

**EVALUATING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RADICAL REFORMATION
EXEMPLIFIED BY LUTHERAN SPIRITUALISTS AND
THE ANABAPTISTS TO GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

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Abstract

The efforts of the fourteen century revivalist movements served as eye-openers to the rots in the Church. All of them leveraged on Biblical information as strategy to sanitize the Church that was invaded by worldliness and guided largely by traditions, human pronouncements as well as some unscriptural practices. With the sixteen century decisive reformation master-minded by Martin Luther, people had thought that the efforts of the reformers were the last move that Christianity needed to sanitize the Church but the rise of radical reformers suggested that over-emphasis of some doctrinal issues at the expense of others of great importance by the classical reformers deprived the Church of reconstruction it needed. This paper attempts to examine the roles played by some individuals and groups to radicalize Christianity through their brand of reformation; and consequently bring to the fore the implications of their expressed concerns on the Church, using historical method.

Keywords: Radical Reformation, Lutheran Spiritualists, Anabaptists.

Introduction

Before commencing full discussion on the topic under review, it is worthwhile to make recourse to the circumstance that led to Radical Reformation. The Church Reformation that took place in the 16th century resulted from disaffection that some people had against Roman Catholicism.⁴³ It was also discovered that some of the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church was not consistent with the scripture; hence there was need for a change. This led to the emergence of classical reformers such as Martin Luther of Germany, Ulrich Von Hutten Zwingli of Switzerland, John Calvin of Geneva, just to mention but a few.⁴⁴

Though the classical reformers shared same opinions on some issues such as opposition to mediatory roles of saints, deification of Virgin Mary, purgatory and transubstantiation etc, yet the fact remains that they could not reach an accord on the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist which otherwise is referred to as sacramental controversy⁴⁵ especially between Luther and Zwingli.

For the Roman Catholics the Lord's Supper is not merely a sacrament, but also a sacrifice; it is even first of all a sacrifice. It is "the un-bloody renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross." This does not mean that in the Lord's Supper Christ actually dies anew, but that He undergoes an external change, which is in some way equivalent to death. Did not the Lord speak of the bread as His Body that was broken for the disciples, and of the wine as His Blood that was

⁴³ H.J. Grimms (1954). *The Reformation, 1500-1650*. England: The Macmillan Company. 19.

⁴⁴ J.L. Gonzalez (1985). *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 2. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 10.

⁴⁵ J. McClintock and J. Stock (1989). *Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*. New York: Harper and Brothers. electronics

poured out for them? The statement of Wilmers in His Handbook of the Christian Religion, which is used as a textbook in many Roman Catholic schools, may be given as an example. "By the fruits of the sacrifice of atonement and impetration: (a) not only supernatural graces, but also natural favors; (b) remission of sins, and of the punishment due to them. What Christ merited for us by His death on the Cross is applied to us in the sacrament of the Mass."⁴⁶

The Reformers, one and all, rejected the sacrificial theory of the Lord's Supper, and the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation. They differed, however, in their positive construction of the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper. In opposition to Zwingli, Luther insisted on the literal interpretation of the words of the institution and on the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. According to him, bread and wine remain what they are, but there is in the Lord's Supper nevertheless a mysterious and miraculous real presence of the whole person of Christ, Body and Blood, in, under, and along with, the elements.⁴⁷ There is a very general impression, not altogether without foundation, that Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper was very defective. He is usually alleged to have taught that it is a bare sign or symbol, figuratively representing or signifying spiritual truths or blessings; and that its reception is a mere commemoration of what Christ did for sinners, and above all a badge of the Christian's profession. This hardly does justice to the Swiss Reformer, however.

Some of his statements undoubtedly convey the idea that to him the sacrament was merely a commemorative rite and a sign and symbol of what the believer pledges in it. But his writings also contain statements that point to a deeper significance of the Lord's Supper and contemplate it as a seal or pledge of what God is doing for the believer in the sacrament. Moreover, for him the emphasis falls on what believer, rather than on what God pledges in the sacrament. He identified the eating of the Body of Christ with faith in Him and a trustful reliance on His death. He denied the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but did not deny that Christ is present there in a spiritual manner to the faith of the believer.⁴⁸

This resulted in the emergence of radical reformers. The so-called 'radical' Reformation appeared in two different places, namely in Germany in Luther's wake, and in Switzerland in Zwingli's wake, but against both. In Germany, Thomas Muntzer, a former priest who had become a pastor, thought that Luther was too restrained and had not gone the whole way, but stopped in the middle. Luther reformed the Church, but Muntzer thought society should be reformed too, made fairer by abolishing the privileges of the nobility, by giving rights to the people, by distributing wealth to all. Whereas Luther called for submission to the social and political authorities, Muntzer preached revolt.⁴⁹ The peasants, especially poor and exploited, heard him and rebelled, but were crushed at the battle of Frankhausen in 1525. Muntzer was made prisoner, tortured and then killed. Luther asked the nobility to pitilessly repress the peasants.

⁴⁶ W. Gudam (1994). *Systematic Theology: An introduction to Bible Doctrine*. USA: Intervarsity Press.200

⁴⁷ W. Gudam. 1994. *Systematic Theology: An introduction to Bible Doctrine*. 851

⁴⁸ D. Bridge and D. Pypers (1981). *Communion: The Meal That Unites*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 40-47.

⁴⁹ Alan Thomson (1976). *New Movements*. London: SPCK. 36.

Between 1521 and 1524 in Zurich, Switzerland, a few inhabitants considered that Zwingli was too slow. They reproached him for his progressive reformation step by step, instead of a clear-cut break. For instance, according to Williams⁵⁰, when Zwingli was finally convinced that the mass was non-biblical, it took him three years to abolish it in favor of the reformed service. Zwingli's purpose was pastoral and pedagogical, so he took time to explain and convince. He only made changes when he believed the people were ready for them.

But some of his collaborators, gathered around the radical Grebel, wished things to be clearer, and to confront each individual with his choice and his own decisions. In contrast to Roman Catholicism, mainstream Evangelical (Lutheran) and Reformed (Zwinglian, Calvinist) Protestant movements, the Radical Reformation generally abandoned the idea of the "Church Visible" as distinct from the "Church Invisible." Thus, the Church only considered of the tiny community of believers, who accepted Jesus Christ by adult baptism, called "believers' baptism". Later, forms of Anabaptism were much smaller, and focused on the formation of small, separatist communities. Among the many varieties to develop were Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites.⁵¹

Lutheran Spiritualists

Lutheran Spiritualists were initial followers of Martin Luther but they later differed from his teachings as a matter of ideologies. They emphasized inward religion, the illumination of the heart by the Spirit through the witness of the inner Word. Stated in such general terms, spiritualism can be found in many places in the Reformation period; there were spiritualist tendencies in Luther himself, though Luther had no sympathy for the spiritualists. By the nature of their outlook, the spiritualists were not founders of churches or of an organized movement, yet some of them had a great influence.

One of the most important among them was Casper Schwenckfeld (1489-1561). According to Gonzalez,⁵² when Ferdinand became king of Bohemia and Hungary in 1526, his domains included Silesia. He was even more hostile to Schwenckfeld than to Lutherans. Schwenckfeld objected to what he considered the excessive concern of the Anabaptists with externals; he also had a much higher regard than they for the Old Testament. While Marpeck, an Anabaptist upheld the view that Christians should be obedient to the State, but must not wield secular authority or bear arms, Schwenckfeld had a much more positive attitude toward the civil authority. He felt that the magistrate's authority was Christian and that the State should take positive measures in the areas of charity, education and public works.

Schwenckfeld also engaged in debate with the Lutherans. The main point of difference between his position and that of Luther is that, while Luther did not find in human a spark of righteousness, Schwenckfeld believed man could, through Christ, be transformed and restored to his original being, immortal and divine. The new man can understand the Word, both the primary Word, which is the inward revelation, and of the secondary Word of the Bible, which can be understood only by the man who has first received the inner Word. In addition, Schwenckfeld argued that the Church was spiritual and invisible, existing throughout time and space and bound together by faith under the headship of Christ.

⁵⁰ G.H. Williams (2000). *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. Truman State: University Press. 87.

⁵¹ B. Claude & M. Sattler (2002). *La naissance d'Eliglise de professants, Excelsis*.

⁵² J.L. Gonzalez (1975). *A History of Christian Thought*. Abingdon: Nashville. 38.

Therefore, he could not identify himself with any of the existing churches and had no desire to found another one.

Schwenckfeld also minimized the importance of the external rite of baptism, though he differed from the Anabaptists; unlike them, he did not repudiate water baptism where it had been performed in infancy, and he did not accept believers' baptism. Luther, for his part, treated Schwenckfeld with outstanding rudeness

In 1529, Schwenckfeld went into voluntary exile, and for the rest of his life was a homeless wanderer, living in a number of places and facing constant danger. However, his lot was far better than that of many of the radicals; he had powerful friends who showed him favor and extended hospitality to him. He was frequently involved in controversies, of which one of the most important was with Pilgram Marpeck, an Anabaptist leader who wanted to unite the Anabaptists and counteract their tendency to go over to Schwenckfeld.

In addition, Thomas Muntzer, a leading German radical Reformer during the protestant reformation was among those sometimes called "spiritualists". He emphasized that the Anabaptists were living at the end of all ages. Although he began his religious revolt by following Luther's theological doctrines, he soon went his own way. He believed that the common people, because of their lack of property and their unspoiled ignorance, would disclose the will of God and rule the world. He became the leader of the abortive peasants' revolt in Thuringia in 1524-25. Marxists in the 20th century viewed him as a precursor in the struggle for a classless society. He was executed after leading the revolt in 1525.⁵³

Another Spiritualist of note was Carlstadt who led a number of followers who had a public display of their faith while Martin Luther was in exile to celebrate the Eucharist, breaking all the norms observed during Mass such as wearing ordinary clothes rather than the priestly garment and administering the Communion. Luther was indeed not happy with this. As a matter of fact, there was record of loss of lives following this event as Luther was blamed to having used his position to cause these crises which lead to death of many. Though Carlstadt was for a while a follower of Luther, but later, his views diverged from those of the great reformer. Unlike Luther, he believed that the man who is justified by faith is not a sinner, but can keep God's commandments and achieve sanctification. He was distressed at the absence of regenerated lives among Luther's followers. He also came to renounce the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, adopting a purely spiritual interpretation according to which Christ feeds the soul spiritually but not physically, and only the soul of his true followers.

Sebastian Franck (1499-1542) was another outstanding Spiritualist, a well-educated man who received Roman Catholic ordination as a priest, but soon became a member of the Lutheran clergy. By 1530 he had moved to the Spiritualist position and left the Lutheran church. In an early writing, he referred to the new sects of Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Anabaptists and declared a fourth Spiritualist would reject all outward forms. The outward church, according to him, went up to Heaven after the death of the Apostles, so that for fourteen hundred years

⁵³ J. Bowker (1997). *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press. 22.

there had existed no true outward Church or Sacrament. The inner truth remained and was received by the faithful from the Spirit.

Stating further, Franck asserts that all outward things in the Church have been done away with and are not to be restored. He had a broad conception of the nature of the true Church, declaring there were many Christians who had never heard of Christ, as among the heathen and Turks.⁵⁴ On the Trinity, he shared the same view with Servetus which means that he denied the orthodox doctrine. Like Schwenckfeld, he believed that the Bible could not be understood except by those who are taught of God, and he advised against too much reliance on the literal word of Scripture. He minimized the importance of theological commentaries and disputes, declaring that the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed contained enough doctrine for pious Christians. He even pointed out what he considered contradictions in the Bible. His views aroused such strong opposition that he was forced to lead the wandering life of the religious radicals until he finally found refuge in Basel, where he spent his last years in comfort, having married a woman who brought a good dowry. In 1540, a meeting of theologians at Schmalkalden, attended by Melanchthon and Bucer among others, condemned Franck, Schwenckfeld, and the Anabaptists, emphasizing the visible Church and the external Word.

Historical Evolution of the Anabaptists

The Anabaptists (or “re-baptizers”) were one of several smaller groups in Church history that endured unspeakable suffering to establish and maintain their witness. The word Anabaptist is derived from the Greek term “anabaptista” which simply means ‘one who baptizes again’. This name was given to them by their enemies in reference to their practices of “rebaptising” converts who “already had been baptized” at infants.

Anabaptism, a heterogeneous society with diverse emphasis remained a strong force in what is known as the Radical Reformation. The protestant Reformation began in Germany in 1517. It sprang up in a different but similar form in Zurich in the early 1520's, begun by Ulrich Zwingli, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz. They split by a disagreement over infant baptism. A public debate ensued with Ulrich Zwingli defending the practice against Grebel and Manz. The city council decided to continue the practice, and Grebel and Manz were told to submit. They did not. Instead, along with George Blaurock and few others, they rebaptised each other upon a confession of faith and began a free (non-state) church in Zollikon, just outside Zurich. Thus, Ulrich Zwingli went to become one of the three major Reformers, while Grebel and Manz were responsible for the Radical Reformation or Anabaptists. Persecution shut down the Church in Zollikon, but Anabaptist preachers spread throughout German and Dutch-speaking countries of Europe. They were persecuted by Roman Catholic and protestant states alike. At first, they were a shining example of the primitive Christian spirit, zealous, filled with love and an evangelical spirit, and steadfast in persecution. Sadly, within 50 years strife over rules and leadership split them, beginning in Holland and rapidly spreading through the entire movement.

⁵⁴ H. Gerhard (2014). “Karlstadt, Andreas Rudolff-Bodenstein von (1486-1541)”. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

Today, their most numerous descendants are the Amish and Mennonites,⁵⁵ though the German Baptist Brethren, Hutterites, Bruderhofs, and numerous splinter groups also survived, their influence may actually be growing in the 21st century due to interaction with the home school movement. Unfortunately, modern Anabaptists, who often refer to themselves as “plain people”, are known more for their distinctive dress, Pennsylvania Dutch language (a dialect of German) and refusal to drive cars than for zeal for Christ.

The Arrowheads among the Anabaptists

The first person to be discussed in this paper is Bodenstein. He was one of the fathers of Anabaptism because he embodied radical attitudes advocating for more religious and social changes than that traditionally supported by Luther’s revolution. He was a colleague of Luther as a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg.⁵⁶ He turned an egalitarian intellectual; cast aside his doctoral degrees, wore plain clothing, tried to become a peasant and preferred to be called “brother”. In 1521 when Lutheranism was beginning Bodenstein celebrated the first publicly protestant communion on Christmas 1521 in a distinct way; without vestment, without fixed prayer of Eucharist consecration, without elevation of the elements, service was conducted not in Latin but in German Vernacular and allowed lay communicants to take bread in their hands and share in the wine. In his reformation that followed, he encouraged participation in common worship, introduced congregational singing of the psalms in the vernacular and restored foot washing after communion. He did not resort to baptism but abolished infant baptism. He encouraged a total break with sacramentalism. He provided the biblical and theological groundings for many features of sixteenth century radicalism in the reformation.

Secondly, the man Balthasar Hubmaier was a man of wits. Born in 1485, Balthasar Hubmaier was one of the foremost leaders of the Anabaptists, who advocated adult baptism in Nicholsburg, Moravis. He was a scholar and a cathedral preacher at Regensburg in 1516. From 1521 when he arrived in Switzerland, he became a leader of the fledging Anabaptists. Hubmaier was especially influential through his writing and represented the more moderate strain of the movement, in contrast to the millenarian gang of Thomas Muntzer. He stressed the community of goods modeled on the primitive Church in Jerusalem. Constantly hunted by imperial authorities, Hubmaier was ultimately captured and burned at the stake as a heretic at Veinna. Under the leadership of Jakob Hutter, the growing communistic colonies assumed his name. The Hutterite survived and are now primarily located in the western United States and Canada.

Jan Mathijs was another outstanding Anabaptist. He was more radical than his mentor Hofmann.⁵⁷ Unlike other Anabaptist leaders who supported pacificism, in 1533, he overthrew the government of German city of Munster and forced out the Bishop of the city. He proclaimed the “kingdom of a thousand years” and forced the whole population to undergo baptism. He opened up the city to thousands of Anabaptists who flocked there from across Europe. They held goods in common ownership and burnt all books except the Bible. The

⁵⁵ A.A. Pettegree (1992). *The Early Reformation in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 97.

⁵⁶ E. Cameron (2012). *The European Reformation* (2ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-873093-4.

⁵⁷ J. Bowker (1997). *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. 22.

community introduced death penalty for adultery but allowed polygamy. Mathijs led the way with 15 wives. He was killed when the city was sieged with troops raised by German princes with the support of the Bishop of Munster. Jan Beukels (later called King John of Leiden) succeeded Mathijs and crowned himself the ruler of 'New Zion' in Munster. In 1535 Munster was captured, and in 1536, the Anabaptists' "King" was executed with two of his accomplices. After Munster, Menno Simons emerge as the leader of original pacifist Anabaptist.

Furthermore, Menno Simonsz (Simons) was a distinguished personality among the Anabaptist. Menno, a Dutch was born in 1496 and ordained Roman Catholic priest in 1524. He was dissatisfied with transubstantiation, infant baptism, and other Church dogmas and later left the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁸ Although he opposed the revolutionary Anabaptists who led an unsuccessful uprising at Munster in 1535, his efforts to help some of those who were escaping put him in danger of arrest, and he went into hiding for a while. In his view, military service and killing were unlawful and he frowned at political office holders who claimed that they were Christian. Late in 1536 or early 1537, he received believers' baptism, and he was called to leadership by the peaceful wing of Dutch Anabaptism. In 1537 he became an Anabaptist preacher and a missionary, carrying the new faith to other part of South Holland, and Germany. Menno adhered fundamentally to orthodox beliefs but rejected those that were not mentioned in the New Testament. He baptized only those who asserted their faith in Christ and also taught that prayer should be said in silence. He found time for extensive writing and established a printing press to circulate Anabaptist writings. His followers formed the Protestants sect called Mennonites, otherwise called "the peace church" in Netherlands. They were among the first to espouse the principle of separation of the Church and state and to condemn slavery. They have traditionally obeyed the civil laws, but many refused to bear arms or to support violence in any form. The more conservative Mennonite groups are distinguished by plain living and simplicity of dress.

Distinctive Beliefs Common to the Anabaptists

The Anabaptists shared with classical Pentecostalism basic tenets like justification by faith, the authority of the Scriptures, and the priesthood of the believers. Like Lutherans and Calvinists, the Anabaptists believed in the paramount importance of personal faith in God, as opposed to ritualism, and to the right of independent personal judgment in addition to these, they have other distinctive beliefs and practices which are contained in a confession drawn up in a Swiss town of Schleithem on February 24, 1527 and branded Schleithem Confession.⁵⁹ These beliefs include:

Believers' Baptism

The Anabaptists insisted on baptism of believers by immersion only and rejected infant baptism. They hold that the rite should be administered only when the individual is of sufficient age to make a conscious profession of faith and commitment to God. To them, the idea of re-baptism is considered a non-issue since infant baptism has no clear-cut biblical basis. Hence baptism shall be given to all who have learned repentance and amendment of

⁵⁸ A.G. Dickens (1970). *Reformation and Society in the 16th century Europe*. London: Thames and Hudson. 134.

⁵⁹ T. Dowley (1996). *The History of Christianity*. Singapore: Lion Publishing Plc. 102.

life; and who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This excludes infant baptism which they considered as the highest and chief abomination of the Pope.

Opposition to Church-State Collaboration

They held that the Church, which should be the community of the redeemed, must be separated from the state. They countered the magisterial protestant society where there was little disengagement of the two realms. Besides, most of the early leaders of the group were opposed to the use of the sword by Christians in the maintenance of social order and even in the conduct of a just war. They argued that the sword is ordained by God to be used by the worldly magistrates to punish the wicked but it must not be used in self defense by Christians.

Since Constantine's time, Christian Europe had accepted the idea that religious offences were also civil offences, and should be punished by the government. In fact, religious offences were the most serious of all, because they threatened the unity of the nation or Empire. Perhaps behind this deep conviction lay the pre-Christian idea that religious obedience was the foundation of the success and prosperity of the people. In addition, Anabaptists also held that Christians should never sue anyone in court though they were often brought to court by others. If Christians are not to go to court or approve the death sentence, it follows that they must also not be responsible for courts, executioners, or soldiers.

The Authentic Church

They maintained that the true Church is composed only of regenerated or converted individuals, that is, people who have had a personal experience of the Christian religion. Individuals join voluntarily following repentance for sin and affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is in contrast to a state church, in which all who are born within a given geographical territory and receive the sacraments including infants automatically become members.

Separation from the World

Separation from the world was understood especially as separation from active involvement in government. According to Anabaptists, a separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; hence they simply resolved not to have fellowship with the world and not to partake in the multitude of its abominations.⁶⁰ One way in which the Anabaptists practiced this 'separation' was in marriage. There was true equality of men and women in their congregation with both husbands and wives as full, believing Church-members. For this reason, to the scandal of Christian Europe, some approved of divorce and remarriage on the basis of Paul's teaching, 'Do not be mismatched with unbelievers' (2 Cor. 6.14). Thus, Anabaptists were free to leave their Catholic or Protestant spouses in order to marry other Anabaptists and be fully integrated into the group. In practice, Anabaptists did not take part in government at all. Even today some of the stricter Anabaptist groups do not vote in elections.

The Concept of Egalitarianism

Some Anabaptists wished to establish communal and egalitarian Christian communities hence Anabaptism appealed most strongly to the poor and to uneducated peasants and artisans. It has been described as the religion of the commoners. Only about two percent were

⁶⁰ A.G. Dickens (1970). *Reformation and Society in the 16th century Europe*. 134.

of aristocratic birth or had higher education. The majority were peasants. This is one of the reasons why the Anabaptists in Europe were widely persecuted by the aristocracy and the magisterial reformers.

Missionary Movement

The vehemence and intransigence of the Anabaptist leaders and to revolutionary implications of their teaching led to their expulsion from one city after another. This simply increased the momentum of an essentially missionary movement. They migrated to different towns and cities of Europe with missionary spirit and were able to make many converts into Christian religion.

Abhorrence of Creedal Confession

Confessional documents had little significance for most of the radical groups. They were opposed to formal creeds and confessions for fear of stifling the workings of the Holy Spirit or compromising their position on the sole authority of the bible or, in theological liberal circles endangering freedom of thought and conscience.

Evaluating the Ideals of Lutheran Spiritualists and Anabaptists

Having explored the ideals of the radical reformers, it is worthwhile, at this juncture to evaluate the significance of their beliefs on Christianity. First of all, the Lutheran Spiritualists will be considered.

The stress on spiritualism which embodies the illumination of the heart by the Spirit and the understanding of the Word through inward revelation are very relevant to spiritual growth. Though Martin Luther emphasized the supremacy of the scriptures (*Sola Scriptura*), the argument of the Spiritualists that Christianity should recognize both the Word and the Spirit makes a balance Christian life. As early as the third century, Montanus had emphasized that any Christian who did not manifest the gift of the Holy Spirit was not a genuine Christian.⁶¹

In addition, the idea of invisible nature of the Church as espoused by Schwenckfeld is another germane issue. He maintained that the Church is bound together by faith under the headship of Christ and not any visible institution. This is to disparage the institution of papacy which the 14th century reformers such as John Wycliffe also denounced.⁶² The argument of this researcher on the irrelevance of the papacy portrays the radical reformers as being extreme because the Church has both the visible and the invisible natures. We cannot talk of the invisible aspect without its visible aspect, hence the concept that the Church is both militant and triumphant. The visible Church has been bestowed authority by Christ to administer the grace of God to the congregation which must pass through some administrative officers i.e. the clerical officers of the Church. Therefore, it is not tenable to jettison the priestly position.

Another salient issue is the idea of classless society propagated by some Lutheran Spiritualists. This paper is of the view that from the creation of the world, there has been disparity in every human society. So, conceiving of egalitarianism may not be totally right. However, their advocacy on more religious and social changes exemplified by Bodenstein was apt, because in religious parlance justice and fairness are key. This agrees with Jesus'

⁶¹ Jonathan Hill (2007). *The History of Christianity*. Oxford: Lion Hudson Plc. 64.

⁶² Louis Berkhof (1988). *Systematic Theology*. Great Britain: Oxford Press. 558.

teaching on equality among the brethren. Therefore, those who are called into clerical Orders should not feel superior to the Laity because every member of the Church has a ministry to fulfill; and no one ministry is more important than the other in the Church. This idea was first propounded by John Calvin who in his Institutes of Christian Religion⁶³ maintained that even among the clergy there should be no disparity and hierarchy. Officers of the ministry share the same equal status.

Another issue emphasized by Lutheran Spiritualists was the claim of the existence of unregenerate heart in the Church. For Franck, this class of people is not better than Heathens and Turks. On this matter, one can argue in favour of the Spiritualists because even in our contemporary world, it has been observed that the Church is flooded with both the saints and sinners. This recalls the criticism of Montanus that the Church of his era was flooded by people without salvific conviction. Worse still, some of these unregenerate hearts held important positions in the Church. However, as much as the argument of the Spiritualists could be true, one could see sense in the argument of St. Augustine that the Church was not established for saints alone, but for both saints and sinners, holy and profane, righteous and unrighteous.⁶⁴ Therefore, in his reaction to Donatist position that nothing unholy should be found in the Church, Augustine concluded that the essence of the Church is to help the sinners become saints.

Similarly an evaluation of the principles and teachings of the Anabaptist reveals an interesting aspect of this discussion in many ways. Firstly, their recognition of indigenous language over Latin in the conduct of services should be commended. This is because for many decades, the Roman Catholic Church relegated indigenous languages to the background; thereby making Christianity an alien religion to most European people. It was this mistake that the Anabaptists especially those of German extraction among them tried to correct. This is reminiscent of the policy of Henry Venn who posited in the 19th century that Christianity would be better understood if the missionaries preached and taught the indigenes in their indigenous languages.⁶⁵

Secondly, the Anabaptists should be commended for their simple lifestyle as well as opposition to slavery. For Menno and his associates, slavery is dehumanizing while ostentatious living was a contradiction to biblical teachings. No wonder, John Wycliffe expressed it succinctly that Christians should observe apostolic poverty since Jesus Christ did not acquire any earthly possession.⁶⁶ In contemporary Christianity, most especially in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, extravagant living has become a norm among Christian religious leaders who flaunt their wealth to the discouragement of their members. This has led many people to develop negative disposition towards Christianity. If religious leaders would be moderate in their living, Christian religion would be given its due recognition that it lost many years ago when materialism crept into the Church through prosperity gospel.

Thirdly, the militarization or revolutionary stance of few of the Anabaptists should be seen as unchristian. For example, Jan Mathij's overthrow of the German government in the city of

⁶³ R. Liardon (1987). *God's Generals: the Roaring Reformers*. California: Whitaker House. 249.

⁶⁴ G. A. Oshitelu (2002). *The African Fathers of the Early Church*. Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd. 100.

⁶⁵ Duke Akamisoko (2002). *Samuel Ajayi Crowther in the Lokoja Area*. Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd.44.

⁶⁶ F.G. LLewellin (n/d). *Heroes of the Reformation*. London: Wickliffe Press. 21.

Munster and his establishment of religio-political government otherwise known as 'New Zion' could be described as religious fundamentalism. During the inter-testamental dispensation, the Maccabean dynasty was equally military and violent in nature, carrying arms in order to protect the sanctity of the Jewish State. But all these are grossly preached against by Christ who stands on the side of the Pacifists.

Moreover, a controversial issue common to all Anabaptist group is believers' baptism. They argued that while adult baptism could be traced to the bible, infant baptism was the creation of the medieval church. The strongest point against infant baptism lies in the thought that repentance and confession are prerequisites to baptism; and since infants are incapable of both, they are not qualified for the rite.

Though, the Scripture is full of evidences that support believers' baptism, yet there are cases in the New Testament where infant baptism is implied. We find in the New Testament narratives of baptisms that "households" were baptized-of Lydia (Acts 16:15), of the jailer at Philippi (Acts 16:32), of Stephanas (1Cor 1:16). It is never said that the children of the household were exempted from the sacred rite. Further still, since baptism is a service of admitting someone into Christian fold, Theissen⁶⁷ asserts that just as the Jewish children shared in the grace of God through circumcision on the eight day, Christian children should not be prevented from God's grace at infancy.

Evidently, baptism of children goes back to the earliest times of Sub-Apostolic church. Irenaeus the disciple of Polycarp who in turn was also a disciple of John made statement that infant baptism had been an established practice in the church long before his days. Tertullian's testimony is more interesting because it made it plain that the custom of baptizing infant existed in his days. Origen, the most learned Christian writer in his homily⁶⁸ bears witness to the fact that the baptism of infant was normal.

Conclusion

The significance of radical reformers discussed so far cannot be over emphasized considering the influence wielded on the society of their time, and even beyond. As much as this paper is not trying to vouch for their perfection, their argument on inward religion otherwise seen as spirituality over outward religiosity which Jesus berated the Pharisees for could be seen as a legacy in global Christianity. In Christendom today, traditions and ceremonial observances should not be prioritized over the role of the Spirit and sound scriptural teachings in the Church. As much as Christian tradition has a role to play, the survival of Christianity owes much to spiritual growth of members of the Church.

Though some radical reformers were hated, repressed and persecuted by both the established church of that dispensation and the secular powers, in 2010 the Lutheran and Reformed churches asked for forgiveness officially from the Mennonites for persecuting them in past centuries. This must have happened through a kind of illumination that brought about conviction of the relevance of these radical reformers. This possibly illustrates what Paul Tillich meant when he said that 'those who seem weak in history finally shape history'⁶⁹

⁶⁷ G.M.A. Theissen (1998). *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 209.

⁶⁸ 14th Homily on St Luke

⁶⁹ J. Horsch (1995). *Mennonites in Europe*. Herald Press.299. ISBN 978-0836113952

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