

The Anabaptist, Mennonite and Spiritualist Reformation

IDC Publishers is pleased to announce the revised and updated version of the catalogue, "The Anabaptist, Mennonite and Spiritualist Reformation", in which we have incorporated the first (1977) edition of the catalogue (Mennonite and related sources up to 1600) and the three later supplements. This second cumulative edition has been subdivided by subject in order to facilitate research and to make the nature of the source material clearer. If you want to receive this comprehensive free catalogue, please complete the reply form and return it to IDC Publishers.

The Radical Reformation

"There is no aspect of European sixteenth-century research that is so alive with newly discovered and edited source materials and monographic revisions as the Radical Reformation", wrote George Hunston Williams in the preface to the third revised edition of his book *The Radical Reformation* (Kirkville, MI, 1992), the unsurpassed standard work on this subject. In 1977, when IDC published the first part of its microfiche series on the Radical Reformation, drawn from the rich sources of the Mennonite Historical Library (the University Library of Amsterdam), "the Left Wing of the Reformation" was already enjoying much scholarly interest. The anti-authority spirit of the celebrated 60s, with its student revolts, provided a healthy soil for these extremely fruitful reflections on and explorations of this period in European church history, which, following the first edition of Williams' study in 1962, has generally come to be regarded as the Radical Reformation. Without question, the greater accessibility of the sources, thanks to the Radical Reformation series published by IDC, has played an important role in this. Since its publication, numerous studies of the source material have been made, many of them translated into English. In scores of monographs and texts, Thomas Muntzer has in a manner of speaking been turned inside out.

Fields of investigation

The area of research has gradually widened as well. Studies have appeared

dealing with forerunners of the Radical Reformation, and with related figures and heterodox movements on the boundaries of the Catholic tradition. The response from the Catholic side and that from the Magisterial Reformation have also been drawn extensively into this domain of study. In the same way, many aspects of popular culture and beliefs, and communication methods,



Illustration from: Acronius, J. *Miraculorum quorundam et eorundem effectuum descriptio*, Basil, 1561.

such as prints, broadsheets and pamphlets, are continuously incorporated in this ever-expanding field of research.

At the same time, the modern generation of church historians and theologians have long abandoned the idea that the larger context, the history of the Reformation, should be considered a German or Protestant matter. In other words, the present-day scholar has to be practically a polymath

in order to remain aware of the theoretical implications and historical diversity of his or her subject of research. In addition, an increasing number of disciplines in the humanities are claiming rights to this fascinating chapter in the history of religions.

The Low Countries

This rough sketch of contemporary trends in the study of the Radical Reformation is also generally applicable to the Low Countries, where especially the history of multi-faceted Anabaptism left its traces. Since the 70s, there have appeared important source studies and monographs on Anabaptism in the Low Countries. Like the text editions in the series *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica*, or the studies and text editions on David Joris and on The Family of Love, founded by Hendrick Nicolaes. Here, too, the scope of research has widened. This fascinating period is no longer the exclusive domain of church history. Literary, art and social historians, as well as musicologists, often raise new and different questions concerning the same historical sources. In this way, our knowledge and understanding of the 16th century become significantly expanded and enriched. Moreover, one should seriously ask oneself whether the Radical Reformation actually passed quietly away during the 16th century. Particularly in the Low Countries, the home of Erasmus, numerous liberal tendencies can be observed until nearly the end of the 17th century on the fringes of the established Mennonite and Reformed Churches. Examples are

Libertinism, a hybrid branch; sects like those of Hiel (Hendrik Jansz. Barrefelt) and Matthias Weyer; the mystical-spiritualistic following of Jacob Böhme and his sympathizers; and the Collegiants, a movement which explored the boundaries between theology and rationalism. Throughout this period, the Low Countries were also to provide a breeding ground for the generally denounced views of Socinianism.

The microfiche project

To assist new types of researchers better, and to make the nature of the source material clearer, the 1977 catalogue, and its three supplements now have their contents rearranged and subdivided by subject. The first part of the catalogue deals with Anabaptism in

the Low Countries and related (spiritualistic) movements. Not only are the works of the most important representatives, as well as other types of writings such as editions of the Bible, hymn books and literature produced by martyrs, considered separately, but the rich polemical writings for and against the Reformed and Catholic Churches are also treated with the respect they deserve. The second part, and the largest, concerns important sources of the Radical Reformation in the German-speaking regions, with the sources of Anabaptism and Spiritualism (in all their variations) constituting the core. Amongst other things, this part also regards the significant period before Münster, Münsterite Anabaptism itself, and the post-Münsterite period as separate subjects; it also handles the different protagonists individually.

Writings that fall within the broad category of Spiritualism have their own section in each part. There is an appendix comprising a small number of sources from the English Radical Reformation, as well as important figures not included elsewhere, such as Castellio, Servetus and Socinus.

Piet Visser

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