

(Reformers and Their Stepchildren) Winckler! - Part 1

by Leonard Verduin

The sermon discusses the derogatory name Winckler and the Church's persecution of those who gathered in secluded places for religious exercises.

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, John 4:23, Acts 5:29, Romans 12:2, 2 Timothy 3:6

Topics: "Church History", "Reformation Theology"

Description

Leonard Verduin delves into the historical context of the term 'Winckler' used by the Reformers to describe unauthorized religious gatherings in secluded places, highlighting the challenges faced by those who sought to worship outside the confines of the established Church. The sermon explores the implications of Wincklerism, including the clandestine nature of these gatherings, the persecution faced by those who participated, and the theological and societal threats perceived by the Church. It discusses the Nicodemite practices of attending both authorized and unauthorized services, the popular appeal of dissenting movements like the Waldensians, and the Church's relentless efforts to suppress these gatherings to maintain religious uniformity and sacral order.

Transcript

Come ye apart into a desert place Matt. 6:31

ANOTHER TERM OF REPROACH WITH WHICH THE REFORMERS regularly belabored their Stepchildren was the derogatory name Winckler. It is with the name and the issue involved in it that we shall be engaged in this chapter.

The word Winckler is derived from the German word Winckel (modern spelling Winkel) meaning a corner or an out-of-the-way place. Winckler are consequently people who gather in some corner or secluded place, for purposes of religious exercises. Such gatherings came to be known as Winckelpredigten, Winkel-preachings.^a

[a. That the Winckler-gatherings came to be known as Wincklerpredigten is mute testimony to the fact that among the people who staged these unauthorized gatherings the reading and the expounding of the Scriptures was paramount, the main dish on the menu.]

Very prominent in the word Winckler, and its derivatives, is the idea of illicit, clandestine, unauthorized. In English-speaking areas, the word hedge has undergone a closely similar evolution. It meant first of all a fence-row; then, as an adjective, it came to mean illicit, unauthorized. A hedge-priest in medieval England was a man who performed the functions of a clergyman without waiting to get a license. (Such hedge-priests were plentiful enough.) The Dutch word haag has had a similar development. It means basically a hedge; but came presently to stand for illicit. The hagepreken (hedge-preachings) that took place in the fields of Flanders on the eve of the Eighty Years' War were called by that name not because there were hedges there but because these gatherings were formed without license from the civil powers. The hagepreken were Winckelpredigten, unauthorized, unscheduled gatherings for religious purposes.

We encounter a related word in the sources, the word Winckelehe, a word that deserves mention here because it too was thrown at the Stepchildren.^b A Winckelehe is a marriage performed in an out-of-the-way place and performed by someone unsent by the prevailing Church and its partner, the State.

[b. The Anabaptists suffered great hardship because their marriages were looked upon as Winckelehe, illegal cohabitations. This is the final chapter in a long story. In pre-Christian thinking the marriage ceremony lies very close to the center of the religious cult, as do the rest of the things that have to do with the vital statistics. The primitive Christian Church did not take over this pre-Christian emphasis upon the marriage ceremony; it honored marriage and did all it could to restore to it the dignity it deserves.

But it did not consider it a specifically religious, certainly not a redemptive, institution. This secularization of marriage on the part of the early Christians drew the ire of the pagan world. We find the pagan Celsus upbraiding the Christians for this, in these words, written about the year 180: "One has to do one of two things; if you think it beneath your dignity to serve those who sustain the world [the reference is to the gods] then men and women may no longer marry, may no longer rear children, nor do any other thing in this life; they can then only retire from the scene, without leaving any progeny . . . , However, if you marry anyway and rear children, enjoy the fruits and participate in life . . . then you must give the appropriate honor to those to whom these things belong [i.e., the gods], you have to perform the religious duties . . . , lest you give the impression that you are ungrateful toward them.

For it is not right to participate in the things that belong to the gods without paying something for it." It is hardly necessary to point out that this whole philosophy of marriage became incorporated in the vision of "Christian sacralism." We need only to remind ourselves that the medieval "heretics" repudiated this whole sacralization of marriage, a policy that thereupon earned them the accusation that they were "against marriage." Nor will it come as a surprise that, after the Reformers had completed their swing to the right, the old medieval concept of marriage was incorporated in their views.

Marriage in the old Reformed Church Orders is an ecclesiastical affair. And it speaks for itself that the Stepchildren refused to go along with this. They made their vows before their own clergymen -- and so laid themselves open to the charge of Winckelehe. The noise of the Second Front in regard to marriage can be heard in the notorious Groninger Edict of 1601. This Edict (It may be consulted in the Knuttel Collection, No. II 72, of which the University of Michigan has a copy), drawn up and promoted by the Reformed pastors of the City of Groningen, contains also this item: "All who cohabit as man and wife without the benefit of law shall be required to have themselves married in accordance with the Church Order, within one month, or face punishment as fornicators

All who have themselves married [the original uses a derogatory expression here: "sich copuleren laten"] outside a Reformed Church . . . shall be punished as the case may require." Although there is, of course, not the slightest New Testament warrant for such ecclesiasticalization of marriage, one encounters remnants of it among Reformed constituencies that have not quite sloughed off their "Christian sacralism."]

In pre-Christian society, that is, in sacral society, the religious cult is a public affair.^c It belongs to the tribe or the Volk; and the chieftain of the tribe, or the ruler of the Volk, is automatically in charge. So also in the Roman society in the midst of which Christianity was laid down. Rome's temples were public buildings and that which transpired in them was every Roman's business. In Roman society, the Church and the State were fused (to use the two terms is virtually to commit an anachronism, for they were in actuality as yet undifferentiated; perhaps we had better say "the religious and the secular," although that, too, would be something of an anachronism). As a consequence, and most naturally, the rituals of religion were public; and the temples were public places, as public as the post office is with us.

[c. The reader will recall that Plato wanted to have laws passed whereby private rites of religion were prohibited. See the passage from Plato's Laws quoted in the previous chapter, p. 135.]

The vision of the primitive Christian Church called for a new kind of religious gathering. It conceived of its assemblies as events espoused by believers and in that sense non-public. To its society only they belonged who had been admitted. To its gatherings others were permitted to come, even urged to come, as spectators, or *auditores* as they were called, listeners, candidates; but the meeting as such was the property of those who belonged.

Significantly, the early Christians had not so much as thought of asking permission, or license, to meet. Just as the Master had gathered, and His disciples, so they met -- without permission granted, or even asked, or, for that matter, thought of.

They followed this procedure intuitively -- implied as it was in their basic assumptions. This policy was dictated not so much by the probability that the request would be refused anyway as by the conviction that to act otherwise was to act out of character. To meet under government auspices would be to bring strange fire upon the altar, would be to go against one of the new faith's most basic insights. The early Christians met in non-public places for principal reasons. Early Christianity conceived of society in any given situation to be a composite thing, consisting of some who glory in the Cross and some who stumble over it; and in a composite society, a cult that is common is by definition precluded.

It was this novel way of doing things that irked the Roman citizen, this a-sacral way of carrying on. Few things were censured so frequently and rebuked so vigorously in the early Christians as the fact that they held their meetings off by themselves. To the Roman citizen this looked like the sheerest sedition; here was the public cult of the official religion that was supposed to hold Roman society together; and then off there in an out-of-the-way place the meetings of the Christians! They were up to no good.

At their nocturnal gatherings, their solemn feasts and barbarous meals. the bond of union is not the sacred rite but crime. It is a people that lurks in the dark and shuns the light, silent in public places, talkative in caves Why do they make such an effort to conceal whatever it is that they worship? Honorable acts welcome publicity; only crimes delight in secrecy. Why have they no altars, no temples, no well-known images? Why do they never speak in public, never meet freely, unless it be that the hidden object of their worship is either criminal or disgraceful? ... and these abominable secret haunts where these impious

wretches hold their meetings are increasing in number all over the world! These execrable conspirators must be utterly rooted out.¹

When in the Constantinian change Christianity was made the official religion of the empire, the roles were changed; Christianity came out of the catacombs and began to parade in public. After all, it was now related to the empire in the same way that the ethnic faith had been related to it in earlier times. The cult of Christianity was now made a public affair -- under the direct supervision of the civil ruler. Very soon pretentious Church buildings, built with public funds, began to be built, often on the very site where there had been a shrine to pagan deity in earlier times.

In view of the fact that not all Christians were able to accept the Constantinian change, there were those who continued to meet in the old way. There is reason to believe that in order to escape the wrath of the proponents of the new sacralism, they sometimes attended the public gatherings, feignedly be it said, only to slip over to the off-the-record gathering where their real religious loyalties were fed.

Needless to say, the Constantinians were at once aware of the seriousness of this non-conformist behavior. They prevailed upon the civil power to deal severely with these Winckler. Following the pattern set in the older sacralism, which had led to the suppression of the Christian assemblies, so now under the terms of the new sacralism was the arm of the State turned against the non-conforming ones. Among the first Winckler were the Donatists. Against them and the Winckler gatherings, severe measures were taken. The death sentence was prescribed for anyone convicted of having participated in any conventicle or Winckelpredigt.²

Ever since, all through medieval times, there were Winckler -- for there were always those for whom the Church of Christ consists of believing folk and of them only. Ever since, all through medieval days, there were those who made the life of the Winckler difficult -- for there were always those for whom the Church embraces the total civilization.

Hilary of Poitiers, whom we have mentioned before, was aware of the disastrous sweep of the Constantinian change and bemoaned it. This Hilary also had nostalgia for the days of the old esoteric meetings of the Christians. With a glance at the huge cathedral-like[d] edifices that were springing up to accomodate the new public cult he said sadly: "We do wrong in venerating the Church of God in roofs and structures. Is it doubtful that the Antichrist will sit there? Safer to me the mountains and the woods, the lakes and the caves and the whirlpools; for in these, either hidden by them or sunken in them, did the prophets prophesy."

[d. The cathedral is best described as the architectural embodiment of "Christian sacralism," as towering above the city square it casts its shadow across the path of every person dwelling in its vicinity. It is not surprising to see Hilary somewhat less than completely happy at the Sight of the pretentious buildings, erected at public expense. We shall see that this dislike for the cathedral became a part of the heritage of the medieval "heretic"; also, that it recurred in the vision of the Stepchildren.]

There was very good reason why the Church made war on the Winckler. They posed a threat to Corpus Christianum and were an assault upon the sacralist formula. As Herbert Grundmann puts it, "The Church never once let up on the idea that unauthorized religious discourse by an uncommissioned preacher was heretical." Because of this sensitivity the Church was incessantly on the warpath against the Winckler.

Workshops, especially places where weavers plied their trade, were often the scene of Wincklerpredigten. As early as 1157 the Church was already alert to the dangers inherent in the weavers' gatherings. The Council of Rheims, which met in that year, issued a very stringent warning against "a very impure sect of Manicheans- and vile weavers who often flee from place to place and change their names, leading captive silly women laden with sin "f

[e. By this time the word Manichean, for a long time used synonymously with the word Cathar, had manifestly already become a common noun, designating the "heretic" in general.

[f. The reference here is to 2 Timothy 3:6, where we read about people who "creep into houses, and lead captive silly women." The medieval Church applied these words to the "heretic." "Creeping into houses" was then interpreted to refer to the "heretics'" practice of invading a parish assigned to a specified priest. Anselm of Laon offered this exegesis of the passage as early as the year 1117, saying: "ex his enim sunt, qui penetrant domos et captivas ducunt mulierculas oneratis peccatis . . . , illi penetrant domos, qui ingrediuntur domos illorum, quorum regimen animarum eos non pertinent"

A little later, orders were given to brand these weaver "heretics" on the forehead and to banish them from the realm. They would be given a chance to clear themselves by trial by fire; if a red-hot iron burned them they were guilty, if it left them unscathed they were innocent.

These weaver -- "heretics" were arch-Winckler. In his Sermons Against Heretics, Ekebertus speaks of them as people "called Cathars in our German tongue, Piphles in Flemish, and Texerants in Romance, because they are weavers." They are folk, Ekebertus tells us, "who say that the true service of Christ and the true faith are to be found nowhere but in their conventicles, which they hold in cellars and weaving establishments and similar subterranean places." So also that medieval woman with her very keen nose for "heresy," Hildegard van Bingen, who said that to find the "heretic" one should look "in subterranean dwellings in which weavers and tanners work." Still another, Saint Bernard, in his Sermons on the Song of Solomon, complained that the moment a priest leaves his parish, the people, young and old, "flock to the weavers' conventicles to attend the worship services there." An ancient chronicle says in connection with a "heretic" who was burned at Kamerijk in Flanders in the twelfth century, " ... of this sect many remain in certain cities until the present time; their name derives from the weavers' trade."

We cannot hope in the nature of things to know very precisely the content of the sermons preached in the Winckler gatherings. They were held in secret, and for reasons of safety little or nothing of what they preached was put in writing. We would expect it to be pretty much the same, however, as that bill of fare to which the Restitutionists generally rallied. The very fact that these meetings were held in competition with the authorized gatherings is enough to establish this.

This weaver tradition reached right into Reformation times, as did the weavers' Winckelpredigten. In 1522 a fraternity existed at Saint Gall in Switzerland, the members of which called themselves "Christian Brethren." Many of them were weavers and the meetings were held in the weavers' guild house. Here the Liebesmahle (i.e. the love-feasts, namely the Lord's Supper of the "heretics") were held. Zwingli himself was intimate with these Winckler, having partaken of the Supper with them in 1522 -- before the rift had occurred which opened up the Second Front.g

[g. It is more than likely that the kind of gatherings to which Balthasar Hübmaier referred in the following passage were Winckler-gatherings, already old in 1524: "Nach dem mein alter brauch von der zeit der Aposteln her reychet, so schwer sachen ynfallen, den glauben betreffende, das als dann etlich, welchen

das Cottlich wort zu reden bevolhen, sich Christenlicher meynung versamlen, die geschrifften conferieren und erwegen, uff das in weydung der Christenlich schafflin nach ynnhalt des worts Gottes einhelligklichen fÄ¼rgefahren werde. Dise versammlung hat man vor zeytten Synod us, aber yetzt Capitula oder Bruderschafften geheysen." (Cf. Quellen IX," p. 72.)]

As late as 1566 the association of weaver and "heretic" was still vivid in men's minds. We read that the city of Leyden was predisposed to heresy "because of the many linen weavers there, who are everywhere infected with this scourge."

We have already touched upon the fact that with the Constantinian change came the building of pretentious buildings to house the now public cult of the new religion. We have also seen that men like Hilary of Poitiers deplored the development. Men of Restitutionist convictions commonly disliked these edifices, architectural embodiments of sacralism that they were, and are. We read of medieval "heretics" who "scoff at a church of masonry, looking upon it as a mere bam and calling it in their vernacular a 'stone house.' Nor do they admit that God dwells there and that prayers made in it are more meritorious than those uttered in a chamber." So much was the choice between the two kinds of gatherings a matter of principle with the Restitutionists, that one of the things required of a convert to the reinstituted church was the promise not to go again into a stone-pile, a cumulus lapidum.

We find this same appraisal of the buildings that housed the public cult with the men of the Second Front. One of them, Georg Zaunring, said, "The Christian Church is His living temple wherein He dwells and wherein He abides; Oh brethren, in that, and not in any stone houses." The Anabaptists, at least at times, required the promise of their converts: "in kain stainhaufen mer ze geen," not to go again into any stone pile.³

The reason for the church's vehemence in regard to the Winckler was not concern for theological correctness. By her own repeated declaration the theological content of the menu served in the Wincklerpredigten was quite all right. What the Church had against these gatherings was that they were a standing threat to a sacral order. They were a standing threat to her darling, the sacrament of Orders, a "sacrament" which provided the legal framework for the suppression of everything except the authorized cult. The essence of this kind of "heresy" cannot be put in theological terms; the essence of it was its anti-sacralism.

Only so can we understand how that one pope after the other issued directives aimed at the liquidation of the Winckler.

Innocent III, addressing his subordinates in Metz in the year 1199, the Metz that already then had a bad record for "heresy,"

said:

Our brother, the bishop of Metz, tells us that in his diocese and in your city a great many lay-folk, both men and women, . . . have had French translations made of the Gospels, the Epistles of Paul, the Psalms . . . and other books, which they read together and preach from in their clandestine conventicles, vilifying those who do not attend, and resisting to their face the priests who would instruct them, arguing that they find in their books much better instruction. Now it is doubtlessly true that the desire to know the Scriptures and to exhort men to follow these is not reprehensible . . . but what is to be condemned is the holding of secret assemblies . . . , arrogating to oneself the right to preach, jeering at the ignorance of the priests.h

For the Scriptures are of such profundity that not only the simple and the illiterate but even the learned ones cannot attain to a knowledge of it, so that it is enjoined in the Law of God that every beast that touches the holy mountain shall be thrust through with a dart . . . , since in the church the doctors are charged with the preaching therefore no one may usurp this office.⁴

[h. The "heretic" was so much better versed in the Scriptures than were the regular clergy that Saint Louis advised men not to debate with a "heretic" but rather to "thrust the sword into the man's belly as far as it will go" (Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, p. 81 quoting). Let us hope that this bit of advice, so quite out of keeping with what we know of the personality of St. Louis, was not seriously meant. It does indicate however that the "heretics" were formidable opponents in the matter of knowledge of the Scriptures. As we have already pointed out, Walter Mapes, a well-equipped churchman, said that he dreaded a debate with the "heretic."]

This had been said before, long before. But it had not helped. That is why Innocent had to repeat the orders. His predecessor, Lucius III, had sought in 1184 to squelch the Winckler, but to no avail. He had placed under perpetual anathema, everlasting damnation, "all Catharos, Patarinos and those who falsely style themselves Poor Men of Lyons, Passaginos, [osepinos, Arnaldistos -- and any and all who, whether against orders or without orders . . . make bold to preach in private or in public."⁵ (It will not have escaped the notice of the reader that in the pope's way of thinking "heretics" can be clubbed together and disposed of in one and the same edict. They were indeed so many consecutive eruptions of one and the same thing -- rebellion against the Constantinian order. The "Poor Men of Lyons," otherwise called the Waldensians, who were then, according to the usual way of thinking, but five years old, are of a piece with Catharos, Paterinos, Passaginos, Josepinos, Arnaldistos, etc., etc.).

This too had been said earlier. But it had not helped. An earlier pope had blustered in very nearly the same words. Alexander III had at the Council of Tours, which sat in 1163, decreed that:

. . . no one shall, under pain of everlasting anathema give residence to the heretics that have drifted over from Toulouse and Gascogne, nor buy from them or sell to them, so that they may be compelled to repent. He who ignores this directive will be hit by the same anathema. The magistrates are to cast them in prison after having stripped them of their belongings. Their clandestine assemblies must be rigidly prevented.⁶

Such bitterness as is revealed here, such a reckless policy of extermination, points to a grievance of long standing. Such rigor, so early, suggests a quarrel of long standing. How long? The record of occurrences that long ago becomes sketchy and tenuous, but it is not hazardous to suppose that Wincklerism had troubled the Church ever since the launching of the Constantinian venture; legislation aimed at the suppression of Winckelpredigten dates back to that moment. The Codes of Justinian, as we have indicated, provide for capital punishment for him who stages a clandestine assembly.

Wincklerism was old in medieval times. William of Saint Amour, writing in the thirteenth century, as he expatiates on "The Dangers of Modern Times," speaks of "false teachers who preach unsent; no matter how learned and how saintly they be, even if they perform signs and wonders, unless they are properly elected by the Church they are not sent ones."

The Host in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* says "I smell a Loller [a Lollard] in the wind." One may say that hardly a breeze ever blew in those times in which one could not detect the presence of a "Loller."i Hedge-priests were everywhere. There was nary a forest whose depths had not been the scene of some kind of illicit religious gatherings, hardly a cave that had not witnessed a Wincklerpredigt, scarcely a barn

or warehouse or deserted mill that had not shielded some nocturnal gathering for Winckler purposes.

[i. The etymological derivation of the word Lollard is uncertain. The most likely guess is that it is from a Flemish word, *lollen*, to sing softly and soothingly. This is the more likely in view of the fact that Lollardy is of Flemish origin (the name occurred in Flanders a full century before Wiclif, with whom the Lollards are usually associated). We know that "heretics" frequently sang their "heresy" into men's hearts. The reason for this is quite apparent; it was relatively safe to sing deviating views, for one could always say, if the hand of the inquisitor were laid upon him, that he had picked up the ditty unthinkingly, and so escape. In all, events Lollards were "heretics" who sang the ideas contained in the *Winckelpredigten*. The place of song as a vehicle for the dissemination of dissent deserves a thorough investigation, the "hymnody of heresy."]

Not only were Winckler gatherings old and wide-spread; they were also amazingly popular. Of the Winckler it may certainly be said that "the common people heard them gladly." In the century of the Black Death the Wincklerpredigten were patronized more voluminously than were the authorized services of the Church. We read in a fifteenth-century chronicle, preserved in the city library at Brugge, that:

In the year 1349 . . . a sect came up called the Cross-brethren. They wore a cross before and behind and came out of Germany and were headed for Brabant. Behind this sect walked many assembled folk They had many points of unorthodoxy; for they did not adore the holy sacrament as it was raised aloft at the mass, nor did they show reverence to the priesthood In 1350 there was a great indulgence at Rome and many went to Rome to be absolved. Well they might; for many were in the ban of the pope because of the Cross-brothers and the Lollards, persons who had fed them or had conversed with them.

So popular were these dissenters (the reader will have observed that their "heresy" also contained the items of Sacramentarianism and anti-sacerdotalism) that as the pope, Clement VI, put it, "They bid fair to thrust the Church backward into the destruction ... men saying that their songs and sermons were worth more than those of the Church." So popular were these Flagellantes and their unauthorized rites that even the rulers flouted the thunderings of the pope. At Mechelen the authorities provided not only straw to bed them down but also beer, wine, and bread, at public expense. Ghent paid the rent for wagons supplied for their convenience.

As always it was not the theological conviction of these "heretics" that bothered the Church[j] but rather the threat posed for the sacralist way of life. And deep down, again as always, lay the notion that unity at the shrine is the prerequisite to peace on the square. "Since we are informed," so reads the papal instruction, "that of late certain folk have again come up of themselves, and, without the consent of the holy catholic church, have held meetings and gatherings ... a matter contrary to the God of heaven, against the holy church and the Christian faith, contrary to the person of every good man, a matter out of which much turmoil and civil disquiet is likely to come Therefore we give orders that no man, whosoever he may be . . . shall sustain, lodge, supply with food or water, in any way whatsoever, nor converse with these or allow themselves to be converted to their fellowship by them -- on pain of ten years' banishment."⁷ Here we hear the words of a man who, like the Constantine of old, is concerned with the religious uniformity because in his sacralist way of thinking it is the *sine qua non* of tranquility on the streets. He is against the Wincklerpredigt because of the threat it poses to the sacralist scheme of things.

[j. Although the Flagellantes were like the "heretics" of other and less anguished times in that they were a revolt against the easy-going everybody-embracing Church, they were unlike other eruptions of rebellion

against the medieval order in that they were not as evangelically oriented. In fact, the whole idea of flagellation is decidedly un-evangelical. This wave of Restitutionism carries the mark of the times, the times of the Black Death, as do most movements in history. The rise of Flagellantism does reflect a widely felt conviction that the prevailing Church and its technique of salvation was inadequate. Criticism of the Church's conductual-averagism was very prominent in the Flagellantes' protest. Contemporary testimony informs us that the Flagellantes did bring about a great many conversions.]

From the above it will be apparent that it was far from easy to be a Winckler. In fact, it was frightfully hard. If you cannot buy or sell, if it is virtually suicidal for anyone to give you food or drink or any other comfort, then you are in a bad way indeed; you have been read out of the society of men; open season has been declared on you. Small wonder that men of Winckler habits were tempted to attend the activities of the fallen Church feignedly and then to patronize the Winckler gatherings as a means to express their real religious selves. This duplicity was very common. It came to be known as Nicodemitism,^k a name derived, of course, from the Biblical character who was one thing in the daylight and another thing at night.

[k. It was common practice among medieval "heretics" to frequent the services of the prevailing Church often enough to escape detection and the Church's vengeance. This policy has led many investigators astray. It has been alleged, for example, that the Waldensians remained "good Catholics" -- because they allowed themselves to be seen once in a while in the gatherings of the Catholics. But this does not at all imply that they were as yet not estranged; it only goes to show that they were prudent. What kind of "good Catholics" the "heretics" were may be gathered from the fact that one of them was heard to mutter as he entered the cathedral, "Caverne des brigandes, que dieu te confonde!" (Den of robbers, may God confound you!).]

The Church knew all about the Nicodemite practices of the Winckler as early as 1145. In that year action was taken against certain "heretics" that had been located near Liege. For purposes of identification we shall recite the entire description:

In this heresy there are distinct levels; it has its auditors who are being initiated into error; it has its believers who are already deceived; it has its clergy and priests and prelates, just as we have them. The wicked blasphemies of this heresy are that they say that in baptism sins are not remitted; they consider the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ to be foolishness; that by the imposition of the pontiff's hand nothing is conferred; that no one receives the Holy Spirit unless good works are in evidence They preach that the entire Catholic Church is found with them; they say that the oath is a crime. And . . . they partake of our sacraments, fraudulently, so that their wickedness may be hid."

Here we have a full-orbed Restitutionist Church, with complete structurization; here is articulate Sacramentarianism; here is Catharism, with its conviction that faith without works is dead; here is the Restitutionist view that the prevailing Church is a fallen creature and that the true Church is with the "heretics"; here is the customary Restitutionist rejection of the oath. And sandwiched in between these familiar items we find mentioned the Nicodemite practice of participating in the authorized Church's sacraments, at least going through the motions, for the sake of survival.

In the same decade Saint Ekebertus complained Similarly of Winckler with Nicodemite habits: "When they come to hear mass or to gaze on the Eucharist they do it all in make-believe fashion, so that their infidelity may not be noticed."⁹

Of all the pre-Reformation Restitutionists none were greater Winckler than were the Waldensians. They held illicit gatherings everywhere, in season and out, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic. Posing frequently as wayfarers or peddlers, they would recite a section of Scripture and if it seemed not too evidently unsafe to do so they appended a brief homily. Such preaching, associated as it was with a personal godliness that even enemies acknowledged, was extremely effective. As a result Europe was shot through with converts and semi-converts to the Restitutionist religion. The Dean of Notre Dame in Arras was reciting stark naked truth when he asserted, a century before the Reformation, that "one third of Christendom if not more has attended illicit Waldensian conventicles and is at heart Waldensian."¹⁰

People who conducted the Winckelpredigten had to be continually 'on the move'. So great was the risk that usually the personal name of the preacher was not divulged, not even to those who were presumably on the "heretic's" side. He would come from nowhere, speak his piece, and disappear as unceremoniously as he had come. By the time the Church had been apprised of his presence the man was already out of reach.

This policy of coming and going earned for the "heretic" several unsavory names. One was Truand, a word related to our "truant," chosen in view of the fact that they were constantly not in the expected place. Another name that derived from the Winckler way of coming and going was Leufer, runner, a word that soon picked up the idea of running on one's own, running without being sent. This name was heard in the noise that issued from the Second Front in the days of the Reformation, especially to designate the man who runs unsent, unsent by the office which alone sends men.

In an effort to suppress the Winckler activities, the Church decreed that every cleric must be bound to a parish. Every man was to have his area beyond which he was not to go and into which no one else, least of all a roving Winckler, was allowed to go. We have already noted that the Church drafted 2 Timothy 3:6 (the passage that speaks of "creeping into houses") to enforce its rule, for to "creep into houses" was, so it was said, to invade another man's parish.

[I. This whole medieval notion, that there are parishes in the which only a specific person is allowed to read the Scriptures and expound them, is without any basis in the New Testament. Jesus and His disciples observed no such regulations, came and went as they saw fit, a fact to which the Stepchildren, when rebuked for holding Wincklerpredigten, were not slow to point. Calvin, no doubt chagrined by the fact that the practice of the Stepchildren in this matter was close indeed to that of the Apostles, asserted that this was a matter of aping the Apostles rather than emulating them. The passage reads: "Ilz estoient au paravant en celie resverie, que c'estoit contre Dieu qu'un pasteur fust depute a certain lieu; mais vouloyent que tous ceux qui seroyent en l'estat courussent d'un coste il l'autre, contrefaisans les Apostres comme singes et non pas comme vrays imitateurs."]

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

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