

Adam Pastor: Anti-Trinitarian Anabaptist

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THE doctrines "justification by faith," the "sovereignty of God," and the "priesthood of all believers" are often considered the major contributions of the Reformation of the 16th century. To be sure, these are the doctrines which became institutionalized in the Protestant groups who date their history back to Luther, Zwingli or Calvin. However, the century of the Reformation was much more a period of intellectual ferment than this standard, facile interpretation would indicate. There were modifications in many other doctrines, and many theological ideas were suggested which did not find themselves embodied in an institution. Furthermore, there was theological speculation no more radical than Luther's and just as much Biblical. Some of these theological ideas were outlawed, and in time Protestant leaders were expelled by Protestant leaders.

While Martin Luther insisted upon a new concept of faith, of the sacraments, and of the hierarchy of the Church, he took for granted many doctrines, orthodox in the Church for a thousand years. Why he should have rejected some doctrines a thousand years old, and retained others just as old, is a study all its own. It can easily be shown that theologians of the Reformation period who challenged the doctrines the major reforms challenged, did so with their blessing. Those who dared to challenge doctrines which the major reformers did not challenge, felt religious persecution from both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Theological ideas which fall into this latter category are those of baptism (or Anabaptism), polygamy (on an Old Testament basis), communal living (such as the

Hutterites developed, also on an Old Testament basis), and most prominently, the orthodox (Chalcedonian, 5th century) doctrine of the Trinity.

Anti-Trinitarians were plentiful in the period of the Reformation, although they argued on different presuppositions from the Unitarians of the 20th century who attempt to claim the most unorthodox of the 16th century as their forerunners. Most of the anti-Trinitarians of the 16th century—Bernardino Ochino, the two Sozzini (father and son), Blandrata, or the celebrated Michael Servetus—were products of the Humanist movement and were "intellectuals" in their own right. However, in the Netherlands and West Germany we find an interesting individual who became anti-Trinitarian from an Anabaptist background—and who attempted to develop his ideas on a strict and literal Biblical basis. This man was Roelf Martens, who after his leaving the Roman Catholic faith took the name Adam Pastor.

Life and Influence

Life.—Adam Pastor (Roelf Martens) was born at Dorpen, Westphalia, approximately 1510. He adopted his new name and left the Roman Catholic faith in 1533 when he became an Anabaptist—thus preceding Menno Simons' leaving the Roman Catholic faith for Anabaptism by three years. Little biographical information is available for Adam Pastor. He was well educated, and was familiar with Greek, Hebrew and Latin which he used in great detail in his exegesis. That he could be called a Humanist in the fullest sense of the word is doubted, especially since some of the main emphases of this movement are absent from the works of Pastor. The influence of Erasmian ideas on his theological formulation, however, seems

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unmistakable, as we would expect of one who lived and worked in the Netherlands where Erasmus' influence was stronger than almost any place in Europe.

Pastor joined the Anabaptist movement as early as 1533,¹ and was ordained a preacher or perhaps a missionary in the brotherhood led by Menno Simons, in 1543.² In 1542-43 he was active in opposing David Joris and Hendrick Niclaes and their extreme spiritualism. He did this as a representative of the Mennonite cause. He was one of the leaders respected over a large area and was listed as an elder in the Mennonite organization in 1546.³ About this time he first entered into a controversy at Lubeck with the two leaders, Menno Simons and Dirk Phillips, over the personality of the Holy Spirit, the eternal Sonship of Christ, and the true humanity of Jesus. At a discussion in Emden in 1547, with Menno Simons as chairman, Pastor was further questioned about his orthodoxy.⁴

The leaders sought unsuccessfully to convert him from his "errors." Later that same year at Goch, Pastor was deposed from his position as a minister for persisting in the same anti-Trinitarian views. He attempted to be reconciled, but this step was never allowed by the more orthodox Mennonite leaders.

After 1547 he held other disputations

¹ *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., (Scottsdale, Pa.: The Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), the article on "Adam Pastor," I, 10.

² Wilbur, Earl Morse, *A History of Unitarian, Socinianism and its Antecedents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 41. Harold Bender, writing in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. by John S. Wenger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), states that the date was 1542.

³ *Realencyklopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig: 1904). Article on "Pastor."

⁴ Vos, K., *Menno Simons, Zijn leven en werken en zijn reformatorische denkbelden* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1914), p. 103. The date is given as 1550 in *Realencyklopädie*.

with Mennonite leaders about the Trinity, and wrote of a discussion with Dirk Phillips and others,⁵ but otherwise his career is little known except for his major writings. In 1547 his congregation at Odenkirchen (near Dusseldorf) severed relations with the Mennonite organization and adopted the name of "Adamites."⁶ This new "denomination" had other adherents shortly thereafter especially in the Duchy of Cleves, where Pastor spent most of his time. In 1552 Pastor wrote his large work: **Underscheid tusschen rechte leer und valsche leer** (The distinction between Correct and False Doctrine). This was only five years after the Emden and Goch disputations, and undoubtedly reflects the thoughts for which he was "banned". This work was soon followed by a shorter work: **Disputation van der Godtheit des Vader, Sone, und Hilligen Geist** (Disputation concerning the Divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), seemingly a record of another disputation held in 1552 or 1553. In this same period, the Anabaptist Dirk Phillips wrote twenty-two statements entitled: "against the Madness of Adam Pastor."⁷

Influence.—Johannes Anastasius, in **Der Leken Wechwyser** of 1554,⁸ places Pastor along with Menno Simons as the heads of the Anabaptist party, although this undoubtedly referred to similar though unrelated groups. This indicates that some of the contemporary writers did not understand the subtle theological differences which divided the two groups.

In 1555 Cassander in his dedicatory letter to **Beati Vigili Martyris Opera**⁹ noted that "Two outstanding leaders of the Anabaptists today, Menno Simons,

⁵ *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, ed., by S. Cramer and F. Pijper, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, (1909), vol. V, on Adam Pastor, p. 319.

⁶ Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁷ *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, V, (hereafter BRN), 325.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 323.

and Adam Pastor, are as it were, in a state of civil warfare with each other." Other than these brief references, Pastor is not mentioned in contemporary circles.

Vos however lists several cities in which he worked, all in Westphalia and southeastern Netherlands:¹⁰ Grafschap Marck, Hertogdamburg, Overijssel, Gelderland and Limburg. He also finds that Pastor worked in the Bishoprics of Munster and Keulen. In 1565 a congregation in Wesel traced its organization back to Adam Pastor's leadership.¹¹ In addition, there is a tradition that he traveled to Poland and was influential there.

Relation to Polish Protestantism.—The relation of the Anabaptists to the early Polish Protestants is a whole study in itself, and Adam Pastor plays some part in that. It is known that Anabaptist ideas had been carried up the Vistula as far as Cracow before 1550, and in 1546 a reference is noted about a "Belga, quidam, cui Spiritus nomen erat" (a certain Belgian, who was known by the Spirit)¹² which has been taken to mean Adam Pastor, or at least his work.¹³ We must remember, however, that Adam Pastor was not from "Belga" but was from the Netherlands and Westphalia, although in 1546 neither Belgium nor the Netherlands was a separate nation. Another possibility is that this refers to Campanus, who was born in northeastern Belgium near Liege. His anti-Trinitarian ideas are similar to those of Adam Pastor, and perhaps his ideas influenced Poland along with those of Adam Pastor himself.

We note a possible reference to Adam Pastor in a letter which Blandrata (in Poland) wrote to Gregor Paul (in Switzerland) "mitto ad te libellum er-

uditi pastoris" (I send you a letter by the erudite Pastor)¹⁴. This may not refer to a person named Pastor, however, but merely a pastor of a local church. Also a Polish leader, Johan Lasitius (Lasecki), in about 1569, came to Heidelberg to discuss theology, and brought with him some of the works of Adam Pastor. Some speculation has centered on the possibility that Adam Pastor visited Poland in the period before his being banned in 1547. On the basis of the foregoing, Dunin-Borkowski maintained that Adam Pastor's influence was widespread in Polish anti-Trinitarian groups, but that probably he did not go there himself.¹⁵

Pastor's death.—Pastor's death has usually been placed at about 1552, at either Emden or Munster. However, we have reference to him in 1554 and 1555 (above), and also we know that his "Complete Concordance to the Bible" was published in 1559. Therefore Vos¹⁶ indicates that he died in 1559 or later, probably in Munster (nearer the area where he was working than Emden).
The Background of his Thought

Ochino.—Since Adam Pastor made no direct reference to any theological forerunner, either contemporary or historical, on whom he was dependent, we have no direct knowledge as to the sources of his theological thought, but there is much speculation. Scheffer, in *Delijdinghe unn den drieenigen God*¹⁷ said that Pastor based his thought on Ochino. However, in checking the life of Ochino we notice that he was active in Italy until 1542 at which time he went to Geneva (1542-4) and for two years (1545-47) he was in Basel, Strasbourg, and Augsburg, and finally he was in England 1549 to 1553. At the time of Queen Mary's accession he re-

¹⁰ Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹¹ BRN, 324.

¹² BRN, 326.

¹³ Trechsel, F., *Die Protestantischen Antitrinitarier vor Faustus Socin* (Heidelberg: Karl Winter. 1839). I, 36.

¹⁴ Dunin-Borkowski, Stanislas von, S.J., "Quellenstudien zur Vorgeschichte der Unitarier des 6. Jahrhunderts." *75 Jahre Stella Matutina*, Festschrift Band 1-2. (Feldkirch: L. Sausgruber, 1931). II, 108.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, II, 108.

¹⁶ BRN, 327.

¹⁷ Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

turned to Switzerland where he worked until he was expelled in 1563 because of anti-Trinitarian views. Following 1563 he went to Poland and finally to Moravia where he died in 1564. There were no periods of direct association between Ochino and Pastor, and undoubtedly their indirect connection across two countries of Europe at this time was not great. For an explanation of Pastor's theological predecessors, we must look elsewhere.

Campanus.—The dependence of Adam Pastor on John Campanus seems much more probable. Campanus was born near Liege, in northeastern Belgium, ca. 1500. He became a Lutheran and was dismissed from the University of Cologne. He studied for a time also at Wittenberg,¹⁸ and wished to be present at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529.¹⁹ He thought that he had a solution to the problem discussed here. This invitation, however, was denied to him. He became an Anabaptist about 1530, and before the Augsburg Diet he presented a statement of his faith to Melancthon hoping to prove his orthodoxy. His statement, however, was unacceptable, and he continued his work in the Duchy of Cleves. It is significant that this is precisely the area in which Adam Pastor was working at the time.

The relation between Campanus and Adam Pastor seems closer when we note the similarities between some of the unorthodox ideas of Campanus and of Pastor. In 1530 Campanus wrote *Contra totum post apostolos mundum* (Against the whole world since the apostles)²⁰, a denial of much of the Nicene and Post-Nicene theology. He included in this two points with which Adam Pastor agreed: (1) a denial that Christ is God, and the insistence that

he really is a being later and subordinate to the Father; and (2) that the Holy Spirit is not a personal being, but simply a power of God. This is important because it was on the same two points that Dirk Phillips banned Adam Pastor in 1547.

Melchior Hofmann.—Dunin-Borkowski²¹ argued that Adam Pastor and Campanus were influenced in Anabaptist theology by Melchior Hofmann, also working in the lower Rhine area Rhine area where the Netherlands and Westphalia join. However, we note that in Campanus' final formulation he was more under the influence of Erasmus and other rational and evangelical approaches to theology than he was under the influence of Hofmann. Dunin-Borkowski²² further argues that many of the early evangelical rationalists were influenced by early Church Fathers, although they do not quote directly nor otherwise indicate their indebtedness.

Sebastian Franck.—Adam Pastor referred to Franck and quoted him in two places.²³ In his final formulation, especially of the doctrine of the Church as a group of true believers rather than an outward organization, he seems to reflect the spiritualist emphasis, perhaps because of his interest in Franck, but then Franck was undoubtedly reflecting the late medieval mysticism and spiritualism which itself emanated from the lower Rhine and the Netherlands.

The anti-Trinitarian views of Adam Pastor

Extant writings.—Our sources for the theology of Adam Pastor are basically two. First, the *Underscheid tusschen rechte leer und valsche leer* (Distinction between correct and false doctrine) was written probably in 1552, and consists of thirteen sections wherein Adam Pastor contrasts what he considered the true with the false doctrines. From this work only the first two sections are significant

¹⁸ Williams, George H. and Mergal, Angel M. *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 147.

¹⁹ F. L. Cross, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), article on "Campanus."

²⁰ Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

²¹ Dunin-Borkowski, "Quellenstudien." II, 108.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ BRN, 330.

in analyzing his anti-Trinitarian views: 1. "Doctrines respecting God, and the writings (Scriptures) related thereto;" and 2. "The Incarnation of Jesus." The second work of Adam Pastor is his *Disputation van der godtheit des Vader, Sone, unde Hilligen Geist* (Disputation concerning the Divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), written probably 1553. This is basically his statement in defense of his orthodoxy, after he had been in another discussion with the Mennonites in 1552-53. Both these documents are printed in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol. V, 1907, as edited by Dr. F. Pijper and Dr. S. Cramer. Virtually all the authors analyzing Pastor go back to this volume of the BRN, with its extensive introduction to Pastor's life and work written by Cramer.

Doctrine of God.—In the first section of *Underscheid . . .* Adam Pastor includes little more than a collection of scriptural quotations wherein he tries to prove that Jesus Christ was subordinate to and different from God. Examples of these are: (I Cor. 8:6, RSV) "Yet for us there is One God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist; (John 17:3, RSV) "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;" and (I Tim. 2:5, RSV) "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Thus we find only an indication of Pastor's concept of God in this section, and must look elsewhere for other aspects of his thought about God.

For Adam Pastor the "nature" of God was unknowable. Even Jesus Christ did not teach us anything about the nature of God, but rather revealed the way in which God works in the life of man. Man recognizes the work of God, but

does not thus perceive God's nature.²⁴

Doctrine of the Son—or the Word.—Pastor denied that Jesus Christ revealed God to man, but maintained that Jesus Christ was an "image" of God, and outward manifestation of God. Otherwise Jesus Christ would be a God himself, and not man. Indeed, Pastor maintained that from Genesis we learn that all men are thus "images of God." Pastor accepted all biblical statements concerning the virgin birth of Jesus, miracles and the like literally. These, however, were only manifestations of God working in one man in a special way. He emphasized that the scriptural passages such as "all power was given to me in heaven and earth . . ." indicated clearly that Jesus Christ had within himself the power of God, but this was given by God, and was not inherent in Jesus Christ because of his nature. A Scriptural text which might deny Pastor's claim is dealt with ingeniously. In Col. 2:9 (RSV) we read: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (*somatikos*)." Adam Pastor felt, however, that the term *somatikos* did not indicate God's nature but his living presence, for God lived also in the midst of Israel, and lives in the heart of each individual man. This scripture thus does not refer to God's being—his nature—but to his Spirit.²⁵

In addition, he stated that God's nature is as far removed from that of man as heaven is separated from earth. For it to be said that Christ had within him both the nature of God and of man would be an injustice to both natures. The Spirit of Jesus was the Spirit of God, and the Spirit purified his body from its original sin. The body of Jesus Christ crucified, hung on the cross, and laid in the tomb, however, was not the body of God,²⁶ but of a man. Also, Thomas stated in John 20:28, (RSV),

²⁴ Dunin-Borkowski, *Die Gruppierung der Antitrinitarier des 16. Jahrhunderts' Scholastik*, VII (1932), 481-523. This reference is p. 488.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

"My Lord and my God," but Pastor suggested that this is in the third person,—that Thomas was referring to God, and not Jesus to whom he would speak in the second person. Thus Pastor concluded that in Christ was the power of God, His wisdom, His will and mind, but not the Father's being nor nature.²⁷

Pastor suggested that God created by the use of his Word, for in Genesis He had said "Let there be light" and it became so. God created through His word, His wisdom, but God's word was not separated from God himself until it was spoken. Further, this was not a person, but merely in the mind of God. The word is thus eternal, that is, in the mind of God before being spoken, and external after being spoken. This word of God was not to be equated with Jesus Christ, however. The Scriptures did not indicate that the Son was eternal, only the Word. Jesus was not the wisdom of God himself, but only reflected the wisdom of God to us.²⁸ Furthermore, when John I mentions the word as creating, he meant really God's creation at the beginning of time, and did not refer to Jesus Christ himself as the Word.

Pastor was once told in traditional terms that "we believe that He (Christ Jesus) has mighty power, majesty, clarity and eternal divine glorification and is a God and is here with the Father," to which Adam Pastor remarked: "I do not believe your reasoning, bring the Scripture to prove it."²⁹

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.—As has been indicated previously, Adam Pastor felt that God's power active in the world was synonymous with the Holy Spirit, and that the latter was not to be thought of as a separate, self-existent, personal being. He stated: "I believe that the father is a self-existent being, but the Holy Spirit is no independent or personal being; but he has an existence in the same way as a breath, a blow-

ing, or the wind is an existence. And I esteem God's breath or blowing so high that we may baptize in His name."³⁰

Pastor defends his orthodoxy.—In his *Disputation van der Godtheit des Vader, Sone, unde Hilligen Geists*, Pastor maintained that he was following Scriptural commands, and was thus unjustly condemned as in a "Turkish tyranny."³¹ The introduction to this document indicates the attempt Pastor made to prove himself correct according to scripture. There is an "only eternal, everlasting God, wonderful in his works and immovable in his judgements," whose influence is spread "through his dear Son Jesus Christ, the only mediator between his father and corrupted men." Furthermore, he claimed to believe the Scriptural teachings of all passages giving supreme importance—but not deity—to Jesus. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God," (I John 4:15); "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God," (I John 5:1); "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," (I. Tim. 2:5). And had not Christ Jesus himself said, "Into Thy hands I commit my Spirit"—not "my Body". After affirming the literal meaning of these scriptures, which seem to subordinate Jesus Christ to God, Pastor complains that he was nevertheless banned.³²

Evaluation

Through such a study we can appreciate the deep concern for theology and for the Bible which many individuals outside the major reformation movements possessed. Had they taken theology lightly they would hardly have taken the time to write the lengthy tracts and books on the subject which we have mentioned. Thus, it is erroneous to think that these anti-Trinitarians were merely critical individuals who neglected and rejected theology

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 488-490.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p., 489.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

³⁰ *BRN*, V, 373.

³¹ *BRN*, V, 341.

³² *BRN*, V, 517.

rather than trying to understand it. Unfortunately this is too often the charge leveled against radicals of this or any other period.

Pastor was strongly antagonistic to any human attempt to construct a theology not based on the Scriptures. He attempted in many ways to make the Scriptures say what he wanted to say, but at the same time he pointed up some real problems which the traditional Trinitarians had never satisfactorily solved. He was certainly not opposed to any supernatural elements of the theological system of his day, but instead, he reaffirmed all parts of the supernatural structure which could be substantiated by Scriptures. In this he was not a rationalist in the same way as others since his day have been, since for Pastor human reason only helped to interpret Scripture and did not supplement where Scripture had no explanation.

As has been stated previously, Pastor indicated no theological forerunners on whom he was dependent. We must, however, assume the probabilities that the spirit of Erasmus is here, in the emphasis on a pure Biblical religion without the empty ceremonies that had been constructed in past generations. In the same general Erasmian tradition Pastor developed a tolerance for differing positions, based in part on his relationship with Franck's writing, and the spiritualizing of some doctrines such as the Church and the Sacraments. In short, we must see the motivation of

one such as this arising from a deep concern for the faith; he wanted it to be rightly understood by others; and he assumed he could think seriously and critically about the faith without destroying it. The anti-Trinitarians of the Reformation period were not anti-supernatural and did not deny the miracles of the Bible. Consequently, we must realize that Adam Pastor, and many like him, were every bit as Biblical in their thinking as Calvin, Luther or Zwingli.

Finally, we must see Adam Pastor as a significant leader in the Radical Reformation, who has received less attention than he should have received. Part of the problem may be that many records of his work have not been preserved, and only a minimum amount of information is available concerning his travels, his thought and his influence. Another problem is that he had no followers who made a careful collection of his writings. Since he was banned by the Mennonite group, who would otherwise have been interested in preserving the details of his life and influence, he almost disappeared into oblivion. The depth of thought and the ingenious method of analyzing this faith was equal to that of many of the other Reformation leaders. But for the charge of being heretical, or having been banned, imprisoned, or burned, many other individuals would surely have figured much more prominently in the Reformation period.

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