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**Final Paper**

**Karlstadt and Luther**

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Protestant Reformation

by

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## Introduction

On October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the Wittenberg Castle Church door, he struck the first discernible note of the Protestant Reformation. Because of this action, Luther is considered the orchestrator and father of the Protestant Reformation. Yet, Luther was not the only reformer in Wittenberg in 1517, nor in the formative years of the Protestant Reformation. Luther's most important early partner in the Reformation was Andreas Karlstadt.

Karlstadt defended Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* against criticism from Johann Eck, and the stage was set for the Leipzig Debate in 1519.<sup>1</sup> Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were certainly a rebuttal to church practice, but Luther was not ready yet to completely break from the Catholic Church. In reaction to Luther's performance at Leipzig though, Pope Leo X issued the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* on June 15, 1520, against Luther and Karlstadt threatening excommunication.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, Luther wrote his *Three Treatises* that would be the precursor for complete schism with the Catholic Church. At the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521, before Charles V, Luther refused to renounce his Protestant beliefs: "I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."<sup>3</sup> Luther's fame was sealed in his fearless defense of himself and Protestant doctrines, but his life was at risk. Frederick the Wise hid Luther at his Wartburg Castle.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (New York: Meridian, 1995), 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

Meanwhile, Karlstadt was left to continue the Reformation at Wittenberg without Luther in the movement from Protestant theological belief into living evangelical reality. The tone and timbre of Karlstadt's Reformation were perceivably more radical than Luther's. On Christmas Day 1521 at Wittenberg Castle Church, Karlstadt conducted the first Evangelical service which would represent the climax of this interlude in Luther's absence.<sup>5</sup> The next movement of Reformation featured much more discord and less harmony between Luther and Karlstadt.

Karlstadt's more radical approach to Reformation in Wittenberg failed and Luther's moderated one succeeded because Karlstadt did not have the protection and support of the authorities. Without the authorities behind him, Karlstadt got caught up in the "eddies of the Magisterial Reformation" and was not able to promote, publicize, and protect his ideas like Luther was able to do.<sup>6</sup> Minor theological differences between Luther and Karlstadt produced dramatically different results in practical ministry which furthered theological disputes. Luther and Karlstadt's initial fallout occurred because Karlstadt had ignored temporal authority, idealized the common man, and emphasized the authority of the Old Testament in the life of a Christian. Karlstadt's Radical Reformation failed because it did not prevent revolution and violence, whereas Luther's moderated one guided those under the authorities to reform.

### **Development of Karlstadt and Luther's Theologies**

When Luther came to Wittenberg, Karlstadt was already a promising Thomist scholar and the holder of no less than three degrees: in theology, in civil law, and in canon law.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>6</sup> Roger H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, (Kirksville: Truman State University, 1962 (Third edition, 1992)), 116-7.

<sup>7</sup> Richard A. Beinert, "Another Look at Luther's Battle with Karlstadt," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (April 2009), 159-60.

Karlstadt conferred Luther's degree on him in 1512, and Karlstadt was converted to Augustinian thought after being encouraged by Luther to investigate Augustine himself. Karlstadt's *151 Theses* were an academic recitation of Augustinian thought in April 1517, whereas Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* posted six months later had more succinct and direct applications contributing to their greater popularity.<sup>8</sup>

Karlstadt had been more influenced by the "Augustinian dualism between letter and spirit rather than the authentically Lutheran tension between law and gospel."<sup>9</sup> Karlstadt attempted to resolve this tension by favoring the spirit over the letter, but, for Luther, the centrality of the Gospel was key. Concerning the letter and spirit, Karlstadt was frequently preoccupied with matters of authority. In the summer of 1518, Karlstadt "asserted that only the Scriptures—not the church fathers, not the papal canons, and not the decretals—were authoritative in matters of faith," rejecting the foundation of the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> This argument would naturally extend in Karlstadt's mind to matters of "evil princes" versus the church when the rulers were against God's law.<sup>11</sup> Persecution could be endured from governmental authorities. However, if they went against God's Word and God's Law, disobedience and dissension were the proper course of action.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bainton, 85.

<sup>9</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Andreas Bodenstein of Carlstadt, Prodigal Reformer," *Church History* 35, no. 4 (1966): 384.

<sup>10</sup> James M. Kittelson and Hans H. Wiersma, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 102.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin A. Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

In October 1520, Karlstadt wrote a pamphlet entitled *Tract on the Supreme Virtue of Gelassenheit* that delineated a theological position that would contribute to the future rift between the two men. Luther's theology was firmly based in Augustine and Paul: "justification by grace alone through faith alone."<sup>13</sup> For Karlstadt, "gelassenheit" was the key element of true Christian faith. Gelassenheit encompassed the idea of total surrender, regeneration, and detachment from the world. Karlstadt saw this internal surrender as the mechanism of achieved grace and mercy from God and extending to the world through acts of love.<sup>14</sup> Karlstadt states, "This is the way it was with the apostles, who were assured inwardly by the testimony of the Spirit, and who afterwards preached Christ outwardly, and reinforced by writings that Christ had to suffer for us."<sup>15</sup> Karlstadt saw faith as working immediately and forcefully from the inside out, "from an inner working of the Spirit which is independent of any external mediation."<sup>16</sup> Karlstadt saw baptism as the "the rite of incorporation into Christ" to show that faith worked from the inside out.<sup>17</sup> This position stood in contrast to Luther's, as Luther saw faith working from outside inward, and Luther believed the Eucharist discharged the role of incorporation into the community of true Christians.

Coinciding with the idea of the eternal benefits of surrender to God, Karlstadt struggled with the idea of surrender and subservience to unrighteous and unjust authority.

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<sup>13</sup> Carter Lindberg, "Conflicting Models of Ministry: Luther, Karlstadt, and Muentzer." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41. no. 4 (October 1977), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Edward J. Furcha, trans. and ed. *The Essential Carlstadt. Fifteen Tracts by Andreas Bodenstein (Carlstadt) from Karlstadt.* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Vom greulichen Missbrauch des heiligen Abendmahls; Walch (1748–53), *Luther's Werke*, 1946–53, 20:2893, quoted in Williams, 1249.

<sup>16</sup> Beinert, 167.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, 114.

Should I then flee death when no one wants to rob me of that same lord and force me to diminish, deny, and reject his unerring word? This is what the tyrannical and alleged Pope Leo X dares to do. Would I not be an evildoer and traitor toward my most gracious Prince Elector and suzerain if I should throw away and deny a letter (entrusted to me by His Grace and which I promised to handle)? How then can I renounce and reject Holy Scripture?<sup>18</sup>

For Karlstadt, the authority of all the Scriptures trumped all else, and everyone including religious leaders and secular rulers were subjected to their authority. Karlstadt “stressed from the beginning the absolute primacy of the Word against tradition.”<sup>19</sup> By 1524, Karlstadt would say it even more forcefully: “The naked truth alone [that is, the Scriptures] should be your foundation and rock.”<sup>20</sup>

Karlstadt’s existentialist thoughts on the pendulum between letter and spirit would influence the Dutch and Swiss Anabaptist movement. As Lindberg observes, “For Luther, the Anabaptist position was the other side of the medieval coin of works righteousness, only now the works were located primarily in the sphere of religious experience rather than ethics.”<sup>21</sup> Luther took issue with the need for human action over divine. Luther’s theology was rooted in faith and grace, whereas Karlstadt’s *gelessanheit* included the idea of regeneration through surrender.<sup>22</sup> As Hans Hillerbrand noted, “The crucial question at Wittenberg in 1521 was the translation of

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<sup>18</sup> Furcha, *Gelassenheit in Essentials*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> B.D. Mangrum, and Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Andreas Rudolff-Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Johann Eck, and Hieronymus Emser—A Reformation Debate: Three Treatises in Translation*. (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1998,) 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald J. Sider, ed., Karlstadt’s “Whether One Should Proceed Slowly,” in *Karlstadt’s Battle with Luther. Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 50.

<sup>21</sup> Carter Lindberg, *European Reformations*, (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 197.

<sup>22</sup> Lindberg, “Conflicting Models,” 38.

theological theory into ecclesiastical practice.” On this point, Karlstadt and Luther had fundamentally different approaches.<sup>23</sup>

### **Approaches to Reform**

Ronald Sider’s argument was that differences between Luther and Karlstadt in strategy, tactics, and timing of the Wittenberg reform were the reason they became at odds.<sup>24</sup> Sider built his argument on James S. Preus:

The fundamental issues in 1521-22 were issues of religious *policy*, and that important aspects of the doctrinal profiles by which Lutheran and “radical” are identified are as much a *function* of the religio-political struggle and the result of reflection upon the outcome of that crisis, as they are a *cause* of the breakup of the movement. To be sure, the theologies of Karlstadt and Luther were by no means identical in 1521-22, but neither were theological differences the decisive reason for their separation.<sup>25</sup>

Richard Beinert offers a deeper look at Sider’s argument that Luther and Karlstadt did not simply differ on “how to proceed,” but they developed “diametrically opposing conceptions of how the individual Christian is formed in the faith” as evidenced in their views on the roles of the Eucharist and baptism.<sup>26</sup> Their views were not diametrically opposed in the initial ideological Reformation in Wittenberg, in late 1521 and early 1522, concerning images and the partaking of both elements in the Eucharist. As the conflict grew, Karlstadt became increasingly frustrated with “Luther’s marginalization of the book of James, plus his views on the character of the Old

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<sup>23</sup> Hillerbrand, 385.

<sup>24</sup> Sider, *Battle*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> James S. Preus, *Carlstadt’s ‘Ordinaciones’ and Luther’s Liberty: A Study of the Wittenberg Movement, 1521-1522*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Beinert, 157.

Testament, eucharistic practice, the oral confession of sins, and the permissibility of religious images.”<sup>27</sup>

For Luther, as he expressed emphatically in his 1524 *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, God “deals with us [the believers] in a twofold manner, the first outwardly, then inwardly.”<sup>28</sup> Through the preaching of the Word, baptism, and the sacrament, Luther believed, “The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward.”<sup>29</sup> For Luther, Christian liberty was paramount, and he wanted people to choose to reform instead of having reforms thrust upon them. Luther held that the Wittenbergers led by Karlstadt, “In devil’s fashion they go out where God would enter and enter where he goes out.”<sup>30</sup>

Contrastingly, for Karlstadt, Christian faith began from an inner working that immediately impacted the external. Karlstadt felt that “each person should hurry to righteousness for himself and that no one is to follow the crowd, and thereby retreat from the right.”<sup>31</sup> Each individual, household, and community was responsible to immediately change and not wait to “become intelligent,” “adduce evidence,” or wait for the weak to be ready to change.<sup>32</sup> Karlstadt compared the desire to wait for the weak to change as to the foolishness of letting a child keep a sharp knife.<sup>33</sup> Karlstadt believed brotherly love was actually forcing the external change even if

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<sup>27</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 89.

<sup>28</sup> Sider, Luther’s “Against the Heavenly Prophets” in *Battle*, 113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>30</sup> Sider, Luther’s “Against the Heavenly Prophets” in *Battle*. 115-6.

<sup>31</sup> Sider, Karlstadt’s “Whether One Should Proceed Slowly” in *Battle*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

people were not ready for it. To do the opposite was “really brotherly injury and offense.”<sup>34</sup>

Karlstadt concluded:

Where Christians rule, there they should consider no government, but rather freely on their own hew down and throw down what is contrary to God, even without preaching. Such offenses are numerous—for example, the mass, images, the idolatrous flesh which the priests now devour, etc.<sup>35</sup>

Luther understood true faith and brotherly love to be expressed the exact opposite. Luther insisted, “I would not make it an ordinance for them, nor urge a general law.”<sup>36</sup> Luther felt that “if we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.”<sup>37</sup> Christian liberty meant ministers of the Gospel “must know Scriptures well and, besides, use them at the right time” and simply “let the Word do its work.”<sup>38</sup> Force and compulsion had no place in converting nominal Christians. Faith flowed from the outside in and not the inside out as Karlstadt supposed.

Small differences in practiced theology between Luther and Karlstadt fueled disagreements which led to major differences in theology particularly centered on the Eucharist and baptism. Karlstadt’s “error regarding the Sacrament,” denying the real Presence of Christ, became central to Luther’s opposition to him by 1525.<sup>39</sup> Karlstadt believed that trust in the external elements of the sacraments was a form of idolatry, a violation of the first commandment of the Old Testament Law.<sup>40</sup> As Beinert observes, “Luther never abandoned the Scriptural

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>37</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Fourth Sermon” in *Battle*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 30, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Beinert., 162.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 163-4.

understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist as a physical means through which forgiveness and grace—even Christ and the Holy Spirit—are communicated to the individual recipient.”<sup>41</sup>

*What One Ought to Think of the Division Between Martin Luther and Andreas Karlstadt*, written by Strassburg reformer Wolfgang Capito was a contemporary view of the Eucharist conflict at full tilt between Luther and Karlstadt from October 1524. In this letter, Capito largely focused on the Eucharist controversy and hoped for “the house” to be reunited after Karlstadt was expelled from Saxony based on Luther’s initiative.<sup>42</sup> Capito believed that the disagreement between Luther and Karlstadt “was peripheral and of no significance.”<sup>43</sup> Luther fundamentally disagreed with that assessment calling Karlstadt his “worst enemy” and accused him of “manhandling the sacrament.”<sup>44</sup> As Hans Hillerbrand noted, “Historically Luther's assessment, rather than Capito's, has set the precedent.”<sup>45</sup>

Truly, the Eucharist divide between Luther and Karlstadt was wide, and, as was the case in the Marburg Colloquy with Zwingli, Luther would offer no compromise. Much like Karlstadt, not only did Luther and Zwingli differ on the theological premises of the Eucharist, but Luther also objected to the “Zwinglian idea of the Eucharist as a sacrament of communalism” that Karlstadt had influenced.<sup>46</sup> For Luther, tradition, custom, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist act was simply non-negotiable. For Karlstadt, it was idolatry.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>42</sup> Erika Rummel, *The Correspondence of Wolfgang Capito: Volume 2: 1524-1531*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 69.

<sup>43</sup> Hillerbrand, 379.

<sup>44</sup> Sider, Luther’s “Against the Heavenly Prophets,” 94-5.

<sup>45</sup> Hillerbrand, 379.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Blickle, “Communal Reformation and Peasant Piety: The Peasant Reformation and Its Late Medieval Origins.” *Central European History* 20, no. 3/4 (1987): 227.

## Two Major Overlooked Differences

Two major differences that led to Luther and Karlstadt parting have often been overlooked and underarticulated: namely, the relationship between authorities and common men and the role of the Old Testament in the life of a Christian. These two issues reveal the beginning of the schism between the two men, and they were the primary reason for the divergence of their efforts in the movement. Both Luther and Karlstadt rejected oral confession as a means of grace, but Karlstadt clearly appealed to common people when he said in the Christmas Service in 1521, “It would be more useful for you to drink a swine’s drink than to drink the Lord’s cup. Or it would be more useful for you to eat donkey’s manure than to eat the bread of Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Karlstadt closely identified with the common man when he referred to “us laymen”<sup>48</sup> in that service further signified by the elimination of the elevation of the host.<sup>49</sup> As B.D. Mangrum notes, “To receive the Eucharist in both kinds would put the laity on equal footing with clergy and this would finally undermine clerical authority.”<sup>50</sup> Karlstadt concluded his sermon by uplifting the role of the laypeople, and he showed the priest’s dependence on the congregation to fulfill the binding and loosing of Matthew 18:18.<sup>51</sup>

Karlstadt had already laid out the premise for abandoning oral confession in June 1521 in the eucharistic pamphlet *On the Recipients, Signs, and Promise of the Holy Sacrament, Christ’s Flesh and Blood* that “no one should abstain from receiving the flesh and blood of Christ because

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<sup>47</sup> Sider, “Sermon by Karlstadt” in *Battle*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. The Development of His Thought: 1517-1525*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 171.

<sup>50</sup> Mangrum, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Sider, “Sermon by Karlstadt” in *Battle*, 14.

of his sins.”<sup>52</sup> In this pamphlet, Karlstadt would also “approve lay communion in the home.”<sup>53</sup> Karlstadt appeals to the common man and the superiority of Scripture as the ultimate and permanent authority to the temporal authority of man: “Look at the text, you laypeople, and let it have more authority than the pope.”<sup>54</sup>

Luther’s First Sermon in March 1522 chided these innovations not on Karlstadt’s theological position, but rather his condemnation was initially based in Karlstadt’s ignoring the prohibitions of the authorities. “Therefore, all those have erred who have helped and consented to abolish the mass; not that it was not a good thing, but that it was not done in an orderly way.”<sup>55</sup> Luther continued, “If, beforehand, you had called upon God in earnest prayer, and had obtained the aid of the authorities, one could be certain that it had come from God.”<sup>56</sup> Karlstadt had completely ignored the Elector in his Christmas Evangelical Service, and Luther would not soon forget it. For Karlstadt, “tactical delay seemed to involve serving men rather than God.”<sup>57</sup> Luther’s Fifth Sermon, in March 1522, condemned the innovations of the December 1521 service:

Although I must acknowledge that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands, nevertheless I must tell you that it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere. For the universal custom is to receive the blessed sacrament from the hands of the priest.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Furcha, *The Eucharistic Pamphlets of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, (Kirksville: Truman State University Press), 23.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Furcha, Karlstadt’s *On Both Forms in the Holy Mass in Eucharistic*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Sider, “Luther’s First Sermon” in *Battle*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Sider, *Andreas*, 200.

<sup>58</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Fifth Sermon” in *Battle*, 33.

For Luther, *how* Communion was received was one thing, but what communion *was* could not be contested.

Philip Melanchton had previously offered communion in both kinds to students at Wittenberg University on September 29, 1521, but he pushed for change in the public mass as well.<sup>59</sup> Karlstadt initially warned, “By all means but without tumult and without giving opponents an opportunity for slander.”<sup>60</sup> Tumult ensued nevertheless as laymen were caught up in the revolutionary spirit, and, on December 3, 1521, commoners “forcibly entered the parish church, threw away the missals, and drove the priests from the altar.”<sup>61</sup> Frederick the Wise offered leniency to the rioters and sought counsel from university officials for next steps.<sup>62</sup>

Karlstadt pushed for innovations in the December 17, 1521, six-article petition to the Elector including “among other things, elimination of obligatory Masses for the priest, elimination of nuptial and votive Masses for the laity, and regular extension of the chalice to the laity.”<sup>63</sup> However, the Elector took the side of the conservatives, forbidding any innovation in the mass while at the same time explicitly allowing “debate via sermon, disputation or tract.”<sup>64</sup> Truthfully, Karlstadt sought the permission of the Elector for the innovation in the mass, but Frederick had tabled the issue. As patron of All Saints Church, Frederick legally had a right to

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<sup>59</sup> Williams, 116-7.

<sup>60</sup> Nikolaus Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung, 1521 und 1522*, (Leipzig: Verlag von M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1911), No. 18, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Sider, *Andreas*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Williams, 115.

<sup>64</sup> Sider, *Andreas*, 157.

“prohibit Karlstadt’s action.”<sup>65</sup> After commotion erupted in the parish and castle churches on Christmas Eve, Karlstadt resolved to defy the Elector to give the commoners what they wanted. On Christmas Day 1521 Karlstadt, dressed as a common peasant without priestly vestments, celebrated the first evangelical mass in the vernacular against the Elector’s prohibition, offering sacraments “in both kinds.”<sup>66</sup> Karlstadt had “sympathized with the commoners,” uplifted their cause of experiencing a fresh equitable faith, and, in doing so, emphatically defied the Elector.<sup>67</sup>

In publicly defying Frederick, Karlstadt was now at odds with the magisterial Reformation. Karlstadt championed the cause of the commoners over the prince’s preferences, and it would cost him dearly in influencing the course of events in Wittenberg. The course of these events accelerated quickly in January. On January 11, 1522, rioters removed and destroyed images from the Chapel. Karlstadt sought the support of the city council in his reforms. On January 20, 1522, Duke George at the Diet of Nürnberg decried the Wittenberg innovations: the changes in the mass, minimization of oral confession, partaking of both elements, children partaking the sacrament, priests and monks marrying, and that “common people [were] incited to frivolity and offense.”<sup>68</sup> Frederick needed to regain control of the events in his city.

On January 24, 1522, the city council under Karlstadt’s guidance issued its “Wittenberg Ordinances,” which mandated reforms in worship. The Ordinances were “in effect, the first municipal Reformation ordinance.”<sup>69</sup> Three days later, Karlstadt published his famous tract: *On*

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> J. Travis Moger, “Pamphlets, Preaching and Politics: The Image Controversy in Reformation Wittenberg, Zürich and Strassburg,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75 (2001), 339.

<sup>67</sup> Williams, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Bainton, 169.

<sup>69</sup> Moger, 345.

*the Removal of Images*. Karlstadt wanted images out of the church because they were a direct violation of the first commandment which forbids idolatry. Karlstadt called on “the highest secular authority” to command the removal of the images.<sup>70</sup> However, if magistrates failed to act, Karlstadt believed they would be punished.<sup>71</sup> Admittedly, Karlstadt did not justify “plebian intervention,” but Karlstadt did believe that God’s law required more of Christians.<sup>72</sup> This tract brings an overlooked difference into sharp focus between Luther and Karlstadt: not concerning images, but of the authority of the Old Testament in the life of a Christian.

### **The Role & Authority of the Old Testament**

Karlstadt, in *On the Removal of Images*, draws support from both Testaments as to why images should be removed from the church. In a place “where God alone should be worshipped,” Karlstadt argued that the images were of no use, utterly sinful, and an explicit violation of the first commandment.<sup>73</sup> “Images bring death to those who worship or venerate them,” and Karlstadt argued that the magistrates should be the first to throw them out.<sup>74</sup> Karlstadt believed that images were of no use to the laity or anyone else, and that only the “Word of God is spiritual and alone is useful to the faithful.”<sup>75</sup> Karlstadt argued that Christians did “not follow the Old Law,” but that “Christ upheld the letter and spirit of the Old Law.”<sup>76</sup> He continued, “Whoever can join together these two maxims, to wit, We preserve the Law through faith, and Through

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<sup>70</sup> Mangrum, Karlstadt’s *On the Removal of Images in A Reformation Debate*, 41.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Sider, *Andreas*, 169.

<sup>73</sup> Mangrum, Karlstadt’s *On the Removal of Images in A Reformation Debate*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

faith or grace we establish the Law, understands Moses, the prophets, Christ and Paul.”<sup>77</sup>

Karlstadt understood *Sola Scriptura* as including both the Old and New Testaments and this joining together of Old and New as a form of *gelassenheit*. For Karlstadt, the New and the Old Law were identical in their condemnation on images,<sup>78</sup> and that “Paul and Moses agree” on this issue.<sup>79</sup> As Sider observed, “Most important, Karlstadt believed that the Old Testament was normative for Christians in a way that Luther feared would undermine Christian freedom.”<sup>80</sup>

Frederick’s patience was ended, and the Ordinances were overturned. Frederick invited discussion, but he held that reforms should take place on a territorial basis and not town by town.<sup>81</sup> With the Bishop of Meissen set to visit, on February 13 Frederick instructed the Wittenberg University and church to stop the innovations:

We have gone too fast. The common man has been incited to frivolity, and no one has been edified. We should have consideration for the weak. Images should be left until further notice. The question of begging should be canvassed. No essential portion of the mass should be omitted. Moot points should be discussed. Karlstadt should not preach any more.<sup>82</sup>

Luther’s eight sermons would usher the end of Karlstadt’s ministry in Wittenberg. In these sermons, Luther differentiated between reformation and puritanism in what Carter Lindberg called, an evangelical “may” versus Luther’s legalistic “must.”<sup>83</sup> Luther, in his Second

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>80</sup> Sider, *Battle*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Moger, 345.

<sup>82</sup> Bainton, 169-71.

<sup>83</sup> Lindberg, “Conflicting Models,” 41-42.

Sermon, affirmed, “I cannot, nor should I, force any one to have faith.”<sup>84</sup> Luther only saw drawbacks in legislating reforming laws considering that the Elector did not support the speed of those innovations. Before his return to Wittenberg, Luther had written to Frederick, “I was disturbed that the gospel was brought into disrepute at Wittenberg.”<sup>85</sup> Karlstadt had done this in Luther’s purview by putting an unnecessary weight on Christians in the keeping of the Law. In the Catholic Church, Luther had seen that “the making of one law grew a thousand laws” and feared the same would happen in Wittenberg.<sup>86</sup>

In his third and fourth sermon, Luther succinctly tackled the issue of images. Luther believed that preaching the Word was the only thing required, and, once the hearts of men were captured, images “would have fallen of themselves.”<sup>87</sup> Again, there was no need for force. Interestingly, Luther mentioned the magistrates by name asking, “Do you think that Duke Frederick, the bishop of Halle, and the others who have dragged so many silver images into the churches, if they thought it counted for nothing before God?”<sup>88</sup> Luther contended that using liberty unnecessarily could prevent people from overcoming their weakness and coming to the faith.<sup>89</sup> For Luther, compulsion and commands were simply not the way to make Christians who were on the fence about evangelical reforms.<sup>90</sup> Luther even considered the weakness of Frederick

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<sup>84</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Second Sermon” in *Battle*, 22.

<sup>85</sup> Bainton, 171.

<sup>86</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Second Sermon” in *Battle*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Third Sermon” in *Battle*, 26-7.

<sup>88</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Fourth Sermon” in *Battle*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Eighth Sermon” in *Battle*, 35.

before returning to Wittenberg writing, “This is not a case for sword but for God, and since you are weak in the faith you cannot protect me.”<sup>91</sup>

In 1522, there was not yet a theological impasse on the Karlstadt’s Eucharist practices, and Luther admitted he was “not partial” to images.<sup>92</sup> Luther’s problems with the innovations hinged in respect to temporal authority and custom. Karlstadt though, in his support of the removal of images from the church, significantly departed from Luther on what authority mattered. Luther deferred to the magistrate, and Karlstadt stood on the Old Testament. Yet, Luther’s eight sermons were not a straightforward repudiation of the authority of the Old Testament, which would come later in Luther’s most satirical and polemic writing, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, in December 1524.

Previously, in his 1523 work *Temporal Authority, To What Extent It Should be Obeyed*, Luther maintained that Christ did not completely abolish Moses’ law or prohibit secular power. In fact, Luther showed that the Law of Moses could be of some benefit to unbelievers as a basis for secular law. Luther believed that Christ’s words and work made it wholly unnecessary for believers to keep the Law of Moses to secure eternal life. For Luther, the Old Testament law was “abolished in the sense that we are free to keep it or not to keep it, and it is no longer necessary to keep it on penalty of one’s soul, as was formerly the case.”<sup>93</sup> As Luther argued, “This is true also of all other parts of the Old Testament; it is not wrong to omit them nor wrong to do them,

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<sup>91</sup> Bainton, 171.

<sup>92</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Third Sermon” in *Battle*, 25.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, (Albany: Ages, 1997), 192.

but all is permissible and good, to do and to leave undone.”<sup>94</sup> By 1525, Luther was ready to cut anchor.

Luther wrote *Against the Heavenly Prophets* after the violent confrontation with Karlstadt at the Black Bear Inn upon Karlstadt’s resignation of the Orlamünde pastorate, and in reaction to Karlstadt’s writings on the Eucharist in Strassburg. In *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther believed that the laws of princes, lords, and emperors should be obeyed by the church and society instead of the laws of Moses in the Old Testament. Luther continued:

We don’t want to see or hear Moses. How do you like that, my dear rebels? We say further, that all such Mosaic teachers deny the gospel, banish Christ, and annul the whole New Testament. I now speak as a Christian for Christians. For Moses is given to the Jewish people alone, and does not concern us Gentiles and Christians. We have our gospel and New Testament....Why does one keep and teach the Ten Commandments? Answer: Because the natural laws were never so orderly and well written as by Moses. Therefore it is reasonable to follow the example of Moses.”<sup>95</sup>

Luther accused Karlstadt of holding the Law above the Gospel. Luther wanted to remind him that the Gospel and faith were all that mattered to him. The Law simply had no place unless it concerned natural law. Karlstadt rebutted, “I do not consider the law above all things, as Dr. Luther’s devilish doctrine alleges.”<sup>96</sup>

### **The Common Man**

In the confrontation with Karlstadt at the Black Bear Inn in Jena on August 22, 1524, Luther attacked Karlstadt on his actions as pastor at Orlamünde in continuing the reforms that had not been successfully continued at Wittenberg. Karlstadt began the Communal Reformation

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Sider, Luther’s “Against the Heavenly Prophets” in *Battle*, 102.

<sup>96</sup> Sider, Karlstadt’s “Review of the Chief Articles” in *Battle*, 130.

in Orlamünde, carrying the evangelical innovations from “city into the countryside” to the peasants.<sup>97</sup> Karlstadt had told Luther, “I intend to earn my living with the plow” after he was forced to resign the pastorate at Luther’s prodding of the magistrate.<sup>98</sup>

Karlstadt was dismayed that Luther had put him “in the same pot with the murdering spirit” of Thomas Muntzer.<sup>99</sup> Although, Luther had not attacked Karlstadt frequently in his writings *by name*, the damage had mostly been done when he lumped him with the fanatical spirits in his sermons. Luther would soon speak to Duke John Frederick about “Dr. Karlstadt’s wantonness and arrogance.”<sup>100</sup> Luther continued to “approach [Karlstadt] with force” putting the blame for the destruction of images and the allowance of the Zwickau Prophets squarely on Karlstadt. As Mark Edwards pointed out, Luther, in his *ad hominem* attacks, imputed “similar characteristics to all his evangelical opponents and to hold any one of them responsible for the views and misdeeds of all.”<sup>101</sup> This further explains how the small crevice in 1520 had transformed from chasm in 1522 to canyon by 1524.<sup>102</sup>

Karlstadt believed that “the princes of the biblical scholars and the whole crowd formerly have erred and can err.”<sup>103</sup> *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly* was Karlstadt’s belated response to Luther’s eight magisterial sermons in 1522. Without a publisher, Karlstadt was not able to

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<sup>97</sup> Peter Blickle, Hans-Christoph Rublack, and Winfried Schulze, *Religion, Politics and Social Unrest, Three Studies on Early Modern Germany*, (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1984), 11-2. A complete study on the Communal Reformation as it applies to Karlstadt’s service from Wittenberg to Orlamünde is in order with application of Blickle’s ideal-typical model of Reformation’s progression from urban phases to rural protests.

<sup>98</sup> Sider, “Confrontation at the Black Bear” in *Battle*, 48; Pater, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Sider, “Confrontation” in *Battle*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Sider, Luther’s “Against the Heavenly Prophets” in *Battle*, 102.

<sup>101</sup> Mark U. Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 58-9.

<sup>102</sup> Sider, “Confrontation” in *Battle*, 45.

<sup>103</sup> Sider, Karlstadt’s *Whether One Should Proceed Slowly* in *Battle*, 50.

publish his response to Luther's pace of reform until 1524 in Jena. Karlstadt believed that love and faith demanded that every individual "act correctly without timidity and without gazing about."<sup>104</sup> Karlstadt wanted every congregation "however little or great it may be" to act properly, wait for no one, and reform immediately.<sup>105</sup> Karlstadt was amazed that the "scripturally learned scholars and princes" would punish physical adultery, but "allow spiritual adultery" in the veneration of images to remain unpunished.<sup>106</sup>

Karlstadt did not share Luther's disdain of "Mr. Everyman."<sup>107</sup> Karlstadt had suspicion of princes who had a perverted mind in taking bribes, showing favoritism, frightening the poor, and being controlled by anger.<sup>108</sup> By 1523, Karlstadt refused to confer degrees at the University.<sup>109</sup> Subsequently, he renounced his degrees and insisted on being called simply "Brother Andrew."<sup>110</sup> Luther contended that temporal authority was ordained by God to make Mr. Everyman outwardly pious, "compelled by sword and law."<sup>111</sup> Luther would not "suffer that the rebellious and the disobedient among the masses are to be led to despise temporal authority."<sup>112</sup> Contrastingly, in Karlstadt's pamphlets, the "layman tended to win all the arguments; anyone

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>107</sup> Sider, Luther's "Against the Heavenly Prophets" in *Battle*, 97.

<sup>108</sup> Sider, Karlstadt's "Review of the Chief Articles" in *Battle*, 134.

<sup>109</sup> Hillerbrand, 386.

<sup>110</sup> Sider, *Andreas*, 177.

<sup>111</sup> Sider, Luther's "Against the Heavenly Prophets" in *Battle*, 97.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 103.

with an ounce of brain and it had the right to ‘judge’, or interpret Scripture.”<sup>113</sup> Preus observed that Karlstadt saw the common people as “responsible subjects, whereas in most contemporary texts (including Luther’s) they [were] the objects of learned and uncomplimentary judgements by the authorities.”<sup>114</sup>

In fact on December 12, 1521, before Karlstadt had even set the Wittenberg reforms in motion, Luther published a pamphlet warning against “Sir Mob” inciting insurrection, worried that common men were not correctly differentiating between the wicked and godly.<sup>115</sup> In *An Earnest Exhortation for All Christians, Warning Them Against Insurrection and Rebellion*, Luther warned, “The common man has been brooding over the injury he has suffered in property, in body and in soul, and has become provoked.”<sup>116</sup> Luther foresaw the dangers that the common man collectively could bring to the clergy, the church, and community. Luther wanted the clergy to “come to their senses and moderate their mad tyranny.”<sup>117</sup>

Luther’s counsel in preventing insurrection was for Christians to live a life of faith and love, for clergy to simply preach the Word of God, and for everyone to “keep [their] eye fixed on the authorities.”<sup>118</sup> Luther believed to do anything else would usher in rebellion against the temporal authorities that God had established. For Luther, temporal authorities were better equipped to distinguish properly between good and bad and to “punish the wicked and protect

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Matheson, "Andreas Karlstadt: A Study in Motivation," in *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*. (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury, 1998), 76.

<sup>114</sup> Preus, 49.

<sup>115</sup> Martin Luther, *An Earnest Exhortation Against Insurrection and Rebellion* in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, (Albany: Ages, 1997), 172.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

the godly” in ways that were impossible for common men to do.<sup>119</sup> In August 1520, Luther had already formulated these thoughts in his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. In this work, Luther encouraged the nobility to “bear the sword and rod” responsibly.<sup>120</sup>

Luther continued to echo this sentiment in his pamphlets and sermons on this matter. In his second sermon in March 1522, Luther, anticipating the future violence of the Peasant’s War, said, “Had I desired to foment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany.”<sup>121</sup> Luther believed it was the duty of a Christian to obey temporal authorities, “as long as they demand nothing contrary to God.”<sup>122</sup> For Luther, force and radical reforms led to insurrection, rebellion, and injustice, whereas patience and love would bring effective and lasting change. True Christians, according to Luther, should “practice [love] above all other things.”<sup>123</sup>

Karlstadt believed that common men could be transformed and ruled by the power of the Gospel. In his January 1522 Wittenberg Ordinances, Karlstadt sought to reform the entire community to bring the worldly, temporal authority in line with the spiritual. Luther contended, “The world and the masses are and always will be unchristian, although they are all baptized and are nominally Christian.”<sup>124</sup> Karlstadt attempted to mandate spiritual reforms through temporal strategies to change nominal Christians, and Luther categorically rejected this.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* in *Three Treatises*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 14-15.

<sup>121</sup> Sider, “Luther’s Second Sermon” in *Battle*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* in *Three Treatises*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 308.

<sup>123</sup> Luther, “Seventh Sermon” in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 2, (Albany: Ages, 1997), 311.

<sup>124</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority*, 187.

Luther maintained that the two kingdoms—sacred and secular—“must be sharply distinguished.”<sup>125</sup> In 1525, in *An Admonition to Peace: A Reply to The Twelve Articles of the Peasants*, Luther addressed both the princes and the peasants, and he offered counsel to both in hopes of staying rebellion. Luther wrote, “I have helped the worldly rulers, even those who persecuted the Gospel and me, to maintain their power and honor.”<sup>126</sup> Unmoved by his counsel, when peasant violence erupted, Luther encouraged the temporal authorities to take up the sword against the “robbing and raging” peasants in his scathing pamphlet *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*.<sup>127</sup> Luther firmly supported the temporal authority considering the violence of the peasants:

Thus, anyone who is killed fighting on the side of the rulers may be a true martyr in the eyes of God, if he fights with the kind of conscience I have just described, for he acts in obedience to God’s word. On the other hand, anyone who perishes on the peasants’ side is an eternal firebrand of hell, for he bears the sword against God’s word and is disobedient to him, and is a member of the devil....These are strange times, when a prince can win heaven with bloodshed better than other men with prayer!<sup>128</sup>

### Conclusion

Karlstadt’s attention to the common people would not protect him like Luther’s dependence on the magistrates. Without the protection of the powerful magistrates, Karlstadt found himself in a dangerous situation at Tauber in 1525. Despite the fact he first brought the *Communal Reformation* to the countryside, Karlstadt was no match when it became the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>126</sup> Martin Luther, *An Admonition to Peace: A Reply to The Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia in Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, (Albany: Ages, 1997), 175.

<sup>127</sup> Martin Luther, *Against the Murdering Horde of Peasants in Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, (Albany: Ages, 1997), 188.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 191-2.

*Revolution of the Common Man* in the German Peasants' War.<sup>129</sup> The cost of protecting his life and his family's lives would be Karlstadt's pride. Karlstadt came to Luther, and Luther agreed to shelter him (on Luther's wedding night no less)<sup>130</sup> and allow him to stay in Saxony, if he recanted his wayward views on the Sacrament. Without a better choice, Karlstadt obliged.<sup>131</sup>

In 1534, after having met with Zwingli at Zurich, Karlstadt took the position of Chair in the Theology of the Old Testament at Basel, fitting for a man who had stayed true to his belief on the importance of the Old Law despite the challenges it had brought him.<sup>132</sup> For the last seven years of his life he served as a professor, rector of the University, and pastor of the University Church of St. Peter before he was succumbed to an illness from an epidemic while ministering there.<sup>133</sup>

A close reading of Karlstadt's forced apology pamphlet from 1525, *The Declaration of How Karlstadt Regards His Teaching about the Venerable Sacrament*, as Gordon Rupp noted, showed that it was not a "retraction of Karlstadt's views, but instead an encouragement to readers to examine scripture themselves and draw their own conclusions concerning the Lord's Supper." Karlstadt believed that common people had "the right to judge doctrine themselves."<sup>134</sup> Karlstadt wrote the first tract on the principle of scriptural hermeneutics in 1520, and, despite the

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, (Brill: Boston, 1998), vii.

<sup>130</sup> Bainton, 238.

<sup>131</sup> Gordon Rupp, "Andrew Karlstadt and Reformation Puritanism," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume X, Issue 2, October 1959, 323.

<sup>132</sup> Rupp, 324.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, 390.

<sup>134</sup> Furcha, *Eucharistic*, 14.

hardships he had endured, he continued to encourage them to discover the truth for themselves.<sup>135</sup> It is no small wonder that Hermann Barge, in his authoritative biography, referred to Karlstadt as “the champion of lay Christian puritanism.”<sup>136</sup> If Luther was the “reformer of the faith,” then, according to Furcha, Karlstadt was the “reformer of nominal Christians.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Hillerbrand, 396.

<sup>136</sup> Hermann Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, (Leipzig: Friedrich Brandstetter, 1905), op. cit., subtitle to volume 2. Translated in Lindberg, “Conflicting Models,” 37.

<sup>137</sup> Edward J. Furcha, “Zwingli and the Radicals: Zwingli and Carlstadt,” *Fides et Historia* 25, no. 1 (1993): 6.

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