

Ob Luther danach – nach eigenem Verständnis und nach den Kriterien des Kirchen- und Ordensrechtes – als Exkommunizierter Ordenspriester der Augustinereremiten blieb oder nicht, ist eine hier nicht zu erörternde Frage. Erst Anfang Oktober 1524 legte er das Ordenshabit ab und heiratete, bis dahin zölibatär lebend, im Juni 1525 die aus ihrem Kloster entwichene Zisterziensernonne Katharina von Bora.

*Martin Luther on the Way from Radical Monasticism
to Radical Laicism: his Damnation of the Vows of 1521*

Abstract

The intention of this paper is to compare the radical monasticism of Matthew Grabow, a Dominican who died as a prisoner in the Castel Sant' Angelo in Rome in 1421, with the radical laicism of the former Augustinian Hermit and later Protestant reformer Martin Luther. Grabow identified Christianity with the form of living of monks and nuns and he thought the »Imitation of Christ« impossible outside the life consecrated by the vows of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and in a monastery or, in the terminology of today's canon law, in a clerical and not in a lay institute of the consecrated life. In contrast to this radical monasticism Martin Luther damned in his essay »De votis monasticis iudicium« and in its short abstract »Themata de votis«, both written in 1521, the vows and the profession of the evangelical counsels as a godless attempt to justify himself instead of the justification by the grace of God and rejected the life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels as a higher degree of Christian perfection. This comparison between Grabow's radical monasticism and Luther's radical laicism takes place against the background of two ways of church reform, a medieval way of repressing lay influence in the church and a modern or contemporary way of strengthening lay influence in the church or the apostolate of the laity.