

BOOK REVIEWS

STAYER, JAMES M. *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*. [McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion.] McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal [etc.] 1991. xxiv, 227 pp. £26.95.

It is now twenty years since James M. Stayer's highly regarded book *Anabaptists and the Sword* came out. A second edition followed in 1976 and in time a series of essays which took research into the Anabaptists further and frequently produced important new perspectives. Stayer is a researcher who has subjected the traditional monogenetic image of the Anabaptists to critical revision and has substituted a polygenetic viewpoint. His particular interest was Swiss Anabaptism. He also studied militancy in Low German Anabaptism, threw light on the virtually unknown fate of Menno Simons's brother, dealt with the new contemporary conceptions of marriage, and also looked at the hitherto neglected phenomenon of the Anabaptist community of goods.

The anthology *Alles gehört allen. Das Experiment Gütergemeinschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute* published in 1984 by Hans-Jürgen Goertz, included a contribution by Stayer entitled "New Models of Community Life: The Anabaptist Community of Goods". At the time, he tells us in the introduction to his new book, he realized that the community of goods had a far greater significance for Anabaptism, the Reformation and the Peasants' Revolt than had previously been recognized and that a more thorough investigation was needed (p. ix). The foundation of the present volume was laid.

Divided into two sections with seven chapters in all, the book offers more than a presentation of theoretical postulates and actual experiments in the community of goods. Stayer is concerned not only with the different forms of the phenomenon but also with developments and historical connections. He argues that the Anabaptist community of goods was a logical continuation of the social message of the Reformation and a radical expression of communal Reformation during the Peasants' War and after its suppression (p. 7). Links are established here which until recently were taboo in research. Only gradually is it becoming clearer that there is a connection between the Peasants' War and the rise of Anabaptism, though there is still no agreement on how close the alliance actually was. In comparison to some who imply a broader mental consensus beyond personal interrelations, Stayer's judgement is more reserved. He does not wish to establish a common identity of the two movements. Ultimately only a minority of participants in the Peasants' War became Anabaptists, he notes, and many early Anabaptists had had no contact at all with the Peasants' War (p. 4).

So he assumes a looser or limited connection between the two movements. This impression is weakened, however, at least formally, by the somewhat unfortunate division of the book. The first three chapters are grouped under the heading "Peasants' War", and the remaining four deal with the Anabaptist community of goods. Though it is obviously not Stayer's intention, this may give an impression of a sharp division between the events of 1525 and the phenomenon of the Anabaptist community of goods.

International Review of Social History 39 (1994), pp. 101–113

Initially the Peasants' War is dealt with in the light of recent research. In the first chapter Stayer, who is very familiar with current interpretations and controversial assessments, offers a problem-oriented introduction to the historiography of the Peasants' War. He stresses in particular that 1525 was not the end of communal Reformation and highlights the outstanding significance – often denied in the past – of the Reformation for the Peasants' War (p. 43).

He subsequently examines how the social message of the Reformation in the years 1524–1527 aroused more radicalized and new ethical-economic expectations. Stayer looks at various programmatic elements as well as the writing of Otto Brunfels, Jakob Strauss and Michael Gaismair. They document how strong was the opposition to usury, taxes and tithes and how there was even talk of abolishing the privileged classes. Many demands under discussion before the Peasants' War found their way into the rebels' programme and lived on in early Anabaptism. Stayer warns in this context, however, against a rash equation of social ideas with the Anabaptist community of goods (p. 60).

Chapter 3 dwells on the issue of interconnections. Where were the points of contact or direct overlap? Stayer suggests that no clear lines can be drawn. Whereas in some areas, such as the Upper Rhine, Lake Constance, Waldshut, Schaffhausen and Sankt Gallen, Anabaptism and the Peasants' War overlapped, there was a delayed form of contact in other regions. In Hessen, Thuringia and Franconia, for instance, Peasants' War veterans joined the Anabaptists and emerged as leading figures. However convoluted the lives of individuals may have been, it is clear that one way or another there were various personal connections between the Peasants' War and Anabaptism. And these appear to have been numerically rather more significant than the figures calculated by Claus-Peter Clasen (p. 91; see also Appendix A, pp. 165ff.) would seem to suggest.

The transition from radical-Social Reformation roots to the Anabaptist community of goods, which has in the preceding chapters already lost much of its coincidental character, now becomes only a small step. Stayer sees the community of goods as an attempt, in imitation of the early Anabaptists, to fulfil chapters 2 and 4 of the Acts of the Apostles (p. 9), a clear aim which was, however, differently interpreted within Anabaptist circles. Thus the community of goods took different forms among the Swiss Brethren (Chapter 5), in the Münster Anabaptist kingdom (Chapter 7) and among the Hutterites (Chapter 8), whose strictly organized communal life had hitherto been regarded as the classical example of the Anabaptist community of goods. However unconventional they seemed, for Stayer the Hutterites were not a special form of Anabaptism but the institutionalized high point of the communal Reformation of 1525 and a more developed form of Swiss and South German Anabaptism (p. 158). In these circles the community of goods assumed more open, less strictly dogmatic characteristics. The Swiss Brethren countered usury and exploitation by calling for Christian brotherly love, which included voluntary sharing. The Southern and Middle German Anabaptists (Chapter 6) were not much different. They were rather more rigorously critical of property and strove, in emulation of Thomas Müntzer, to free themselves of material bonds. The community of goods practised in Münster was in many ways an exception. Without reference to the events of 1525 and strongly determined by the city being under siege, it was more like a sad "war communism" (p. 138).

Stayer's contribution has been to set, for the first time, the whole breadth of the Anabaptist community of goods in its social-revolutionary context and to deal

with it systematically. His book therefore represents an important contribution to research into the Anabaptists and the Peasants' War. This given, I would like to make a critical comment or two. It would have been useful to examine, analogous to the treatment of the Peasants' War, the current state of research on the Anabaptists; it would vice versa have been sensible to examine the community of goods in greater detail in the light of the sources from the Peasants' War. And, a detail, a bibliography would have been a great help to the reader.

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LEVINE, BRUCE. *Half Slave and Half Free. The Roots of Civil War*. Hill and Wang, New York 1992. x, 292 pp. \$30.00. (Paper: \$11.95.)
 —, —. *The Spirit of 1848. German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 1992. xiv, 378 pp. \$34.95.

Bruce Levine has done what most historians can only dream about: publish in the same year two attention-getting and markedly different books, each a contribution to a well-regarded series sponsored by a reputable publisher. *The Spirit of 1848*, distilled from the author's doctoral dissertation completed in 1980, is a monograph *par excellence*: it is detailed, it relies heavily upon primary sources (many of them newspapers translated from German), and it conforms to scholarly expectations with its footnotes, appendices and bibliography. Levine's second work, *Half Slave and Half Free*, aims for a more general audience and draws upon much recent scholarship to advance the author's insights regarding the "roots" of the United States' Civil War. Taken together, these two books reflect Bruce Levine's solid skills as a historian and his wide reading in American history.

In *Half Slave and Half Free* Levine explores the social dimensions of antebellum politics through what he terms the "resynthesis of political and social history". In his title and throughout his book, Levine underscores a central paradox born of the American Revolution: this newly-minted republic stood simultaneously as one of the world's most free nations and as the "greatest" slaveholding power of the nineteenth century. The Civil War, in Levine's words, represented "the second act of America's democratic revolution", a conflict rooted in the differing economies of the free North and the slave South that created clashing perceptions about each region's aims and values. Throughout his narrative, Levine highlights the more glaring contrasts between Northern and Southern political leaders and cultures, distinctions that may be overdrawn given the country's enduring, if fragile, unity founded upon successive sectional compromises through 1861.

In the first chapter, devoted to the Southern slave economy, Levine contends that slavery was "first and foremost a way of obtaining and controlling the workers [. . .]" As Levine acknowledges in his lengthy, helpful bibliographical essay, he builds upon the work of Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*, published in 1956. This intellectual framework leads the author to emphasize the economic basis of slavery and its ties to expanding market economies, and to portray the slaveholding planter as a rational (but not always beneficent) manager of capital, human and other. When compared with elite counterparts in the North's dynamic economy, however, South-