



Hans-Jürgen Goertz, James M Stayer, eds. *Radikalität und Dissent im 16. Jahrhundert: Radicalism and Dissent in the Sixteenth Century.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002. 233 pp. EUR 38.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-428-10744-5.



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G. H. Williams Re-Revisited

The volume under review publishes papers delivered at a symposium held in Wittenberg in 1999 under the auspices of the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte and the Society for Reformation Research. Its organizing problem is a question often posed to undergraduates: “How radical was the Radical Reformation?” Does it deserve a second treatment by distinguished authors in the field after Hans Hillerbrand’s edited volume, *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation. Divergent Perspectives* (1988)? One of the new editors, James Stayer, contributed to the earlier volume, which scarcely receives a mention in this one, while the previous editor and another of his contributors, Günter Vogler, are again featured in the new one. Hillerbrand’s slim volume had seven articles in English; its successor includes twelve articles, half of them in German. Five of its offerings are largely devoted to general considerations arising out of the debate launched by G. H. Williams, whereas in 1988 five out of seven were more specialized contributions. While this volume includes ample surveys of the historiography—with occasional duplications—and discussions of the meaning of “radicalism” and “dissent,” nowhere is the fundamental distinction explicitly explored between, on the one hand, what would have been regarded as outside accepted norms and beyond the pale in the context of late

medieval theology and political and social thinking, and, on the other, what has come to be accepted as radical after the revolutions of 1789 and subsequent events.

Nevertheless, the reader can profit from the varied diet of differing views included, although the fruits of original research are rare. After his introduction to the historiography and summary of the following papers, Stayer points to the shift in recent research from leaders of radical/dissident movements to their followers, although only the last two papers in this collection pursue that route. Stayer’s second contribution traces the familiar course of Anabaptist historiography. In “Die Radikalität reformatorischer Bewegungen. Plädoyer für ein kulturgeschichtliches Konzept,” Goertz claims that, if anything, the whole Reformation was radical. He advances the by now accepted criticisms of Williams, that revolutionary tendencies grew out of disappointment at hopes placed in the state, not its rejection, that Williams ignores fluctuations in time over attitudes towards the state, and that he did not establish the radical nature of the theology of all the many groups discussed in his monumental work, *The Radical Reformation*, in its three burgeoning editions (at some 1,500 pages, the third edition of 1992 was 50 per cent longer than the first of 1962). For Goertz the term “radical” should be applied to all who sought social change, including break-

ing with the papacy, and to pacifists and mystics as well. While applying this post-1789 definition to all reforming movements, he will not allow for degrees of radicalism to have any meaning. Variations in radicalism may rather be seen in the contrasting reception of common ideas by different social groups, as consequences were drawn from original Reformation principles. This “cultural” interpretation of the Reformation postulates different forms emerging from the process of struggle between individuals and groups in the early years. This period of “experience” was followed by a more settled one after 1530, another stimulating assertion with which many may disagree.

Scott Hendrix (“Radical Agenda, Reformation Agenda: The Coherence of the Reformation”), firmly rooted in the sources as well as the literature, gives a foretaste of his splendid recent book, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (2004). All the Reformers were dissenters, but there was dissent within dissent. They merely disagreed on how to implement a common agenda of re-Christianization (following the interpretation of Jean Delumeau), which involved establishing a more Christian society, whether that was in the form envisaged by Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, the peasants in 1525, the Anabaptists in Münster, the Moravian Hutterites, or others. For him the parallel pursuit by different groups of this common agenda is more important than any supposed decline from an original communal form of Reformation to an etatist one.

Günter Vogler (“Konsens-Konflikt-Dissens: Das Exempel Thomas Müntzer. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag”) accepts the arguments of Goertz and Hendrix and goes on to analyze the forms of conflict that led Müntzer to abandon his original path. Only when his theological demands were resisted by secular authorities did he turn against them. As the Reformer changed while not abandoning basic principles, so too has his erstwhile Marxist biographer. A review of the mostly imperial and Protestant edicts against Anabaptists is provided by Eike Wolgast in “Stellung der Obrigkeit zum Taufertum und Obrigkeitsverständnis der Täufer in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts.” This survey may be unoriginal, as Stayer claims in his introduction, but is useful to have. All attempts by the Protestant authorities to agree upon a common policy towards the Anabaptists ran into the sand when it came to implementation; they could agree on how to identify Anabaptists, but not on how severely they should be punished. As is well known, the Anabaptist response to secular authority was equally varied between the poles of Balthasar Hubmaier

and Michael Sattler’s Schleithem Articles.

R. Emmet McLaughlin revises Williams’ spiritualist sub-categories of evangelical, rational and revolutionary in “Reformation Spiritualism: Typology, Sources and Significance.” Major emphasis is placed on the roots of spiritualism in Plato and differing neo-Platonist schools, as well as in late medieval trends. Williams’s chosen examples, Caspar Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Franck, and Münster, are analyzed as “the step-children of late medieval Catholicism.” Schwenckfeld is also the lynchpin of Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann’s “Spiritualistische Exegese im Streit. Brenz, Soto, Schwenckfeld, Flacius,” an analysis satisfactorily saturated in quotations from, and summaries of, the original texts. Lutheran exegesis was under threat from both Catholic and radical quarters. In the Württemberg Confession (1552), Johannes Brenz relied on *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* to refute the Catholic tradition defended at the Council of Trent and by the Dominican Pedro de Soto (former chaplain to Emperor Charles V) in *Assertio Catholicae fidei* (1552), while declaring Schwenckfeld a heretic lacking exegetical discipline. In a lengthy Latin treatise of 1556 (*In Apologiam Confessionis [...]*), written in a sharply polemical and vulgar Reformation manner, Brenz deliberately misinterpreted the Catholic tradition of interpretation as philosophical and inspired by the Jewish Kabbalah, while ignoring the interconnections between philology, dogma and exegesis. By contrast with Brenz, the main aim of Matthias Flacius Illyricus was to refute Schwenckfeld’s reliance on the spirit as the higher and inner Word, superior to the lower written Scriptures. Brenz had made the mistake of relying on the spirit when opposing de Soto, which left no defense against Schwenckfeld’s more extreme views. *Sola scriptura* and *sola fide* were still fixed principles in Flacius’s *Claves Scripturae Sacrae* (1557). The Bible had to be interpreted historically to yield dogma, but the original texts had to be purified to yield the divine original. Only dogma, served by learned philology, could determine the true sense of Scripture. This circular argument ruled out a spiritual interpretation like that of Schwenckfeld. In this way, Lutheran orthodoxy was paradoxically defined by someone considered on the fringe by most orthodox Lutherans.

Turning to the wider effects of radicalism, Gary K. Waite explores “Radical Religion and the Medical Profession: The Spiritualist David Joris and the brothers Weyer (Wier).” Joris corresponded with several physicians, though only possibly with Johannes Weyer, the Cleves court physician and polemicist against witchcraft beliefs. The spiritualist distinction between spirit and

flesh may have helped doctors to separate the spiritual or diabolical causes of illness from the physical. Joris certainly denied the existence of the Devil and therefore of the Devil as a cause of illness. Matthias Weyer did discuss his spiritualist views with his brother Johannes; however, there is more mileage in Waite's contention that Johannes (who like his duke had Lutheran leanings but never left the Catholic Church) was familiar with spiritualist writings than in his circumstantial evidence that Johannes had contact with Joris or knowledge of his views.

Providing these essays with some broader context, Susan Karant-Nunn gives a polished summary of what is already known about the continuation of much pre-Reformation culture after the Reformation in "Popular Culture as Religious Dissent in the Post-Reformation era." Robert von Friedeburg ("Untertanen und T ufer im Konflikt um die Ordnung der Welt: Das Beispiel Hessen") makes a fundamental distinction between the view by state authorities of the Anabaptists as a danger to public order and mistrust of them by local communities because they excluded themselves from the society of their fellows and condemned their churchgoing and lifestyle. Inquisition records show that only a few parishioners were accepting of the Anabaptists, though interestingly, examples can be found of pastors who preached that Anabaptists were better behaved Christians than their own flock, using language not dissimilar from that of the Anabaptists themselves. The Anabaptists in turn declared their loyalty to the state, which was more tolerant in Hesse than elsewhere, at least to the extent of allowing repentant Anabaptists readmittance to the established Church.

Whether this argument, based on a few sources, can be replicated in other areas presents an interesting line for future research.

At the end of the volume, a token non-German case study is surveyed by James D. Tracy in "Begrenzter Dissens. Die rechtliche Stellung nichtcalvinistischer christlicher Gemeinden in Holland, 1572-1592." As in Hesse, the established Church had to compete with the dissidents, here Mennonites, in creating a disciplined church for those who wanted one, but had to allow a degree of freedom to the multitude of other churches and even the Jews. The latitude allowed to dissidents was not the product of a unique social order or a tolerant national character, but of years of conflict with Spain, which required that those of all religions be kept loyal.

For me, the more stimulating essays are those by Goertz, Hendrix, Schmidt-Biggemann and von Friedeburg, but others will surely find their own favorites. It is perhaps not surprising, but nevertheless regrettable, that a conference of German and American historians to discuss the Radical Reformation failed to investigate either Austrian or Swiss forms of dissent, let alone those further afield. As long as there is no other typology of the whole range of Reformation dissent other than Williams's--and who would venture to match his enormous range?--discussion will probably continue to center on his views, but one may hope that a third volume devoted to discussing his ideas will wait a few years until newer methods of studying the radicals from the bottom up have yielded more fruit.

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