

# *Luther Literally Killed JWO Movement in Reformation*

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## *Introduction*

By the time of the Reformation, Tertullian's lessons about Paul being less authoritative than the twelve or Jesus' words were forgotten. Yet, predictably, there was an immediate revival back to Jesus' Words Only (JWO). This happened in two phases.

The first JWO movement was represented by Carlstadt in 1521-22, an early leader of the Reformation whom Luther later crushed. Carlstadt publicly reprovved Luther for his undue emphasis on Paul over the Synoptics. Carlstadt also faulted Luther for excluding James' Epistle from canon on the circular reasoning that Paul's doctrine controlled what was canon.

The second JWO movement was the Brethren movement. It was smeared as the *Anabaptists*, whom Lutherans and Calvinists persecuted with torture and death from 1524 forward through the reign of King James. The Brethren's early movement was inspired by Carlstadt's theology. They too taught that James' Epistle embodies Jesus' Gospel. They eschewed an undue emphasis on Paul. They incurred thereby the ire of Luther.

Their efforts at political reform are castigated as *The Peasant War*. However, they were simply Christians demanding the right to worship Christ free from the Catholic church and free from unfair tax burdens by Catholic rulers. The *Brethren movement* had a spirit similar to the founders of our American Revolution. However, they were crushed when Luther in a *published tract* told Catholic rulers to kill them as ‘dogs’ because they violated Paul’s directive to obey rulers as God’s ministers (in Romans 13:1 *et seq.*) Yet, they were all *Protestants!* With Luther’s blessings, 100,000 of them were murdered in 1524-25. The only *Anabaptists* to survive were the most pacific—the Mennonites and Amish—or Brethren groups beyond the reach of these murderous rulers.

This background demonstrates two important facts about the streak of Paulinism within modern Protestantism.

- As orthodoxy in the long history of the church, Paulinism is a rare modern phenomenon. It was heresy in the apostolic era, exemplified by how Marcion was treated.
- Paulinism dominates among Protestantism today only because Paulinist elements in the Reformation were willing to instigate murder against non-Paulinist *Protestant* opponents.

Because the JWO movement was crushed during the Reformation, we inherit an outlook from within a bubble of the surviving dominant Protestant Christianity. Inside this bubble, we cannot see how truly small this blip of Paulinism is within history. We lack the perspective on the continuum of time and geography that others who live outside our bubble can see. This article will try to step outside the bubble to explain to us how Protestantism came to be dominated by Paulinism.

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*Luther Is Immediately Challenged by Carlstadt  
With A Jesus' Words Only Non-Pauline Approach*

One proof of how Christians ordinarily would gravitate naturally to Jesus' Words Alone as orthodoxy is how quickly it became *part-and-parcel* of the Reformation. In fact, when reformation first was taken to the masses, it was a Jesus' Words Only movement. It was highly popular and evangelical. Its first popular messenger also was the first *true* hero of the Reformation: Andreas Rudolf Bodenstein von Carlstadt (1480-1541). Carlstadt's popularity threatened Luther. Carlstadt was quickly crushed by Luther allying with his government friends on the city council of Wittenberg.

When Luther arrived in 1511 at Wittenberg, Carlstadt was Professor of Theology at its university. Carlstadt had been twice Rector of the University of Wittenberg. He was also Canon and Archdeacon of the University's church called *Stiftskirche*. It was he who conferred on Luther his doctorate in 1512.<sup>1</sup> Luther always admitted that Carlstadt was his superior in learning.

In fact, Carlstadt was more the initial leader of the Reformation than Luther himself, with a far greater following initially. At first, Carlstadt as teacher and Luther as pupil were seen as joint allies. In 1517, they worked together on putting up the *95 Theses* on the church door at Wittenberg. They debated Eck together in 1519. They both wrote reformation works on similar themes in 1520. Yet, Luther had the honor alone of making his famous defiant and heroic speech at the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521. However, Luther then went into hiding for two years at Wartburg (1521-22) in Thuringia. At that juncture, Luther's points were merely debated in academic and clerical forums.

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1. Belfort Bax, *The Peasants War* (1903 edition) (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968) ch. 3.

“[The Pope] has long deserved that some one should drive him out of this world, so many wretched souls has he strangled with this devil’s snare.”

Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility* (para. 14) (1520)

However, then in the two years that Luther was hiding (or was being hidden, as others try to claim), Carlstadt stepped forward. He became the greatest early leader of the reformation among the people of Germany. Prior to that time, Protestantism was *not a popular movement*. Under Carlstadt, it moved from academic questions in front of prelates to the people. As Bax correctly notes, “Luther had always regarded the authorities as his mainstay [while] Carlstadt appealed to the people.”

For a variety of reasons, which we will explain, Lutherans and Catholics like to distort and demonize Carlstadt. The recent movie *Luther*, a cinematic masterpiece, tries to portray Carlstadt as leading the charge of mobs who entered churches in 1521 to remove images and statues of saints while Luther was hiding in a tower for two years.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there is no proof that anyone but Luther himself had previously made a call to violence as a principle of the reformation.<sup>3</sup> The *Lutheran Encyclopedia* refers to Carlstadt as the “Revolutionist of the Reformation.” As to this charge, however, there is no evidence but a *coincidence* of mobs cleansing churches of what they deemed to be idols following sermons by Carlstadt against such idols. In the same period, two monks were stoned by students, but no one can link their actions either to Carlstadt. As one scholar puts it: “I have no evidence linking Carlstadt directly with the violence that occurred.”<sup>4</sup>

The movie *Luther* also tried to make this iconoclast movement of 1521-22 at Wittenberg synonymous with the Peasant’s War. However, that war was years later, in 1524-25, led by different men in different cities. While they were Christians, and they were inspired by Carlstadt’s theology and teachings, their aims were largely political. Carlstadt cannot be associated with any violent episodes in those events. Bax’ famous work *The Peasants War* (1903) is considered one of the most thorough historical accounts of that war even though

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2. While some like to portray the agents of the Elector of Saxony holding Luther captive at Wartburg, this is myth. Luther for good reason was in hiding. His life was in danger, and the Elector provided him protection.

Bax had a socialist axe to grind. Bax places the Peasants War in full-swing in other cities in the Rhine, Swabia and Franconia with no role of Carlstadt mentioned until late into the events. Even then, Carlstadt had no role in violence. In fact, his only role was a few sermons that preceded a totally peaceful 'revolution' at Rothenberg. Bax tries to play up Carlstadt's role in the War, but according to Bax, Carlstadt only appearance is in 1525 when he was received happily by the peasants of Rothenberg. He gave a few sermons and was ordered expelled by the city council. Then he stayed in Rothenberg anyway. Nevertheless, soon thereafter, the City of Rothenberg without violence voted to join the Evangelical Brotherhood—the new state the peasants were creating across Southern Germany.

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3. Luther's March 1521 statement in *Last Bull of the Antichrist*, implied the laity would be justified going into armed revolt: "What wonder if princes, nobles and *laity* should smite the heads of the pope, bishops, priests, and monks, and drive them from the land?" *Wider die Bulle des Endchrists; / Assertion of All the Articles Condemned by the Last Bull of Antichrist* in WA, VI, 614 ff.; EA, XXIV-2, 38 ff. Luther in his *Address to the German Nobility* clearly espoused that the rulers themselves should take up arms against the Pope if he would not back down: "It seems to me that if the Romanists are so mad the only remedy remaining is for *the emperor, the kings, the princes* to gird themselves with *force of arms to attack these pests* of all the world and fight them, not with words, but *with steel*. If we punish thieves with the yoke, highwaymen with the sword, and heretics with fire, why do we not rather assault these monsters of perdition, these cardinals, these popes, and the whole swarm of the Roman Sodom, who corrupt youth and the Church of God? *Why do we not rather assault them with arms and wash our hands in their blood?*" (WA, VI, 347; VIII, 203; EA, II, 107; PE, IV, 203; Wil Durant, *Reformation*, at 351.) Luther, when confronted with the latter quote, tried to escape his meaning. He claimed that since he does not believe in killing heretics, he should not be interpreted as suggesting we should bathe our hands in the blood of the Romanists. Quoting his original language, he says: "Since I do not approve of burning heretics nor of killing any Christian—this I well know does not accord with the gospel—I have shown what they deserve if heretics deserve fire. There is no need to attack you with the sword." (WA, VII, 645-646.) This was somewhat disingenuous, as the original quote proves, but at least Luther did retract his call to violence against Catholics as heretics. Later, Luther would demand death of the Christian peasants for rebelling against the state (not because of heresy). Luther reasoned that the state are, as Paul says, God's ministers and thus any political rebellion was a rebellion against God.

In Bax' account, Carlstadt is not mentioned giving any more sermons thereafter or participating in any of the Peasants War movement. (Bax, *supra*, ch. 5.) Thus, Carlstadt, if he played a role at Rothenberg, did so in the *one town* that transformed itself *without a shot being fired by anyone*. Bax cites no other facts on Carlstadt's role in the Peasants' War. We must therefore treat as hyperbole those who stretch Carlstadt's role into something encouraging the violence in the Peasant's War. Catholics, Lutherans, Protestants and now Socialists have axes to grind to associate Carlstadt with violence. However, none of them have any facts to support this charge.

Instead, the only person who incited the Christian Peasants to violence in 1524 was Luther himself who did so in a 1522 pamphlet entitled *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops Falsely So-Called* (4 July 1522). Throwing blame on Carlstadt for the violence is the only way to make sense of Luther's later call in 1525 to mercilessly slaughter the Christian peasants who rose up in reliance on Luther's *initial* words exhorting revolt. It was only later — in 1525 — that Luther said any Christian who rebels against a ruler is disobedient to Paul's command to obey rulers. (Rom. 13:1 *et seq.*) Yet, Luther's *unequivocal* call of 1522 was the opposite. Luther wrote at that time:

It would be better to ***kill all bishops and to annihilate all religious foundations*** and monasteries than to let a single soul perish, not to mention losing all souls for the sake of these useless dummies and idols. ***What good are they***, except to live in lust from the sweat and labor of others and to impede the word of God? They are ***afraid of physical rebellion*** and do not care about spiritual destruction. Are they not intelligent, honest people! If they accepted God's word and sought the life of the soul, God would be with them, since he is a God

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4. Ross Vander Meulen, "Essay on Revolution 'The College's Role in Revolution,'" talk given at Knox College's Opening Convocation on September 7, 1972, reprinted at <http://www.knox.edu/x5040.xml>

of peace. Then there would be no fear of rebellion. But if they refuse to hear God's word and rather rage and rave with banning, burning, killing, and all evil, ***what could be better for them than to encounter a strong rebellion which exterminates them from the world?*** One could only laugh if it did happen, as the divine wisdom says, Proverbs 1[:25–27], “You have hated my punishment and misused my teaching; therefore I will laugh at your calamity and I will mock you when disaster strikes you.”

Not God's word but stubborn disobedience [to God's word] creates rebellion. Whoever rebels against it shall get his ***due reward***. Whoever accepts God's word does not start unrest, although he is no longer afraid of the masks and does not worship the dummies.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in 1522, Luther taught the true rebel is the one who disobeys God's word. The person who accepts God's words, though he rebel against temporal powers, is no rebel.

But then in 1525, as we will discuss later, Luther declared the Christians involved in the Peasants War must all be put to death, and killed as dogs for rebellion against Paul's words in Romans 13:1 *et seq.* Luther's flip-flop makes virtually no sense to any Lutheran or Protestant historian. Thus, they have made every effort to paint the Peasants as the sons of Carlstadt who allegedly inspired them to political rebellion. Thus, the Peasants and any of their errors belong to Carlstadt, we are supposed to imagine. This picture is vaguely painted in countless histories. It surfaces in how Carlstadt appears in the recent movie *Luther*, holding a weapon in his hand during the Peasant's War dumbfounded that Luther is not joining in the violence. Yet, it is purely *myth*.

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5. Martin Luther, *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops Falsely So-Called* (July 4, 1522) printed in *Luther Works* (American Edition)(ed. H.T. Lehmann)(1955) Vol. 39, at 239-299, quotation from 252-253.

### Why Is Carlstadt Such A Problem for Lutherans?

Why is everyone so anxious to shift the blame for the violence of 1524-25 onto Carlstadt instead of on Luther to whom it rightfully belongs? Why is Carlstadt's memory distorted by everyone?

As mentioned before, Luther went into hiding from 1521 to 1522. "During [Luther's] absence Professor Andreas von Carlstadt assumed leadership of the Protestant movement in Wittenberg."<sup>6</sup> Carlstadt preached as the local priest of Wittenberg against celibacy for church leaders, against monastic vows, and against the mass. At Christmas, 1521, he omitted in the service part of the mass the invocation that claimed transmutation. He also distributed communion as both wine and bread for direct handling and drinking from the chalice.<sup>7</sup> The Wittenberg City Council approved of all these changes by a decree of 24 January 1522.<sup>8</sup>

Carlstadt announced at the same time that he would lay aside the priestly dress and other ceremonies. Two days afterwards he was engaged to the daughter of a poor nobleman in the presence of distinguished professors of the university, and on January 20, 1522, he was married.

Here was a major hero of the Reformation, taking chances that Luther, hiding out in a tower, was not taking at the moment of greatest danger.

On the issue of iconoclasy, the movie *Luther* did Carlstadt a major injustice in particular. In 1521, Carlstadt had denounced pictures and images as dumb idols, which he argued were plainly forbidden in the second commandment, and should be burnt rather than tolerated in the house of God. He induced the town council to remove them from the parish church. However, the populace anticipated the

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6. Meulen, *id.*

7. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume VII. *Modern Christianity. The German Reformation.* §66.

8. Helmar Junghans, "Luther on the Reform of Worship," *Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. XIII (1999) at 315, 322.

orderly removal and tore them down. They hewed them to pieces and burnt them. This had nothing to do with the Peasant's War. The only violence involved in this period was a stoning against two monks by two young students which cannot be linked to Carlstadt. No one can cite any words or role of Carlstadt in this unfortunate crime.

So why all the blame shifted to Carlstadt and distortions about him? What disturbs Lutherans is how Carlstadt took the reformation in a successful direction with the people while Luther hid for two years. Carlstadt began a Jesus' Words Only movement. Carlstadt repudiated all titles and dignities, since Christ alone was our Master (Matt. 23:8). He cast away his priestly and academic robes, put on a plain citizen's dress, afterwards a peasant's coat, and had himself called *brother Andrew*. Carlstadt's *Protestant* theology laid the ground for the *Brethren movement* which was the inspiration to the Peasant's War.

Carlstadt next opposed the baptism of infants, refusing to even have his young son baptized. More important, it was on the issue of the Hebrew Bible, in particular the Sabbath command, that Carlstadt and Luther would conflict. Carlstadt pointed out that the Sabbath command's discontinuance was only by papal decree. It came late in Western European history (363 A.D.). Carlstadt insisted this Biblical command was still binding. As Dr. Barnas Spears summarizes in *Life of Luther* (Philadelphia: 1850) at 401:

Carlstadt differed essentially from Luther in regard to the use to be made of the Old Testament. ***With him, the law of Moses was still binding.*** Luther, on the contrary, had a strong aversion to what he calls a legal and Judaizing religion. Carlstadt held to the ***divine authority of the Sabbath from the Old Testament;*** Luther believed Christians were free to observe any day as a Sabbath, provided they be uniform in observing it.

Luther clearly was supported by Paul's epistles in abjuring the need to follow *Saturday Sabbath* and the Law. How could Carlstadt differ from Paul's view and yet be such a luminary and leader of the

Reformation? In some respects, Carlstadt was far more daring than Luther in reformation. In fact, as we shall see, to stop Carlstadt, Luther will join forces with Catholicism to crush Carlstadt, calling him the “new Judas.” To do so, Luther will make common cause with Catholic authorities in favor of infant baptism and viewing the host and wine as truly the body and blood of Christ. Why was Carlstadt so different in outlook than Luther, his pupil in reformation principles? Why did Luther feel the need to stop Carlstadt? ***Because of Carlstadt’s different view of Paul when compared to the Gospels.*** As Wil Durant summarizes:

Later in the same year [1520] Carlstadt issued a little book—*De Canonicis Scripturis Libellus*—***exalting*** the Bible over popes, councils and traditions, and ***the Gospels over Epistles***. If Luther had followed this last line, ***Protestantism might have been less Pauline***, Augustinian, and Predestinarian.<sup>9</sup>

Carlstadt, in particular, in this booklet openly disagreed with Luther that one could reject the book of James as noncanonical based on doctrine obtained from Paul. First, Carlstadt said you must determine what is canon. Then one can determine one’s doctrine. His slogan was *canonicity before doctrine*. If one reverses the procedure, then one’s personal doctrine, however commendatory, turns into a weapon by which genuine Scripture is rejected or down-played unnecessarily.

[A]s early as 1520, Luther’s Wittenberg University co-reformer Bodenstein von Carlstadt...***condemned Luther’s rejection of James*** and argued that one must ***appeal either to known apostolic authorship*** or to universal historical acceptance (*omnium consensus*) as the test of a book’s canonicity, not to internal doctrinal

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9. Wil Durant, *The Reformation* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1944) at 352.

considerations. (Carlstadt, *De canonicis ,Scripturis libellus* (Wittenberg. 1520) para, 50.)<sup>10</sup>

Luther was angry with Carlstadt's reforms, his downplay of Paul, and his theological acceptance of the Epistle of James. In 1521, from his place of hiding, Luther savagely attacked Carlstadt in a book entitled *The New Judas*, meaning Carlstadt.

Then Luther backed off in 1522 on the Lord's Supper a bit. In 1522, Luther wrote a pamphlet in which he was upset that people were taking the bread and cup in the service. Some were not "qualified" to take the cup. Luther indirectly acknowledged Carlstadt was correct that no transmutation occurs in the Mass of the bread and wine into Jesus' real body and blood. (Luther had previously in 1520 boldly said no transmutation occurs in the Lord's Supper.)<sup>11</sup> Yet, Luther said that reform was moving too fast. Some weak in faith might be encouraged to violate their conscience and later have regret, and then not return to church. Thus, in 1522, Luther was "decisively against" the speed of these reforms made by Carlstadt, but he appeared sympathetic on the issue of transubstantiation.<sup>12</sup>

However, later, in 1524, Luther again moved into extreme opposition to Carlstadt, and allied with the Catholic position. He attacked Carlstadt once more for Carlstadt's insisting the communion is symbolic. Luther insisted, instead, that "the body of Christ... is really and substantially present in, with and under the Supper..."<sup>13</sup> Luther was once more favoring the Catholic position. Thus, Luther in

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10. John Warwick Montgomery, "Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ," *God's Inerrant Word* (1974), reprinted online at <http://www.mtio.com/articles/bissar37.htm>

11. This was in his 1520 pamphlet *A Prelude Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.

12. Helmar Junghans, "Luther on the Reform of Worship," *Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. XIII (1999) at 323.

13. "The Eucharist," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* reprinted online at <http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/ISBE/ID/5577>

1524 denounced Carlstadt's position that the Lord's Supper was symbolic even though in 1520 and 1522 Luther had agreed it was symbolic. Luther was flip-flopping. Yet, as Dr. Spears relates, by changing position, Luther was able to have authorities expel his opponent Carlstadt from his job at the university as well as from all of Saxony:

The work which he wrote against him, he entitled, 'The Book against the Celestial Prophets.' This was uncandid; for the controversy related chiefly to the sacrament of the supper. ***In the south of Germany and in Switzerland, Carlstadt found more adherents than Luther.*** Banished as an [alleged] Anabaptist, he was received as a Zwinglian. (Spears, *supra*, at 403.)

The civil power moved to the side of Luther, and crushed Carlstadt for views we now all accept: the supper is representational and we can receive the wine and bread in our hands. "[H]e [Carlstadt] was crushed by the civil power, which was on the side of Luther." (Spears, *supra*, at 400.) Luther demanded Carlstadt "get out of town." The civil authorities at Wittenberg and Saxony officially repeated Luther's demand. In 1524, Carlstadt was expelled from Saxony. He and his wife were left to wander from place to place. At first, he became a laborer on his father-in-law's farm. Later in 1531 he became a pastor in a Zwinglian church. In 1534, he was appointed professor at Basel, which is where he remained until he died in 1541.

Yet Luther was intent Carlstadt live a life in infamy due to Luther's branding him *The New Judas*. The great Luther had made it difficult and often impossible for Carlstadt to find work. Ruined and penniless at times, Carlstadt had no one to thank but Luther and the persecuting authorities under Luther's influence.

Thus, Carlstadt was destroyed by Luther based on disagreement over communion on a point which today all Protestants agree with Carlstadt, not Luther. But, the issue was much deeper than that:

*Carlstadt took the emphasis off Paul, and put it back on Jesus of the Gospels.* This meant James' Epistle cannot be discarded, as it clearly reflects Jesus' teachings.

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*Lutherans' Demonization of Carlstadt Teaches Another Lesson About Paul.*

The Lutherans' persistent effort to make Carlstadt out to be the one to blame for the Peasant's War is a shameless effort to ignore Luther's role in the violence of that war. This blame-shifting highlights Luther's cowardly retreat from taking responsibility for his own words which exhorted violence *by the laity* against Catholic bishop-rulers. It also underscores the fruit of Paul. For Luther relied on Paul's teachings on *submission to governments as God's ministers without any exception* to justify his exhortation to the German *Catholic* rulers. Luther told them to strike down "as dogs" 100,000 of the earliest Protestants who were of Carlstadt's stripe. Luther's actions expose the evil fruit of Paul's teachings that state officers are "ministers of God" in Romans chapter thirteen.

To begin proving this, we must ask: what were the goals of the Peasants involved in the Peasants War of 1524-25? The demands of the peasants were Christian in spirit and moderate, influenced *in content* by Carlstadt's preaching and example. They professed that they wanted the right to practice their faith in Christ, free of civil oppression that was inconsistent with Christian principles. Their demands were: 1. The right to elect their own pastors (conceded by Zwingli, but not by Luther). 2. Freedom from the small tithe (the great tithe of grain they were willing to pay). 3. The abolition of bond-service, since all men were redeemed by the blood of Christ (but they promised to obey the elected rulers ordained by God, *in every thing reasonable and Christian*). 4. Freedom to hunt and fish. 5. A share in the forests for domestic fuel; 6. Restriction of compulsory service. 7. Payment for extra labor above what the contract requires. 8. Reduction of rents. 9. Cessation of arbitrary punishments.

10. Restoration of the pastures and fields which have been taken from the communes. 11. Abolition of the right of heriot, by which widows and orphans are deprived of their inheritance. 12. All these demands shall be tested by Scripture; and if not found to agree with it, they are to be withdrawn. (Scaff, *History of the Reformation*, Vol. 7; Bax, *The Peasant War*, ch. 3.)

This list, incidentally, reveals the Peasants were *Protestant* Christians. They wanted the freedom to choose their own *minister*, a concept that Carlstadt-Luther had introduced first somewhere between 1517 and 1524. The peasants wanted their proposals to be tested by Scripture, and if proven inconsistent, they would withdraw the offending demand. This was *Sola Scriptura* in action. They certainly were not Catholic. Yet, they were not Lutherans either. What were they theologically? They appear to be the spiritual sons of Carlstadt. For Carlstadt was the first to take Reformation ideals to the people, during 1521 to 1522, while Luther was in hiding. Thus, by 1524, Bax reports ***there were 250,000 Peasants leading the Evangelical Brotherhood as they called it***, drawn from every part of Southern Germany. Yet, even though they were spiritually sons of Carlstadt does not mean Carlstadt handed them their program or methods.

The one item on the *Evangelical Brotherhood* Peasant list that we know offended Luther was their position at odds with Paul on submission to rulers (#3). There was no other serious doctrinal issue that Luther raised against the Peasant's demands. Luther contended in May 1525 in his work entitled *Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants* that their movement violated Romans 13:1. Luther reminded them this verse from Paul imposed on them a duty of obedience to the ruling powers because their rulers are God's ministers. Paul made no exception for alleged perceived injustice. Luther repeated this in *Exhortation ...Against Insurrection*:

Hence ***no insurrection*** is ***ever right***, no matter how good the cause in whose interest it is made....My sympathies are and always will be with those against

“[W]e must endure the authority of the prince. If he misuse or abuse his authority, we are not to entertain a grudge, seek revenge or punishment. Obedience is to be rendered for God's sake, for the ruler is God's representative. However they may tax or exact, we must obey and endure patiently.”

Martin Luther,  
*Tribute to Caesar*  
(Luther Hess Waring  
*Political Theories of  
Martin Luther* (N.Y.:  
1910) at 104.)

whom insurrection is made, however wrong the cause they stand for . . . **God has forbidden insurrection...**<sup>14</sup>

The Peasants countered by insisting it can be obedience to God that directs a Christian to resist oppression by rulers, citing Biblical passages of how God rescued the Israelites from oppression.<sup>15</sup> In the Brethren's words are the echoes of our own Declaration of Independence. In it we read the Christian sentiment that we are "endowed by the CREATOR, with certain unalienable Rights" which if "any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."

The Peasants' methods were not treacherous or evil. They made specific written *moderate* demands. They were willing to use force if their feudel lords or ruling *Catholic* bishops refused. They used force on several occasions. They were kindly in victory. Each new city enrolled thereupon belonged to the new state they called the *Evangelical Brotherhood*. Some cities signed on voluntarily, such as Rothenberg. When the Peasant army approached other city-states, the Peasants engaged in good faith and patient negotiations on the twelve demands listed above.

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14. Martin Luther, *An Earnest Exhortation for all Christians, Warning Them Against Insurrection and Rebellion*, in Luther Works (Philadelphia Edition)(1955) III, 201-222, quotes from 206-213, 215-216; also in *Works American Edition* VIII, 676-687.

15. The full text of their March 1525 articles appears in Bax' *The Peasants War* ch. 3. The introduction responds to Luther's charge of violating Paul's words: "For the rest, it followeth clearly and manifestly that the peasants who in their Articles require such Gospel as doctrine and as precept **may not be called disobedient and rebellious**. But should God hear those peasants who anxiously call upon Him that they may live according to his word; who shall gainsay the will of God? (Rom. xi.). Who shall Impeach His judgment? (Isa. xl.). Yea, who shall resist His Majesty? (Rom. viii.). Hath he heard the children of Israel and delivered them out of the hand of Pharoah, and shall He not to-day also save his own? Yea, He shall save them, and that speedily (Exod. iii 14; Luke xviii. 8). Therefore, Christian reader, read hereunder with care and thereafter judge."

However, Luther regarded their effort to negotiate political and religious freedom by use of the *threat of arms* as a violation of Paul's injunction to obey the government. By May 1525, Luther was exasperated trying to convince them any longer. Luther gave his blessing to the Catholic rulers that they should now use ruthless and merciless force on the Christian *Protestant* peasants. Luther in his famous pamphlet *Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants* responded with stunning vitriole. He called for merciless punishment of the revolt by the peasants. Relying on Luther's endorsement, Catholic rulers **refused to negotiate** any of the demands of the *Christian* peasants. They began to crush and frankly murder the largely defenseless peasants, including women and children. At Frankenhausen, 50,000 were slaughtered. When all was finished, Schaff tallies 100,000 Christian 'rebels' killed. Who was responsible for this unyielding murderous response to their moderate demands? Schaff does not hide the culprit.

Luther dipped his pen in blood, and burst out in a most violent manifesto "against the rapacious and murderous peasants." He charged them with doing the Devil's work under pretence of the gospel. He called upon the magistrates to "stab, kill, and strangle" them like mad dogs.

The myth of associating Carlstadt with this uprising was self-serving. It was a way that Lutheran historians try to make it appear Luther had *other doctrinal* reasons beyond Paul's injunction to obey officials. How otherwise can one justify killing 100,000 Christian souls based on merely violating Paul's directive to obey the ruling authorities as "God's ministers"? However, *no doctrine* other than Paul's view of *government authority* had anything expressly to do with Luther's view of the rebels. The only doctrine Luther ever cited against the peasant rebels was Paul's doctrine that one must support authorities as God's ministers. Based on this doctrine, Luther simply authorized the most bloody reprisals possible against what was a

Christian and *Protestant* attempt at *political action*. The Peasant rebellion on moderate grounds was met with merciless slaughter not only with Luther's blessing but also with his firm *instigation*.

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*What Luther's Paulinism in the Peasant Revolt Reveals About Paul*

In fact, Luther's action raises another question about the legitimacy of Paul. For Paul once more contradicts Jesus on the core issue that Luther was emphasizing justified repression. Paul indeed did teach rulers are "ministers of God" in Romans 13:1 *et seq.* It follows, as Paul teaches, we must obey them as if we were obeying God "for conscience sake." There are no exceptions for when you will obey God. Thus there can be no exceptions likewise for when you will obey a ruler. Luther made a correct deduction of Paul's words. Jesus, however, never said this, and contradicted Paul.

Jesus said the sons of God are free from government rules, but we obey so the rulers *do not "stumble" and sin by being antagonized.* (Matt. 17:26-27.) Jesus' words thus teach we do not obey from conscience sake, as if the rules came from God. Rather, we only obey so as not to anger rulers and make them sin. However, ***Jesus' words open the door to consider disobeying when we do not cause a ruler to sin, but instead the ruler is sinning already by oppression or evil.*** In that case, Jesus implies we are free to call the ruler to do righteousness, which leads him from sin to goodness. Christian disobedience to unjust demands thus has the same objective as Christian obedience to just demands: *to lead rulers away from sin.*

Thus, we see Jesus and Paul do not see eye-to-eye on a most important issue. In our own day, the Paulinism of Luther had its ultimate fruit. Many marvel and ask why would German Christians obey Nazi orders to kill innocent babies who were born lame, the elderly, Gypsies and Jews. But it was not surprising. German Christians were predominantly Lutheran by Hitler's day. They had been taught that Luther was correct that the government, right or wrong, must be fol-

lowed as God's ministers. There is no exception of when you must obey God's ministers. You must endure patiently, yet perform your duty even if that means killing the innocent, the lame, or the Jew.

Jesus said this is *never true*. We are never subject to the rules of the government as a matter of conscience. They are man-made rules. We only obey so as not to antagonize and cause our rulers to sin by making them *justifiably* angry. Yet, if a Christian is ordered to kill a baby because it is lame, it is murder even if it is a 'lawful' order of a government. The ruler sins by ordering something in violation of God's law. You can do no wrong if you call your ruler to be accountable to that higher law.

Based on Paul, however, Luther taught an *absolutely strict code of obedience to government no matter what*. The Lutheran teachers who prepared the grammar school lessons for children became Hitler's pawns. For the Lutheran professors and grade school teachers always praised Luther's position on the Peasant's War. It was a key event in German history. The massacre of the Peasants at Luther's request was as unforgettable to Germans as our Declaration of Independence. Luther's position was praised based on a Christian's allegedly strict moral duty to obey the government even if the orders appear unjust. Thus, by myth-making, Luther was no longer one of the most beastly figures of human history for his instigating Catholic rulers to murder 100,000 people. Instead, Luther was transformed into a wise and Godly-man. No wonder that Hitler's SS men who were trained by Lutheran teachers could justify as a moral duty the commission of similarly beastly acts on the same soil that 100,000 of the Brethren (including women and children) were previously murdered at Luther's adamant insistence.<sup>16</sup>

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16. See Peter. F. Wiener, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor* (London: Hutchinson, 1944), available online at <http://www.tentmaker.org/books/Martin-Luther-HitlersSpiritualAncestor.html#bibliography>.

Thus, Luther's excessive reliance on Paul, disregarding Jesus' contrary views, helps expose once more the error of following Paul. Based on Paul, Luther instigated the murder of 100,000 Christian *Protestants* by Catholic authorities so as to rigidly uphold *Paul's teaching* against political disobedience.

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*Why Carlstadt Is Associated With the Peasant's War.*

What other reasons supported associating Carlstadt with this debacle? First, besides lending some principled basis to Luther's call to kill the rebels mercilessly, it tended to justify why Luther turned his back on his friend and had him expelled from Wittenberg. Yet, to repeat, no one can link anything involved in the Peasant's War to Carlstadt. Further, blaming the war on Carlstadt takes the blame off Luther's words which previously had endorsed violence against Roman Catholic prelates. No one can find a word of violence on the pen of Carlstadt in his many pamphlets nor in any sermon he ever gave. Carlstadt becomes a scapegoat to pay for the sins that Luther himself committed.

What again then were the doctrines of Carlstadt, who is frequently maligned by Protestants, in particular Lutherans? They were:

- Paul's epistles were subordinate to the Gospels.
- James was not to be eliminated based on *a priori* assumption that Paul's doctrines are the test of whether to exclude James.
- The Sabbath was never properly abrogated by the Catholic church, and the Hebrew Scriptures and Law remain valid and binding on Christians (*i.e.*, he rejected antinomianism).

The Reformation that Carlstadt began was aborted by Luther's intervention. Yet, Carlstadt's reformation came *right at the inception* of the Reformation. It came just before *Luther decided on a retrenchment toward Catholicism*. This history demonstrates how

clearly Jesus' Words Only as a principle will manifest itself to true Christians. It also shows that Luther *intentionally* repressed this movement by use of *force*, allying with city authorities at Wittenberg to expel his old friend, branding him the *New Judas*. It was an heartless endeavor to render his old friend penniless and irreversibly defamed in Christian circles. Who had the better fruit? Carlstadt or Luther? Between the two, who engaged in slander and hateful destruction of the other?

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*Luther is Immediately Challenged by An  
Anabaptist Jesus' Words Only Movement.*

Most Protestants do not know that almost immediately after Luther initiated the *95 Theses* with Carlstadt, the so-called Anabaptists challenged Luther's Pauline emphasis. These forty or more sects had a common vision: they claimed to see Luther's error of relying too heavily on Paul, and called everyone to follow Jesus' Words Only. If it could not be found in the Bible, it had no warrant. They called Christians to a purer form of Bible-based Christianity. This movement was first pejoratively referred to by the Roman Catholic authorities as the *Anabaptists* (re-baptizers). They were a faster growing group than the Lutherans for a long time. In response, Lutherans instigated governors in Germany and Zurich sympathetic to their views to torture and kill them as rebellious heretics. Calvinists did the same later in England under King James.

In fact, in the Reformation, the *Anabaptists* became Martyrs to the murderous leaders of the Protestant Reformation. These leaders were Luther first at Wittenberg, and Zwingli at Zurich. Each convinced their city's governors to side with themselves against these *Protestant* Christians, and have them killed due to their 'rebellious' difference in doctrine with Luther and Zwingli.

How had this come about?

Luther and Zwingli elected to live in protected city-state enclaves to print their books and spread their doctrine. They used their new-found political influence to crush and kill the non-Paulinist JWO *Anabaptist* movement within Protestantism. There is not a single example you can find of Anabaptists *killing* Lutherans, Calvinists or Zwinglians due to their doctrine. This is because one of the tenets of *Anabaptists* was their desire of freedom of religion from state churches, such as now existed at Wittenberg, Geneva, and Zurich where Luther, Calvin and Zwingli spiritually reigned.

Why were these Protestants smeared as *Anabaptists*? For two reasons. First, it made it appear they were one-issue people. Also, the public bias in those days was that infant baptism was an indispensable fact of Christian life. The populace liked this practice. It was easy to curry favor with the masses by supporting infant baptism's validity. Thus, Luther joined the Roman Catholics to oppose anyone who thought one needed to be rebaptized after becoming a Christian as an adult. These *Anabaptists* were 'Bible-only' theologians. They insisted infant baptism was not able to save. It was not Biblical.

These so-called *Anabaptists*' initial opponents were the Roman Catholic church. In reply, the Catholic leaders disparaged them, insisting infant baptism *by the Catholic church did save*. The Catholic hierarchy insisted that no re-baptism as an adult was necessary when you later in life found *faith*. The proponents of *rebaptism* held other doctrines of equal importance, but the Roman Catholic view was to brand them *Anabaptist*, which means *re-baptizer*. Today we know the *Anabaptists* by their proper names that show they are a diverse group: the Amish, the Mennonites, and The Brethren. These *anabaptist* groups disliked the excessive reliance on Paul to the detriment of following Jesus' statements and example. As one historical account puts it:

A thorough-going Christo-centrism is the indisputable tenet of anabaptism. To be a Christian means, ***not to cling to Paul's 'gospel' (or Luther's reading of Paul)***—which invariably seems to set him in opposition to

both James and Jesus—but to live in conformity to the way of life taught and demonstrated by Jesus in the gospels. \*\*\*\*

When it came to the Bible, Anabaptists ***started from Jesus and interpreted everything in the light of him***—unlike the Reformers whom Anabaptists suspected of ***starting from doctrinal passages [from Paul] and trying to fit Jesus into these.***<sup>17</sup>

The Anabaptists were treated cruelly by both Roman Catholics and Lutheran Protestants. In the 1500s, Zwingli (a leading Protestant figure) in Swiss territory instigated the council of Zurich to treat re-baptizing as a capital crime. Franz Manz was drowned in the river of Zurich in 1527 at the behest of Lutheran-inspired Protestants. The initial leader of the Anabaptists, Michael Sattler, was tried by a Roman Catholic court in 1527. Despite what appears to have been a

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17. *So What's All the Fuss About Anabaptism* (2004) reprinted at <http://anabaptist.lifewithchrist.org/permalink/8135>. This article goes on to explain the basis for such statements. Hans Denk, an early Anabaptist leader, famously stated, “No one can claim truly to know Christ unless one follows him in life.” For the Anabaptists, the heart of Christian life was not justification by faith or divine election or the inward work of grace but rather the concept of ‘following Jesus.’ Then the author quotes Karsdorf’s explanation of *Anabaptists*: “No other Christian movement between the apostolic era and the modern mission period has articulated and demonstrated more clearly the meaning of discipling than have the Anabaptists. While mainline Reformers rediscovered the great Pauline term ‘Glaube’ (faith), the Radical Reformers rediscovered the evangelists’ word ‘Nachfolge’ (discipleship). People cannot, they maintained, call Jesus Lord unless they are his disciples indeed, prepared to follow him in every way. This was the message they preached, the code they lived by, and the faith they died for.” The Roman Catholic critique of *Anabaptists* is somewhat humorous. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* creates a myth of a unified *Anabaptist Party*, lumping all those who attacked infant baptism as necessary for salvation into one group of violent communists who believed in a community of women. The article only admits the presence in the same movement of a “more pacific current” in Switzerland. See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01445b.htm>

well-reasoned defense, on May 20, 1527, his tongue was cut out, he was tortured, and then he was burned alive. He remained faithful unto death for the simple proposition that Jesus' Words alone mattered.<sup>18</sup>

During Calvin's spiritual reign over Geneva in the 1500s, Geneva had 57 executions of Christians who held to various *Anabaptist* tendencies. This murderous solution to dissent against *Anabaptists* was frequently repeated in England under King James at the best of the Calvinist Puritans who controlled the church.

Thus, the fact the Jesus' Words Only movement does not predominate today is due an historical accident. Luther and later Calvin made alliances with authorities to kill Christians who advocated Jesus' Words Only—who insisted Jesus' words have priority over Paul's teachings.

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### *Impact of Anabaptists on Luther*

The “Jesus Words and Example Only” idea of the Anabaptists apparently touched the heart of Martin Luther in the end. Martin Luther (1483-1546) decided in his last explanation of salvation to join the Anabaptist emphasis on Jesus' words only. In an apparent agreement with the Anabaptists, Luther in the 1531 version of his *Catechisms* abandoned Paul's salvation formulas. Instead, Luther chose to rely upon Jesus' Words Alone, as the Anabaptists were teaching. Luther in fact has been attacked as a heretic and deceiver by evangelical Christians when they examine these *Catechisms* in light of Pauline doctrine. Thus, there is really no dispute that something earth-shaking took place *late* in Luther's life. Prior to that time, Luther was as Pauline as any Paulinist of today. (See the article on this website Luther Adopted Jesus' Words Only and Turned His Back on His Prior Paulinism.)

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18. “Reformation Radicals: The Anabaptists,” *Christian History Institute*, reprinted at <http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glimps017.shtml>

Late in life, Luther did still disagree with *Anabaptists'* concern over the need for rebaptism. He still endorsed infant baptism as an alleged command of God. Yet, Luther was diametrically at odds with the Catholic view of infant baptism as a *saving sacrament*, highly endorsing the concerns of the Anabaptists who insisted it had no *saving quality* on an infant.<sup>19</sup>

This demonstrates that Luther in the 1531 version of his *Catechisms* had come around to the Anabaptist approach to teaching salvation from Jesus' words alone despite how that made Paul look.

In sum, we need to follow these examples of the early church's emphasis on Jesus (not Paul). We need to see certain Anabaptists were heroes (some less perfect than others) for this cause. Finally, we need to see Luther too came around to Jesus' words only in his *Catechisms*. This was his penance for having instigated murder against the Brethren during the Peasants' War—people who merely wanted Jesus' Words Only to be the rule of life and doctrine. If God forgave Luther, so can we.

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19. Luther wrote in the *Larger Catechism* XIII A: "Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting." Luther then admits that to apply it to an infant is a "wrong use." Yet, Luther says rebaptism is wrong because even though we "make a wrong use of it," it is still valid, because it is a sacrament of the church. Thus, when you are an adult, and you believe now, Luther says you accept your infant baptism as effective even though you "did not receive it aright." Luther concludes that infant baptism is merely a "command" by God to us to do, which means *de facto* it has no saving power. Luther then says that it is wrong to infer that "where there is no true faith there is no true baptism." Luther uses some bizarre logic to support this. He says that if you "do not do what you ought" (*i.e.*, you are baptized without faith) does not mean "the thing in itself shall be nothing and of no value." Luther was thus saying from the child's perspective, it is insufficient, but we are commanded to baptize children. But Luther's conclusion is nonsense. Of course, anything produced wrongly produces a wrong result. What Luther was really doing is trying to agree with Anabaptists that infant baptism does not save, but also disagree that rebaptism was necessary for adults baptized into the Catholic faith.