

Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486-1541)

by Alejandro Zorzin

This fascinating and polemical theologian of the Reformation was born 1486 in Karlstadt, a small town on the River Main in the Franconia region of Germany.¹ His academic studies were in Erfurt (1499/1500-3), Cologne (1503-5) and Wittenberg, where in 1510 he received the degree of Doctor of Theology. That same year he was ordained a priest, and the following year he received the position of archdeacon in the collegiate church of All Saints, the ecclesial foundation connected to the residential castle of the Saxon princes in Wittenberg. The position of archdeacon, second place in the clerical hierarchy, included teaching responsibilities in the theology faculty of the new University of Wittenberg, founded in 1502. Along with his tasks as priest and professor, Karlstadt continued the study of law.

During a stay in Rome from November 1515 to May 1516, he obtained the doctorate *utriusque iuris*, that is, in both civil and canon laws, from the Sapienza, the University of Rome.

Upon his return to Wittenberg he felt challenged by the innovative theological proposals of his colleague Martin Luther, which he debated in the September 1516 academic disputation for Bartholomäus Bernhardi, *De viribus et voluntate hominis sine gratia*. Although he initially questioned Luther's position, he soon began to study in depth the works of Augustine and thereby became an adherent of the "new theology" of Wittenberg. His support of Luther's position became evident with his publication on April 26, 1517 of 152 Augustinian theses *on nature, law, and grace*. Between 1517 and the beginning of 1519, he lectured on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*. But furthermore his theology also expanded beyond the scholasticism of his initial studies through the important contributions of German mysticism (Tauler and Johann von Staupitz) and Renaissance philosophy (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus).

Around the beginning of 1519 Karlstadt began to spread the new Wittenberg theology of grace through pamphlets written in German. Together with Luther he defended the Wittenberg theology against Johann Eck, professor of theology at Ingolstadt, at the Leipzig Disputation (June 27 to July 15, 1519). In the summer of 1520 Eck included Karlstadt in the Roman bull threatening excommunication, *Exsurge domine*. In response, Karlstadt published a harsh pamphlet in which he demonstrated "by means of Holy Scripture ... that the holy pope can err, sin, and commit injustices" (October 1520) and thus ended his earlier caution before the Roman See, making public his definite break with the papacy.

During Luther's absence from Wittenberg while secluded in the Wartburg Castle from May 1521 to Februar 1522 following his condemnation at the Diet of Worms, Karlstadt joined with Gabriel Zwilling, Philip Melancthon, Nikolaus von Amsdorf, and Justus Jonas to become one of the driving forces of the "Wittenberg Movement." This group of theologians, in close collaboration with the town Council, implemented a series of concrete reforms of the Mass,

¹ See Ulrich Bubenheimer, "Karlstadt, Andreas Rudolff Bodenstein von (1486-1541)" in *TRE* 17:649-57; idem, "Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Andreas" in *OER* 1:178-80; also Amy Nelson Burnett's "Introduction" (pp. 1-20) to here edition of *The Eucharistic Pamphlets of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*. The major biography of Karlstadt remains that of Hermann Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, 2 vols. (1905).

religious life, and various social aspects of the town. The reforms were condensed and published as *A New Order for the City of Wittenberg* (January 1522) and were intended to convert the town into a model "Christian City" to be imitated by others. However, the transformations provoked opposition from a section of conservative clergy and from the prince elector, who having ultimate political authority over the town did not endorse this demonstration of municipal autonomy. In this context, Karlstadt, disobeying the Prince's prohibition, publicly celebrated an "evangelical" mass on Christmas Day in the Castle Church attended by an enormous crowd of the faithful who, for the first time, were invited to commune under both species. In addition, consonant with his strong criticism of monastic vows and priestly celibacy, Karlstadt married the young Anna von Mochau on January 19, 1522.

Soon after Luther's return in early March 1522, profound divergences appeared between the two Reformers; the university censured Karlstadt's publications, and he began to distance himself from his colleagues and academics.

In June 1523 he began pastoral work in the small rural parish of Orlamünde (on the river Saale in Thuringia) that was incorporated in the prebendary foundation of the Wittenberg Castle Church of which he was archdeacon. There in Orlamünde, between July 1523 and September 1524, he began work as a peasant farmer with the objective of gaining independence from his ecclesiastical income and being able to support his family by manual labor. In this profound change of life he also abandoned his title of doctor, and asked to be called "Brother Andie," expressing his desire to be known as "a new layman." In Orlamünde he initiated a communal model of evangelical reform: celebrating worship in a simple and austere manner, communing the Lord's Supper under both species as a memorial of the liberating death of Christ on the cross, removing images from the church, postponing the baptism of infants, intensifying bible study in open debate with the common people, and emphasizing the great importance and autonomy of the laity in the total life of the church.

However, the offensive that Luther launched in the summer of 1524 against Thomas Müntzer², parish priest in Allstedt, also reverberated against the reform project Karlstadt was leading in the Saale valley. It did not matter that Karlstadt and his Orlamünde parish publicly distanced themselves from the Allstedt defensive alliance against tyrants which they had been invited to join by Müntzer, for Luther included Karlstadt among the "heavenly prophets." On August 22, Luther and Karlstadt had a tense discussion of this charge in the Black Bear Inn in Jena.³ There Luther challenged him to publish his divergent theological views. As soon as a month later, Karlstadt was expelled from the territory by order of Duke John of Saxony.

Karlstadt then deepened his rupture with Luther by a volley of pamphlets, printed in Basel, which spread and defended his views of the Lord's Supper and rejection of infant baptism.⁴ He passed the winter of 1524/5 in the Franconian town of Rothenburg on the Tauber. His detractors implicated him in the peasant rebellions in the area, and Karlstadt ended up a fugitive, unable to gain permission to reside in any territory. At his request, Luther interceded for him before the new prince elector, John, so that he could return to Saxony. In exchange for this asylum, Luther demanded that Karlstadt retract his theological positions and maintain

² Summarized in Luther's *Letter to the Rulers of Saxony concerning the Rebellious Spirit* (summer of 1524).

³ Ronald J. Sider, *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther*, pp. 38-48.

⁴ See Alejandro Zorzin, "Karlstadts 'Dialogus vom Tauff der Kinder' in einem anonymen Wormser Druck aus dem Jahr 1527. Ein Beitrag zur Karlstadtbibliographie," ARG 79 (1988) pp. 27-57.

silence about the debates breaking out within the heart of the Reform movement concerning the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

From mid-1525 until the beginning of 1529 Karlstadt subsisted with his family in the environs of Wittenberg, first as a farmer and then as a peddler. But by the onset of 1529, fed up with tolerating control over all his contacts and movements, he fled Saxony and offered assistance to the lay preacher Melchior Hoffman in a dispute over the Lord's Supper with evangelical theologians in Flensburg, in northern Germany. After passing through Strasbourg, he distanced himself from Hoffman, and with the support of Zwingli he obtained a position as pastor in Zürich.

In 1534 Karlstadt moved to Basel where, after a decade away from academe, he returned to teaching in the Faculty of Theology and actively collaborated in its reorganization. At the same time he played a role as a parish priest in Basel's St. Peter's Church. There he died on December 24, 1541⁵, a victim of the plague, contracted while ministering to the sick.

In light of this brief biographical sketch, it is clear that Karlstadt was a competent theologian and Jurist who began his militancy as Luther's colleague in Wittenberg at the very beginning of the evangelical cause, the cause he continued during the last decade of his life as professor and priest for the Swiss Reformation in the areas of Zürich and Basel. This makes evident that his theology was not only innovative but sufficiently broad to reach between both poles of the Reformation movement. Furthermore, we need to take into account that besides being an initial co-protagonist in the Reform movement that arose in Wittenberg and his later participation in and support of the Swiss Reformation, Karlstadt was also a significant referent for sectors of the so called "Radical Reformation."⁶ There is no doubt concerning the relevance of his person and theology in those intense, stormy years between the Leipzig Debate (1519) and the Colloquy of Hagenau/Worms (1540/1).⁷

With approximately seventy publications spread between 1517 and 1541 in somewhat more than two hundred editions, Karlstadt was one of the most published and prominent spokespersons of the early Reformation movement. The period of his most prolific publication was between 1519 and 1525, when the volume of his published pamphlets in German, directed to the common people (47 pamphlets in some 125 editions), made him one of the most influential authors next to Luther.⁸

Following the renewal impulse of his colleague Luther, Karlstadt rediscovered the anti-Pelagian theology of Augustine,⁹ which he set forth in a series of theses and a Latin text on the

⁵ A commemorative broadsheet published in Basel [1542?] on this occasion, shows an authentic portrait of Karlstadt (small woodcut: 15 x 14,5 cm); image on *Cover* of Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Eucharistic Pamphlets of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*.

⁶ See Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism*.

⁷ An impression that Melanchthon confirmed when in July of 1519 he described Karlstadt as "a good person, of rare erudition and extraordinary culture, as recognized by his writings." Philip Melanchthon, *Studienausgabe* 1:10, 7ff. and Richard Wetzel, "Melanchthon und Karlstadt im Spiegel von Melanchthons Briefwechsel", in Sigrid Looss and Markus Matthias, eds., *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486-1541). Ein Theologe der frühen Reformation*, pp. 159-222.

⁸ Alejandro Zorzín, *Karlstadt als Flugschriftenautor* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), pp. 79-83.

⁹ His lectures on Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* (1517/18-1519), edited by Ernst Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin. Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De spiritu et littera. Einführung und Text* (1952).

dynamics of justification titled *De impii justificatione*, in 1518,¹⁰ that he lectured on in Wittenberg. In his 370 (in reality, 405) theses in defense of Holy Scripture and the Wittenberg theologians (*CCCLXX et apologetica conclusiones pro sacris literis*¹¹) he has a section (theses 177-185) that reflects his theological "about-face." Combining the Psalm verse "I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me" (Ps. 40:17) with the Augustinian paraphrase of Galatians 2:20, *ubi non ego, ibi felicius ego*¹² Karlstadt anticipated *Gelassenheit* (*abnegatio*) as the structural axis of his theology of grace.

At the beginning of 1519 he publicly stated the fundamental opposition between an authentic theologian of the cross and a scholastic theologian of glory.¹³ Around this distinction he outlined the first flier of the "Wittenberg circle." Illustrated by Lucas Cranach, it was published in two editions (Latin and German) with brief explanatory captions. Shortly after this Karlstadt enlarged this work into his first major pamphlet in German.¹⁴ These works and his bitter polemic with Johann Eck make clear that his progressive theological dissent from Luther did not revolve around the question of the (initial) justification of the sinner *sola gratia*, but rather with regard to the impact or subsequent effect of renewal which liberating grace can and ought to have on the social and ecclesiastical reality in which justified Christians are immersed. The first frictions between Luther and Karlstadt over this theme of renewal occurred by mid-1520 in relation to the Epistle of James. Luther considered this epistle spurious, whereas Karlstadt held that it was a work of authentic exhortation to evangelical ethics.¹⁵

Increasingly oriented to the horizon of comprehension of the common laity, Karlstadt took leave from the Latin terminological aspects of theology and began articulating his perception of salvation *sola gratia* in biblical language that highlighted the ecclesial and social consequences of justifying faith. In March 1523 he published an important theological treatise titled *The Manifold, Singular Will of God, The Nature of Sin* on whose title page he called himself "a new layman." A key passage summarizes his synthesis of Augustinian theology combined with the mystics' accent on the Christian's following of the suffering of the cross of Christ:

Where there is true knowledge of God in faith, there the true love and friendship of God are. And where love of God is strong, there too is love of neighbor and orderliness. ... By the new fruits, we know a new tree; and by the old fruits, we know an old one. A person who is new and is found to be in God's will sprouts with new work. If he was hard before, he becomes soft; if he used to steal [see Eph. 4:17-20],¹⁶ he now works with his hands

¹⁰ Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts. Teil I: Das frühe 16. Jahrhundert (1501-1530)*. Band 2, *Druckbeschreibungen H-L* (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica Verlag, 1992).

Microfiches of the original editions. Microfiche No. 1553.

¹¹ Köhler, Microfiche No. 2504.

¹² Augustine, *De continentia* 13:29; see Ernst Kahler, p. 57.

¹³ Thus in a creative manner, Karlstadt popularized the famous thesis 21 of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* of April 1518.

¹⁴ For the flier "*Curus*" and "*Wagen*" see Zorzin, *Chronologisch geordnetes Verzeichnis*, nos. 10 and 11; and Köhler, Microfiche No. 2564.

¹⁵ See Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, vol 1, pp. 197-200.

¹⁶ It is clear that by theft, Karlstadt is referring to a type of economic exploitation, for example, that to which the church subjects the simple faithful. In this same work this point is affirmed in another passage: "We have nothing to expect of the devil's procurers except for harm and injury to body and soul. They are not content with scraping, scratching, and robbing us by being spiritual princes who bring much ill fortune and assist in nothing that is right." Edward J. Furcha, trans. and ed., *The Essential Carlstadt: Fifteen tracts by Andreas Bodenstein (Carlstadt) from Karlstadt*, p. 228.

and earns his bread by his labor. By our fruits we are able to know ourselves and others. Therefore, we must look to what we do. For true knowledge of God and the acceptance of his will break forth and present themselves [in fruits]...¹⁷

This theme returns in his defense against Luther's attacks in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*.¹⁸ There Karlstadt bluntly set forth the consequences of his dissent from Luther's perspective on Christian liberty:

(One may examine and see ...) how it is with one's righteousness, and how the righteousness of the heart is to bring forth works or fruit. It is certainly true that regarding works Scripture does not teach that we are to serve ourselves through them, but others. Nor that we become righteous through them, but merely that we bear external testimony to the power of our righteousness and how it is to show itself when it is true. For a free person does not only stand before God and his conscience, but on earth before the congregation of God.¹⁹

Luther's double thesis in *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520) sets forth the claim that the Christian can be free in the internal sphere of faith and conscience, accepting simultaneously (in solidarity with the neighbor by love) submission to adverse sociopolitical reality.²⁰ For Karlstadt this perspective was too one-dimensional; probably because it privileges the free existence of the Christian in the interior sphere or dimension before God (*coram Deo*), while it relegates to a secondary plane the transforming action that free individuals realize in reality or the social order in the midst of others (*coram hominibus*). Karlstadt's brief leadership in the first attempt at ecclesial and social reform during the "Wittenberg Movement" (1521/22) revealed to him that Luther's perspective on "Christian freedom" permitted postponing the "historical emergencies" of the socially weakest and little ones, thereby theologically legitimating the resistance of other "weak ones" who, socially powerful, refuse to modify those aspects of ecclesial and communal reality that the Word of God unmask as obsolete and corrupt. In biblical terms this posture centers more on the individual than on the whole Community, tolerating the *scandalum pusillorum* (Mt. 18: 6ff.) in order to avoid the *scandalum phariseorum* (Mt. 15: 12-14).²¹ The abuse of the Mass ought to be eliminated, and it can easily be done without generating conflict or rebellion. In a report to the prince elector set forth by the group of theologians engaged in the "Wittenberg Movement," they affirmed that:

No one ought to consider contemplation in the face of scandal or other objection, in the same way as Christ spoke to the pharisees, so that they were scandalized by his teaching that went against their traditions and human laws, Matthew 15 (:14). "Let them alone, they are blind guides of the blind."²² "It is necessary to obey God rather than men" Acts 5 (29).²³

¹⁷ Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, pp.219-20; Köhler, Microfiche No. 2867 (G4^v).

¹⁸ Ronald J. Sider, *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther*, pp. 94-125.

¹⁹ *Several Main Points of Christian Teaching Regarding Which Dr. Luther Brings Andreas Carlstadt Under Suspicion Through False Accusation and Slander*, 1525. Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, pp.376.

²⁰ A situation of *simul liber et subiectus* before the political authorities, the magistrates, would be equivalent to the famous reality of *simul iustus et peccator* before God.

²¹ Ulrich Bubenheimer, "Scandalum et ius divinum: Theologische und rechtstheologische Problem der ersten reformatorischen Innovationem in Wittenberg 1521/22," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Kan. Abt. 90 (1973) pp. 263-342. Karlstadt developed this theme in his *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly and Avoid Offending the Weak in Matters Pertaining to God's Will* (1524), Ronald J. Sider, *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther*, pp.49-71.

²² See Alejandro Zorzín, "Rezeption und Verteidigung der Wittenberger Publizistik im >Spiegel der Blinden<

For Karlstadt as theologian and Jurist, the implementation of changes in those ecclesial and socioeconomic aspects that openly contradict the Word and will of God was an inescapable responsibility for the whole Christian Community.²⁴ This was a radical stance that Karlstadt set forth without reservation in his *Whether We Should Go Slowly and Avoid Offending the Weak in Matters Pertaining to God's Will* (1524):

[W]here Christians rule, they are not to look to any magistrate, but are to strike out freely and on their own and throw down whatever is against God even without [previous] preaching.²⁵

Karlstadt's radicality was a consequence of a programmatic decision in his reformatory theology. In the fifth thesis of a series of 25 formulated for the academic disputation of Jakob Probst (May 13, 1521), he affirmed: "Preachers always ought to lead the people of God towards the interior things (where the Spirit works) and repeatedly call them away from external things."²⁶

That is exactly what Karlstadt sought to put into practice with his proposal *On the Abolition of Images...* (1522). In the face of a traditional religious practice that perverted the reconciliation of the common laity from the authentic faith, and distracted and saturated laypersons with the false worship of external objects, the Reformer demanded these objects be eliminated. To Karlstadt, institutional piety had been "thingified," and he desired the removal (not the destruction!) of images from the churches so that the people might return to the essentials of faith.

I cannot advise anyone who is sick unto death to cling to a carved or painted Crucifix, for the simple reason that these are good for nothing, as I said, and incapable of getting the sick any further than the physical suffering of Christ which is of no avail. As Christ himself says, "The flesh avails nothing," Jn. 6:27. It does not please Paul when you know Christ in the flesh only. He therefore says, "We do not know Christ after the flesh" [2 Cor 5:16]. But those who worship images intend to make the fleshly Christ known to lay persons. This is not good. They prefer to teach how Christ was hanging rather than why he was hanged. They teach of his body, beard, and wounds; but regarding the power of Christ, they do not teach anything. Without the power of Christ, no one will be saved; but without the physical form of Christ, many thousands shall be saved in days to come.²⁷

The above passage condenses and anticipates the argument Karlstadt would use to reject the Real Presence of the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. His *Dialogue or Discussion Booklet on the Infamous, Idolatrous Abuse of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Jesus*

(1522), in: Alejandro Zorzin, *Karlstadt als Flugschriftenautor*, pp.241-149.

²³ In this second dictum of December 12, 1521, they refuted five arguments by which the prince on October 25 had objected to the manner in which they proceeded to reform the Mass in Wittenberg. See Nikolas Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522* (1911), No. 43; pp. 84-90. Bubenheimer provides an in-depth analysis in his "Scandalum et ius divinum." Karlstadt's radical position is presented in his *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly* (published in 1524).

²⁴ "I will pride myself on hating and fleeing from rebellion. So let us hope that my critics by and by do not rise a rebellion leading to nothing good. I proscribe rebellion. But several press the poor people so hard, that I would prefer them acting in a more christian way." (Karlstadt's letter to the saxon nobleman and official representative of the prince elector Hugold von Einsiedel, 4/2/1522), Nikolaus Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, p.104.

²⁵ Erich Hertzsch, *Karlstadt's Schriften aus den Jahren 1523-1525*, 1:96; Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, p. 267.

²⁶ "Contionatores populum dei semper ad interna trahere (ubi spiritus domini operatur) et crebrius ab externis avocare debent. See Hans-Peter Hasse, *Karlstadt und Tauler. Untersuchungen zur Kreuzestheologie*, p.206.

²⁷ Köhler, Microfiche No. 1175. E.J.Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, p.108.

Christ (1524)²⁸ reflects his position by means of a dialogue between three persons: Gemser, a cleric; Victus, a learned layman; and Peter, a lay peasant. Peter is the one who finally develops and defends the correct view of the subject.²⁹ In a similar manner as in his *On the Removal of Images*, Karlstadt set forth his conviction that external splendor and the adoration of the Sacrament distracted the attention of the laity from the essential element of genuine faith, the cross of Christ on Golgotha.³⁰

Peter: Although I am prepared to concede that the body of Christ is united with the bread, I would speak deceitfully and wrongly, however, if I were to attach to waferthin bread so much power and strength as to be able to forgive our sins and bring us peace. That I grant to the bread, I take away from the suffering of Christ. ... [N]ote how Paul directs us to know the remembrance of the bitter death of Christ, which we recall whenever we think back some fifteen hundred years, even though our knowledge and memory extend beyond time and place. No one should be bound to these anyhow, for they contribute nothing toward the forgiveness of sins.

Through this argument in the autonomy given to him by the Holy Spirit,³¹ Peter, the layman, convinces Gemser, the priest, of his error which ends with his admission that "the sacrament is an external thing which cannot save us, nor make us holy, or good, or better, or more just, or free, though we look on it a thousand times."³²

The option for a style of evangelical life - sober and austere - is another essential element in Karlstadt's proposal that makes it "radical." This Option progressively took shape as a distinctive characteristic for some other sectors of the movement and became an extra factor of separation and polemic between the theologians of the "new center" (Luther, Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Rhegius, et al.) and those of the "critical periphery" (Karlstadt, Müntzer, Hubmaier, Hut). Again, the fundamental theology of this choice of life in holiness is rooted in the mystical conception of the centrality of the bitter cross of Christ for the faith and life of the Christian. In a letter that Karlstadt sent between the middle and end of May 1523 to Duke John of Saxony, he laid the foundation of his decision to assume pastoral work in the parish of

²⁸ E.J.Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, p. 269-316.

²⁹ The linking of Karlstadt (in 1529/30) with the lay preacher and missionary Melchior Hoffman may be interpreted in the light of his admiration for the action of the Spirit in simple persons. It is very probable that Hoffman's turn to apocalyptic (when he entered into contact with the group of prophetic, apocalyptic Anabaptists in Strasbourg) led Karlstadt to distance himself from him.

³⁰ In his tract *Von dem Priesterthum und opffer Christi (On the Priesthood and Sacrifice of Christ)* (1523/4), Karlstadt set forth how the devil "by means of many lies" skillfully attains that the priests "make a sacrifice of the bread and wine and thus they do business with much money like Judas with his betrayal; all with the object of building - for their profit and based on this deception - monasteries grander than castles and Cathedral foundations, filling each corner with chapels and devilish houses. ..." The priests, according to Karlstadt, usuriously acquire money and goods from the daily sacrifice of Christ in the Mass. See Köhler, Microfiche No. 175 (C2 verso to C3 verso).

³¹ It is in this place where one may sense the understanding that Karlstadt developed (from 1522 on) on revelation by the direct hearing of the voice of God (and not just through the Scriptures). When the priest Gemser questions Peter the layman who teaches this new perspective on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Peter responds: "The one whose voice I hear yet whom I do not see and of whom I do not know how he came to me and how he left me." When Gemser asks: "Who is this?" Peter responds, "Our Father in heaven." See Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, 281. This represents one of the few passages where Karlstadt provides a glimpse of his "doctrine of revelation by direct hearing" - for which Luther disqualified him as a "heavenly prophet." In spite of this, there is a difference between Karlstadt and Müntzer that may seem at first of no considerable importance: that for Müntzer, divine revelation mediated by visions and in dreams is considered as being final. In any case there exists a reference from Marcus Thomae (called Stübner), one of the "Zwickau prophets", holding a conversation with Karlstadt at the end of December 1521 in Wittenberg. See Müller, No. 63; 136.

³² Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, 294-5.

Orlamünde. To understand what concerned Karlstadt, it is necessary to bear in mind how clergy within the traditional ecclesiastical System enjoyed a series of benefices and special privileges.³³

For the daily profits, that ... I am in the habit to collect and take in Wittenberg, and because in addition I have at my disposal a parish [Orlamünde], from which - being an absentee - I collect a pension, I am criticized with such scorn and insults, that my ears no longer want to hear it. In particular because it has come to my notice that some respectable and upright persons have come to Wittenberg to criticize me and to inform me that I scandalize exceedingly the servants of God and of Christ of the territory [Saxony] and other regions. Furthermore, they would have me request that I rapidly put an end to the mentioned scandal.³⁴

The continuation of the old prebendary system extended sufficiently beyond the beginning of the Reform movement initiated in Wittenberg to generate criticism from some supporters. For Karlstadt, this incoherence between critical-theological speech and the manner of life of those who articulated it compromised the authenticity and credibility of the movement. For this reason he decided to move with his wife to the parish of Orlamünde in order to work there as a parish priest. It is interesting to observe that the "evangelical asceticism" that Karlstadt tried to live in his "dissident phase" (1523-1529) did not attempt to evade the responsibilities, limitations, and risks with all their consequences of an ordinary farmer and family father. At first it was simply a natural "inner-worldly asceticism", that only became the subject of polemic and debate when Luther - bothered by the publication at the end of 1524 of a series of tracts by Karlstadt on the Lord's Supper and baptism - attacked him with the blunt and devastating treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1524/25). Karlstadt's response was equally blunt:

What do you think, Luther, would blisters on our hands not be more becoming than gold rings? When some people leave work in order to preach and go idly as a result, I am surprised that they do not read that Christ was a carpenter who did carpentry work [Mk. 6] and that many prophets were simple peasant folk and that it was prophesied, "I am a tiller of the soil." ... How do you like that, Luther, when you dare write, as I reported, that a preacher may demand and take two hundred guilders a year? ... Paul says to the elders of Ephesus, "I did not desire any of your silver, gold, or clothing, for you know yourselves that my hands served in providing my necessities." But Dr. Luther not only lines his own bastard offspring with silver and gold, etc., but desires the poor man's sweat and blood and extracts it by force. I will write about this some other time.³⁵

Now Karlstadt's early radicalism - and its theology of the cross that differed from the mystical-apocalyptic elements of Müntzer, with whom he maintained contact - rejected any recourse to physical force for its implementation. He ruled out resistance to the reaction of the powerful

³³ Karlstadt received an annual income for this charge - as second within the hierarchy of the chapter - of 130 ducats per year. Of this sum, 80 ducats came from the Orlamünde parish, incorporated as a prebend in charge and attended by a vicar, who received about 17 ducats per year.

³⁴ Letter to Duke John in May 1523 edited in: Eduard F. Hase, "Karlstadt in Orlamünde," *Mitteilungen der Geschichts- und Altertumsforschenden Gesellschaft des Osterlandes*, 4/1 (1854): 91. See, for example, the passionate defense that the masterly layman Valentin Ickelsamer began in 1525 of Karlstadt's austere style of life in his work *Complaint of Various Persons of all the Christians who Support Andreas Karlstadt against the Great Injustice and Tyranny on the Part of Luther in Wittenberg*. Köhler, Microfiche No. 2513.

³⁵ *Several Main Points of Christian Teaching Regarding Which Dr. Luther Brings Andreas Carlstadt Under Suspicion Through False Accusation and Slander*, 1525. Köhler, Microfiche No. 1561 (F2^v); Furcha, *The Essential Carlstadt*, pp.370-371.

who violently objected to a communal plan of reform such as that he had tried to lead in Orlamünde in 1523/4. Karlstadt developed the foundation for his position by an exhaustive exegesis of a key biblical passage, Matthew 11:12. In his *Interpretation of this verse: The Kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force* (July/August 1521),³⁶ he developed the basis of a biblical theology of non-violence in view of the possible reactions to the changes proposed by the Wittenberg group. He had a realistic eschatological anticipation of the consequences for those who followed the cross of Christ and adhered to his Word. They are of the Kingdom of God and because of that they are persecuted. In this situation - of violence to those who support the Kingdom of God - their only recourse is the Word of God. The Word of God ...

... is the hammer with which they crush their assailants; it is the fire with which they consume their enemies; and it is an angelic support, a strong defense and shield with which Christ puts the devil to flight in the time of temptations.³⁷

As a biblical paradigm of the violence that erupts against those who point to Christ "in the same way as did John the Baptist who pointed to Christ with his preaching and forefinger," Karlstadt presents the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah withstood severe critics when he openly reproached the people and their leading politicians "... to abandon God in order to serve the carved and portrayed saints, delighting in carved images [see Lk. 11:51]. The violent cannot tolerate criticism and in response - now as then - take stones and assassinate him by order of the king."³⁸

Already in July 1521, Karlstadt was aware that this violence against the Kingdom of God is not just exercised by the spiritual authorities but also by laypersons, such as jewelers, painters, and sculptors, as in Acts 19.

There are clear biblical passages that show not just priests and clergy exercising violence against the Kingdom of God, but also the group of the powerful, the majority of whom were laity.³⁹

In a certain sense, the brief *Letter from the Community of Orlamünde to the People of Allstedt concerning how one should fight in a Christian way*, published at the end of July 1524, is a testimony that Karlstadt anticipated the radical evangelical non-violence such as that chosen by the "Brotherly Union" at Schleithem (1527) and later by Menno Simons.⁴⁰ The text from his Orlamünde faithful is significant because it ought to suffice to correct the distorted image of Karlstadt and his proposal of radical reform spread by his detractors.

In brotherly fidelity we do not want to conceal from you that we cannot help you with armed resistance (if we have understood your letter correctly). We have not been commanded to do this, for Christ ordered Peter to sheath his sword [Mt. 26:52] and would not permit him to fight for him, because the time and the hour of his suffering were near. Thus, when the time and the hour arrive that we must suffer for the sake of divine justice, let us not reach for knives and spears and drive out the eternal will of the father with our own violence, for daily we pray [Mt. 6:10], "Thy will be done." If you want to be armed against your enemies, dress yourself in the strong, steel-like and unconquerable armor of faith, about which St. Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 6[13-17]. Then you will

³⁶ See Hasse, *Karlstadt und Tauler*, pp.153-72.

³⁷ Köhler, Microfiche No. 2995 (C3^v).

³⁸ Köhler, Microfiche No. 2995 (B4¹).

³⁹ Köhler, Microfiche No. 2995 (B4¹).

⁴⁰ See Calvin Augustine Pater, "Kritische Stellungnahme zu Luthers Karlstadt-Bild", p. 252.

conquer your enemies vigorously and destroy them, so that they will not harm even a single hair on your head."⁴¹

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Chapter 22: "Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1536-1541)", pp.327-337.
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⁴¹ This tract of two pages was printed in Wittenberg by Hans Lufft. The original German text is in Adolf Laube, et al., eds., *Flugschriften der frühen Reformationszeit (1518-1524)*, 1:443f. An English translation is in Michael Baylor, ed., *The Radical Reformation*, pp.33-34.

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