

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module RDL7076: The Reformation.
Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

LEVEL 7 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:	MICHAEL ALLURED	Student ID number:	1705426
Programme:	MTH CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY		
Module:	THE REFORMATION		
Module code:	RDL 7076	Contribution to Overall Module Assessment (%):	
Lecturer:	DR TIMOTHY BAYLOR	Internal Verifier:	
Assignment Title:	What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.	Word count (or equivalent):	2,500
Submission deadline:	24 MAY 2019	Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:	
Submission method:	All written assessments, where practical and possible, must be submitted via Turnitin unless otherwise instructed by the Lecturer. (Please DO NOT put this assessment specification into Turnitin or it will match many similarities with other students' submissions.) Alternative submission method (if applicable): Late submission of the assessment will result in a late penalty mark. Penalties for late submission: Up to one week late, maximum mark of 50%. Over one week late, 0%. Only the Extenuating Circumstances Panel may approve a change to submission dates.		
Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

The Radical Reformation and its upholders have been described by Roland H. Bainton and others as the Reformation's 'left wing'.¹ Geoffrey Dipple is right to acknowledge the problems that the term 'left wing' can raise in this context: arguing that it implies a theological coherence which was clearly not present among the heterogeneous groups he calls 'Reformation radicals'. He nevertheless has more sympathy with Bainton than with the term 'Radical Reformation' popularised by the historian George H. Williams.² To refer to the Reformation's 'left wing' might accurately describe the social and economic discontent of the Peasants' War of 1524-5 (the fire for which was lit by Luther), the iconoclastic Thomas Muntzer and events in Munster in 1534-35 when radicals embraced violence in the belief that they were 'fighting for the honour of God and not for selfish or "creaturely" motives'.³ For the purpose of this study, however, I shall defer to Williams, who provides a more precise temporal framework for treating the diverse theologies - not always distinct even within each group - of Reformation radicals.⁴

Whether, like Dr Thomas Fudge, we place the origins of the Radical Reformation in January or Easter 1525 and the performing of the first believers' baptisms or are with Dipple (with whom I agree on this point) and locate its beginning as early as 1521-22 in Wittenberg, what historians agree on is that the figures of the Radical Reformation went much further than the Magisterial reformers Luther, Zwingli and Calvin did in challenging the theology and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and the foundations on which Christianity in the late Medieval period stood.^{5 6} As Williams wrote, '...the Radical Reformation contained impulses which were at once more

¹ Roland H. Bainton, 'The Left Wing of the Reformation' in *The Journal of Religion*, volume 21, number 2 (April 1941). pp. 124-134, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/482718> accessed 10 May 2019.

² Geoffrey Dipple, 'Radical Theology' in *T&T Clark Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David M. Whitford (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 291-292.

³ Michael G. Baylor, *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. xx

⁴ George Hunston Williams, 'Introduction' in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, ed. by George Hunston Williams and Angel M Mergal, Volume XXV, The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 20-22.

⁵ Thomas Fudge, *Upon this Rock: A History of Christianity from the Roman Empire to the Reformation*. Lecture 30, Radical Reformation (Portland, Oregon: A Hewett Research Foundation Production, 2005).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3340&v=m1DPCPPu7SI accessed 26 April 2019.

⁶ Dipple, p. 292.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

primitive and more modern than the driving forces of classical Protestantism'.⁷

Bernard Reardon elucidates for us the degree of difference between radicals and Magisterial reformers by writing that they:

sought not merely a reformation or cleansing of religion of its abuses but rather a restitution, or literal restoration, of its primitive condition as portrayed in the New Testament and by writers of early post-apostolic times. For these reform would necessarily have to be effected in a much more drastic and reductive way than anything envisaged by Luther or even Zwingli. The one pattern to be followed was that of the days when the church was composed not of Christian citizens going about their normal pursuits and willingly submitting to if not actually exercising civic authority, but of committed believers eschewing all power other than spiritual and prepared for the sake of their principles to endure suffering and persecution like their Christian forebears in the church's heroic age when the Spirit-filled community was a people apart and the way of faith, in all likelihood, that of martyrdom as well.⁸

While the Magisterial Reformation represented a fundamental challenge to the Church and its political structures it never intentionally questioned the fundamental doctrines of institutional Christianity as some radicals like Servetus and the Socinians did in relation to the Trinity. Indeed, Luther later moderated his enthusiasm for *sola scriptura* and as early as around 1524 the Zurich Council, encouraged by Zwingli, required all babies to be baptised within eight days of birth and by 1526 had passed an edict to punish adult baptism by drowning.⁹ In answering the more radical Reformation thinkers, the Magisterial reformers found themselves caught between challenging tradition in Christianity and using tradition as an argument against these more radical thinkers by saying that the Bible had to be interpreted and that tradition

⁷ G.H. Williams and A. M. Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia/London: Library of Christian Classics, 1957), p. 848, cited in Bernard M. G. Reardon's *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London and New York: Longman, 1981), p. 235.

⁸ Reardon, p. 210.

⁹ Author unknown, *Radical Reformation vs Magisterial Reformation*

<https://freewillpredestination.wordpress.com/radical-reformation-vs-magisterial-reformation/> accessed on 10 May 2019.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

(e.g. the sacraments of Eucharist and baptism) was part of that.¹⁰ Luther's reforms were about purging the Church of corrupt practices and on this he was in agreement with the radicals. There was a broadly common position on rejecting sacramentalism and ritual and placing more importance on justification by faith and grace and the priesthood of all believers. Radical reformers, increasingly disillusioned, went beyond Luther and Zwingli and began to challenge areas on which Magisterial Reformers agreed, even with the Pope.¹¹ Caspar Grebel wrote that 'Zwingli the herald of the Word has cast down the Word, has trodden it underfoot and has brought it into a captivity'.¹² Notions central to Reformation radicals - freedom of conscience, voluntarism in religion (the idea that, notwithstanding events in Munster with the expulsion of those refusing rebaptism and the practice of shunning among Mennonites, that coercion in matters of faith was wrong), Biblical literalism, a renewed emphasis on eschatology, a return to primitive Christianity, total separation of Church and state and communal living - were dangerous to the fabric of the social order and conservative rulers on whom Luther and Zwingli relied.¹³

This challenge ran against the culture of civic Christianity that characterised the classical Reformation and it came from three main and diverse, though on some doctrinal points, overlapping groups and associated figures: the Anabaptists (Conrad Grebel, Menno Simons, Karlstadt, Thomas Muntzer and Jacob Hutter), Spiritualists (Hans Denck, Caspar Schwenkfeld) and Rationalists (Servetus and the Sozzinis). Let us turn now to examine the specific nature and degree of this radical challenge characterised by some of the personalities and communities which both Roman Catholics and adherents of the Magisterial Reformation perceived as so dangerous to the established order.

¹⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 149.

¹¹ MacCulloch, p. 184.

¹² E. Arbenz, *Die Vadianische Briefsammlung der Stadtbibliothek St Gallen* (St Gall, 1890ff.), III, 50 cited in Reardon, p. 213.

¹³ David E. Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (Chicago, Illinois: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2000), p. 12.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

We begin with one of the central preoccupations around which all Reformation radicals were united, namely their antipathy to the involvement of the state or ecclesiastical authorities in religion.¹⁴ Baylor draws the radicalism out particularly well on this point, and notes that, unlike the Magisterial reformers, the radicals were reluctant to wait for the magistrates to countenance their changes (broadly the pattern in Wittenberg and even Zurich) but were executors who believed in direct action rather than theorists. He astutely concludes that the radicals saw each radical community as having the right to reconstruct itself 'immediately according to the Gospel as understood by the community' and that each community had the right 'to hear the gospel preached in pure form and regulate its life according to the Gospel.'¹⁵ There should be community control over the local church and ecclesiastical payments and they believed in the right for congregations to choose their own minister.¹⁶ This was radical, Baylor notes, and in contrast to the Magisterial reformers' position because it linked the legitimacy of political authority to a willingness to govern according to the Gospel and that if that willingness was questionable it was legitimate to change the regime.¹⁷

The events in Munster, where Anabaptists gained control of the town council and where in 1534 John Leyden came to create a New Jerusalem on Earth, were an extreme example of this. Under the Anabaptist leaders the city was declared a sanctuary for those oppressed by the state and who would be saved amidst eschatological catastrophe. As MacCulloch rightly notes, the Munster experience cemented the alliance between the political powers of Europe and the rather more conservative Magisterial Reformation because of the threat posed to the state.¹⁸ That is why in 1528 the Habsburgs burned the Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier. This is the man, according to MacCulloch, who can be credited with persuading the town council at Waldshut to implement 'Europe's first comprehensive civic reformation of religion, far outstripping anything that Wittenberg, Nuremberg or Zurich had done at

¹⁴ Baylor, p. xvi.

¹⁵ Baylor, p. xvi.

¹⁶ Baylor notes that in 1522 Luther had indicated support for this kind of communal reformation but by 1524 he opposed it.

¹⁷ Baylor, p. xvii.

¹⁸ MacCulloch, p. 189.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

that stage'.¹⁹ We must agree with MacCulloch's judgement that the principles driving the radical reformers and which were codified in the Schleithem Confession: no participation in lawsuits, no serving in armies or swearing of oaths, were 'a denial of the concept of Christendom, the alliance with worldly power that had sustained the medieval Church and that was now beginning to sustain the magisterial Reformations'.²⁰ Is it no wonder then that princes felt threatened by Anabaptist theology, particularly as lived out in the Hutterite communities of Moravia, where the sharing of goods was established as a core principle and one which the civic authorities were keen to crush?

The Hutterite communities that developed in Moravia were a powerful representation of a radical strand of the Reformation. Their conviction was that the community of goods was a true reflection of Christian principles based on the Acts of the Apostles.²¹ Families lived not in small houses but communally in dormitory dwellings called *Bruderhofs*. Children did not live with parents but first in 'small' and then 'great' schools. Individuals could not benefit from profits but the community could and all members of the community learned a craft. Individuals in Hutterite communities pooled their craft and farming skills to make and sell goods (though, as they were pacifists, not weapons) for a reasonable price, and what an individual owned at death reverted to the community. The 70 Hutterite communities that existed by 1591 were seen as honest because they were not driven by the profit motive and yet their ideas were challenging the Reformation which, they believed, had not fulfilled its mission to re-establish a society based on New Testament principles. Given that they did not wish to be part of the social contract with the world and lived in a community setting that anticipated the *kibbutzim* it is hardly surprising that this 'first society in Christian Europe to expect everyone to read and write' were looked on with suspicion.²² In spite of this many saw the attraction of the *Bruderhof*: a return to the ideals of the early Church, firm religious foundations, a disciplined religious life, strong community and social ties, shared property,

¹⁹ MacCulloch, p. 166.

²⁰ MacCulloch, p. 169.

²¹ Chapters 2 and 4.

²² MacCulloch, p. 170-171.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

education for children, support for the ill and elderly, an opportunity to learn a skill and be employed, indeed support from cradle to grave and protection from the oppression of the secular state.²³

Minno Simons, who gave his name to the Anabaptist Mennonites, rejected the notion of a state church and like other radicals believed in voluntarism and the supreme authority of scripture.²⁴ This is another major area where radicals rejected any monopoly by priests and Reformation ministers in interpreting the Scriptures. Magisterial reformers wanted to keep interpretation of Scripture under the control of ordained clergy and universities.²⁵ The way to achieve the aim of restoring the Church to its primitive form was not to reform its governance but rather to put the interpretation of Scripture in the hands of ordinary people rather than scholars. Anticlericalism was most extreme in Esslingen, where formal leadership of the congregation disappeared totally.²⁶ The political theory of the radical reformers was linked to their philosophy for how to live a Christian life in the everyday: living in peace, harmony, charity towards each other according to Scripture.²⁷ In the hands of radicals sola scriptura was dangerous.

What was also perceived to be dangerous was the doctrine of adult or believers' baptism, to which Anabaptists gave their name. For Muntzer, Karlstadt, Simons and Hubmaier (and also Michael Servetus and Socinus) infant baptism had no basis in the New Testament and represented a serious theological error. For them adult baptism was no empty church ceremony but 'marked both entry to the church and a voluntary [and conscious] commitment to live as fully as possible a Christ-like life'.²⁸ This honest religion that advocates 'baptism should follow a personally held faith and not simply anticipate it' seems logical to us today but in an age where baptism was one of the ways in which babies and their parents were introduced and bound into

²³ Fudge, *Upon this Rock*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3340&v=m1DPCPPu7SI

²⁴ Horsch, John, *Menno Simons: His Life, Labors and Teachings* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1916).
www.mennosimons.net/horsch18.html accessed 1 May 2919.

²⁵ Baylor, p. xiii.

²⁶ Dipple, p. 303.

²⁷ Baylor, p. xvii

²⁸ Dipple, p. 299.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

the community this was an unsettling doctrine, just as worrying as 'the idea that the spirit of religion transcends any or all of its institutional embodiments'.²⁹

The most radically shocking idea to develop during the Reformation was that the Doctrine of the Trinity might not be true. Servetus wrote: 'Your Trinity is a product of subtlety and madness. The Gospel knows nothing of it.'³⁰ Given the lack of a Scriptural basis for the triune God, Luther and other Magisterial reformers had not dwelt too closely on the Trinity but the intemperate Servetus opened a Pandora's box that upset Catholics and Protestants alike with what Melancthon called 'confused imaginings' of 'a fanatical spirit'.^{31 32} Even Luther's adversary at the Diet of Worms wrote of *On the Errors of the Trinity* that 'I never saw or read anything more nauseating'.³³ For Servetus the Reformation was not about removing corruption but rather restructuring doctrine.³⁴ His was a subtle argument and one can conclude that Servetus was a Trinitarian of sorts when he wrote:

And so I admit one Person of the Father, another Person of the Son, another Person of the Holy Spirit; and I admit Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one Godhead; and this is the true Trinity. But I prefer not to use a word foreign to Scriptures.....may this blasphemous and philosophical distinction of three beings in one God be rooted out from the minds of men...³⁵

Howe quotes Earl Morse Wilbur's summary of Servetus's ideas about God's being incomprehensible, intangible, immeasurable and transcending all things and rightly

²⁹ Reardon, p. 236

³⁰ Michael Servetus, *On the Errors of the Trinity* cited in Jack Mendelsohn's *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995), p.55.

³¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Haunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Sevetus: 1511-1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953, revised edition, Rhode Island: Blackstone Editions, 2005), p. 43.

³² Bainton, p. 43 quoting *Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunbt omnia* (Corpus Reformatorum), 2:630, 2:640, 2: 660-661.

³³ Bainton, p. 45.

³⁴ Reardon, p. 230.

³⁵ Michael Servetus, *On the Errors of the Trinity* cited in David B. Parke's *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995), p. 6.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

notes the pantheistic overtones of his conception of God in the Universe.³⁶ As he writes: these 'certainly represented an even further departure from traditional trinitarian theology than his earlier writings' and while he made room for Christ and the Holy Spirit 'both were...overshadowed by his grand vision of God as the ultimate source and creator of all things'.³⁷ Calvin condemned such ideas in Servetus's *Restitutio* as 'a rhapsody composed of the impious ravings of all the ages' ³⁸

It was of course these 'ravings' and the burning of Servetus at the stake in 1553 that planted the seeds of religious toleration for the future. Servetus himself in 1531 made a plea for religious liberty: 'I consider it a serious matter to kill men because they are in error on some question of scriptural interpretation when we know that the very elect may be led astray'. Sebastian Castellio in Basel asked how burning a man could defend a doctrine and wrote: 'To burn a man is not to defend a doctrine. It is to burn a man.' He continued:

Christ's doctrine means loving one's enemies, returning good for evil, having a pure heart and a hunger and thirst for righteousness...Before God and from the bottom of my heart I call you to the spirit of love.³⁹

Such theology was not about tending the religious institution but rather simplifying Christianity on a true Biblical basis without unnecessary ritual. It spoke to the indwelling spirit and, certainly for the Socinians as forerunner of Unitarians, to reason and conscience and the humanity and not divinity of Christ. For Socinus, unlike for Luther and Calvin, man's fate was not predestined: humanity had inherent moral capability that went hand in hand with responsibility and freedom.

Reformation radicals attempted to practise religion anew by returning to the ideals of the primitive Church and in their quest went further in their vision than the Magisterial reformers. They took religion in a direction not previously practised by the Church: a

³⁶ Howe, citing Earl Morse Wilbur's *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and Its Antecedents* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 28-29.

³⁷ Howe, p. 29.

³⁸ Bainton, quoting Calvin's Opera, 14:600, p. 133.

³⁹ David E. Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (Chicago, Illinois: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2000), p. 17.

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module RDL7076: The Reformation.
Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

path of voluntarism in embracing Christ, respecting individual conscience, belief in the separation of Church and State and religious liberty. Theirs was for them authentic, not State, religion. This was arguably true religious radicalism.

[2,500 words, excluding bibliography, footnotes and this note.]

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module RDL7076: The Reformation.
Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

Bibliography

Author unknown, *Radical Reformation vs Magisterial Reformation*
<https://freewillpredestination.wordpress.com/radical-reformation-vs-magisterial-reformation/> accessed on 10 May 2019

Bainton, Roland H., *Haunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Sevetus: 1511-1553* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1953, revised edition, Rhode Island: Blackstone Editions, 2005)

Bainton, Roland H., 'The Left Wing of the Reformation' in *The Journal of Religion*, volume 21, number 2 (April 1941).
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/482718> accessed 10 May 2019

Baylor, Michael G., *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Bumbaugh, David E., *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (Chigago, Illinois: Meadville Lombard Theological School Press, 2000)

Dipple, Geoffrey, 'Radical Theology' in *T&T Clark Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David M. Whitford (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)

Fudge, Thomas, *Upon this Rock: A History of Christianity from the Roman Empire to the Reformation*: Lecture 30, Radical Reformation (Portland, Oregon: A Hewett Research Foundation Production, 2005)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3340&v=m1DPCPPu7SI accessed 26 April 2019.

Horsch, John, *Menno Simons: His Life, Labors and Teachings* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1916). www.mennosimons.net/horsch18.html accessed 1 May 2019

MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

Mendelsohn, Jack, *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age* (Boston, Mass.: Skinner House Books, 1995)

Parke, David B., *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion* (Boston, Mass.: Skinner House Books, 1995)

Reardon, Bernard M. G., *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London and New York: Longman, 1981)

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module RDL7076: The Reformation.
Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Assessment 2. Essay. What was 'radical' about the Radical Reformation? Give reasons for your answer.

Tudur Jones, R., *The Great Reformation: From Wyclif to Knox: Two Centuries that Changed the Course of History* (Leicester: IVP, 1985)

Whitford, David M., ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Reformation Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)

Wilbur, Earl Morse, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945)

Wilbur, Earl Morse, *A History of Unitarianism: In Transylvania, England and America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952)

Williams, George Hunston, 'Introduction' in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, ed. by George Hunston Williams and Angel M. Mergal, Volume XXV, The Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM Press, 1957)