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Introduction

SEVERAL PARALLELS BETWEEN THE radical Christian movements inspired by Latin American liberation theology and sixteenth-century Anabaptism can quickly be discerned. Both movements exploded into life inspired by a powerful new idea. For the sixteenth-century Anabaptists this was that New Testament baptism is only for those who already have a personal faith in Christ—believers’ baptism. For the twentieth-century Latin American liberation theologians, the crucial new realization was that God’s concern about poverty is an all-embracing biblical priority—the preferential option for the poor. Both movements built upon a newfound, or re-appropriated, concept and then applied its insights to contemporary religious and secular life. Both movements emerged in continents that were deeply Catholic in religious affiliation and can, in some ways, be viewed as renewal movements emanating from within that Church. In both movements there were concerns to reshape Church and Society in general in the light of their discoveries, accompanied by attempts to create local congregations as authentic Christian communities. Both movements asked radical questions about the political and religious status quo and made moving appeals for liberty, and for freedom of conscience. Examples of enormous courage—shown in the face of persecution, harassment and often death—abound in each context. Both movements engendered very high levels of mistrust, indeed paranoia, among the secular and religious authorities of their day. Both also encouraged lay leaders who played key roles, and both also allowed women to exercise some leadership roles. In

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both of these movements, too, there was a deep commitment to evangelization, in its many expressions, which resulted in their expansion, especially among communities of the poor.

But there was also a key difference. Those committed to liberation theology hardly ever questioned the presuppositions of a Church-State ecclesiology, for all of their dissatisfaction with them. Many Anabaptists, in contrast, abandoned the Christendom ecclesial model within a few decades. Some reasons for this significant point of discontinuity will emerge over the course of this book. It will, however, also become clear that separatism was not an inevitable or consistent theological conclusion for Anabaptism, especially when Central European examples of the movement's development are brought into the equation. One significant and relatively new aspect of contemporary Anabaptist research is the rediscovery that the movement was not simply confined to Western Europe. The melting of "The Iron Curtain" has helped to open up a large new field of Anabaptist studies as, among others, Karin Maag has indicated: "It is a curious fact that one can read most general histories of the Reformation without being strongly aware that there *was* a Reformation in Eastern Europe . . . The almost total exclusion of lands such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia (as it then was) and Poland from free cultural and political interchange with neighboring lands to the west for 45 years from 1945 had a hugely distorting effect."¹ This book draws on Anabaptist materials from Central and Eastern Europe—in the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Czech lands including Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, and Transylvania especially. This book is, then, one which seeks to bring creatively together two areas of theological research—Anabaptist studies and liberation theology.

The methodology adopted in this comparative process—one of holding up mirrors from one movement to the other—will, it is hoped, be vindicated by the ecclesiological insights that result. The scale of this book is, however, an ambitious one involving two major religious movements, each capable of generating many doctoral theses in and of themselves. The options for chapter themes and examples are accordingly manifold. No claim is made then that the six themes chosen for this book—origins, contextual responses, opposition, faith-community building, use of Scripture and evangelistic practice—are comprehensive ones. The cornucopia of examples chosen, nonetheless, demonstrate the fruitfulness of a comparative approach. Taken together, they help to open up the heart of radical Christianity. It should also be noted here that a predictable chronological

1. Maag, *Reformation*, 1–2.

framework for each chapter has been deliberately avoided. The chapters do not necessarily start with an Anabaptist point of reference and then move on to a similar Latin American one. Instead, related examples are interwoven—having first been drawn from the lives and literature of participants in both movements.

Contemporary Anabaptist studies still largely operate within a framework established by a small number of scholars. Harold S. Bender argued in 1944 that Anabaptism was the fulfillment of the Reformation, truer to the original vision of Luther and Zwingli than they were themselves.² At its heart, he argued, it was an attempt at *restitutio*—the recreation of the original New Testament church, envisaged by Christ and the apostles. Discipleship, for him, was the essence of Anabaptist Christianity, coupled to its discovery of a new congregational ecclesiology. It was also, as Bender affirmed with some pride, the first religious movement in history to advocate religious tolerance based on freedom of conscience. Evangelical Anabaptism, he argued, was the pioneer movement which gave rise to many of the core convictions of contemporary Protestantism, thus playing a key and formative role in the development of World Christianity. George Huntston Williams' monumental 1962 work *The Radical Reformation*, with its subsequent revised and expanded editions, made a more substantial case for this re-instatement. Indeed Williams introduced so much new material that, over 40 years later, his work remains indispensable to researchers of what has been called “the left wing of the Reformation.”³ He drew out the many nuances of Anabaptism so convincingly, and in such detail, that almost all attempts to claim that it was a uniform movement, sharing agreed core convictions from the very beginning, are doomed to failure. His contention that, for example, there were other types of Anabaptist radicals than Evangelicals—for example the Spiritualizers and (his own ancestors in the faith) the rationalist Unitarians—is incontrovertible. James Stayer's works on the sword and on community of goods within the Anabaptist movements built on Williams' methodology. Stayer also emphasized the considerable diversity within these radical movements during the first three decades or so of their existence.⁴

C. Arnold Snyder's review of the various Anabaptist movements, published some 30 years after Williams, synthesizes the approaches of

2. Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision.”

3. Bainton, “The Left Wing of the Reformation,” 41–45.

4. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*; and Stayer, *The German Peasants' War*. See also Stayer et al., “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis.”

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Bender, Williams and Stayer.⁵ His research contains many examples of diversity and nuancing but, nonetheless, argues that there were core convictions during Anabaptism's early decades: "In spite of the fact of multiple origins and a variety of ideological influences, there was nevertheless a coherent core of belief and practice that was common to all sixteenth-century baptizers."⁶ This core included the Apostles' Creed, anti-sacramentalism, anticlericalism, belief in the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith, and these convictions—the presence of the Holy Spirit as the community gathers, the importance of both Word and Spirit in discipleship, the need for both faith and works, and an eschatology characterized by the conviction that they were all living in the last days.⁷ Snyder also suggested that there was a common Anabaptist ecclesiology that included five core ingredients. Baptism is for adults and only after prior teaching and faith. The ban—the Anabaptist practice of excluding those deemed to have sinned from membership of their communities for a period—is the preferred biblical method for admonition and discipline. The Lord's Supper is a service of remembrance that must be closed to the non-baptized. Mutual charitable support is necessary because none can lay claim to earthly goods, and belonging to a faith community means being willing to suffer and persevere to the end.⁸

A lengthy challenge by Snyder to the views of a German advocate of early Anabaptist uniformity—Andrea Strubind—in the pages of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 2006 replayed, in many ways, the differences between Bender's approach and those of Williams and Stayer. Here, once again, detailed arguments for and against the diversity within Anabaptism of the early Swiss radical Reformers were rehearsed.⁹ Strubind's argument was that there *were* direct links between the ecclesiology of the proto-Anabaptists in 1523–25 and the separatist theology that emerged during a formative Anabaptist Assembly at Schleithem in 1527. Snyder rejected this, arguing that such a thesis does not do justice to a detailed historical analysis of those years. His arguments with Strubind's views here also helpfully introduce a question near the heart of this book. Two decades ahead of her book claiming that separatism was the Anabaptist

5. Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis," 1–34.

6. Snyder, *Anabaptist History*, 450.

7. *Ibid.*, 142 and 449–51.

8. *Ibid.*, 142.

9. Snyder, "The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism."

movement's consistent stance from its very origins,¹⁰ Snyder had argued for a very different conclusion: “. . . there cannot be, nor has there ever been, a pure believer's Church apart from the world. There has only been an all-too-human people trying to be Christ's faithful Church in the middle of the world, meeting God in *all* human reality, be it 'church' or 'world.'”¹¹ For him, what was at stake was an accurate account of the ancestry of contemporary radical Christians. Do they have roots only in a world-denying group of ghettoized, pietistic Christians who have no empathy with the positives that can flow from constructive Christian engagement with Society? Or are their roots, as Snyder contends, actually in a group of believers some of whom were struggling to engage creatively with an often hostile and dangerous world—one where good people get badly hurt—in order to do gospel good? This book will provide more evidence to support Snyder's judgment here—by demonstrating that both Liberationists *and* some Anabaptists engaged constructively with both Church and State.

A comparative analysis of these two movements, on this scale and in such detail, has not hitherto been attempted. There are those, however, who have anticipated one of the purposes of this book—to examine the connections between the movements inspired by Anabaptism and liberation theology. Williams himself suggested that there were connections between them: “. . . the new Counter Reformation in Latin America and elsewhere with its base communities and its proclamation of God's preferential option for the poor finds resonance and precedent in the sixteenth-century radicals, so many of whom as martyrs placed themselves under the Kingship of Christ rather than submit against their scriptural informed conscience to the mandate of Emperor, prince, landowner, and pluralist prelate.”¹² Under the auspices of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* a Symposium on “Anabaptism, Oppression and Liberation in Central America” was held at LaGrange, Illinois from 13–15 October 1983. The papers were subsequently published in a special supplement.¹³ The symposium co-coordinator Urbane Peachey explained that one of the purposes of the symposium was to ask this question: “How do we come to terms with political and economic structures that perpetuate the untimely death of

10. The full title of her thesis in German is *Eifriger als Zwingli. Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz*. It was published in Zurich by Brockhaus & Oncken in 2003.

11. Snyder, “Relevance of Anabaptist Nonviolence,” 120–21.

12. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 20.

13. Peachey, “Anabaptism, Oppression and Liberation,” 333–451.

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50% of children before they reach their fifth birthday?”¹⁴ In his opening remarks Snyder drew out some contemporary resonances: “Our Anabaptist forebears spoke from a context of oppression and held to a Christian faith and a view of the Christian life that places them far closer to the cries for liberation than we, as a North American church, have grown accustomed to thinking.”¹⁵ A volume edited by Daniel Schipani similarly examined shared themes in the two movements such as discipleship and social justice, attitudes to violence and pacifism, and responses to poverty. Anabaptist scholars such as John Yoder, Arnold Snyder, and Ronald Sider contributed alongside theologians of liberation such as Jorge Pixley, Rene Padilla, and Jose Bonino.¹⁶

Stuart Murray, as part of a quest to reintroduce Anabaptism as a contemporary church option, has also noted its connections with liberation theology. He discerns shared concerns in both movements: “Anyone tempted to dismiss Latin American hermeneutics as derived from and relevant only in its specific context,” he argued, “will find this charge less plausible in light of very similar Anabaptist convictions developed in a quite different sociological and historical setting.”¹⁷ Both movements have enfranchised the laity over against the professionally religious or academic. Both emphasize community hermeneutics, gathering many around the Word of God to reflect on its meaning for their lives and communities. Both emphasize the importance of following Jesus and of *praxis* and have a strong emphasis on the gospels and the historical Jesus. And, for Murray, *both* movements are concerned to challenge the existing social order.¹⁸ A further observation by Williams on the Anabaptists is pertinent here too: “. . . their sense of mission, their rethinking of the biblical revelation and of the central doctrines of faith . . . their achievements in self-government and intra-communal nurture and tutelage . . . despite martyrdom and marginalization would eventually provide models, precedents and even recovered ingredients for the transformation of established churches in their old seats in Christendom and in the propulsion of Christianity

14. Ibid., 334.

15. “Oppression and Liberation—The Quest for an Anabaptist vision.” Opening statements of the four panel members. Ibid., 431–40 (439).

16. Schipani, *Freedom and Discipleship*.

17. Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 233.

18. See Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 228–38 for further suggestions about the inter-relationship between liberation theology and the 16th c. Anabaptist movement.

around the globe.”¹⁹ In this book the ways that these words are also true of liberation theology will be explored.

If Anabaptist studies are currently burgeoning, liberation theology in contrast has experienced a waning of interest after dominating, for a time, much contemporary theology. As Christopher Rowland wrote at the end of the last century: “If book sales offer an accurate guide to its continuing influence, the situation would appear to be rather hopeless.”²⁰ Its story remains, however, an inspirational one and is told here in new ways and from a fresh perspective. For liberation theology also continues to develop. Ivan Petrella has suggested four categories of liberation theology writing, since the collapse of the Berlin Wall: those welcoming its demise; those simply reaffirming the truths of the past; those suggesting revisions to the original project but unable to deliver realistic ways forward, and those who have so revised the original vision that the new liberation theology bears little resemblance to its roots.²¹ This is a helpful guide. Those welcoming its demise include one of the movement’s arch critics, Joseph Ratzinger, later “the German Pope” Benedict XVI. Some of the reasons for his opposition to liberation theology will be explored in chapter four. Other critics are those more closely associated with the tradition of North American evangelicalism, represented by an early analyst of the movement—the church growth exponent Peter Wagner: “The Bible does not indicate that Christians should fight in the Marxist revolution, or should agitate in labor unions, or should publish self-righteous declarations against the large world powers, and then ‘all these things shall be added unto you.’”²²

Others do indeed simply reaffirm the ‘truths’ of the past. Petrella suggests that this is true of, for example, the writings of the theologian widely acknowledged to have initiated the liberation theology movement, Gustavo Gutierrez.²³ But is that wrong? Ideas from the past may need to be re-stated and indeed re-affirmed. This study draws happily from the writings of the key exponents of first-generation liberation theology such as Gutierrez, Jose Miranda, Jose Miguez Bonino, Jon Sobrino, Jose Comblin and the Boff brothers, Leonardo and Clodovis. It also, often, allows them to speak for themselves rather than weakening the force of their writings

19. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1311.

20. Rowland, “The Future of Liberation Theology,” 249.

21. Petrella, “Liberation Theology,” 147.

22. Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 43.

23. Petrella, *Latin America Liberation Theology*, 151.

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with paraphrase or summary. The powerful words of Sobrino are a good example here: “One day [liberation theology] may be obsolete when oppression, demeaning and unjust poverty, cruel and massive repression cease to exist. On that day liberation theology will be obsolete, and this is the day that liberation theologians are working for, even though on that day they will be out of a job.”²⁴ The conviction of the author of this book is that liberation theology will re-emerge even more powerfully as the twenty-first century unfolds—because the majority of the world’s population remain poor and therefore in need both of liberation and a Liberator.

Petrella’s third category—those suggesting revisions to the original Latin American theological project—include Comblin in his turn of the century work, *Called for Freedom*. Liberation theology, he argues there, must find the courage to move in new directions and yet still stay true to its original goals. An always honest and frank guide to the dilemmas facing a new generation of liberation theologians, Comblin makes some key criticisms of liberation theology. For all the talk of the irruption of the poor, they are still far from having power because consciousness-raising is well and good but the actions have not matched up to the rhetoric.²⁵ In the 1970s, it all seemed so simple but how different it all is now, lamented Comblin: “There is no lack of material for a theology of liberation. It is obvious that the problems of that period have not been solved by the new period; they have become even more serious.”²⁶ Comblin goes on to list several of the challenges a contemporary liberation theology faces—the rise and fall of neo-liberalism, social exclusion, the welfare state, the mission of the State, cultural action, urbanization, the role of intellectuals, and spiritualizing trends.²⁷ One of Comblin’s proposed solutions was to commend involvement in new popular democratic movements.²⁸ Another was to allow a theology of freedom²⁹ to refocus the movement: “Liberation theology needs the theology of freedom in order to take its proper place within the whole body of theology and to be received as theology in the fullest sense—and not simply as an appendix to a section in the treatise on justice. . . .”³⁰ Others have also sought to revise this movement.

24. Sobrino and Ellacuria, *Companions of Jesus*, 50–51.

25. Comblin, *Called for Freedom*, viii–ix and 77–78.

26. *Ibid.*, 203.

27. *Ibid.*, 203–17.

28. *Ibid.*, 216–17.

29. See especially here ch. 3, “Freedom and Liberation,” 21–47.

30. *Ibid.*, 48.

Nestor Miguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung attempted, in a joint 2009 volume, to find a new role for liberation theology in the twenty-first century world.³¹ Liberation theology today calls, they argue, for the replacing of “the imperial vision” with a “laocratic” vision for the future of the world and its politics.³² North America, in particular, is in their sights: “While Empire is bigger than the United States, that country has a special place in the formation of Empire today . . .”³³ The naïve assumptions of cultural superiority which failed Iraq so disastrously in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003,³⁴ the use of torture in the war on terror,³⁵ and the effects of the “sub-prime mortgages” catastrophe on ordinary people the world over³⁶ are all used to illustrate the negatives of Empire. Like Comblin before them, the authors are asking a key question: where does liberation theology head when Socialism has imploded and, or so it seems, there is no alternative to Capitalism as a working template for making the contemporary world function? How too can the poor be mobilized to continue the struggle? This task, they declare, will not be easy: “Without a clear perception of the tremendous crisis in which we find ourselves—reaching from the ever greater inequality of wealth to the as yet unforeseeable snowball effects of global warming—real change may not be possible.”³⁷ For these authors a way forward can be found in some of the more recent writings of liberation theology pioneer Leonardo Boff.³⁸ They join him in appealing for a society where economics is subject to social and ecological priorities. Their rhetoric, however, is far more impressive than their ability to outline any feasible program to deliver transformation:

Beginning with the cross and resurrection of Jesus, this new era has begun. In this way, the new *laos* of God incarnates not a nation but a multitude, a “popular’ people,” a new experience of humanity without exclusions. Thus, messianism expresses the anti-imperial, the surprise that upsets history, the necessity of maintaining the meaning of the public, so that the voice of the

31. Miguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*.

32. *Ibid.*, ix.

33. *Ibid.*, 28.

34. *Ibid.*, 153.

35. *Ibid.*, 42.

36. *Ibid.*, 147.

37. *Ibid.*, 158.

38. *Ibid.*, 123.

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laos shows the limits of power, returns meaning to the political, puts into play the hope of the excluded, and redeems the human in the creature, and, with it, the whole dimension of creation.³⁹

The question “But how?” lingers.

Fourthly, there are those who have revised the original vision beyond recognition. Petrella dismisses Daniel Bell’s “end of history” writings here.⁴⁰ Bell argued (writing before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and the subsequent “war on terror” or the traumas the world’s economies faced in the autumn of 2008 and 2011) that Capitalism was now the dominating ideology of the new century. Economic and political liberalism as well as Western culture had triumphed totally after 1989.⁴¹ For Bell, this marked a clear end to the first phases of liberation theology. Now liberation theology must find new ways to bring its challenges to Capitalism: “. . . some of the base ecclesial communities may be enacting Christianity as a form of resistance to capitalism that is better suited to the ‘signs of the times,’ that holds more promise in a post-modern age.”⁴² It also needs to rediscover, he argued, a truth at the heart of Christianity—God’s chosen way to overcome sin and injustice is by forgiveness. The refusal to cease suffering—by which is meant continuing to embrace suffering in order to transform it by forgiveness—is potentially, or so Bell, the greatest strength of a redefined liberation movement. “God in Christ,” he pleaded, “shouldered the cross and refused to cease suffering, defeating sin and injustice by forgiving it, by bearing it in order to bear it away.”⁴³ For Petrella, whatever this is, it is not liberation theology but rather “a death sentence.”⁴⁴ He himself argues, however, that all is not lost: “Liberation theology need not resign itself to a life of quiet domestication.”⁴⁵ What it does need to do instead is to rediscover big historical projects—like Nicaragua—all over again.⁴⁶

39. *Ibid.*, 201–2.

40. Petrella, *Future*, 128–32.

41. Bell, *End of History*.

42. Bell, “Liberation Theology in the Wake of Capitalism’s Triumph,” 1.

43. Bell, *End of History*, 146.

44. Petrella, *Future*, 132.

45. *Ibid.*, 123.

46. *Ibid.*, 121–37. The impact of liberation theology on Nicaragua is explored in chapter 7 of this book.

It also needs to concern itself with issues of human sexuality, race and racism, feminism, immigration, ecology, and globalization.⁴⁷

Those experienced in research will understand well the irony of discovering a summary, in a few sentences, of a subject that has absorbed many years of time and study. In a recent major study of Latin America, Michael Reid summarizes the movement to which much of this book is devoted:

At the same time the Catholic Church—which had blessed injustice in Latin America since the moment a Dominican friar had taken a full part in the capture and murder of Atahualpa, the Inca—had an attack of conscience. Stimulated partly by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and Pope John XXIII, a new current emerged, which preached that the Latin American Church should concern itself primarily with helping the poor. The main impact of liberation theology, as it was called, was to form a network of grassroots ‘base communities’ which agitated for change. But some of its proponents flirted with Marxism and violence. Nearly a thousand priests submitted a manifesto to a conference of Latin American bishops, held at Medellín in Colombia in 1968, in which they differentiated between the ‘unjust violence of the oppressors’ and ‘the just violence of the oppressed.’ That stance would create many martyrs, among both priests and nuns and their followers.⁴⁸

His summary is an accurate one. Exploring the implications of these events represents a significant part of this book’s exploration of the development of liberation theology.

The term “Christendom” recurs throughout the chapters of this book. This is, however, a concept that infuriatingly defies clear categorization. Features traditionally associated with Christendom—often polemically—include treating Christianity as the official religion of an empire, nation, region or city; the assumption that all who live there are Christians by inheritance and birth—except for Jews and Muslims, and the concomitant widespread practice of infant baptism as the symbol of incorporation into *corpus Christianum*.⁴⁹ Other characteristics are an “us and them” world-view with Christian countries and continents set over and against “pagan” lands and regions; the integration of the sacred and the secular in civic and community life; the intertwining of religion and

47. See here the various articles Petrella has included as the editor of *The Next Generation*.

48. Reid, *Forgotten Continent*, 159–78.

49. I.e., a kind of corporate Christianity.

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politics—usually in favor of the ruling powers and with often favorable financial support structures for the Church. The imposition of Christian morality on an entire population, and the use of a “Christian” legal system to control and coerce the immoral, heretics and blasphemers also feature. As does a pyramidal ecclesiastical system with the most important persons being nearer to the top—thus mirroring the hierarchies of ‘secular’ Society—and an often patronizing understanding of the laity and their place in the scheme of things.⁵⁰

Positive appreciations of Christendom are, however, also still heard. Oliver O’Donovan’s measured observation as part of his “. . . word of advice to [Christendom’s] would-be critics”⁵¹ is a helpful one: “The peril of the Christendom idea—precisely the same peril that attends upon the post-Christendom idea of the religiously neutral state—was that of negative collusion: the pretence that there was now no further challenge to be issued to the rulers in the name of the ruling Christ.”⁵² Much gospel good, he argues, can still be achieved by a creative interaction between Church and State. Indeed Christianity is at its best, he suggests, when it is both willing and able to speak truth to those in power. John Colwell has echoed such sentiments: “The error of Christendom was not its confession of Christ’s universal Lordship but its fatal and blasphemous misapprehension of the manner of that Lordship.”⁵³ Christendom at its best, Colwell argues, insists on the lordship of Christ over the whole of life and not just its sacred components: “Does God have two words, one for the Church and one word for the State, a word of grace and a word of law; or does God have but one word, the word of the gospel for both Church and State?”⁵⁴ One understanding of Christendom’s power and potential, frequently adapted by liberation theologians for their own purposes, was to want to use the Church for and on behalf of God’s poor. The Church fails its calling, they insisted, if it acquiesces in the poor’s marginalization and favors only the powerful and the rich. For the liberation theologians the Church could and should work with people of goodwill in diocese and government, cathedral and council chamber, Senate or Synod in the interests of the preferential option for the poor. This kind of vision—for a renewed

50. Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 221.

51. O’Donovan, *Desire*, ix.

52. *Ibid.*, 213.

53. Colwell, “In Defence of Christendom,” 24.

54. *Ibid.*, 28.

Christendom—will be observed often in the course of this book, and not just in Latin America.

It should finally be noted here that a kind of ecclesiological prism will be used to compare these two radical movements. A central task of this book is to examine the critique of the existing model of Latin American Christendom mounted by liberation theology, alongside the reasons for the rejection of the traditional Christendom model by some sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The changes to ecclesiologies in Roman Catholic Latin America in the later twentieth century and in sixteenth-century Europe after Luther, make for a fascinating comparative analysis. Several ecclesiological guides—among them Hans Kung, Ernst Troeltsch, Avery Dulles, Miroslav Volf, Paul Avis, Nigel Wright, Stuart Murray and Oliver O'Donovan—will be drawn on in this comparative process. O'Donovan's advice especially will be heeded here: "A theological account of how this world is ruled, then, must proceed from and through an account of the church. It should not lose itself in the complex suburbs of ecclesiology, a branch of theology threatened more than any other by uncontrolled suburban sprawl; but neither can it afford to take a bypass."⁵⁵

The flow of this book is as follows. In chapter two, New Beginnings, the social, political and ecclesiastical contexts from which twentieth-century Latin American liberation theologies and sixteenth-century Anabaptism emerged are introduced, with particular reference to the Swiss Federation and Peru. These are described as "crucibles." The contextual theologies of two pioneers—Gustavo Gutierrez and Balthasar Hubmaier—are then considered before some of the common factors which gave rise to these two radical Christian movements are listed. Different responses to a key question are also evidenced in this chapter—should radical Christians stay within the existing Church or begin to create a wholly new one? Some Anabaptists broke away and refused even to speak of the "reformation" of the church—with its corollary that a true Christian church existed before them. Instead they worked to re-create the Church from its very foundations, preferring the term *restitutio*—" . . . a Promethean reconstruction of the church from ground zero."⁵⁶ Others continued to engage with and within Christendom, however, despite brutal persecution. Among the Liberationists, in contrast, whilst some very radical alternative—*ecclesio-lae* within *ecclesia*⁵⁷—models emerged, this occurred without any break

55. O'Donovan, *Desire*, 159.

56. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 213.

57. Little churches within the larger Church.

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from the mother Catholic Church. Some of the reasons for these differences will be analyzed later in this book.

In *Responding to Revolution*, chapter three, a template for the development of radical Christian movements is suggested in the light of a remarkably similar series of responses to revolutionary times. Examples of radical Christian social activism in Brazil and of constructive social engagement by Anabaptists in sixteenth-century Germany are given here. Some key differences between the Anabaptist ecclesiologies of Pilgram Marpeck and Menno Simons are noted in the process. Both movements committed to an ambitious program of education in order to defend and promote their new ideas. The adaptation by radical Christians in Latin America of Freire's educational methodology and Anabaptist debates within Polish Reformation Christianity are used as illustrations of this. Both movements used major Church Conferences as vehicles for sharing and advancing their convictions. Medellin, Puebla and several Polish Synods of the 1550s and 60s are referenced here. Both movements also engaged in an often polarized debate about the ethics of violence. The case histories drawn on here are those of Anabaptist terrorism in Munster, the Colombian guerrilla priest Camilo Torres (whose career helped to formulate the terms of the debate on violence within liberation theology), early Polish pacifism, and the "violence of pacifism" as advocated by Helder Camara. Differences in attitudes to Christendom will again be observed here.

In chapter four, *Persecution and Propaganda*, several accounts of the hostility, persecution and harassment experienced by these two communities will be explored. The repression of Dutch Anabaptists will be considered, with particular reference to van Braght's classic martyrology, *Martyrs' Mirror*. The persistence of their hostile treatment, even after some of them fled from Holland to seek refuge in England under several different religious regimes there, will also be examined. In the Latin American context, the cruelties and atrocities that took place in the El Salvador of the 1980s and 90s help to set the context for an examination of this theme within liberation theology. Here the particular focus will be on the theology of the Jesuit priest Jon Sobrino and on Oscar Romero's life, writings and assassination. In the process, the emergence in both movements of ecclesiologies shaped by a theology of martyrdom will be observed.

Chapter five, *Building Community*, examines various experiments in community and congregational life within both movements in the context of a discussion about the helpfulness of terms such as "Church" and "Sect" to define them. What is described as an "ecclesiology of the ordinary" is

here outlined. After an introduction to, and analysis of, the expansion of the Christian base communities in the Latin America of the 1970s and 80s, the development of communitarianism in Western and Central European Anabaptism is considered. The Hutterite communities, especially in Moravia, are examined. Some early Anabaptist convictions are argued here to have been deeply political in their implications. It will also be seen that activists within the base communities usually refused to disengage from Christendom, despite exceptional provocation.

The inter-relationship, for these two movements, of Scriptural truth and everyday life is the subject of chapter six on Word and World. Three shared approaches to the connections between the Bible, Church and Society are considered. Hans Denck, Pilgram Marpeck, and the evolution of a Confession of Faith in sixteenth-century Transylvania receive attention. And in Latin America, Sobrino's re-application of Jesuit spirituality, Carlos Mesters' hermeneutical methodology within the base communities, and the negotiations and compromises that led to the Puebla Final Documents are all considered. A practical spirituality, fed by Scripture, which leads to committed discipleship in the contemporary world, is illustrated with reference to Marpeck and Sobrino. The transformational significance of a newly discovered Scriptural idea is explored using the writings of Denck and Mesters. And the importance of statements of faith to encapsulate radical Christian convictions—often emerging from a process characterized by conflict, tension and compromise within both Church and State—is observed in sixteenth-century Transylvania and in the 1979 Puebla Conference in Mexico.

In *Evangelism and Evangelists*, chapter seven, the focus is on two principal models of evangelization in the two movements—Hutterite Anabaptist mission and the Nicaraguan revolution. A case is made here that these two expressions of evangelism represent a zenith for the two movements. Anabaptist understandings of evangelism—and especially Hutterite mission—are compared with that of the mainstream Reformers. The role that radical Christians played in the program of evangelization that was such a significant part of the Nicaraguan revolution is described here. The two evangelistic models are then compared with particular reference to their underlying assumptions about Christendom. There was far more to Anabaptist evangelism than a ghetto mentality and the saving of souls. Conversely liberation theology, whilst seeking to transform an entire continent, also valued the power and impact of individual conversions and of congregation-building within a living Christian community.

Transforming Faith Communities

Evidence emerges of radical Christian congregations, in both contexts, engaging in constructive mission and, in the process, transforming existing understandings of State-Church relationships.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, a case is made that radical Christianity is not intrinsically or necessarily anti-Christendom and two questions considered at several points in this book are revisited. What can be learned from the experiences of these two radical religious faith communities that might help in understanding similar Christian faith communities in the world today and what are some of the factors that contribute to making such communities world-affirming? Through the chapters of this book, then, many vivid examples of transforming faith communities at work will be in evidence.

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