nor harms another man. It is not in the nature of religion to coerce to religion, which must be adopted freely and not by force." But just as this Tertullian had his other side, so that he also said, later in life, that "Heretics may properly be compelled, not enticed to duty; obstinacy must be corrected, not coaxed," so did Luther also shift his weight to the other leg. His stance was determined by what was at the moment uppermost in his mind, the New Testament delineation of the Church or *het historisch gewordene*. There were moments in which Luther cherished the ancient Restitutionist hope of having some day a Church of believers. He spoke sometimes, to his most intimate friends, about this pipe-dream. But each time he was jerked back into the world of reality and its harsh requirement. Then the other alternative beckoned.

Those in his following who had been conditioned by medieval "heresy" soon grew weary of this halting between two opinions. For them there was no problem. For them there was only one solution, that of making a clean break with the past and starting from scratch. There were hot-heads among them, men who wanted to go "full steam ahead, come what may!" Their recklessness made Luther look the more

kindly toward the other alternative. This only made the radicals the more impatient. Disappointed with the Reformers' halting between two opinions they skulked off by themselves.

Soon we find Luther launching a full-scale attack upon his erstwhile friends and associates. Now that they had abandoned him there was nothing further to lose. The 'Reformation had crystallized in the pattern of neo-Constantinianism; there was nothing left but to turn the guns on those who had deserted the Reform because of it.

Luther assigned to his associate Urbanus Rhegius the task of leading the attack, telling him to write a book against the Schw rmer, as he now began to call them. Rhegius complied, with a volume in which lavish praise is heaped upon Constantine and his successors for the direction they had given. Rhegius endorsed to the hilt the policy of coercing those who stand in the way of sacralism, liquidating them if need be:

The truth leaves you no choice; you must agree that the magistracy has the authority to coerce his subjects to the Gospel. And if you say, "Yes, but with admonition and well-chosen words but not by force" then I answer that to get people to the services with fine words and admonitions is the preacher's duty, but to keep them there with recourse to force if need be and to frighten them away from error is the proper function of the rulers . . . . What do you suppose "Compelle intrare" means?<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the Radicals went about to organize a Church as they thought it should exist -- by voluntary association. As one of their leaders, Felix Manz, put it, their ambition was "to bring together those who were willing to accept Christ, obey the Word, and follow in His footsteps, to unite with these by baptism, and to leave the rest in their present conviction." It will not escape the observant that here we have voluntarism secured, (in the words "willing to accept") and coercionism precluded (by the phrase "leaving the rest in their present conviction").

This was certainly Restitutionism, without any ambiguity. For this ambition Manz was placed in a boat with his hands tied together at the wrists and passed over his knees, a heavy stick then thrust between his knees and his bent elbows. Thus bound, he was rowed to the far end of the Limmat and thrown overboard, so that he perished in the murky waters. This happened on January 5, 1527.

Another of the Radicals, Georg Blaurock, gave expression to the Restitutionist vision in these words: "to gather by ourselves as Paul has it." Such a Church cannot be a Church of the masses. To raise up such a Church is to put an end to the sacralist program. No wonder Blaurock was a hunted man.

Still another, Pilgram Marpeck, a Restitutionist of the higher classes, put the issue of voluntarism and coercionism thus: "By infant baptism men coerce people to enter the Kingdom of God; and yet there should be no coercion there. All they have eternal punishment awaiting them who seek to sustain the Kingdom of God with recourse to the civil power . . . the magistracy has no assignment touching the Kingdom of God."

To quote still another, Hans Denck: "Let everyone know that in matters of faith things ought to be on a voluntary basis, without coercion."

In these testimonies we hear the voices of the leaders of the Second Front; if we listen to the voices of the common soldiers we hear the same sentiments. About eighty young men, selected because of their physical fitness from among some two hundred who had been arrested, were held at Trieste until the

galleys (on which they had been sentenced to serve as beasts of burden) came into port to take them on. While they waited they drew up a statement of their faith. In it the matter of the propriety of coercion was also taken up. We read in the quaint dialect of these simple folk: "Where has God commanded His child saying 'Child, go into the whole world ... teach all nations, him however who refuses to accept or to believe your teaching you are to catch, torture, yes, strangle until he believes'?" When the representative of the "Christendom" which was responsible for the incarceration of these people, a cleric who had been dispatched to convert these "heretics," replied by saying, "Does not Christ say in the parable . . . 'go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be full'?" they shot back, "It is by His 'Word and His judgment that Christ constrains men!"

All this is plain enough, no doubt. The rejection of coercive techniques from the area of Faith was an integral part of the platform of the Radicals -- from the most intellectual leader to the simplest peasant. That this was the case may be known still more clearly from testimony given by the Reformers themselves. Henry Bullinger, for instance, Zwingli's successor, recited the following to show what "intolerable" people these Restitutionists were:

They say that one cannot and may not use force to compel anyone to accept the faith seeing that faith is a free gift from God. It is wrong, say they, to compel anyone by force or coercion to embrace the faith, or, to put anyone to death because of erring faith. It is an error, they assert, that in the Church any other sword is used than that of the divine Word. The secular kingdom, they hold, should be separate from the Church and no civil ruler ought to exercise his authority there. The Lord has commanded, they hold, simply to preach the Gospel and not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true Church of Christ, according to them, has this characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict it upon any."

The passage just quoted should go far to refute the argument, heard only too often, that it would be an anachronism to expect from the Reformers an open espousal of the principles of religious freedom since those principles had not been formulated as yet. Bullinger knew them and was able to recite them -- only to reject them. The same is true of Bucer, who had been exposed to the following, addressed to him personally:

This work of the Lord will be done without the help of the sword and without show of physical force, solely by the spiritual power and grace, not without many afflictions and tribulations . . . . The Sacred Scriptures do not teach that the mighty ones and the glorious must build the Church . . . with the help of force and coercion utilized knowingly and unknowingly .... Those who have the sovereignty and the faith also . . . ought to be subject to the discipline of God together with the other members of the Church . . . for the magistrates have not been called by God to uproot and exterminate the tares by persecuting them or by confiscating their goods and industry or by depriving them of their life for the cause of religion. It is not for this end that God has given them power; quite to the contrary, Christ forbids that the powers be used to these ends in the bosom of the Church. It is their duty to administer in an equitable and impartial way temporal affairs and material things . . . . It is not fitting that they who love the Word of God in truth should constrain to the faith by tyrannical violence those who are outside, or, to make those who share in their own religion to continue in it contrary to their own volition. It is impossible to believe that it is in any way useful to necessitate a man to attend the Holy Supper, in the vain hope that this will eventuate in a voluntary and lasting acceptance of the faith . . . . The law of grace does not desire to have men serve contrary to their own choice, but, quite to the contrary, leaves to every man his own free choice . . . . The Lord has not given any other rule nor any other means of constraint for forcing men to faith and to religion, none other than the Word of Truth alone .... In this matter you take recourse to imperial law and to the

views of Augustine . . . but we hold that such constraint brings the Church more of evil than of good.

Far from giving in to this, Bucer only retorted:

It is the magistrates' duty not to tolerate that anyone assails openly or reviles the doctrine of the Gospel . . . . The notion that this is because such a person is seditious and constitutes a threat to the peaceful regiment is not of itself enough; for he also is not to be tolerated in a Christian republic who refuses to be taught[h] the things pertaining to the Kingship of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

[h. With this we are back to the forced attendance at indoctrination classes invented when "Christian sacralism" was first launched.]

It is apparent that the Reformers knew the principles that lead to religious freedom; they knew what was meant by separation of Church and State. It is also apparent that they rejected this line of thought. And they did so because it was an axiom with them that the State must have a religious confession, must be a "republica Christiana." It was this conviction, a conviction that leads straight to "Christian sacralism," that made them what they were.

Bucer's associate, Adam Krafft, added his bit to the propaganda in favor of coercionism, saying that "It can happen that he who is coerced today may come willingly tomorrow ... and then is saved, and thanks his magistrate for coercing him." In an attempt to justify coercionism he added "Thus did also the king of Nineveh when he commanded his subjects to fast .... So did also Nebuchadnezzar when he threatened with death all sacrilegious persons. This imperial edict of Nebuchadnezzar teaches all Christian magistrates that they certainly have the prerogative to coerce men to the faith."<sup>7</sup> This Protestant pastor was blissfully unaware that by saying this he was in reality cutting his own throat; it was only too true that the policies he recommended were of pagan origin and fit into pre-Christian ways of thinking and into them only. He was asking the Church of Christ to unlearn what its Master had taught it and to sit at the feet of pagans instead!

The apologetes for "Christian sacralism" were able, as we have seen, to find support for their views with the heathen. They also fared fairly well at the hands of the Old Testament -- where there are indeed examples of religious uniformity enforced by the coercing sword of the civil rulers. But even the Old Testament -- which the men of the Second Front insisted was obsolete in this matter -- was not quite stem enough for the Reformers. The aforementioned Urbanus Rhegius asserted that "It follows that our magistrates should punish heretics and faction-makers and exterminate them, not with less but with greater zeal than did the kings in the Old Testament."<sup>8</sup>

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

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