



## The Meaning of Good Works: Luther and the Anabaptists\*

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Luther's stand against the Anabaptists was outspoken and negative. Given the information that was available to Luther in his day this need not be surprising, particularly if one takes into account that Luther defended such central doctrines as infant baptism, two kingdoms, and *sola gratia* versus "works righteousness" (merits gained by good works). Nevertheless, there are good reasons for opening the ancient account. Luther was mistaken in assuming the rapid demise of Anabaptism, and in grave error when he charged them one and all with "works righteousness." While infant baptism and the two kingdom doctrine—therefore also the doctrine of the church and the understanding of state-church relations—still in a way separate us, the concern for good works in a perspective of grace does not, and it may serve as a sound point of contact for further dialogue and rapprochement.

### I.

It was a genuine tragedy that Luther first encountered the Radical Reformation through its fanatical fringe. The so-called "Zwickau prophets"—so named after the city of their origin, and including Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel, and Markus Thomas: Stübner—were very unstable visionaries who disregarded the Holy Bible and the tradition of the church and who had no grasp of the significance of church discipline. They relied on their own visions in the naive conviction that God had directly spoken to them. With utter sincerity Storch announced that infant baptism "had no different effect than if [water] was poured

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over a dog."<sup>1</sup> The crude phrasing was memorable and caught popular attention. Luther did not forget it either. He later lamented: "So they carry on and call it a dog's bath."<sup>2</sup> In this context it cannot be overlooked that the Zwickau prophets arrived in Wittenberg during Luther's absence in 1521, while Luther was hiding in the Wartburg castle. Not only was the city soon in an uproar, but even Phillip Melancthon was significantly confused. Had the "prophets" won, the entire Reformation would have been undone! As Luther rightly saw it, his own return to Wittenberg on March 7, 1522, was required to re-establish order and sense.

The encounters with Thomas Müntzer were also unfortunate. At first, in 1520, Müntzer was recommended by Luther to Johann Silvanus of Eger, called Egranus, now serving in Zwickau. As Müntzer's message became more and more radical, he moved to the town of Alstedt in 1523. Although always closely reliant on biblical texts, Müntzer arranged them in an order

which was uniquely his own—but which he assumed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Müntzer now proclaimed that the Reformation would have to be carried out by violence, eradicating all the opponents. Predictably, Müntzer’s army of some five thousand men was defeated at the village of Frankenhausen on May 15, 1525. Müntzer was captured and after cruel torture quickly beheaded. While the peaceful and evangelical Mennonites would eventually disclaim any association with Müntzer, and were right in doing so, the fact remains that revolutionary ideas were widely spread among many early Anabaptists. Thus plans for a revolution were admitted by the Anabaptists of Königsberg and Fulda.<sup>3</sup> The notorious Hans Krug of Fulda led a group of robbers and on one occasion raped a woman who refused rebaptism.<sup>4</sup> Hans Römer planned to overthrow the city of Erfurt.<sup>5</sup> Hans Hut believed that the Turks would defeat the Christian princes in a battle near Nürnberg. The surviving princes would be later killed by the Turks or, possibly, even by the Anabaptists.<sup>6</sup> The most notorious Anabaptist uprising, of course, took place in the city of Münster. Not surprisingly, Luther assumed that all the radicals would commit crimes of violence as soon as they had the opportunity.

Most unpleasant, however, were Luther’s experiences with Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1480-1541). A fellow colleague at the University of Wittenberg, Karlstadt had originally sided with Luther. Bravely, though unsuccessfully, he debated Johann Eck in Leipzig in 1519 and then rather ineptly guided the reformation in Wittenberg from 1521 to 1522 during Luther’s absence at Wartburg. Luther’s successful return to Wittenberg entailed an outspoken opposition to Karlstadt and a public refutation of his extremism. Evidence had convinced Luther that Karlstadt was without common sense and a thorough fanatic

<sup>1</sup>John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964) 11.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe; Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883-) 26.170.5; *Luther’s Works* (55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1976) 40.258; hereafter cited as *WA* and *LW*.

<sup>3</sup>J. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists*, 69, 67.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 96, 101.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

who, in Luther’s salty words, “has devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all.”<sup>7</sup> Luther was persuaded that the storming of the churches and the breaking of images would only serve as a prelude to a violent revolution, i.e., “to make the masses mad and foolish, and secretly to accustom them to revolution.”<sup>8</sup> On occasion Luther put it even more pointedly: Karlstadt “has a rebellious, murderous, seditious spirit in him, which, if given an opportunity, would assert itself.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore Luther counselled: “Above all, however, Dr. Karlstadt with his gang must be stopped, for he is obdurate and will not be instructed, but goes on justifying and defending his factiousness.”<sup>10</sup>

Admittedly too busy with carrying out the magisterial Reformation, Luther did not explore the entire Anabaptist movement in any depth. Under the circumstances, Luther could not be expected to do otherwise.

## II.

At the same time Luther had very precisely formulated those scriptural principles which he regarded as applicable in the refutation of Anabaptism. Among them the most important insight stressed that God had arranged for salvation to take place in accord with the following steps: “Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the Holy Spirit does not work otherwise than through the Word and the Sacraments.

The main error of Karlstadt—that “presumptuous ass”<sup>12</sup> “with his grovelling Greek”<sup>13</sup>—was that he had attempted to reverse this order and to induce spirituality by outward works. Luther explained: “That which God has made a matter of inward faith and spirit they convert into a human work.”<sup>14</sup> And it does not matter by which particular works “the order of God”<sup>15</sup> is being reversed. Hence Luther’s warning: “Dear friend, do not lightly regard this prohibition of what God has not forbidden, or the violation of Christian freedom which Christ purchased for us with his blood, or the burdening of conscience with sins that do not exist.”<sup>16</sup> Two specific issues may serve as examples.

The radicals advocated and attempted to carry out the violent destruction of images—statues and pictures of Christ and the saints. Luther certainly did not

<sup>7</sup>WA 18.66.19-20; LW 40.83.

<sup>8</sup>WA 18.71.14-15; LW 40.89.

<sup>9</sup>WA 18.72.16-18; LW 40.89.

<sup>10</sup>WA 18.86.25-26; LW 40.103.

<sup>11</sup>WA 18.136.9-16; LW 40.146.

<sup>12</sup>WA 18.104.2 (wilch eyn vermessen esel); LW 40.120.

<sup>13</sup>WA 18.158.34 (mit seyner Kriecherei); LW 40.168.

<sup>14</sup>WA 18.139.2-4; LW 40.148-149.

<sup>15</sup>WA 18.139.13; LW 40.149.

<sup>16</sup>WA 18.141.37-142.2; LW 40.151-152.

see himself as a special defender of images.<sup>17</sup> On occasion Luther had even pressured his elector Frederick the Wise to do away with the collection of relics,<sup>18</sup> each preserved in an elaborate silver or gold encasement. In the meantime hotheads like Gabriel Zwilling interpreted the Bible literalistically—“You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything” (Exod 20:4; cf. Lev 26:1; and Deut 5:8)—and looked for opportunities to destroy images. Karlstadt wholeheartedly supported such efforts and published in their defense his tract *Von Abtuhung der Bilder*.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile unruly mobs translated violent thoughts into angry deeds. This, Luther believed, was a clear case of works righteousness, that is, an attempt to accomplish by human works what can only be done by the divine Word. He explained: “One is obligated...to destroy [the images] with the Word of God, that is, not with the law in a Karlstadtian manner, but with the gospel. This means to instruct and enlighten the conscience that it is idolatry to worship them, or to trust in them, since one is to trust alone in Christ.”<sup>20</sup> When the Word has accomplished

liberation from the magic of the images, the images cease to be harmful and can be dealt with in several ways: “God grant that they may be destroyed, become dilapidated or that they remain. It is all the same and makes no difference, just as when the poison has been removed from a snake.”<sup>21</sup> In the process the Christian conscience has been set free and has gained authentic liberty.<sup>22</sup> “For when [the images] are no longer in the heart, they can do no harm when seen with the eyes.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Luther noted, “he acts contrary to God’s Word,... who only smashes them in pieces outwardly, while he permits idols to remain in the heart and sets up others alongside them, namely false confidence and pride in works.”<sup>24</sup>

Another example of works righteousness Luther saw was in the wholesale rejection of “everything that is found in the papal church.”<sup>25</sup> The results of such a frozen opposition were predictably bleak. For a case in point Luther referred to Karlstadt: “What think you now? Is it not a fine new spiritual humility? Wearing a felt hat and a gray garb, not wanting to be called doctor, but Brother Andrew and dear neighbor, as another peasant, subject to the magistrate of Orlamünde and obedient as an ordinary citizen. Thus with self-chosen humility and servility, which God does not command, he wants to be seen and praised as a remarkable Christian, as though Christian behavior consisted in such external hocus-pocus.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>17</sup>WA 18.73.11-12; LW 40.90.

<sup>18</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950) 205.

<sup>19</sup>*Von Abtuhung der Bilder und das keyn Bedtler vnther den Christen seyn sollen*, ed. Hans Lietzmann (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1911).

<sup>20</sup>WA 18.74.6-10; LW 40.91.

<sup>21</sup>WA 18.74.10-12; LW 40.91.

<sup>22</sup>WA 18.73.25-27; LW 40.91.

<sup>23</sup>WA 18.67.12-13; LW 40.84.

<sup>24</sup>WA 18.68.14-16; LW 40.85.

<sup>25</sup>WA 18.148.6-7; LW 40.232.

<sup>26</sup>WA 18.100.27-101.14; LW 40.117.

In other words, works righteousness is so very destructive, that it cuts one off from grace, faith, and justification. Whoever reverses the order of salvation ends up losing his or her soul. At the same time Luther obviously did not reject the need for good works.<sup>27</sup> He saw good works as the fruits but not as the roots of faith. Luther wrote: “Where there is genuine faith, there good works will certainly follow, too.”<sup>28</sup> This will not be an automatic and effortless occurrence: “Now we do not tell people to believe that all is done when we believe, and that we need not do good works. No, we must not divorce the two. You must perform good works and do good to your neighbor at all times, so that the inner faith of your heart may glow outwardly and be reflected in your life.”<sup>29</sup> Now such statements are not at all rare in Luther’s writings.<sup>30</sup> Hence they attest to Luther’s genuine appreciation of the need for good works.

### III.

While the center of Luther’s thought was the doctrine of justification with its clear foundation of grace, faith, and the denial of merit, the center of Anabaptist religious existence is not so readily defined. The organizing principle has been recognized variously as the doctrine of

the church, the understanding of discipleship, or even anti-clericalism. Consequently the relationship of grace and good works has not always been evaluated with the same interest and intensity.<sup>31</sup> We shall nevertheless make the claim that among the theologically more discerning sixteenth century Anabaptists the *intent* of their religious concerns is clear and unambiguous. Thus, according to Hans Denck, a mystically understood *gratia praeveniens* rules out all works righteousness. Balthasar Hubmaier, known for his defense of free will, points to rebirth as an act of pure grace that enables the will to become free in the first place. Authentic cooperation with God occurs only in the subsequent acts of the will. While salvation then is not gained by good works per se, both faith and good works are participatory in the process which leads to salvation.<sup>32</sup> The most precise analysis of the origin and role of good works, however, is found in the writings of Menno Simons.

With conviction and clarity Menno Simons taught that salvation is “not by our own merits and works, but by grace through Christ Jesus.” Having said this, Menno immediately pointed to Ephesians 2:4-10 as his source and underscored: “not of works, lest anyone should boast.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, Menno Simons

<sup>27</sup>Already in 1520 Luther had published the incisive *Treatise on Good Works*, WA 6.202-276; LW 44.21.114; cf. Ragnar Bring, *Das Verhältnis von Glauben und Werken in der lutherischen Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1955).

<sup>28</sup>WA 32.423.23-24; LW 21.150.

<sup>29</sup>WA 33.168-169.2; LW 23.110.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Egil Grislis, “Luther on Sanctification: Humility and Courage,” *Consensus: A Canadian Lutheran Journal of Theology* 10 (1984) 3-16.

<sup>31</sup>For a clear denial of works righteousness, cf. Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1976) 25-34, while basic obscurity permeates Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973) 78-101.

<sup>32</sup>Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Die Täufer: Geschichte und Deutung* (München: C. H. Beck, 1980) 68-69, 72-73.

<sup>33</sup>*The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956) 504; hereafter cited as *MS*.

was well aware that the followers of the magisterial reformers continuously charged him with works righteousness. Against such an accusation Menno Simons defended himself with vigor: “As for being heaven-stormers: Because we teach from the mouth of the Lord that if we would enter into life, we must keep the commandments;...therefore the preachers have to call us heaven-stormers and merit-men, saying that we want to be saved by our own merits even though we have always confessed, and by the grace of God ever will, that we cannot be saved by means of anything in heaven or on earth other than the merits, intercession, death, and blood of Christ, as has been amply demonstrated above.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time Menno did not hesitate to assert that from an authentic faith there will flow good works: “Faith which comes by the Word of God cannot be without fruit except in those who grieve the Holy Ghost....”<sup>35</sup> Therefore the principal thing is faith, and not works....<sup>36</sup> For true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant, but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love.”<sup>37</sup> Conversely, when Menno Simons observed the low level of spirituality in the state churches, he deduced the absence of faith from the lack of fruits: “That the preachers of the world are not born again, have not the Spirit of Christ, and do not abide in His Word, their fruits abundantly prove.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time Menno Simons was not prepared to value fruits above the roots, though such accusations had

been current. In his customarily spirited manner, Menno Simons boldly proclaimed: “But this assertion, that such fruits alone matter in our sight, is written, alas, from an impure heart. For I presume [Gellius Faber] knows very well that we plainly teach that we cannot be saved by outward works, however great and glorious they may appear, or that we can thus entirely please God; for works are always mixed with imperfections and weakness, are they not, and therefore through the obstacle of our corrupted flesh we cannot attain wholly to the original righteousness required in the commandments. Therefore we point to Christ Jesus alone, who is our only and eternal righteousness, reconciliation, and propitiation with the Father, and we do not, eternally not, put any confidence in our good works.”<sup>39</sup> And when it is brought to Menno Simons’ attention that among the Anabaptists Obbe Philips had taught “that the justification of man results not from faith alone, but from faith, love, and good works,” Menno curtly retorts: “We and the church of God are not thus minded,...we seek justification in the righteous and crucified Christ Jesus alone.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, as we have seen, works righteousness is rejected by both Martin Luther and Menno Simons. Also both of them vigorously assert that good works proceed from faith only *after* and *not before* the reception of grace. On such a very significant issue as the meaning of good works, there is authentic unanimity, ancient prejudice notwithstanding.

<sup>34</sup>MS 569.

<sup>35</sup>MS 267.

<sup>36</sup>MS 268.

<sup>37</sup>MS 307; cf. 328, 396, 399.

<sup>38</sup>MS 508.

<sup>39</sup>MS 654.

<sup>40</sup>MS 760.

Some remarkable closeness to Luther may also be noted in Menno’s readiness to assert the sinfulness of the regenerated Christian believer<sup>41</sup> and therefore to write a blunt denial of perfectionism.<sup>42</sup> Of course there are also many significant differences between the two thinkers. Without enumerating, we need to note in regard to the present inquiry that Menno Simons rejected Luther’s order of salvation, since he regarded Luther’s interpretation of the gospel as erroneous, and classified the sacraments with works. Menno Simons proclaimed his *solus Christus* as follows: “You see, kind reader, we do not seek our salvation in works, words or sacraments as do the learned ones, although they accuse us of that very thing, but we seek [it] only in Christ Jesus and in no other means in heaven or on earth. We rejoice exclusively in this only means.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, differences notwithstanding, both reformers agreed in their interpretation of good works.

#### IV.

The agreement, however real, was nevertheless overshadowed by authentic distrust. Luther viewed the radicals as unstable people without Christ and grace, who sought salvation by works righteousness, were clearly heretical on account of denying infant baptism, and potentially, if not already actually, were violent revolutionaries. In the Anabaptist perspective, on the other hand, the magisterial reformation which engaged in persecution and bloodshed could not be Christian and moral. Consequently it had to be said that there were no good works among the

Lutherans (or Calvinists).

Today, after the ancient accusations and mutual incriminations have been laid aside long ago, the question may be raised whether the controversy can yield any positive insights in regard to good works. I very much believe this to be the case. Menno Simons' writings make it poignantly clear that grace, although freely given, is never received without bearing the cross. The Christian life is never easy, but filled with challenges that need to be responded to with courage and diligence. The Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer restated this insight for our century. In his interpretation of the meaning of discipleship, Bonhoeffer called attention to the decisive difference between "cheap" and "costly" grace. "[Cheap] grace is grace without price; grace without cost."<sup>44</sup> In theology it appears as a doctrine that can be memorized without being lived. And here Bonhoeffer does not mince his words: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline,

<sup>41</sup>MS 311, 506, 673.

<sup>42</sup>MS 122, 447. John S. Oyer insightfully generalizes in regard to the entire evangelical Anabaptist tradition: "They never tried to measure the amount or degree of moral goodness in regenerated humans; nor did they postulate progress towards an ever greater moral goodness, toward some beatific condition of perfection in this life." "Luther and the Anabaptists," *Baptist Quarterly* 30 (1983) 167.

<sup>43</sup>MS 504-505.

<sup>44</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (rev. and unabridged ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1963) 45.

communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."<sup>45</sup> It was Bonhoeffer's conviction that it was Martin Luther who had originally restored grace to its proper role and dignity. Luther freed the believer from the self-righteous seclusion of the monastery and showed the way to the dangers that mark faithful living in the world.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Bonhoeffer now challenged his contemporaries to a new and active sense of Christian responsibility—that is, to discipleship. At the same time it was the daring and the radical nature of the discipleship that brought Bonhoeffer very close to the Anabaptist position. Of course Bonhoeffer was not an Anabaptist; only uninformed romantics can make that claim! Abram John Klassen has thoughtfully noted several major differences between Bonhoeffer and the Anabaptists. Above all it is a difference between a theological and a biblicist orientation. Specifically, Bonhoeffer "defined discipleship as 'adherence to Christ.' The Anabaptists insisted on a literal following of Jesus' example."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, where "Bonhoeffer saw the need for a new understanding of faith," the Anabaptists "were concerned to demonstrate the fruit of faith through integrity in practice."<sup>48</sup> Hence the focus of Anabaptist attention was directed to "the power of example" of Jesus rather than to his teaching.<sup>49</sup> A further important difference is seen in Bonhoeffer's adherence to what Abram John Klassen calls "a mass church" and the Anabaptist "separation of church and state."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, in addition to being a Lutheran, Bonhoeffer also re-evaluated the traditional state-church responsibilities. While Bonhoeffer certainly was not inspired in his participation in the attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler by the pacifistic Mennonites, he can be said to have acted in the spirit of the sixteenth century militant Anabaptists. Put in another way, "good works" as understood in the wider Anabaptist tradition open up both pacifistic and revolutionary responses which are not quite as readily available in Luther's theology and ethics. Hence those Lutherans that either engage in anti-nuclear protests or

support revolutionary liberation movements may discover the wider definition of “good works” to be both insightful and practically applicable.

At the same time the acquaintance with both Lutheran and Anabaptist definitions and examples of good works may save us from the trivialization of the meaning of “good works.” Listen how vividly Christocentric Luther’s definition of the Christian life is: “That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering of the cross.”<sup>51</sup> What Martin Luther pro-

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>47</sup>*Discipleship in Anabaptism and Bonhoeffer* (Claremont Graduate School, Ph.D. Diss., 1970) 179.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>51</sup>Walther von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 17-24.

claimed and was ready to experience at the Diet of Worms and at all other junctures of his life where he might have so readily been put to death the Anabaptists actually suffered! More than four thousand Anabaptists were martyred in the sixteenth century. Thus at their best the “good works” we are speaking about are not just nice gestures, sweet smiles, and little acts of neighborly kindness, but painful martyrdom.

Now the accounts of Anabaptist martyrdoms are not carefully crafted theological treatises. At best they are vivid portraits of an immense courage of faith. Thus *The Martyrs’ Mirror*<sup>52</sup>—the popular account of Anabaptist suffering at the hands of Protestant and Catholic persecutors that is kept in print as faithfully as the Lutheran *Book of Concord*—records case after case where the persecuted could have flinched and denied, but remained steadfast and died in frightful torture. So insightfully, the Lutheran historian Martin Schmidt has observed that “the dutiful submission to the cross and persecution, the identification with Jesus Christ, and the waiting upon the inner Word and the Last Day created a deeper sense of community of the Word and the sacraments, church order and church discipline.”<sup>53</sup> Thus we must note that good works, when understood in their ultimate sense as martyrdom, transcend the realm of ethics and serve a soteriological role. Did not the early church view martyrdoms as “baptism of blood” and treat them as equivalent, if not superior to, ordinary baptism? In an ecumenical age it is only fitting to acknowledge that Anabaptist “good works” when seen as an ultimate commitment to Jesus Christ are no less efficacious. They are not humanly devised patterns of works righteousness, but another modality of the Word and the sacraments!

In North America where religious freedom precludes martyrdom, the Anabaptist ethic provides another witness. Mennonite “good works” offer an affirmation of the unflinching separation of church and state: “To the State and the world they testify to the ultimate futility of force, to the power and principle and practice of love in all human relationships, to the waste of war, and to the higher citizenship of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>54</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr’s<sup>55</sup> cogent arguments may be thoroughly persuasive to me, a non-pacifist. But as a tolerant Christian I have to acknowledge that the vigorous Anabaptist witness for peace also speaks for the Christian



tradition and thus enriches the total understanding of “good works.”

Last but not least it is only realistic to acknowledge that what I have designated as the Lutheran position does not realistically represent all Lutherans. In our midst there are devotionally oriented people who are pietists at heart. They, much like the sixteenth century Anabaptists, are on occasion prepared to speak in categories of “works,” although in the depth of their hearts they are

<sup>52</sup>The English version currently in print is *The Martyrs' Mirror*, compiled by Thieleman J. Van Braght (Scottsdale: Herald, 1950).

<sup>53</sup>Martin Schmidt, “Luther und die Täufer im Gesamtverständnis der Christlichen Botschaft,” *Die Zeichen der Zeit* 5 (1951) 92. Reference translated by Egil Grislis.

<sup>54</sup>Henry H. Bagger, “The Anabaptists—Extinction or Extension of the Reformation?,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (1982) 257.

<sup>55</sup>Notably *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952) and *Christian Realism and Power Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

oriented only by “grace.” To say this is not to deny the theological significance of the Word and Sacraments as means of grace, but only to acknowledge that they dare not be simplistically limited to preaching from a Lutheran pulpit and administering infant baptism and the Holy Eucharist in a Lutheran church.,

Where true faith prevails, good works are certain to follow. But since our faith is not a trivial belief in some memorized dogmas, but a complete commitment to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, so also our good works, if genuine, are not occasional acts of expressing our goodwill, but a lifetime of courageous service. Both Martin Luther and the evangelical Anabaptist tradition offer authentic help in accepting and following our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the present reflection is to clarify and not to obscure this most important facet of our life.

However, both Zwingli and Luther rejected the Anabaptists because they deemed them to be too radical. Though the Anabaptists had some support in various parts of Western Europe, they were rejected by Protestants and Catholics alike and all but hunted down. What did the Anabaptists believe in? In general they believed inÂ However, the Anabaptists had no generally accepted doctrine as each group adopted their own specific beliefs and there was no central organisation. The Anabaptists also had no overall leader so there was no John Calvin or Luther-like figure. The influence of the Anabaptists was never extreme because its origins were far from precise. Whereas Luther, Calvin and Zwingli could be specifically associated with a geographic area, the Anabaptists could not. Luther embarked upon his radical criticism of the Roman church with the conviction that the Word of God had been hampered and needed a path cleared for its free and unhindered course. Men had always...Â Luther's letter to Link is obviously a reply to Link's inquiry about the deaths of Anabaptists. Google Scholar. 6. Tischreden, September 2â€“17, 1540, WT, V, 19. Question: "Who were the Anabaptists, and what did they believe?". Answer: Anabaptists are not a denomination, and it is unlikely that you will find any church named "First Anabaptist." The name is more of a descriptive title than an organizational name. From the days of the apostles, there was one Church of Jesus Christ, with a single body of doctrine taught by the apostles and their successors. The various local churches preached repentance and confession of sins, along with baptism by immersion as an outward sign of the new life in Christ (Romans 6:3-4). Though under the authority Luther sanctioned the death penalty for doctrinal heresy most notably in his Commentary on the 82nd Psalm, written in 1530.Â Not a good thing, not Luther either. Here are the documented factsÂ For the rest, the Anabaptists hold tenets relating to infant baptism, original sin, and inspiration which have no connection with the Word of God, and are indeed opposed to it. . . . Concerning such tenets, this is our answer : As the secular authorities are bound to control and punish open blasphemy, so they are also bound to restrain and punish avowedly false doctrine, irregular Church services and heresies in their own dominions; for this is commanded by God in the other commandment where He says : "Whoso dishonours God's name shall not go unpunished." First and foremost, the Anabaptists taught that those who had been baptized as children had to be baptized again (hence the name Anabaptist). The reason for this demand to be rebaptized was because of their teaching that baptism was not to be given to children, as they 1) didn't need it as they are not sinners but are righteous before God, and 2) haven't yet "gained the use of their reason," and therefore are saved without Baptism.Â The Rev. Michael Schuermann is pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Sherman, IL. Read more in: History, Theology. Post navigation. Bible Study With Luther: Galatians 4:1-7. Lutherans in Lithuania.Â Learn the meaning of the Reformation 2017 logo, download it, and use it as a tool to witness to others. Learn More. History.