4

Wait for No One: Implementation of Reforms in Wittenberg

Every congregation, however little or great it may be, should see for itself that it acts properly and well and waits for no one.

Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt

In the Land of the Birds

Safely perched in the Wartburg Castle overlooking his "land of the birds," Luther began work on making the new song of the gospel accessible to the people. His German translation of the New Testament, though an intensely academic labor, was potentially as revolutionary as his burning of the papal bull and canon law. Both actions were public affirmations of reform. Luther's provision of a readable and accurate translation of the Bible was a stimulus toward universal education – everyone should be able to read in order to read God's Word. More immediately, his translation deprived the elite, the priestly class, of their exclusive control over words as well as the Word. Even today scholars, the "priestly classes," of all disciplines, the natural sciences as well as the humanities, like to develop exclusive languages for their specialties. Luther would have none of this penchant for the arcane that makes the uninitiated dependent on "experts." His translation of the New Testament – completed within three months! – was printed in Wittenberg in September 1522, and hence is known as the *Septembertestament.* This first printing of 3,000 copies quickly sold out and a new printing was done in December, the *Dezembertestament.*

Luther's translation of the Bible into German was not the first. There were over a dozen translations before his, but their German was poor and they were translations of the Vulgate, that is translations of a translation, rather than translations from the Hebrew and Greek texts. Luther's concern was to get as close to the original text as possible. Philologically and stylistically his translation is superior to prior

translations, and indeed to many since then. Some of the leading literary lights of Germany, such as Herder, Goethe, and Nietzsche, "accorded Luther's Bible the highest praise" (Bluhm 1983: 178). His translation influenced the English translations by Tyndale and Coverdale as well as translations in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. Throughout his life, Luther worked continually to make the Bible more accessible to the laity through translations, explanatory prefaces, and even plans for a large print version for those with failing eyesight.

Luther's sense of evangelical freedom was evident in his concern to translate "not word for word but sense for sense." Hence his famous addition of the word "alone" in the translation of Romans 3: 28: ". . . justified without the works of the law, by faith alone" (*allein durch den Glauben*). In his treatise *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530; *LW* 35: 188–9), Luther explained that he wanted to speak clear and vigorous German, not Latin or Greek. Thus his translation was guided by how people speak in the home, on the street, and in the marketplace. Luther further argued that the theological point of the text supersedes the nature of language alone. The meaning of justification by faith in Christ without any works of the law is "the main point of Christian doctrine. . . . Whoever would speak plainly and clearly about this cutting away of works will have to say, 'Faith alone justifies us, and not works.' The matter itself, as well as the nature of language, demands it" (*LW* 35: 195).

During Luther's enforced "sabbatical" at the Wartburg, winds of confusion and pressure to implement reforms buffeted his colleagues in Wittenberg. A new theology had been proclaimed; now, some cried, it should be enacted. But Luther had disappeared. Was he dead? In hiding? Had he deserted the cause? Who would lead reform of the church in his absence? Leadership logically fell on two of Luther's closest colleagues in the reform of the university: Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (ca. 1480–1541). Both would soon be involved in the efforts to implement the new understanding of the gospel. But as they picked their ways through the personal and political minefields of reform, it would be Karlstadt who would receive the ministerial equivalent of a battlefield commission.

Melanchthon: Teacher of Germany

Melanchthon, grandnephew of the famous humanist Johann Reuchlin, became a famous humanist and theologian in his own right as well as Luther's close life-long collaborator. A precocious youth, Melanchthon

finished his BA in less than two years at the University of Heidelberg at the ripe old age of 14, and received his MA from the University of Tübingen in 1514. His enthusiasm for humanism and Greek studies is evident in the graecizing of his German family name (from Schwarzerd to Melanchthon: "black earth" in Greek does have a certain cachet lacking in the German!), a practice common among the humanists of the time. By the age of 21 he had published a Greek grammar textbook that remained in demand for decades. His contributions to German pedagogy led to the appellation *Praeceptor Germaniae*, "the teacher of Germany." His many contributions to the Reformation included the first systematic theology textbook, *Loci communes rerum theologicarum* ("Fundamental Theological Themes," 1521) and the confessional statement read before the emperor at the diet of Augsburg (1530) that remains foundational for Lutheran churches up to today, the Augsburg confession.

With the shift from scholastic to biblical theology at the university, the faculty wanted to add Greek and Hebrew to the curriculum in order to develop the ability to read the Bible in its original languages. The "regularization" of Luther's "language event" would require a learned ministry. This was the context for Melanchthon's appointment in 1518 as the first professor of Greek. Luther was so impressed by Melanchthon's language skills that he soon had Melanchthon delivering the lectures on Romans. On his part, Melanchthon was soon an enthusiastic supporter of Luther. The two men differed on various points and certainly in temperament. Although there were times when Luther became impatient with Melanchthon's cautiousness, his so-called "pussy-footing," and times when Melanchthon was upset by Luther's rages, their personality differences did not separate them. The same cannot be said for Luther's other colleague, Karlstadt.

Karlstadt and Proto-Puritanism

Karlstadt received his BA from the University of Erfurt in 1502; he also studied Thomism at Cologne. He went to Wittenberg in 1505, and there received his doctorate in 1510. Supported by Martin Pollich, the vice-chancellor of the university who was also a Thomist, Karlstadt's career rapidly progressed. By the time Luther arrived in 1512, Karlstadt was regarded as a theologian of promise. He had produced two studies in Thomist logic, been promoted to archdeacon of All Saints, professor of theology, and dean of the faculty. As a young professor on the make, his ambition directed him also to the study of law. Perhaps he had his

eye on the position of provost, usually the preserve of the lawyers. At any rate, he contrived a leave and went to Italy in the fall of 1515. On his return in May 1516 he ostentatiously sported doctorates in canon and civil law. This did not sit well with faculty colleagues who had covered his responsibilities in his absence and who had been told he was only going on a brief pilgrimage to Italy to fulfill a vow. Perhaps too much should not be made of this, since faculties are renowned for petty jealousies; but it does seem that Karlstadt did not relate well with his colleagues. He has been described as a volatile, exasperating, scheming, fiery-tempered man suffering from an inferiority complex. It has been suggested that his later falling-out with Luther had elements of "sibling rivalry" and jealousy of his fellow theologian's growing fame (Sider 1974: 11–15; Bubenheimer 1981a: 110).

Some scholars have argued that the conflict that developed between Karlstadt and Luther was rooted in differences over strategies and tactics concerning the pace and direction of reform in Wittenberg, and/or Luther's insistence on personal ownership of the reform movement. These pertinent observations should not obscure the theological differences between the two men. The developments in Wittenberg following the diet of Worms foreshadow alternative theologies of reform that were soon also to swirl around Zwingli in Zurich and dog reform movements throughout the period. The question faced everywhere was the relationship between Christian freedom and authority in the implementation of reforms. Already, the Reformation initiated by Luther had become the Reformations. The application of this interpretation to the story of the reform movement in Wittenberg requires a brief excursus into Karlstadt's theology and its difference from Luther's.

When Karlstadt returned to Wittenberg in June of 1516, he discovered that the university had undergone marked change in orientation and curriculum due to Luther's impact. When Luther declared in a disputation that September that the scholastics understood neither Scripture nor Augustine, Karlstadt angrily opposed him and confidently took up Luther's challenge to check the primary sources. After buying a new edition of Augustine's works, Karlstadt set about to refute Luther. In the process he discovered to his amazement that Luther was correct and that he, Karlstadt, had been "deceived by a thousand scholastic opinions." With surprising rapidity Karlstadt's reading of Augustine brought him to the side of Luther against scholastic theology. Within months Karlstadt had a theological conversion that found expression in 151 theses on nature, law, and grace that were predominantly excerpts from Augustine. With Luther, he rejected

scholasticism's piety of achievement that rested on human freedom to cooperate in its own salvation. Karlstadt now argued that persons can contribute nothing to their salvation; the human will is in this regard passive, only receptive; God alone is active. By the summer of 1517 he had followed up these theses with a series of lectures on Augustine's treatise *On the Spirit and the Letter.*

Luther was overjoyed by Karlstadt's move to the reforming camp; but by the time of the Leipzig debate with Eck tensions were already arising between the two reformers. These tensions were rooted in alternative readings of the Bible and Augustine. Luther understood God's favor to the sinner as a Word of promise, a Word that addressed the sinner from outside the self. Luther emphasized that this promise from "outside us" (*extra nos*) is "for us" (*pro nobis*). To Luther the Christian always remained simultaneously sinner and righteous, unable to fulfill God's law from himself but rather accepting Christ's fulfillment through faith.

In contrast, Karlstadt's theology seems to have been more determined by a theological shift from Thomist to Augustinian thought. This was certainly personally and religiously significant to Karlstadt. His "theological" conversion meant not only a major turn in his theology but also the repudiation of ten years of scholarly labor and publications. Few professors are ever willing to change this radically! In contrast to Luther's theological motif of the dialectic of law and gospel, Karlstadt emphasized the contrast of letter and spirit; in contrast to Luther's empasis on the Christian as simultaneously sinner and righteous (*simul iustus et peccator*), Karlstadt spoke in more ethical terms of the Christian as simultaneously good and evil (*simul bonus et malus*). Hence Karlstadt emphasized inner renewal in contrast to outer acceptance, regeneration over justification, obedience to the Christ "in us" (*in nobis*). Karlstadt, like Luther, saw forgiveness through Christ's atonement as central, but unlike Luther he focused on self-mortification and inner regeneration. This led Karlstadt in the direction of conceiving of the Scriptures as divine law that governs church and individual, demanding perfection. So Karlstadt's major twentieth-century biographer, Hermann Barge (1968), referred to Karlstadt as "the champion" or "pioneer" of "lay Christian puritanism." And Ulrich Bubenheimer (1989: 62–3) has traced the influence of Karlstadt's theology of rebirth and sanctification on the development of Pietism into the eighteenth century.

Along with Karlstadt's discovery of the theology of Augustine came discovery of the German mystics. The latter especially contributed to his emphasis upon regeneration and a spiritualist interpretation of the

Bible. This mystical influence is evident in his 1520 tract *Missive von der aller hochsten tugent gelassenheit* ("Open Letter on the Very Highest Virtue of Resignation"). The development of the concept of *Gelassenheit* will become central in Karlstadt's theology. Here too is the beginning of a new hermeneutic, a shift from the outer word to an inner, unmediated word of God. "In the *gelassenen* person as the temple of Christ the word of Christ rings out, and thus is God born" (Bubenheimer 1977: 177).

The term *Gelassenheit* has been variously defined as "resignation," "yieldedness," "abandon," "a way of renunciation for the soul seeking union with God," "detachment of the soul from creatures," and "joyful endurance and patience in the face of adversity." For Karlstadt this is the beginning of the Christian life as one overcomes self-will and merges with the will of God conforming to Christ in suffering. The outer person is to be mortified for the sake of inner regeneration.

The potential conflict between Luther's emphasis on justification and Karlstadt's emphasis on regeneration became an actual conflict in the respective models of ministry developed by the two reformers.

Bishops, Clerical Marriage, and Strategies for Reform

Between Luther's journey to the diet of Worms in April 1521 and his return from the Wartburg in March 1522, there developed in Wittenberg a fateful and paradigmatic power struggle for the further course of the Reformation. From the Wartburg, Luther entrusted the implementation of the reform to his Wittenberg friends. In early May he wrote to Melanchthon of his concern that their work not end like the fig tree of Matthew 21: 19, all leaves and no fruit. "The truth is indeed that it is only foliage and words as long as we do not act in accordance with our teaching" (*LW* 48: 214).

But how should the Reformers act in accord with their teaching? This first city Reformation confronted its participants with political, legal, and theological problems which had no precedents. Who will direct the course through these uncharted waters? Who has competence for church law? New legislation for church and society must be developed and carried out; pastors and preachers will have to be trained, provided for, and supervised; church property will have to be managed; and church discipline will have to be administered.

The question of leadership had to be resolved because of the competing possibilities for carrying out reform. Who had the authority

to implement reform: the prince? the town council? or the commune itself? Furthermore, the university with its local relationships was also an institution that could, in relation to one of the above authorities, take over some of the functions in directing a new, evangelical church. The criticism and then elimination of papal and episcopal authority and jurisdiction over not only spiritual but also political and legal structures introduced open and unclear relationships. This in turn led to a power vacuum and social instability so long as new ecclesiastical structures had not replaced the old, discredited ones. In medieval culture church and community were not separate but rather coextensive, and power struggles between the church and various authorities were characteristic whenever one or the other party was weak. In Wittenberg each interested party – prince, town council, and commune – wished to expand its influence on the governance of the church in accord with its own values and needs. Hence conflicts arose involving the relations and goals of individual theologians as well as the theologians as a whole *vis-à-vis* other interest groups.

After the publication of the bull *Exsurge Domine*, papal authority markedly diminished for the Wittenbergers. The authority of the episcopal office was also severely eroded by events, and with the publication of the bull of excommunication and the edict of Worms was extensively destroyed in Electoral Saxony. The territorial lords were ready to step into the breach and create a territorial church, and their hands were strengthened by the disturbances about to break out in Wittenberg in late 1521 and early 1522.

Prior to this, the confrontation with the bishops had two foci: the continuing promotion of indulgences by Albrecht of Mainz, now cardinal, and clerical marriage. In the fall of 1521 Albrecht announced a campaign to sell indulgences to visitors to his relic collection in Halle. When Luther, in the Wartburg, got wind of this he wrote a strong letter to Albrecht demanding he stop this abuse. If Albrecht did not cease, Luther threatened to publish a treatise against him that would "show all the world the difference between a bishop and a wolf" (*LW* 48: 342). Within weeks the cardinal apologized and told Luther it would stop. This was a remarkable about-face considering that Luther had been condemned by pope and emperor and was now concealed in the Wartburg. This was not just an echo of the earlier indulgence controversy but rather a direct challenge to the spiritual authority of Cardinal Archbishop Albrecht and hence all bishops; and the Reformer seemed to have more power than the cardinal!

Clerical marriage especially challenged episcopal spiritual and legal jurisdiction and forced a clarification of whether episcopal claims could

still be realized. Luther had criticized celibacy in his *Address To the Christian Nobility* (1520). Every priest should be free to marry because "before God and the Holy Scriptures marriage of the clergy is no offense." Clerical celibacy is not God's law but the pope's, and "Christ has set us free from all man-made laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls. . ." Thus the pope has no more power to command celibacy than "he has to forbid eating, drinking, the natural movement of the bowels, or growing fat."

Luther's tract was liberating for many clergy who suffered anguish over their failure to remain celibate, an anguish that led many to self-hatred. Anticlerical writings such as the *Letters of Obscure Men* had long exploited the sexual meanderings of the clergy, and it was not uncommon for priests' concubines and children to be maligned as whores and bastards. A contemporary described the dilemma in these words: "I cannot be without a wife. If I am not permitted to have a wife, then I am forced to lead publicly a disgraceful life, which damages my soul and honor and leads other people, who are offended by me, to damnation. How can I preach about chastity and unchastity, adultery and depravity, when my whore comes openly to church and my bastards sit right in front of me? How shall I conduct mass in this state?" (Hendrix 1993: 456). The evangelical endorsement of clerical marriage offered conscience-stricken priests "a resolution especially to their personal dilemmas, thus enabling the self-hating cleric to attain a new dignity freed from the causes of self-hatred" (Scribner 1993: 153–4).

In May 1521 three priests, one of them Luther's student Bartholomew Bernhardi, drew the practical consequences from Luther's treatise. Other priests followed suit. These were courageous acts, for they entailed persecution and imprisonment because the obligation to clerical celibacy was also embodied in imperial law. Bernhardi's bishop, none other than Albrecht, demanded Elector Frederick turn him over for trial. Frederick refused and referred the case to a commission of jurists for decision. Melanchthon's brief for the defense argued that both Scripture and the practice of the early church supported clerical marriage, and that frailty of the flesh impeded observance of the vow of celibacy.

These events sparked a lively debate and prompted Karlstadt to propose an academic disputation on celibacy. In Karlstadt's theses and his tract *On Celibacy* he argued on the bases of 1 Timothy 3: 2 and 5: 9 that all priests should be married; anyone under 60 should not enter a monastery; and monks and nuns under 60 should be given the freedom to live in wedlock in the monasteries. When Luther received Karlstadt's

arguments he was disappointed in the exegetical bases for them and by November had begun his own tract, *On Monastic Vows*. Not only, Luther argued, are vows not commanded by God, they are counter to God's word. Here Luther attacked the medieval distinction between commands and counsels which claimed that while all Christians are to fulfill the commandments of God there is extra merit in keeping the counsels of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. These counsels were the special province of monasticism and their salvatory merit contributed to the treasury of grace. Another significant point is Luther's rejection of the claim that only those who kept the counsels, i.e. monastics, have a religious vocation. To Luther, the only difference between the "religious" life and the "secular" life is the form, not the content. Luther's abolition of distinctions among Christians opened the way for his view of the priesthood of all the baptized and of all Christians as having a divine calling, a vocation in the world. Luther did not advocate the abolition of monastic life altogether, only of its compulsion. If one wished to be a monk, the choice must be as free as other human vocational choices, and it should be clear that that choice is in no way superior to the choice to be, say, a farmer or a teacher. Faith is the "great equalizer" which frees the clergy as well as the laity for service to the neighbor. Monastic vows conflict with faith because they embrace works rather than God's promise of mercy. Thus vows are against evangelical freedom, because what is not necessary for salvation is free. In baptism God made a vow to us; we do not become acceptable to God by making vows to him. Baptism frees one from dependence on works for salvation; any human commandments that encroach on this freedom are contrary to God. This tract, according to Brecht (1990: 24), "is one of Luther's most beautiful writings on evangelical freedom." On 6 January the Augustinians held their chapter meeting in Wittenberg and decreed that those who wished to leave the monastery might do so.

The intensive propaganda and activity of the Wittenberg theologians in favor of clerical marriage now rebounded on themselves. They had encouraged other priests to marry but had not themselves taken this step, and thus their own credibility was on the line. In November of 1521 Karlstadt proposed to set an example. The day after Christmas he became engaged to Anna von Mochau, the young daughter of a poor nobleman of a nearby village. Karlstadt's marriage on 19 January 1522 was an act of propaganda. The public invitation to the wedding expressly stated that his marriage was to serve as a model to other priests to marry their "cooks." He also sent a personal invitation to the elector and invited the entire university faculty and the town council. He expected a big party and spent more than 50 florins for sausage and

drink! More to the point, his guest list also included the bishops of Magdeburg, Brandenburg, and Meissen. These invitations indicate Karlstadt's self-confidence regarding clerical marriage, underscored the programmatic and political significance of his wedding, and treated the bishops as equals in spiritual authority. The elector played the better part of valor and did not attend, although the Wittenberg theologians were confident of his positive disposition on this matter. For political purposes Frederick wanted to keep his distance from his married priests. Thus when Bugenhagen married, the court provided the venison for the wedding feast but had it listed as the gift of Spalatin, privy councilor to the Elector (Brecht 1990: 92).

Karlstadt's marriage created a sensation. It was praised by the evangelicals and condemned by the establishment. Within months a large number of priests followed suit. According to Ozment, "No institutional change brought about by the Reformation was more visible, responsive to late medieval pleas for reform, and conducive to new social attitudes than the marriage of Protestant clergy. Nor was there another point in the Protestant program where theology and practice corresponded more closely" (Ozment 1980: 381). The first clerical marriages were a public rejection of contemporary ecclesiastical order. In the face of the papal ban and proscription, the Reformers' courage to implement the implications of their theology was an important demonstration of the reform movement. Not only were other priests given a model, but their congregations were also drawn into the process. Bernhardi had obtained the agreement of his parish for his marriage; and the parish of Seidler interceded for him after his arrest by Duke George. Written defenses of clerical marriage also addressed the laity with respect to Christian freedom and vocation as well as marriage. Clerical marriage was popular with the laity and also moved clergy toward the obligations of citizenship.

The self-confidence of the priests and theologians in advocating and enacting clerical marriage over against the bishops and in some cases the secular authorities is astonishing. In the process the Wittenberg theologians and other pastors and preachers claimed for themselves a spiritual authority hitherto reserved for the bishops. Archbishop Albrecht refused to engage in substantive discussion of the issue, claiming that he had the right to judge matters on the basis of canon law and legal praxis. But for the Reformers the only norm was the Bible.

Wherever territorial lords refused to provide support for the bishop, as in the case of Bernhardi, the crisis of spiritual jurisdiction became public. While Frederick's position may be attributed to his personal sympathy for his married priests or to religious uncertainty, it is

equally reasonable to see here the tendency on the part of territorial rulers to expand their influence over the church. By hindering the execution of the bishops' judgments the princes intruded upon episcopal jurisdiction not theoretically but practically. This was not new to the Reformation but it was a further challenge to the power of Rome and strengthened secular authority, thereby contributing to the development of the Protestant territorial church.

Luther himself did not marry until 1525. Luther met his Katy (Katherine von Bora, 1499–1552) when she arrived in Wittenberg in April 1523 with other nuns who had escaped a nearby monastery. The Reformers were soon able to place or marry off all these nuns except Katherine (there were few possibilities for a single woman in the Middle Ages). A strong-willed personality, she let it be known that she was not pleased with the match proposed for her, but that Luther would do just fine. In the meantime Luther himself was under continual pressure from others to marry: his supporters wanted a practical expression of Luther's support for married priests, and his father wanted grandchildren. On 13 June 1525 Luther married his Katy, to please his father and to spite the pope (*LW* 29: 21).

Now Luther affirmed marriage from experience as well as theory. It is, he claimed, a glimpse of what the lost Eden must have been like. Certainly he knew married life was not one long honeymoon, and commented that if we knew what lay in store for us, we probably would not get married. But celibacy, he believed, removed men and women from service to the neighbor, contravened the divine order, and denied the goodness of sexual relations. Marriage created a new awareness of human community. "Marriage does not consist only of sleeping with a woman – everybody can do that! – but keeping house and bringing up children" (*LW* 54: 441). The father washing smelly diapers may be ridiculed by fools, but "God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling – not because the father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith" (*LW* 45: 40).

For Luther the companionship of husband and wife is a marvelous thing. But the Luthers also knew firsthand the pain of the loss of children. Elizabeth died in infancy, and Magdelene died in his arms when she was only thirteen. "It's strange to know that she is surely at peace . . . and yet to grieve so much" (*LW* 54: 432). Altogether Martin and Katy had six children whom they loved dearly. Katy nurtured and scolded her husband through more than 20 years of what certainly must have been one of the most eventful marriages in history. Luther was convinced that God had come to his aid by giving them to each other. His marriage was an influence upon his theology of human relations,

especially in terms of the mutuality and reciprocity of love, and contributed to new perspectives on the dignity and responsibility of women (Scharffenorth 1983).

The Gospel and Social Order

Concomitant with the agenda of clerical marriage was that of reform of the mass, the abolition of images, and the reform of poor relief (the last of these will be discussed in the next chapter). We shall discuss the mass at greater length later, but for now we need to recall that the eucharist was the central symbol and reality for late medieval culture. The eucharist was presented by the church as the foremost sacrament which supported the whole sacramental system and clerical power. The mass was the central element in church life. To change the mass was bound to shock and shock profoundly the Wittenberg congregation.

From the Wartburg, Luther requested Melanchthon be appointed preacher in his stead in the city church. But the town council, although affirming Melanchthon's theological qualifications, would not appoint this married layman to the position. Whether Melanchthon could have provided stability in this tumultuous period is questionable.

In July of 1521 Karlstadt argued with regard to the mass that "those who partake of the bread and wine are not Bohemians but true Christians. He who receives only the bread, in my opinion, commits sin" (Barge 1968: I, 291). Luther had already spoken his mind against withholding the wine from the laity at communion, but he could not claim that reception of both kinds was a necessity on pain of sin. Luther's fellow Augustinian, Gabriel Zwilling, now attacked the private mass in his sermons and preached against veneration of the consecrated host. When the monastery prior forbade changes in the mass, masses in the monastery ceased entirely. When the hermits of St Anthony appeared in early October for their annual round of begging, students interrupted their sermons and pelted them with dung and stones. The elector rejected any changes in the mass; Wittenberg was not to innovate on its own. This of course got the students even more exercised and prompted stronger steps by Zwilling, who led an exodus of monks from the Augustinian monastery. Anticlerical violence began to build during the weeks of December. The crisis was at hand. Karlstadt at first counseled caution but then advocated mandatory reforms. In the next weeks a commission to the elector submitted a report favoring immediate reform in practice in line with the new theology. In December a petition to the town council requested

amnesty for the rioters and reforms in liturgy and ethics. The elector again expressed his view that this was not the time for innovation.

On 22 December Karlstadt announced that at his next mass, scheduled for 1 January, he intended to celebrate in line with the new theology. The elector sent word that Karlstadt was to do no such thing. Karlstadt responded that in that case he would do it on Christmas Day. This may have been less bull-headedness on Karlstadt's part than an attempt to forestall another riot. Also, when events begin to take on a momentum of their own it is sometimes necessary for leaders to run fast in order to get out ahead of the crowd. Certainly what was most important for Karlstadt was that the mandates of God take precedence over the concerns of others, whether they be a prince's concern for maintaining order or a pastor's that his congregation not be scandalized. To Karlstadt, grace was costly, for it meant keeping in step with Jesus and scriptural norms rather than with the prevailing culture.

Christmas Eve was neither silent nor holy: gangs roamed the streets, threatened priests, and disrupted services. The next day Karlstadt celebrated communion in the castle church without vestments; dressed as a layman, he pronounced the consecration in German and distributed communion in both kinds. Karlstadt did publicly what Melanchthon had done privately with his students some months earlier. This was the "sign language" of anticlericalism, and the public break with a millennium of tradition. The congregation, including both community and church leaders, communed without having previously fasted or gone to confession. The fact that those communing took the chalice in their own hands, and that a host was dropped on the floor, deeply offended contemporary sensitivities. Karlstadt announced that the next evangelical celebration of the Lord's Supper would be New Year's Day in the city church, a parish not under his jurisdiction. To say the least, the Christmas mass was a sensation and a public rejection of tradition. It was a hard act to follow, but in his zeal to translate theory into practice, he at least equaled it. The next day he was betrothed.

In the meantime more tinder was added to this already volatile mix by the arrival of the so-called "Zwickau prophets." Zwickau, a city in the southern part of the electorate known for trade and its cloth industry, had a history of social tension between its wealthy upper class and the poor journeymen of the cloth industry. Waldensian and Hussite influences prior to the Reformation abetted these tensions and also prepared the ground for widespread sympathy for Luther. Thomas Müntzer (see Chapter 6) had since May 1520 been preaching there to the socially discontented from his pulpit in St Catherine's church, in the parish where most of the lesser artisans belonged. His critical

preaching led to his expulsion from the town in April 1521. During his brief ministry in Zwickau Müntzer met and encouraged the religious ideas of Nicholas Storch, a master clothier, Thomas Drechsel, a weaver, and Marcus Thomae, a former Wittenberg student known as Stübner. These three men, "the Zwickau prophets," were themselves forced out of the city because of their radical religious ideas, which included the rejection of infant baptism and convictions of immediate divine revelations by the Spirit of God. They arrived in Wittenberg soon after Christmas claiming divinely inspired dreams and visions of a great Turkish invasion, the elimination of all priests, and the imminent end of the world. They further claimed that people are to be taught by God's Spirit alone who has no connection to Christ and the Bible. Melanchthon was unnerved by them and urged the elector to allow Luther to return. Karlstadt did not seem to be taken by them, and the elector did not think it wise to recall Luther. The Zwickau prophets soon moved on in search of greener pastures, their main contribution having been to undermine Melanchthon's leadership.

On 24 January the town council endorsed the changes in the mass as well as another of Karlstadt's causes, the elimination of images. Two weeks earlier Zwilling had led the monks remaining in the Augustinian monastery in removing its images, smashing the statues and burning whatever was combustible, including the consecrated oil used for extreme unction. Karlstadt had been preaching that Old Testament law forbade images, and he kept up the pressure until the council named a day for the removal of images. The result was more violence and disorder.

The widespread destruction of the images and symbols of the old faith that accompanied the introduction of reform movements was not mere vandalism but rather a ritual action that both deconstructed Catholicism and contributed to the construction of Protestantism, and was all the more powerful because the image-breakers had only recently been the image-makers. The "ritual process" of the Reformation was a metaphysical shaping of the world according to new convictions. Destroying images, or degrading them by unusual placement or by urinating or defecating on them, drove "the pope and papal religion out of the minds and hearts of those who took part." The iconoclasts viewed images as "voracious idols" which devoured resources but produced nothing in return. Icons and altars represented the displacement of charity from the poor to lifeless objects (Scribner 1987: 103–22; Eire 1986; Wandel 1995).

This understanding helps to explain the influence of Karlstadt's tract, *On the Abolition of Images*. On page after page he emphasized that

images are against the first commandment. There is no excuse, he argued, in the claim that an image – even the crucifix – points beyond itself to God. Christians are to abolish images, just as in the Old Testament the altars to idols were smashed and overturned; for Christ is the continuation of Old Testament law, and God forbids images no less than murder, robbery, adultery, and the like. Karlstadt may well have been motivated by more than just his understanding of the gospel as a new law. Trained as a Thomist, he had imbibed a metaphysics that gave reality to images. The physics of vision of the time reinforced the metaphysics by holding that the eye was passive and acted upon by images (Scribner 1987: 106; Wandel 1995: 27). "My heart was trained and reared from my youth up to offer honor and worship to images, and a destructive fear was produced in me which I desire eagerly to rid myself of, but cannot. Thus I stand in fear that I burn no idols. . . . Although I have and know the Scripture that images do not have influence . . . nevertheless . . . fear held me and made me stand in fear of a painted devil" (Karlstadt 1522: 19).

Since, Karlstadt argued, the priests have perverted God's law and thereby hindered the faithful, the magistrates should follow the example of King Josiah and forcibly reform the church. Only days earlier, on 20 January, the imperial diet, meeting in Nuremberg, had issued a mandate that criticized Electoral Saxony for innovation and demanded that all innovations concerning religious practice be nullified under threat of punishment. Needless to say, Elector Frederick was not about to begin emulating King Josiah. Melanchthon was told to silence Zwilling, and Karlstadt was directly requested to stop preaching. The town council was forced to compromise its program to implement reform. By now Melanchthon was having a bad case of nerves; he appealed to Luther to return from the Wartburg and restore order.

News of Luther's intention to leave the safety of the Wartburg for the upheaval of Wittenberg did little for the elector's peace of mind. He wanted his rambunctious professors to keep a low profile. Thus, soon after he had ensconced Luther in the Wartburg, he sent Karlstadt off to Denmark to get him out of town too; but Karlstadt had returned to Wittenberg in only two weeks and had since thoroughly stirred the pot. Frederick wrote Luther to stay put. Luther's replies reflected his faith and confidence, as well as making a dig at Frederick's relic collection. "To my most gracious Lord, Duke Frederick, elector of Saxony . . . Grace and joy from the God the Father on the acquisition of a new relic! I put this greeting in place of my assurances of respect. For many years Your Grace has been acquiring relics in every land, but God has now heard Your Grace's request and has sent Your Grace without cost or

effort a whole cross, together with nails, spears, and scourges" (*LW* 48: 389). Soon after this letter, Luther informed the elector he would return to Wittenberg in spite of the elector's wishes because he must obey God rather than any secular government. "The sword ought not and cannot help a matter of this kind. God alone must do it" (*LW* 48: 391). We shall have occasion later to refer to Luther's rejection of the use of force or government for support of religion. For now, it is important to call attention to Luther's conviction, a conviction he was to hold consistently throughout his career, that to enforce the gospel by law is to change the gospel into law and thereby pervert the Reformation. What is free cannot be compelled.

Luther arrived in Wittenberg on Friday, 6 March 1522. The following Sunday he began a series of sermons known as the "Invocavit Sermons" after the liturgical name of that Sunday, Invocavit, the first Sunday in Lent. The theme of these sermons was the distinction between an evangelical "may" and a legalistic "must." Luther emphasized the centrality of the gospel which frees persons from sin and makes them children of God. He then spoke of the inseparability of faith and love. Faith active in love gives patience for the neighbor who may not yet be equally strong in the faith. Some of the Wittenbergers were not yet ready for the implementation of reforms, for they saw these liturgical innovations as ungodly. Luther's concern was not with the reforms initiated but rather with their haste and compulsion. "The cause is good, but there has been too much haste. For there are still brothers and sisters on the other side who belong to us and must still be won" (*LW* 51: 72).

Figure 4.1 (a) "Lament of the Poor Persecuted Idols and Temple Images," ca. 1530, ascribed to Erhard Schön. This is one of the earliest renditions of the iconoclasm that followed in the wake of the Reformation. To the left is a church "cleansed" of images, which are being burned to the right. The remaining bare altar with only two candles burning on it reflects the Swiss Reformed rejection of ecclesiastical artwork. Above the fire is a man whose wealth is indicated by his large sack of money and the large wine flask. He gestures towards the iconoclasts and has a large beam in his eye that illustrates the parable of seeing a splinter in someone else's eye but not noticing the beam in one's own (Matthew 7: 3; Luke 6: 42). The point is that removal of images does not remove idolatry, in this case that of wealth, and reflects Luther's point that idolatry is not located in images but in people's hearts. This satirical critique of iconoclasm is also seen in the man who takes up the cross – for vandalism. (b) Rage against the gods who fail the people, a reaction not limited to narrow religious contexts, was widely seen in the destruction of the symbols of communism after the dissolution of the USSR.
Sources: (a) Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, (b) Associated Press.

In Luther's perspective, Karlstadt has been preaching "must-y" sermons. That is, the sacrifice of order and the consequent offense to the weak resulted from making a "must" out of what is free. Faith is a free gift to which no one can be constrained. Luther opposed the papists but only, he said, with God's Word, not with force. Indeed, according to Luther, God's Word did everything "while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf." Luther is well aware that he could have fomented a revolt within the Empire, but to do so would have been "mere fool's play" (*LW* 51: 77).

Luther argued that forced reform changed the good news into bad news, that is, gospel into law. The history of the church shows, he said, that one law quickly leads to thousands of laws. Furthermore, rushing about smashing altars and destroying images is counterproductive, for it only sets images more firmly in people's hearts. Compulsive zeal not only offends the weak, it creates the suspicion that Christian liberty is being flaunted in order to prove that one is a better Christian than others. "For if you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others just because you take the sacrament into your own hands and receive it in both kinds, you are bad Christians as far as I am concerned" (*LW* 51: 91).

The sermons differentiated reformism from puritanism. The abolition of abuse and the forcible implementation of reform, no matter how correct the theology, does violence to ignorant and unconvinced consciences. The weak need to be started on pablum and then gradually led to the strong meat of Christian freedom. To do otherwise is to be concerned only for outward things and external change. Even worse, in Luther's view, is that it substitutes exhortation for proclamation, the very criticism he had of the medieval piety of achievement. For Luther, the first word will always be what God has done for humankind; only the second word speaks of what humankind ought to do in response. The effect of these sermons was an almost immediate restoration of order. Innovations ceased for the time being and so did the violence.

Throughout the sermons Luther never referred to Karlstadt by name, but it was obvious from the context as well as the content that the two Reformers had divergent models of ministry. Each derived his model from the historical and theological resources of the church in an effort to respond constructively to social, political, and religious unrest; and each believed his model was incompatible with that of the other. This tension led in the coming years to an angry parting of the ways, Karlstadt's expulsion from Electoral Saxony, and Luther's vehement attack on him in the treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525). However, it also needs to be said that in the aftermath of the Peasants'

War, Luther saved Karlstadt from disaster by taking him and his family into his own home and obtaining permission for Karlstadt to remain in Electoral Saxony if he would only keep quiet.

There has been a persistent tendency in Reformation studies to equate the initiation of the Reformation with Luther. However, it was Karlstadt who tried to implement the new theology while Luther was in the Wartburg. Karlstadt lived out his theology of regeneration in the face of tremendous pressures, the greatest of which to him was the Spirit of God. Luther later remarked that Karlstadt seemed to have swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all (*LW* 40: 83). But Karlstadt's impatience with the slowness of implementing reform had biblical roots (e.g. Matthew 7: 21; 10: 34–8), and that impatience was to become evident in other centers of the reform, such as Zurich. Wherever the Reformation was introduced there was tension between those who advocated rapid, radical reform and those who insisted on gradual reform. In his later tract *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly* (1524), Karlstadt gave the following analogy to clarify his drive to implement reforms and his opposition to gradualism: "If I should see that a little innocent child holds a sharp, pointed knife in his hand and wants to keep it, will I show him brotherly love when I let him keep the dreadful knife . . . or when I break his will and take the knife? . . . When you take from the child what injures him, you do a fatherly or brotherly, Christlike deed (Sider 1978: 65; Baylor 1991: 49–73). To Karlstadt, genuine brotherly love "would forcibly break the will of fools." Hence, in the context of the recovery of the gospel, "each congregation, however little or great it may be, should see for itself that it acts properly and well and waits for no one" (Sider 1978: 65, 56).

The events in Wittenberg raised the perennial questions of every reform movement. Once reform is underway should it be gradual or radical? How will it be controlled? Who will guide it? Where will it lead? Where will it stop? With the unfolding of events in Wittenberg the Reformation became a social and political movement. As a social movement involving the elector, the town council, and the commune as a whole, it was no longer coterminous with Luther's personal breakthrough to the gospel. The Reformation had already become Reformations. Luther's sense of this is reflected in a passage of his *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard against Insurrection and Rebellion*, written from the Wartburg after a secret visit to Wittenberg in early December, 1521.

> I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. What is Luther? After all the teaching is not

> mine [John 7: 16]. Neither was I crucified for anyone [1 Corinthians 1: 13]. St Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, would not allow the Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I – poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am – come to have men call the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians, after him whose teaching we hold. (*LW* 45: 70–1).

It was a fine appeal, but it would not inhibit people from reading and hearing Luther's precious Scriptures differently from how he did. And so Luther came to identify with St Paul and to embrace the view that those who differed from him were, like those who had differed from St Paul, "false brethren" (Edwards 1975: 112–26).

Suggestions for Further Reading

Mark U. Edwards, Jr, *Luther and the False Brethren*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975

Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986

Calvin Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984

James S. Preus, *Carlstadt's "Ordinaciones" and Luther's Liberty: A Study of the Wittenberg Movement 1521–22*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974

Ronald J. Sider, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: The Development of his Thought 1517–1525*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974

Ronald J. Sider, *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther: Documents in a Liberal–Radical Debate*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978

Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995