

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 5: Radical Reformation: The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists: From the Publisher

With this issue Christian History makes the transition from an "occasional" publication to a regularly scheduled quarterly. This step is taken as a result of the enthusiastic reader response received to the first issues. We sincerely thank you who encouraged us to expand our efforts.

Our hope for this publication is that it will deepen appreciation for your own specific heritage when the subject matter deals directly with your particular tradition and that it will broaden awareness of and respect for the heritage of others when the subject matter represents a background different from your own. Surely the grace and truth of the Lord has not been deposited exclusively or monopolistically within any single denomination or tradition. We have much to learn from each other.

May this issue serve that end in causing Anabaptists to appreciate anew their unique story and in causing those of us not of that lineage to discover new dimensions of faith and commitment from their experience. Perhaps more than any other movement, Anabaptists have been unfairly maligned over the years by other Christian groups. Typically they have been identified with the madness of Müntzer and Münster as if that tragic man and episode defined the movement instead of being unfortunate aberrations that Anabaptists themselves universally disowned and condemned.

As you read through the pages of this edition, consider the observation of Franklin H. Littell of Temple University on the impact of Anabaptism in the sixteenth century and now: "When the Anabaptists refused to repeat the feudal oaths, refused to bear arms, and withdrew from participation in the legally privileged and controlled churches, they struck a radical blow for liberty, conscience and human dignity. Their devotion was directed toward true Christianity rather than social reform, but the secondary consequences of their spiritual emigration were also momentous ... While much of the teaching of the Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians of the sixteenth century is today unreal and irrelevant, what the Anabaptists taught about mutual aid, peace, discipline, religious liberty, and lay witness is as fresh and important as it was fifteen generations ago.

The history of Anabaptism contains two sharply contrasting themes. It is splashed with the blood and ashes of martyrs willing to give up their good name, family, home and their lives for what they believed. And it is colored also with industrious families whose peaceful life earned them the not entirely complimentary epithet—"the quiet in the land"

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The Anabaptists: Did You Know?

Anabaptists are the originators of the "free church." Separation of church and state was an unthinkable and radical notion when it was **introduced by the Anabaptists**. Likewise their defense of religious liberty was regarded as an invitation to anarchy.

In the court records of 16th century South and Central Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, only **12,522 Anabaptists** can be counted. Their numbers were never very large, yet they managed to **populate 2088 towns and villages** of that region!

Protestantism did not make inroads without the backing of princes and powers of state. From the beginning Anabaptism was an **underground movement** that lost virtually all its leaders in the first two years.

It was partly because of Anabaptism that Protestant churches adopted the **confirmation service**, and **baptismal registers** (the boon of genealogists) came into being.

A 16th century man who did not drink to excess, curse, or abuse his workmen or family **could be suspected of being an Anabaptist** and thus persecuted.

Anabaptists were the **first reformers to practice church discipline**. Under their influence the Reformer Martin Bucer attempted without success to introduce discipline into the church in Strassburg. He succeeded in convincing John Calvin, who was able to establish church discipline in Geneva. Without knowing when the Anabaptist Schleitheim Confession was formulated, **Calvin** read it in 1544 and **concluded** "these unfortunate and **ungrateful people have learned this teaching and some other correct views from us.**" Calvin was an 18-year-old Catholic at the time of Schleitheim.

Direct descendants of **Anabaptists today** number 730,000 in 57 countries, with the largest numbers in North America, Zaire, Indonesia, and the U.S.S.R. Over half live in third world countries. There are **21 distinct groups**, among them **Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren In Christ**.

Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems fled for his life across a frozen lake. When his pursuer broke through the ice, **Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning to save his persecutor**. He was then captured, imprisoned and burned at the stake in 1569.

Mennonites are the most diverse group of modern day descendants. They share a common view of Christ and in not bearing arms but are not uniformly distinguished by a separation from the world in lifestyle or dress.

The Amish split from their Swiss-German brethren in 1693 over the issue of shunning or avoiding excommunicated members. Today Amish are recognized for their **strong communal values** enforced by **strict nonconformity** to the world in matters of dress and use of technology. Amish are located primarily in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.

The Hutterites, who originated in Moravia in 1529, **practice Christian communalism**. They dress

simply in a style influenced by the folk costume of eastern Europe. In the 1870's they migrated to America and settled in South Dakota and later in other western parts of the U.S. and Canada.

The Mennonite Brethren had their beginning in 1860 as a renewal movement among transplanted Dutch Mennonites in southern Russia but has since been transplanted to North America, Paraguay, and other countries. The Mennonite Brethren distinguished themselves from Mennonites, not in the area of belief, but in the practice of ***baptism by immersion***, rather than sprinkling.

The Brethren in Christ originated in 1750 in Pennsylvania but only gained official status during the Civil War when their young men were drafted into the army. They were nicknamed "***River Brethren***" because of their habit of baptizing in a river.

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A Fire That Spread Anabaptist Beginnings

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"Anabaptist" was the nickname given to a group of Christians in the sixteenth century. It simply meant one who baptizes again. A person could not be called a dirtier name in sixteenth century Christian Europe. By its enemies Anabaptism was regarded as a dangerous movement—a program for violent destruction of Europe's religious and social institutions. Its practices were regarded as odd and anti-social; its beliefs as devil-inspired heresy. At other times and to other people Anabaptism has been an antique social curiosity, the first true fundamentalist movement, or a Christian movement—tough, resilient, and genuine because it was tied to the land and expressed in hard work and simple frugality. Still others have regarded it as the only consistent Protestantism which overcame the perversions of the church of Rome and brought Protestantism to the goal which Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, and John Calvin did not reach.

Anabaptism was a sixteenth-century religious movement which grew out of the popular and widespread religious and social discontent of that age. Its immediate source was the reform movement of Huldreich Zwingli that had begun in Zurich, Switzerland in 1519. Anabaptism began formally in 1525 and spread with great rapidity into nearly all European countries, but especially in the German and Dutch speaking areas of Central Europe.

It was never a unified movement if by unified we imply a common form of church order and common leadership. That was prevented from happening by the Anabaptist policy of congregational autonomy, by the fierce persecution which made Anabaptism become an underground movement, and by geographical barriers. Considerable differences therefore existed between the various Anabaptist groups in interpretation, theology and church practice. The movement was unified however in certain ways which will become clear.

Like most religious movements of that time—including Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican, Anabaptism had its share of black sheep. There was the foolishness of biblical literalism from St. Gall. Because the Gospel said that we must become as little children to enter the Kingdom of God, some people literally behaved like children, playing with toys and babbling like babies. There was the apocalyptic lunacy of certain Anabaptists from Thuringia, one of whom claimed to be the Son of God. Most important of all there was the violent terror of the Kingdom of God of Münster when Anabaptists turned to violence and oppression. In this latter event Anabaptists employed tactics of Catholics and Protestants all over Europe for the coercion of people toward a religious faith. These are skeletons in the Mennonite family closet, but they represented a minority that never had much support and which was in fact rejected by the majority of persons in the movement.

Like their contemporaries in other Christian groups, Anabaptists were pretty certain that all other groups would inherit not the kingdom of God but his fierce wrath for their intractable stubbornness in rejecting the truth that they the Anabaptists had found. Their conviction that they were the true church was as unpleasant and as unjustified in them as in others. Anabaptists were internally more splintered than other groups because they were persecuted and refused a unity enforced by the sword.

But the Council had begun to drag its feet. The Council's hesitation to move ahead was based, not on

biblical or doctrinal grounds, but on economic and political considerations. Grebel, Manz, and others had come to believe that obedience to Christ should not be qualified by either prudence or fear. Moreover they had concluded from their study of the New Testament that the name Christian could be applied only to those who truly followed Jesus and not indiscriminately to all who were baptized. Thirdly, they denied that there was any essential difference between a Christian and a non-Christian government in their political roles. Certainly a so-called Christian government would not make a society Christian.

But Zwingli was unable to share these views. A break developed and Grebel, Manz, and several others began to meet by themselves to study the Bible further. Like two Zurich priests—Wilhelm Reublin and Johannes Brötli who a year earlier in 1524 had begun to preach against infant baptism in the villages of Witikon and Zollikon outside Zurich—this little group came to the conclusion that the Bible did not teach baptism of infants. This was the straw that broke the proverbial back! Zwingli and the Council agreed that the Grebel-Manz group must be put in their place. They had become a threat to the unity and peace of Zurich. Council ordered them to conform to the law of baptism and forbade them to meet as a group.

The men who gathered in Manz's house that winter night were aware of the seriousness of what they were doing. But as the evening wore on they became more and more convinced that they had no choice but to obey God who had led them to their new and dangerous understanding. And then—if the account in the ancient Hutterian Chronicle is accurate—they felt suddenly compelled to take the actual step necessary to give concrete form to their obedience. Amid prayer and the certainty of persecution they baptized one another and in the same moment commissioned each other to build Christ's church on earth.

This action made missionaries of the small group. In the days following others were baptized, especially some farmers from the nearby village of Zollikon. They continued to meet for Bible study and prayer and also to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The persecution they had expected set in immediately. A number of the group were arrested and put in prison. After harassment for three or four months by imprisonment and the threat of exile, this first "free" church disintegrated.

The Birth of Anabaptism

Darkness had already fallen on 21 January 1525, when, one by one, a half dozen men could have been seen furtively entering a house in Zurich's Neustadgasse near the Great Minster. They had reason to be furtive, for they were meeting in violation of a law passed earlier that same day by the City Council prohibiting any assembly by them. The occasion for this meeting behind closed shutters was Bible study and prayer.

Actually group meetings for Bible study were well-known in Zurich. Stimulated by the reformer Huldreich Zwingli, scholars and other interested persons had met frequently since 1520. Zwingli himself had participated. But although some members of these study groups were there that night in January, Zwingli was not.

Major disagreements had arisen between the group represented chiefly by Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz on the one hand and Zwingli on the other, over the role of the City Council in the progress of reform in Zurich. Zwingli had committed himself to letting the Council set the pace. Since he was convinced that the Council was a Christian council, this position was in harmony with his insistence that only Christians could make changes in the church.

From Switzerland to South Germany to Austria to the Netherlands

But the leaders had been busy elsewhere as well. Grebel had preached and baptized in Schaffhausen and St. Gall; George Blaurock, a former monk, went to the Grisons and the Austrian Tyrol. In May 1525, Ebo Bolt became the first Anabaptist martyr. He was burned at the stake for his faith in the canton of

Schwyz. A year later Grebel died of the plague away from home, and in January 1527 Manz was publicly executed in Zurich by drowning for the crime of rebaptism.

But by that time, two years after the forming of the first congregation, the movement had spread hundreds of miles beyond its starting point through a unique missionary zeal. By May 1526 there was an Anabaptist assembly in Augsburg under the leadership of the highly gifted Hans Denck. Denck had been expelled from Nuremberg on 21 January 1525 for holding to ideas critical of the Lutheran teaching in that city. Although a restless fugitive from then until his death, Denck exercised a moderating influence on the movement in South Germany with his emphasis on love as the sum of all virtue and his care and reticence in judging others. Denck baptized Hans Hut in the summer of 1526. Hut was one of the most zealous and successful of all Anabaptist missionaries. He founded Anabaptist churches all over Austria. His method was to preach, baptize converts, then immediately appoint other missionaries to be sent out. Although many of these "apostles" were executed, the movement spread rapidly.

Hut's activities also prompted the rise of communal Anabaptism in Moravia. In 1528 a group of Anabaptists no longer welcome in the domains of the Lords of Liechtenstein decided to combine their resources for a common life of work, discipleship, and worship. Their most important early leader was Jacob Hutter, who for seven years worked to rescue Anabaptists from the terror of Hapsburg persecution in the Tyrol to the safety of Moravia. He was burned at the stake in Innsbruck in 1536. The Hutterian communities thrived under relative toleration and sent successive waves of missionaries as these Anabaptists were called, to many parts of Europe.

Meanwhile Anabaptism had been spreading elsewhere as well. A Lutheran preacher named Melchior Hoffman came to Strassburg in 1529 where he met Anabaptists for the first time. He quickly became one himself. He left Strassburg again the following year, taking his new views northward to the Netherlands and North Germany. Like Hans Hut he was a fiery preacher and baptized many converts. Numerous groups of Melchiorites emerged in the fertile spiritual soil of the Netherlands.

Hoffman had a special interest in the future events of the Second Coming and the Millenium when Christ would reign as King. He was also much occupied with the place of these events and fastened on Strassburg as the New Jerusalem. For this reason he returned there and in 1533 cheerfully went to prison because he believed that his imprisonment would set in motion the sequence of the last events of human history. Instead he died in prison ten years later.

Meanwhile other men had taken over the leadership in the Netherlands. In their hands Hoffman's speculations about the future and their own role in these events turned into dark tragedy in Münster. The city of Münster in Westphalia had become Lutheran and then, by early 1535, had turned in an Anabaptist direction through the preaching of Bernhard Rothmann. When Anabaptists in Amsterdam learned of this and went to see what was happening there, they announced that Münster, not Strassburg, was the New Jerusalem. Jan Matthis and Jan van Leyden, both unstable extremists, gained control of Münster. Whereas Hoffman had urged his followers to await peaceably God's Kingdom, Matthis and Leyden taught that force will bring in the Kingdom. They forced people to receive baptism and to join the movement or leave the city.

The developments in the city alarmed the prince-bishop of Münster and he besieged the city. But before the city was sealed off, thousands of Anabaptists from the Netherlands made a hopeful exodus to Münster in expectation of Christ's triumphant return. Instead, they saw Jan van Leyden crowned as King David ruling with an iron hand and instituting polygamy. In June 1535 the city fell, its inhabitants slaughtered and no apocalypse in sight.

The tragedy became a disaster for Anabaptists. Now their persecutors had what they believed to be ironclad evidence that Anabaptists, with all their insistence on nonviolence, were basically more violent than anyone else. The authorities were convinced that persecution was the only way of containing this

potential violence.

But Anabaptists, too, saw Münster as a terrible perversion of the Gospel and resolutely turned away from it. The most important person in the consolidation of nonviolent Anabaptism was the former priest Menno Simons. He helped organize congregations and worked tirelessly for a church order which preserved both love and the integrity of a church composed only of those who had consciously decided to follow Jesus. His congregations were scattered from Amsterdam to Danzig and from Cologne to the North Sea. He continued his work for twenty-five years, most of that time with an imperial price on his head. He died in 1561. Seventeen years later his followers in the Netherlands were granted toleration.

A contemporary of Menno Simons was Pilgram Marpeck, a civil engineer. His area of activity was South Germany and Switzerland where he picked up the work laid down by Hans Denck and Hans Hut. Both of these men had perished in 1527. Marpeck became the acknowledged leader of a group of Anabaptist fellowships in Alsace, Württemberg and Moravia. He was passionately devoted to the unity of the church, and especially distressed that there was a division between South German Anabaptists and the Swiss Brethren, followers of Conrad Grebel. Marpeck objected to their legalistic use of the ban and their tendency to make hasty judgments about the failings of others. His emphasis on the primacy of love and the necessity for patience in the exercise of church discipline reflects the influence of Hans Denck.

In contrast to the Netherlands, however, toleration did not come to South Germany, Switzerland and Moravia for several more centuries. The movement practically disappeared in South Germany, and was completely eradicated in Austria by fire and sword. It survived in Switzerland in small enclaves, but always under restrictions. The Hutterian brotherhood fared relatively well until 1590 after which its way became again the bitter way of the cross. They survived ultimately only by removal to the Ukraine and from there to America.

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Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant

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What Anabaptists Believed— What Is a Christian

For Anabaptists, as for all other Christians in the sixteenth century, Christian faith had been revealed to men by God. God was the author of it; the mediator of it was Jesus Christ.

By Jesus' death, which was an expression of the love and mercy of God, sin is removed and man is forgiven. Man's own merit achieves nothing for he has none before God. Life in Christ is a gift of God's grace. Jesus Christ is the saviour of man, and man is saved by faith in him.

But to accept him as Saviour is only the beginning of faith. Obedience to Christ the Lord is an integral part. As Hans Denck affirmed in his first public statement:

This obedience must be genuine, that is, that heart, mouth, and deed coincide together. For there can be no true heart where neither mouth nor deed is visible.

Christ's life served as the model of a God-pleasing life. "Let Christ Jesus with His Spirit and Word be your teacher and example, your way and your mirror." In thousands of passages in Anabaptist writings, there is a call for a concrete following of the example of Christ.

Anabaptists made a great deal of the new commandment of love in John 13:34; the fulfillment of which was a mark of "genuine faith and true Christianity." They insisted that the commandment of love was concrete and had to do with specifics in human life and experience. It meant forgiveness for injury, refusal to retaliate, refusal to injure, refusal to coerce. It meant aiding, supporting and defending the needy, comforting the sorrowing, preaching the Gospel to the poor. The commandment to love had content, they believed, usually identified as the ethical injunctions of Jesus and the apostles. And it was not a casual matter; it must be deliberately and consciously fulfilled. It is a commitment that every disciple takes upon himself at baptism, and which he makes regularly every time he shares in the Supper.

Since God gave the commandment to love all men, to live the truth, and to do it in a community, the Anabaptists straightforwardly assumed that it was possible, and that God would give his power and Spirit to those who asked him. They believed that the person who has faith is gradually changed into the holiness of God after the image of Jesus by the action of the Holy Spirit; this sanctification then becomes visible by the life that is lived. Good works are both the consequence and the evidence of being made holy.

Because of their emphasis on Christ-like living, Anabaptists have repeatedly been subject to the charge of legalism. Luther was one of the first. When Anabaptists emphasized that faith is visible and genuine only if expressed in action, Luther saw nothing but a new system of righteousness by works.

The Anabaptists were very sensitive to this charge and regularly replied to and rejected it. As Menno Simons explained:

Because we teach from the mouth of the Lord that if we would enter into life, we must keep the commandments; that the love of God is that we keep his commandments, the preachers call us heaven-stormers and meritmen, saying that we want to be saved by our own merits even though we have always confessed that we cannot be saved by means of anything other than by the merits, intercession, death, and blood of Christ.

Luther emphasized salvation by grace through faith alone. He did not discount good works but rather insisted that they will follow faith even as the good tree bears good fruit. But some of Luther's statements convinced the Anabaptists that he was not serious about a Christlike life. When he said "Sin bravely," what were people to think? Many readily concluded that such a statement cancelled out his call for a good life. In reverse, while Luther and others undoubtedly heard Anabaptist assurances of an evangelical position, these assurances were in turn cancelled out by their constant references to "the new law" and the "law of Christ." Law was for Luther the opposite of Gospel; there could be no joining of the two.

Luther's concern was to break free of the multitude of things required of the faithful in Roman Christianity to achieve salvation: the prayers, penances, pilgrimages and all that. But many assumed from Luther's words that works also included moral behaviour, and, therefore, that this too was no longer important. The Protestant insistence that there is no law for the Christian resulted in a popular tendency to assume that Protestantism removed all moral shackles and restraints. Menno Simons complained about the carnal lives of these professing Christians in his ***Reply to False Accusations***:

No drunkard, no avaricious or pompous person, no defiler of women, no cheat or liar, no thief, robber, or shedder of blood (I mean in the conduct of warfare), no curser so great and ungodly but he must be called a Christian. If he but say, I am sorry, then all is ascribed to his weakness and imperfection and he is admitted to the Lord's Supper, for, say they, he is saved by grace and not by merits. He remains a member of their church even though he is an impenitent and hardened godless heathen; today as yesterday and tomorrow as today, notwithstanding that the Scriptures so plainly testify that such shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

In contrast, the Anabaptists espoused a radical, uncompromising discipleship.

The Community of Believers

While the decision to become a disciple was an individual step of faith, the new life upon which the disciple entered was communal. Becoming a disciple brought him into the community of those who deliberately resolved to realize, in the present, God's will for the whole of mankind. Peter Rideman wrote:

The Church of Christ is a lantern of righteousness, in which the light of grace is borne and held before the whole world, that men may also learn to see and know the way of life.

Anabaptists were convinced that the Christian was not capable of being a disciple by himself; rather that he needed the help and understanding of others to walk the steep and narrow way of life.

In a world that applied all its pressures to crush them, the Anabaptists could not be casual about following Christ. Sin had to be dealt with if they were to continue as disciples and the model community. Therefore the church practiced discipline, "Christ's rule of binding and loosing" found in Matt. 18:15–18. If sin occurred, the one who knew about it was responsible to get rid of it. The provision was that privacy about it be preserved. It could not become the subject of gossip and ignorant judgment. If it could be settled at that level the matter was finished; loosing or forgiveness had taken place. It might, for one reason or another go further, but the same rule of privacy applied for the protection of the one who sinned. Only as a last resort did the community use the ban of excommunication—when clear incompatibility of life and conviction had been established. In that case the one who persisted in disobedience was to be regarded as a heathen and let alone. When that happened the person remained bound or the sin was retained. A sin cannot be forgiven unless it is acknowledged; forgiveness makes possible the liberation of the offender.

Binding and loosing is surely one of the most radical aspects of Anabaptist discipleship for it clearly assumed that the company of Jesus' disciples—that is the church—forgives and retains sin. This was a continuation of the Catholic belief that the power to forgive sins is actually in the hands of the church under the direct authority of Jesus.

The Anabaptists' strong commitment to church discipline cannot be dismissed as legalism, for voluntarily accepted discipline is never the equivalent of legalism. A spirit of legalism nevertheless became evident. The Anabaptist way of life required constant attention to the details of Christian discipleship. It is seldom easy to determine whether any given act really does compromise one's position as a disciple, and people could not always easily decide whether a matter was important or not. Issues were sometimes pressed and made the test of discipleship, and there was a tendency to over-emphasize the seriousness of an offence. The pressure of persecution from outside surely added to the determination not to relax vigilance, and the tendency was strong to err on the side of caution.

The Anabaptist's discipleship led them into a new attitude towards property. They all agreed that in the Kingdom of God there could be no "mine" and "thine." When a person entered the community he put all that he had at the disposal of the brothers. While this did not necessarily involve a common treasury it did mean that no Christian could call his property his own as though it had nothing to do with others. They simply believed that within the community of faith there should be no need. As Balthasar Hubmaier stated:

Everyone should be concerned about the needs of others, so that the hungry might be fed, the thirsty given to drink, and the naked clothed. For we are not lords of our possessions, but stewards and distributors. There is certainly no one who says that another's goods may be seized and made common; rather, he would gladly give the coat in addition to the shirt.

Personal property was allowed among the Anabaptists—it was not made common, but was treated as such. An exception were the Hutterian Anabaptists in Moravia, where this conviction developed into a complete community of goods involving both production and consumption.

Despite the fact that Zwingli and Melancthon had both at one time spoken like Anabaptists on the question of private property, they now regarded such convictions as seditious. While Anabaptists expected the new attitude to property to prevail in their own community, and at no time advocated its extension to the whole of society, it nevertheless represented a threat to the stability of society. Had the movement a chance to grow it could most certainly have had major economic consequences. The established authorities were understandably apprehensive.

Baptism

Baptism was to be administered to those who had given evidence of repentance and a changed life, who believed that their sins had been taken away by Christ, and who desired to follow him. In baptism the reborn believer committed himself to a life of obedience in the fellowship with other believers. This was an adult decision, thus baptism was for adults. Baptism signified a changed life by virtue of Christ's death but by no means in an individualistic sense. Repeatedly Anabaptists insisted that no one was to be baptized without committing himself to the discipline of the community. He thereby declared himself ready to participate in dealing with sin in the community in a redemptive way.

Anabaptists saw infant baptism as a practical inference from the doctrine of original sin, but as having no support in Scripture. Sin, they argued, came into the world with the awakening of the knowledge of good and evil. An infant does not have this knowledge and therefore has no sin. Consequently it needs no baptism for the removal of sin. Statements by Marpeck and Grebel illustrate this position.

When the children grow in the knowledge of good and evil, only then do sin, death, and condemnation come into play. Since the guilt of sin exists in the knowledge of sin, Christ has taken away the sin of the world by his blood, the innocent through the word of promise, the guilty through faith in him. Although innocence contains a root of sin in the manner of flesh, it is still not sin itself.

All children who have not yet come to the discernment of the knowledge of good and evil, are surely saved by the suffering of Christ, the new Adam.

Religious Liberty

At rock bottom in medieval life was the belief that European society was a Christian society, often referred to as the "corpus Christianum." Since the time of Constantine church and state had been united. The church encompassed all members of society—if not by conviction by coercion. It was recognized that within this larger church there was a true church of the faithful—but no one knew who or where they were. They formed an "invisible church" within Christendom.

In contrast, the Anabaptists viewed the church as the company of those who were consciously committed to Jesus. No one was under any compulsion to join them. And if anyone already in their community could not agree he was not forced to conform against his will but was allowed to leave without restriction. The Anabaptists, along with a few other individuals such as Sebastian Frank and Sebastian Castellio, were the first ones to raise this claim for religious liberty.

Since the Middle Ages it had been accepted practice to put dissenters and unbelievers to death. It was done for their own good, it was argued. It prevented them from falling even further into error; sometimes torture and stake brought them to "repentance." During the Reformation period Zwingli, Luther and Calvin completely rejected the notion of religious liberty. Catholics and Protestants alike agreed that dissenters had to be dealt with by force if they did not yield to persuasion.

The Anabaptists, however, appealed to their Lord's command to love all men and their conviction that God's truth needed no human coercion to be victorious. When persuasion by God's Word failed, the dissenter ought to be allowed to hold his error without losing his head. With some individual exceptions this was regarded by all in sixteenth century Europe as an invitation to anarchy. Simply by being the visible church in this new way, Anabaptists were setting up a counter-society which, whether they intended it or not, challenged the existing one where church and state were one. From the point of view of the authorities this could not be tolerated. Hence there was fierce and persistent persecution.

The Bible

Anabaptists shared in the reformation claim that the Scriptures were the final authority for the Christian. Along with Protestants they rejected the Catholic teaching which assigned equal validity to Scripture and tradition.

But how were these Scriptures to be correctly interpreted? Anabaptists gave a twofold answer. First, they understood the coming of Jesus to be central, the event in which God revealed himself more clearly and with greater authority than anywhere else. What Jesus said and did as well as the words and actions of his first followers therefore had greater authority than anything or anyone else. They rejected as God's Word for their day whatever did not agree with the life and doctrine of Christ.

Secondly, Anabaptists agreed with Luther when he insisted that every believer, no matter how humble, had the Holy Spirit and could therefore legitimately interpret Scripture. But they went a step further and held to the old principle that ultimately it is the church that interprets Scripture. It is not the hierarchy as in Catholicism, nor an appointed group of scholar-teachers as in Protestantism, which interprets the Bible, but rather the gathered disciple community. This community struggles with the meaning of Scripture and reaches, where possible, a common understanding of its intent.

What Is Sacred?

Anabaptists rejected totally the notion that specially sanctified persons, places, and things put man in touch with God, thereby rejecting a centuries-long Christian understanding of the sacred. (At this point they clearly followed their teacher Zwingli.) This is demonstrated in their observance of the Lord's Supper.

In an effort to dissociate themselves completely from the sacramental words of the Catholic Mass, the Anabaptists insisted on the non-sacred function of words. Conrad Grebel wrote that only the words from the Gospels or 1 Corinthians were to be used for the observance of the Supper, with no additions.

There were no sacred things—ordinary bread and drinking vessels were to be used. No place was sacred—Anabaptists gathered in homes, and felt that celebrating the Supper in a church created a false reverence. There were no sacred persons for Anabaptists. All who belong to Christ are saints, and no one is any more sacred than anyone else. Special holy days were also rejected.

Anabaptists frequently spoke of holiness, but in its basic prophetic sense which is personal and ethical in nature. In Jesus God has sanctified all persons, places, things, time, and words that are devoted to him.

In an effort to eliminate the abuses which characterized Catholic practices of their day, Anabaptism did away with emotionally necessary and religiously satisfying ritual, including aesthetics of sound, color, and movement. Conrad Grebel, for example, insisted that singing is contrary to the will of God (though many other Anabaptists clearly did not accept this view). Anabaptism settled for religious forms that were meaningful beyond doubt but unquestionably impoverished.

Conflict with the State

Anabaptist belief and practice came into conflict with the civil government at point after point. Their attitudes toward property, defense of religious liberty, even the refusal to baptize infants, all threatened the established political structures. There are several more areas where this conflict was explicit.

1. They refused to participate in the magistracy. This refusal was founded upon the biblical conception of the two orders, the old and the new. The state is the restraining authority in that area which has not accepted the Lordship of Christ, punishing the evil and protecting the good. As the

servant of God's anger, the state carried out its function with the sword.

The other order is that which has willfully and joyfully accepted Christ's Lordship. Anabaptists knew they belonged to the new order in which radically different ways of acting were the norm. If they were serious about their confession of nonviolence they could not participate in the functions of any state in their time.

But they were also consistent and tried to apply the reverse as well. They called on the magistrate to stay out of the affairs of the new order, the church, denying the state any right to make decisions in the church. It was a radical departure from an assumption practically unquestioned for more than a thousand years.

2. They refused to take oaths. The basic statements on the oath found in the literature simply restate Jesus' prohibition of swearing any oath at all. The oath is not used by disciples of Jesus since it is designed to ensure that truth is spoken. The disciple speaks the truth as a matter of course since he belongs to the Truth which is Christ.

There was an added dimension to the Anabaptists' refusal of oaths. Many of them were faced with swearing an oath of allegiance to the state of which they were citizens. Such an oath involved the commitment to bear arms on behalf of that state, and confirmed a view of the function of the state which they could not hold. Considering their refusal of this oath, it is no wonder they were always suspected of sedition.

3. They refused to participate in warfare. Like the refusal to take an oath, this refusal follows directly from the Anabaptist view of the disciple's relation to the state. Their refusal occurred in a time of constant warfare, territorially and in the Holy Roman Empire. It was also a time when all of Europe feared the aggressiveness of the Ottoman Turks. So when Michael Sattler said he would not fight against the Turks, that was akin to saying today that one would not fight against communism. To a Christian society, refusal to fight meant that one was ready to let the infidels conquer. To Anabaptists, refusal to fight signified a trust in God's hand in the ultimate consequences of human conflict.

When Anabaptists spoke about refusing to bear arms, they were addressing professing Christians who were fighting professing Christians. They were pointing out a glaring contradiction—confessed allegiance to the prince of Peace and denial of him in action. As Grebel wrote, the "gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves." Anabaptists believed that the community of Jesus had resources of strength for its life and work which made the power of governments unnecessary.

Fighting and killing were clearly contrary to the law of love, no matter how much the situation might seem to demand it. Menno Simons wrote:

All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend scripturally retaliation rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?

In every age there are those who appeal to the necessity of violence in the pursuit of justice. Anabaptists certainly called for justice, but they knew that justice and violence are enemies, and that the attempt to achieve justice with violence was like fighting fire with oil. Instead they simply refused the old powers and institutions the authority which they were claiming over people. They began to live as though the kingdom of God, whose final arrival they anticipated, had already come. They said in

their day "the war is over," and commenced to live in peace.

Anabaptism challenged the oneness of medieval society, in which church and empire, pope and emperor, bishop and king, priest and nobleman were united in their shared responsibility for maintaining wholeness, peace, and order. The Anabaptist response to these prevailing assumptions was a direct consequence of their understanding of the Christian life as discipleship and their view of the church as the company of those who were consciously committed to Jesus.

This is in contrast to the Reformers. While religiously they were clearly and undeniably innovative, socially they were all, to a man, conservative, clinging in some form to the medieval idea of the unity of society. While Zwingli and Luther had, to begin with, made some truly radical noises, they were soon haunted by the very real prospect of the secularization of the state and the dechristianization of society. At that point their conservatism won out. They then consciously and deliberately opposed the trend away from the unitary society which was already beginning to develop.

The Suffering Church

Anabaptists believed that the persecution they faced was not accidental. It was assumed that the community of faith would be a suffering community. Jesus had said this would be true. Further, the New Testament writings all had the shadow of persecution over them. The Anabaptists believed that anyone who was serious about following Christ would be persecuted.

An Anabaptist lived by the rule of Jesus at the price of his own life, thus giving concrete expression to Jesus' words: "Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he must take up his cross, and come with me." While the Anabaptist movement was persecuted in an orgy of fire and blood, yet the movement did not compromise its commitment to living by new rules even in the midst of the terrible power of the old. Four centuries ago they knew and lived and died by their "theology of hope" in the resurrection, somehow certain that their faithfulness would be taken up into God's great peace plan for mankind.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 5: Radical Reformation: The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists: A Gallery of Factions, Friends and Foes

Swiss Brethren

They were the first generation of Anabaptists—**Conrad Grebel** (a patrician's son and Zwingli's former protege), **Felix Manz** (a clergyman's illegitimate son), **George Blaurock** (middle-aged ex-priest of peasant origins), **Simon Stumpf** (parish priest in rural Hongg), **Wilhelm Reublin** (middle-aged priest in Witikon who was the first Zurich pastor to marry and to persuade parents to refuse baptism of their child), and Johannes Brötli (priest in rural Zollikon)—to name a few. Stumpf, Reublin, and Brötli had achieved reform in their rural parishes through their refusal to send tithes to support Zurich's clergy while Zwingli was still trying cautiously to institute reforms in the mass in that city. Zwingli's insistence on the full support of city council frustrated Grebel and Manz, who concluded that the magistrate's way and Christ's way were not necessarily the same. Relinquishing their first hope of packing city council with likeminded reformers, they met on 21 January 1525 to discuss and pray about their response to city council's newest law: that all infants be baptized within eight days of birth. When Blaurock asked Grebel to rebaptize him and then proceeded himself to rebaptize Grebel and others, these brothers in Christ signaled their intention to go a different way and suffer the political consequences of following Christ. Grebel left home and family, sold his books, and became a traveling evangelist working with Manz—first winning followers at Zollikon in what became the first Anabaptist congregation and then later quelling extremism among the rebaptized.

On 5 January 1527, Manz became the first martyr of the Swiss Brethren. Grebel had died of natural causes six months earlier, and Blaurock by 1528 was banished from the Swiss cantons. A popular preacher, Blaurock established many congregations in the Austrian Tyrol until he was caught and burned at the stake near Innsbruck on 6 September 1529. Brötli had met the same fate sometime in the preceding year. Seeking to keep the cause of the common man and the gospel joined, Reublin sought converts in Waldshut and surrounding areas of Austria, baptized Hubmaier and traveled to Strassburg. From there he seems to have led Michael Sattler to the Neckar Valley and been among those gathered at Schleithem to solidify what by now was a separatist underground movement. Escaping Sattler's fate of martyrdom in May 1527, Reublin made his way to Moravia. He preached a rigorous communalism but was not faithful to it himself, was banned after Jacob Hutter conducted a sober investigation, and lived the last three decades of his life no longer associated with Anabaptists. Like Stumpf, Brötli and Hubmaier, Reublin seems to have held more to a Zwinglian view of the possibility of Christian magistrates and a Christian political system than to the more radical idea of separatist discipleship as held by Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock.

Thomas Müntzer

(1490?–1525) Historians have not found it easy to classify him: Was he an Anabaptist? A wayward disciple of Luther? Forerunner of modern socialism as Marxist scholars and others have claimed? He was the revolutionary spiritual leader of the Peasants' War of 1525 and a torchbearer in the great wave of religious and social revolution of this time. A student of medieval realism—well read in church history, the German mystics, and the humanistic and Reformation tracts—Müntzer in 1520 received a pastorate in the Saxon city of Zwickau, where he quickly allied himself both with the disenfranchised artisans wanting a role in government and with those council members urging that the city become free of outside ecclesiastical powers. Müntzer combined the anticlerical spirit of the times with his own mysticism. Not in the Scriptures, not in the sacraments, not in the institutional church but rather in the

tormented struggle of his soul did a person, according to Müntzer arrive at faith. And one still would not have faith unless God himself gave and taught it. This "experienced faith" placed the believer in a new order, an elect, to whom sooner or later the kingdom of this world would be given in the form of democratic theocracy. Müntzer's conviction to bring faith to the common man resulted in his 1523 innovations in worship services, including German liturgies, psalms and hymns. When the court of Weimar retaliated by declaring that his pastorate was not official, Müntzer was summoned to give a "trial sermon" to Duke John and his son John Frederick, the latter already convinced of Luther's version of the Reformation. In this "Sermon to the Princes" Müntzer invited his hearers to flee the inevitable bad combination of ecclesiastical and worldly powers for the "unconquerable Reformation"—the kingdom of Christ on earth. Unsuccessful, Müntzer had to flee Allstedt in August 1524 for Muhlhausen. There he joined the Peasant's Revolt in the Black Forest. He had become convinced that their cause, especially the confrontation forthcoming at Frankenhausen was the last judgment and that the ensuing conflict would put the common man in direct contact with God. The results of the Frankenhausen battle on 15 May 1525, in which six thousand peasants and six princes met their death, proved Müntzer's cause wrong. Shortly thereafter he was captured, tortured, and then executed on 27 May. Although the Swiss Brethren took issue with Müntzer's use of force, they did identify with his insistence that the inner experience of faith affected totally the actions of both the individual and the fabric of society.

Hans Denck

(1500–1527) One of the early leaders of South German Anabaptism, Denck was called the "pope of the Anabaptists" by Strassburg Reformer Martin Bucer. Born in Upper Bavaria of educated, God-fearing burgher parents, Denck from 1517–19 studied Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was also well read in the mystical and humanistic texts of the day. In 1523 as headmaster of the renown St. Sebald School in Nuremberg, his mystical-humanistic ideas came under scrutiny of the Lutheran clergy. Consequently, after making hasty provisions for his wife and child, Denck left Nuremberg in 1525 and went to Augsburg. Here he became an Anabaptist and in 1526 baptized Hans Hut, who would become a charismatic Anabaptist evangelist. After a confrontation with Augsburg's Lutheran ministers Denck moved to Strassburg, where he met Anabaptists of all stripes and engaged in conversations with the city's Reformers. A man who by his own admission lacked the disposition for dogmatic controversy, Denck left Strassburg in December 1526. Next in Worms, he consulted with Jewish scholars and assisted Ludwig Hatzer in translating the Old Testament Prophets from Hebrew into German.

Published in Worms in April 1527, the Haetzer-Denck *All the Prophets* went through twenty-one printings in the next seven years, and became a source in the Zwingli and Luther translations of the Old Testament. Denck died of the plague in Basel in November 1527.

Hans Hut

(?–1527) He was the Anabaptist evangelist who began almost all the Anabaptist groups in Austria and Moravia, making more converts in southern Europe than all the other Anabaptist leaders combined. His work rightly earned him the epithet "Apostle of Austria." As a book peddler, he traveled to Frankenhausen (Thuringia) in hopes of making some sales among Müntzer's army. There he heard Müntzer preach his fiery sermon that linked the Lord's second coming with the peasants' cause, and Hut went up the hill with the peasants against Landgrave Philip. It is the Hut- Müntzer association in this event and Hut's assistance in getting Müntzer's "Express Exposee" published that led Bullinger and other Reformers to call Müntzer the "father of Anabaptism." Disappointedly convinced that the peasants had sought their own glory, not God's, Hut returned home. When the bodies of Müntzer and Heinrich Pfeiffer, his co-worker, were not buried but left to hang dead on spikes, Hut came to identify them as the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3, whose bodies were to lie unburied for three and a half days. This number, Hut's own disappointment in the peasants' rebellion, and an old prophecy made by Albert Gleicheisen let Hut to one conclusion: Christ would return on Pentecost 1528 three and a half years later. On Pentecost 1526 while he was passing through Augsburg, Hut was baptized by Hans Denck. With two years to go

before Christ's return, Hut embarked on a feverish missionary journey, baptizing and using the cross as a sign upon the forehead in order to recruit the 144,000 saints needed for the Christ's millennial kingdom. Besides increasing converts, Hut's contribution to Anabaptism was to take issue with Hubmaier over the use of the sword and whether magistrates could be Christians. Hut was captured, and he died on 6 December 1527 of smoke inhalation in his prison cell. As a warning to his followers, Hut's dead body was tied to a chair and tried, then burned at the stake.

Balthasar Hubmaier

(1480?–1528) As the most able theologian among early Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier easily earned his enemies' epithet of being the "head and most important of the Anabaptists." The Council of Trent placed him in the same league with Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Schwenckfeld. Educated at the University of Freiberg, Hubmaier learned theology at the feet of one of the keenest Catholic polemicists, Johann Eck, and received his doctorate in the same year as Luther. By 1520 Hubmaier had moved to Waldshut where he began reading the letters of Paul and the writings of Erasmus, Melancthon, and Luther. "Christ was starting to sprout in me," he wrote of this period. After participating with Zwingli in the October 1523 disputation on images and the mass, Hubmaier returned to Waldshut determined to change the mass. The Waldshut council supported him in expelling the Catholic priests. Hubmaier's work did not go unnoticed; with Archduke Ferdinand's threat to bring his Waldshut subjects forcibly in line, Hubmaier went to Schaffhausen where he penned one of the earliest arguments for religious toleration. When Ferdinand became distracted by a war with France, Hubmaier returned in October 1524 to Waldshut and began immediately to celebrate the mass in German and to remove images and holy objects. Meanwhile, Waldshut was seeking to increase its political power by aligning itself to the insurgent peasant groups, who were soon victorious. On Easter Sunday 1525 Hubmaier and sixty others were rebaptized by Wilhelm Reublin. In the days following, Hubmaier rebaptized 300 others. For a short time Anabaptism as the "state faith" flourished here. And Hubmaier was inspired to write one of the best early arguments for believer's baptism. By December 1525 with the peasants defeated and Zwingli and Oecolampadius openly opposed to him, Hubmaier fled to Zurich, was arrested there, and temporarily recanted his faith. Meanwhile the Hapsburg troops moved into Waldshut, and the town reconverted to Catholicism. By July 1526 Hubmaier and his wife had made their way to Nicolsburg, where the tolerant prince Leonhard van Liechtenstein himself received baptism at Hubmaier's hands. Again, Anabaptism as a "state faith" flourished briefly. To encourage his growing flock (according to contemporary accounts 12,000 Anabaptists collected there under Hubmaier's influence) he published works on Christian living and church discipline. When the fiery preacher Hans Hut came to town, his preaching won disgruntled followers away from Hubmaier's more moderate approach to the relationship of church and state. In July 1527 King Ferdinand arrested Hubmaier, tried him in Vienna, and had him burned at the stake on 10 March 1528; his wife was drowned in the Danube three days later. Although most other Anabaptist leaders rejected Hubmaier's plea for a tolerant Christian government and judicious use of the sword, they adopted his arguments for adult baptism, tolerance and free will.

Jacob Hutter

(1500?–1536) A scantily educated hatter, Hutter served only two years as leader in Tyrol and Moravia, yet he managed to unify this group according to the apostolic model of community of goods in Acts 2–5. Consequently, this group became known as the Hutterites and 450 years later are still thriving as Christians living communally against the backdrop of an opposing worldly reality. In 1529 with the martyrdom of Georg Blaurock, Hutter became the leader of Tyrolean Anabaptism at a time when hardly a day passed that Anabaptist matters did not come up in the local councils throughout the region. Burning stakes, crowded prisons, bereft, starving children, and abandoned property were the visual reminders of the test of faith. Hutter travelled to Moravia, hopeful that his flock could emigrate to that region. He returned and began sending Tyroleans there. However, the Moravian Anabaptists were divided and quarreling. Both sides petitioned Hutter to conduct an investigation, which he did. Then in August 1533 he returned to Moravia for the fourth and last time and "cleaned house." Even though he was never formally ordained to leadership, Hutter brought stability and unity to the brotherhood over the

next two years. They began practicing total economic sharing. In reaction to the debacle of Münster King Ferdinand in 1535 ordered that all Anabaptists in Moravia be rooted out. Reluctantly their tolerant lords obeyed, and the Anabaptists had to seek refuge in the caves and forests. Hutter and his wife were hunted down in Tyrol. He was tortured, whipped, immersed in freezing water, doused with brandy and then burned publicly at King Ferdinand's insistence (and over the protest of local officials) on 25 February 1536.

Ferdinand I

(1503–1564) No other European leader paid such relentless attention to Anabaptism's suppression—a mission he virtually accomplished in Austria. A staunch Catholic, Ferdinand had the complex problem of keeping "infidel" Turks away from Vienna while repressing the monster of heresy within his realm without alienating the Protestant princes, whose support he needed in order to defend Vienna. Crowned Archduke of Austria in 1521, King of Hungary and King of Bohemia in 1526, and Holy Roman Emperor after his brother Charles V abdicated in 1556, Ferdinand found in the persecution of Anabaptists the perfect action to bring about some cooperation among the diverse groups of his territory. The mandate of 20 August 1527 signalled his intention against all "sectarians and heretics." Using Hubmaier's remote connections with the 1525 Peasants' War, Ferdinand made him one of the first victims. When the trials proved slow, Ferdinand appointed a special commissioner to organize Tauferjager or Anabaptist hunters. The pyres burned everywhere; according to one account 1,000 Anabaptists were burned in the Inn Valley alone from 1527–30. The Imperial Diet of Speyer in 1529 extended the boundaries of persecution to the Holy Roman Empire, where according to the Hutterian Chronicle 2,169 Anabaptists were martyred during Charles's and Ferdinand's reigns. Tireless in his efforts, Ferdinand sometimes personally outlined the details of his bloodbath, as in the case of Jacob Hutter. Only in Moravia, where the proudly independent feudal lords found the industrious communitarian Anabaptists too lucrative, did Ferdinand not initially succeed. After temporary repression in 1535, Moravian Anabaptists again found protection and began their "Golden Age" (1550–90). Even the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 which allowed "whose region his religion" did not permit Ferdinand to re-Catholicize because by then he was too distracted by the Turks at his door.

Menno Simons

(1496?–1561) Mennonites, the largest group of Anabaptists today, take their name from him and rightly so, for Menno Simons was able after the Münster horrors of 1535 to salvage the nonresistant, Biblically based Anabaptist vision of a disciplined church. Menno Simons' prolific writings and a life consistent with his beliefs brought courage to the many Flemish, Frisian, and North German Anabaptists who had an immense horror of what had happened at Münster. "For no other foundation can any man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11) appeared as Menno Simon's motto in his writings. In simple language he explained basic doctrines and ethical standards of the "new man" in Christ for the scattered and confused "covenanters" of the Netherlands. His ***Foundation of the Christian Doctrine*** of 1539 continues to have its usefulness for Mennonites today. Ordained a priest in 1524 in his native Friesland, Simons did not touch the Scriptures for his first two years for fear that he would be misled, yet a growing doubt that the bread and wine was the body and blood of Christ led him to examine the New Testament. The martyrdom of a Friesland Anabaptist in 1531 drove him to examine the Scriptures on infant baptism. A likeable person and popular priest, Simons did not leave his parish until 1536 after he had already begun preaching the "true repentance" and against the abomination of Münster for nine months. He also married that year. His first tract pointed out the fallacies of Münster and proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the Spiritual David, King of Israel. The congregation, separated from the world, became the community of the reborn. East Friesland, where Melchior Hoffman first introduced Anabaptism, was to be the center of renewal under Simons. From 1536 to 1554 he was a hunted man with a price of 100 Guilders on his head. At least one friend was executed for sheltering him, and the property of another friend confiscated for sheltering his wife and children. He preached and baptized at

night. Under the tolerant leadership of Countess Anna of Oldenburg, Menno Simons was called before her superintendent of the East Friesland churches, John a Lasco, who was charged with determining which sects in her domain were heretical. It was the countess in her decree of 1545 who first coined the term "Mennisten." From 1544 to 1554 Menno Simons traveled throughout the Lower Rhine region of Cologne and Bonn and then to Danzig and Prussia as an evangelist and elder. Questions regarding the application of church discipline occupied his attention in later years, with Simons first taking the middle road "in this sad affliction" and then becoming more rigid. At the conference of South German Anabaptists at Strassburg in 1557, where 50 representatives from Moravia, Switzerland, and Alsace were present, the elders sent a letter to Menno and his co-workers urging them not to go to extremes in matters of the ban and avoidance so that family life was disrupted. Simons responded that the heavenly marriage with Christ was more important than the earthly marriage of man and woman. Menno Simons finally found a home and protection in the province of Holstein, where he died a natural death. To the last, Simons remained very much preoccupied with the protection of the community of disciples and the discipline necessary for its health.

Pilgram Marpeck

(1490?–1556) He was a civil servant and did not live the life of a hounded Anabaptist. From a prosperous prominent family and trained as an engineer, Marpeck in 1525 became magistrate for the silver mines of Rattenberg, his birthplace. In 1528 Marpeck quit his job, left his property and wealth behind, and went to Strassburg where the city hired him to devise more efficient means of transporting wood from the Black Forest and to correct drainage problems. Here he made public his Anabaptism and engaged in conversations with the Reformers. Among the Strassburg "radicals," Marpeck took a middle stance—on the one hand, between Denck's mystical approach to Christianity and the more radical spiritualism of Schwenckfeld and Sebastian Franck and on the other hand, the apocalyptic teachings of Melchior Hoffman. Wide respect for his accomplishments as well as his preaching against infant baptism and the oath of allegiance made him a political liability, and he was banished. From 1532–1544, Marpeck moved from place to place. During this time he opposed the Swiss Brethren who were then concerned with the ban and with the particulars of an ascetic way of life. Although Marpeck insisted on church discipleship and separation from the world, like Denck he emphasized the primacy of love. In 1541 he traveled to Moravia to pursue uniting South German Anabaptists with the Moravian Anabaptists, but he concluded they were too divided and authoritarian, and he rejected community of goods on the grounds that it opposed freedom of the Gospel. Deeply burdened with a concern for church unity, he and his followers sought a statement that would represent common areas of belief. A rewriting of Bernard Rothman's *Bekentnisse von bey den Sacramenten* was published as the *Taufbuchlein* in 1542. This confession represents Anabaptist doctrine almost twenty years after its Zurich beginnings and shows its adaptation to the struggles and issues of the time.

Melchior Hoffman

(1495?–1543) He took Anabaptism from South Germany to East Frisia and the Netherlands where it gained mass support. Among his followers Hoffman's fanciful prophecies sowed a mood of expectancy that made them travel by the thousands to Münster to establish the "kingdom of God" in 1534–35. Later, through the careful work of Menno Simons these militant "Melchiorites" evolved into an Anabaptist group that by 1550 comprised one quarter of the population of the Northern Netherlands. A furrier by trade, Hoffman from 1523 to 1529 was a Lutheran lay missionary in Livonia, Stockholm, Lubeck and Schleswig-Holstein. In Strassburg in 1529 he became an Anabaptist. He took Denck's idea of universal divine grace, modified Schwenckfeld's notion of the celestial flesh of Christ, and added the idea held by a small group of "Strassburg prophets" that Christ would return soon. He preached that the world must prepare for this return in which the free imperial cities would defend the true gospel against the emperor, pope, and false teachers.

Although Anabaptists would not bear arms in this struggle, they must pray and build fortifications in anticipation of the peaceful theocracy that would be the final outcome. When Strassburg issued a

warrant for his arrest in 1530, Hoffman escaped to East Frisia; here and in Emden he made many converts among unemployed artisans suffering from high food prices. Convinced that the imminent apocalyptic events would begin in Strassburg in 1533, Hoffman resumed there and cheerfully permitted himself to be arrested; there still imprisoned he died ten years later.

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Sticks and Stones Broke Their Bones, and Vicious Names Did Hurt Them

16th Century Responses to the Anabaptists

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Sixteenth-century Anabaptists were ardently disliked and despised. This fact is nowhere more aptly illustrated than in the nasty nicknames given them. Indeed the name Anabaptist itself, which means "rebaptizer," was probably designed to these people under the penalties of Roman civil law—which, in a series of imperial edicts from approximately 390 to 420 A.D., decreed death to those who rebaptized or were rebaptized. The Reformers had destroyed or disregarded canon law and judicial procedures, which had been developed over many centuries by the Roman Church. In order to draw up laws more suitable to their view of Scripture and the church, Reformers chose edicts and patterns of jurisprudence ready at hand in the Justinian Code, compiled under Roman Emperor Justinian's orders in the 530s. On the basis of those edicts, therefore, the Reformers and princes decreed the death penalty for rebaptizers, thereby giving the name Anabaptist itself an unfavorable reputation. Indeed, second generation German Marxist Karl Kautsky has concluded that "Anabaptist" in the sixteenth century bore the emotional stigma of the term "Bolshevist" in the early twentieth-century West.

There were other naughty nicknames: (1) Fanatics (**Schwärmer**) or people with bees in their bonnets, who followed no rational order of social behavior but upset every social convention by stubbornly insisting on a radical separatist religious existence, as if they alone understood divine matters or even God himself; (2) Corner-preachers (**Winkelprediger**), who conducted their illegal religious enterprises in secret hideaways and spurned the light of open, forthrightly-public pronouncements of their views. The fact of early edicts banning their private religious gatherings did not spare them this nickname; (3) Mob-spirited factionalists (**Rottengeister**), who played upon the emotional immaturity and latent grievances of the lower classes of society with their own brand of passionate rhetoric; (4) Donatists, who like their fifth-century forebears considered themselves a spiritual elite, not fit for company with common Christians; (5) Revolutionaries (**Aufrüherer**), who promoted civil disobedience and revolt under the guise of preaching and practicing religious piety. English translations of these terms cannot quite convey the degree of contempt or hatred of their sixteenth-century German originals; even present-day German dictionaries have succeeded in domesticating and taming some of these unruly names.

Why did people use these names? And why did they despise and then persecute the Anabaptists? Our own secularist, post-Christian West has difficulty understanding persecution for religious reasons. It will be the task of this essayist to describe and to explain attitudes toward these Anabaptists by different groups of people in the sixteenth century. This will not be an apology for the Anabaptists, because most Westerners now consider their religious divergences to be relatively harmless.

The Common People

Early on both peasants and townfolk displayed an openness to the Anabaptists, without much inquiry as to their reputed heretical views. All Europe was awash in fresh religious fervor. Many people were, of course, disturbed by suggestions of too much change in religious practices. Such changes could impair and even harm the faith of simple, transparent and steadfast Christians, as Luther understood so well. But there were many other people for whom the freshly-opened Bible led to novel ways of understanding and living out its message. (Of course Roman Christians before and during the Reformation read the

Bible; many of them knew its contents extremely well. Still the Reformation built and developed its own momentum on this freshly interpreted Scripture, even to the point of elevating Scripture to an authority above that of the Church, which had much earlier decided exactly which books could be accepted as part of the Bible.)

A peasant carting his onions to market a few miles distant; a furrier who plied his craft in several North German towns; a housewife or nun to whom some new word about Christ or the saints raised questions about religious practice that had lain dormant; a weaver or a shearer who joined with fellow clothmakers in any of several Lowlands towns; a schoolteacher whose natural theological curiosity pressed him to reexamine both Scripture and also the Latin Fathers—all of these and many more found themselves open to the new and strange words of itinerant Anabaptist missionaries who, in the spirit of the times, did not necessarily reveal their own identities and who moved on to other towns and villages after only a few days of instructing new converts. In the summer of 1525 peasants still smarted from their recent defeat and the cruel deaths of their friends at the hands of the lord's mercenaries. Many of them still believed in a Christian, biblically-based equality or egalitarianism, and they longed for a more just, even distribution of wealth. They continued to recite the older peasants' revolutionary couplet:

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who then was the gentleman?

Peasants bitterly resented restrictions on hunting and fishing and the enforced payment of tithes to a church that they considered corrupt, especially among the local clergy and mendicant friars and preachers. Townfolk were caught in economic cycles with downturns that no one understood but that caused untold suffering and deprivation. They also resented the wealth and privileges of their local clergy, and especially of those monasteries near at hand. To such people an Anabaptist gospel of simple discipleship and of sharing of goods so that none are needy appeared to be deeply and properly Christian—the way God would have his people live. And both peasants and townfolk, like all people in those times, interpreted the Turkish threat to European civilization and even planetary movements as ominous signs of the impending end-times. Repentance in order to join God's people was the answer. (There were, of course, a few upper class people who also found the Anabaptist truth convincing, nobles as well as city patricians.)

But from 1535 to 1550, especially in South Germanic regions, the Anabaptist message fell on stonier ground. Newspapers of sorts and broadsides, both intermittently published, broadcast the juicier details of that Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster. The larger movement, therefore, suffered some degree of disgrace. It had never been united. But even those who had declared nonresistance to be biblical some ten years before Münster found themselves discredited. And it became increasingly dangerous even to listen to an Anabaptist missionary after some feudal lords began to obey the 1529 imperial mandate decreeing death to Anabaptists. The favorable tide had turned. After 1535 Anabaptist converts embraced the cause because they were too dissatisfied with any other religious option, or because they found Anabaptist steadfastness in torture and execution itself compelling. Consequently, the movement, never large, probably decreased in number although we have no reliable statistical data to help us measure their number or influence.

Magistrates

Feudal lords, judges, bailiffs with responsibility for social order, and city magistrates—all found the Anabaptists both nettlesome and personally troubling: what should be done with them? On the one hand Anabaptists gravitated in effect toward a religious pluralism which no one in the sixteenth century was willing to accept as viable. Society would break up. Political chaos and even revolution were the only possible results of religious differences within a given political body. And the more religiously earnest among them all felt a divine call to propagate the true faith among, and to regulate the moral behavior

of, their subjects. It is easy for us in secular states to overlook that genuine concern, especially in princes or rulers whose own lives were anything but morally exemplary. But what should be done to punish these religious dissidents? A few princes and magistrates—for example Philip of Hesse, Ulrich of Württemberg, and the Strassburg Council—could not bring themselves to exercise the death penalty for religious offense. As Philip once declared, to do so would mean that one would need to kill all Jews and Catholics also. So there developed a lively correspondence among these rulers, and with theologians and jurists as well, on the topic of how to deal with Anabaptists. A few isolated feudal lords, sufficiently distant geographically from their overlords (the Liechtensteins in Moravia, for instance), felt that they could afford to harbor and protect Anabaptists without suffering from their own overlords. These lords reaped the benefits of the Anabaptists' artisan and agricultural skills in return. In Moravia for example, Anabaptists contributed economic prosperity, innovations in medicine and improved methods of roof thatching. But most rulers would not tolerate them. Many feared in them a reappearance of peasant unrest and revolution and at the very least exiled them. Of course many had them executed—Catholics by the traditional burning at the stake (with a small bag of gunpowder tied around the neck of the victim to ensure an early death, as a humanitarian gesture), and Protestants by drowning and beheading.

One can gain a clearer idea of rulers' and judges' degree of apprehension about the Anabaptists by looking at the questions put to them in trials. For example, in August 1533 some twenty-five Anabaptists were caught in the small village of Sorga, Hesse, and interrogated in court on 9 August. Each one was asked nine questions, as follows: (1) Do you attend our preaching, and if not why not? (2) May a Christian tolerate temporal government? (3) Do you pay war taxes? (4) Will you defend the fatherland in case of military invasion? (5) Was the recent Peasants' War of God or not? (6) May a Christian in financial need take the goods of another Christian? (7) May a Christian own private property? (8) Why do you hold community of goods with others? [None of these Anabaptists did.] (9) May the government rightfully require the payment of tithes and taxes? Many political authorities regarded question 1 and questions 6 through 8 as political. That would make all of them political in essence, with no interest expressed in ascertaining the more explicitly religious views of the captives.

Thus, the questions illustrate the degree to which political authorities thought that the Anabaptists constituted a political threat to society.

To rulers at least, another measure of the revolutionary character of the Anabaptists was the refusal to swear an oath. Most rulers and theologians thought that the civic oath was a major means of holding society together. The annual oath of allegiance and support in each town of any size, on the appropriate saint's day in the town square, was a festive occasion. But it also demonstrated to the fullest possible degree the fundamental intention of the town's citizens to honor their social obligations. Most sixteenth-century people continued to believe that whoever violated his sworn word suffered *more* the penalties of divine damnation than the civic punishments which might be meted out—after all in the oath God had been called upon as witness. No matter how blasphemous a sixteenth-century man might be, he usually had enough fear of God in him to turn the civic oath into a formidable force for truth-saying. To many rulers, therefore, the Anabaptists' rigid adherence to Jesus' command not to swear an oath appeared both politically subversive and also impious. To refuse to swear was tantamount to a declaration of revolution. The Anabaptists themselves were uncomfortable with the singular political interpretation of their non-swearing. They were trying to maintain that truth-saying was constant for a genuine Christian, not something that one decided to do only on some special occasion. In the face of storms of protest on their refusal to swear the civic oath, they had few opportunities to make that point. In our own day when the legal penalties of perjury apply equally to affirmations and oaths, we fail to understand fully the sixteenth century significance of the refusal to swear a formal oath.

The Reformers

Only a few of the Protestant Reformers demonstrated much sympathy for, or even understanding of, the Anabaptists' religious views. Wolfgang Capito, and during the first eighteen months of the movement Martin Bucer also, both of Strassburg, showed sympathy, especially for individual Anabaptists such as

Michael Sattler. Catherine Zell, the dynamic, influential wife of Matthew, Strassburg's cathedral preacher, even offered Anabaptists protection. By 1526 in Zurich, 1528 in South and Central Germany, and 1532 in the Lowlands, Reformers' attitudes had hardened. Some became implacably hostile. It was the Reformers who singled out the issue of baptism as decisive, even though to the Anabaptists themselves it was not the most important issue. To the Reformers the denial of baptism to infants literally damned them—even the Zwinglians and Calvinists who denied the sacramental power of baptism believed that the rejection of infant baptism excluded the child from the nurture and fellowship of God's people. To Luther that denial was blasphemy—a rejection of a power of God to act redemptively in a manner of His own choosing, through the Word and water of baptism. This issue separated the Anabaptists from Christian fellowship and community in the eyes of all of the Reformers. By the 1550s some Reformers had compiled formidable lists of Anabaptist "errors." But most of them were derivative from the twin accusations of blasphemy in baptism and sedition in nonswearing of oaths (or nonresistance).

The Reformers wrote against the Anabaptists frequently and in detail to counteract their potential influence among the common people. The Reformers' fear was obviously earnest; they believed that the Anabaptists' religious alternative could only bring literal damnation.

To most Reformers the moral improvement that Anabaptists preached was sheer hypocrisy, not to be taken seriously except insofar as it was effective in attracting converts. Most of the Reformers decided, sometimes after several years of soul-searching (Luther never quite liked the decision), that Anabaptists had to be killed for the good of society and the benefit of religious truth. They were pressed on the issue by rulers who systematically inquired of many of them, especially in the 1530s. Of the various Reformers who declared themselves in writing on the Anabaptists, Justus Menius and Urbanus Rhegius of the Lutherans wrote with the greatest degree of knowledge of Anabaptists. Melanchthon and Luther wrote less, and understood less well, although Melanchthon had supervised the theological interrogation of several. As far as we can tell, Luther met only one Anabaptist in his entire life, and that one was a radical spiritualist. Among the Swiss Reformed Heinrich Bullinger wrote the most, with a higher degree of credibility than did his predecessor Ulrich Zwingli or his contemporary Calvin. But none of the major Reformers ever set about systematically to acquire information about this group they preferred to dismiss as deluded. To all of them the Anabaptists were an enormous hindrance to the progress of God's Kingdom.

Catholics

Most Catholic religious writers who bothered to touch on Anabaptism signed off the movement as a wilder perversion of Protestantism in general. They blamed Luther for the entire lot. An occasional observer wrote in greater detail, if no less hostility, from a closer acquaintance with bonafide Anabaptists—Erhard and Fischer writing about the Hutterian Brethren at the end of the sixteenth century, for instance. There were a few other reform-minded Catholics who found some kinship of spirit with Anabaptists, even when they rejected them as schismatic: Georg Witzel, Jacob Strauss and Reprecht von Mosham, for example. All three bore their own grievances against the abuses of Rome, and the first two spent some years as Lutheran pastors only to reject Lutheranism for ethical reasons similar to those of the Anabaptists. The topic of Catholic reactions to the Anabaptists deserves further study.

Conclusion

This tiny movement of not more than a few thousand adherents throughout the sixteenth century, nevertheless, aroused a high degree of anxiety and fear, both in rulers and theologians. The number of those who were killed—probably only several thousand—is not itself a satisfactory measure of the degree of fear Europeans felt. We rightly see the Reformation era as one of great religious enthusiasm and also fluidity. Why then should these Anabaptists, who went underground early on, have become the cause of so much alarm and outright fear? The answers to that question remain basically simple, even when they are not fully satisfying to our own minds. (1) Anabaptists' earliest successes in gaining adherents turned

them into rivals of the Reformers and reform minded Catholics. (2) They were thought to be the nucleus of a fresh political revolution drawing egalitarianism from the Bible. That politically seditious flavor was reinforced by the events of Münster. (3) They destroyed the unity of the faith, and that could only arouse the wrath of the Lord. God would surely punish Europe severely. No matter that others did the same; each Reformer thought that his religious way was the only biblically correct one, and that others erred because their spirits were evil. (4) They were some special spawn of Satan who had always found pious-acting adherents throughout the centuries.

Surely these Anabaptists deserved more than censure and condemnation. They deserved death itself!

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 5: Radical Reformation: The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists: Christian History Timeline

A Quarter Century that Lit a Fire...that Spread to All the World!

Erasmus kindled it with his Greek New Testament and translations of the Church's greatest thinkers. Luther struck the match. From Wittenberg to Zurich, Strassburg, Basel, and Bern the fire swept. It was a fire meant to cleanse the Church of greed and corruption—a fire to restore Christianity. But it did more than that. It changed the map of Europe. It changed lives. Princes gained ground from it; artisans and peasants gained power. It took religion out of the monastery and into the marketplace. It made of Christendom competing factions and gave powers of speech to “even women and simple folk.” It was a fire of ideas that occupied the attention with as much intensity as man's walk on the moon in this century. To those called heretics (or Anabaptist) it gave the “mark of Christ”—confidence to give one's own life like a brand to fuel the fire of the “true gospel.”

Reformation World

- 1516 Erasmus' edition of Greek New Testament published
- 1517 Martin Luther posts 95 theses
- 1517 Erasmus publishes anti-war tract
- 1518 Luther summoned to Augsburg but refuses to recant
- 1519 Zwingli becomes People's priest in Zürich
- 1520 Luther burns papal bull for his arrest
- 1521 Carlstadt celebrates first Protestant communion at Wittenburg
- 1521 Muntzer publishes *Prague Manifesto* justifying violence in the elect
- 1522 Luther introduces German liturgy in Wittenburg
- 1522 Muntzer marries and germanizes services in Allstedt; Zwingli secretly marries
- 1523 Zwingli holds Zürich disputations
- 1523 Reformer Martin Bucer arrives in Strassburg; German services introduced
- 1524 Storm on images in Zürich
- 1524 Planets align in sign of the Fish; widespread expectation of evil
- 1524 Carlstadt puts aside priestly vestments to become a “new layman”; declines to baptize infants

- 1524** Erasmus publishes tract on free will
- 1525** Luther marries
- 1526** Erasmus publishes the works of St. Augustine
- 1527** Urbanus Rhegius publishes anti-Anabaptist "Nikolsburg Articles"
- 1528** Reformation established in Bern
- 1529** Reformation becomes official in Basel
- 1529** Diet of Speyer—Luther's followers name Protestants
- 1529** Luther and Zwingli convene at Marburg
- 1531** Bullinger succeeds Zwingli and publishes first book against Anabaptists
- 1536** William Tyndale, English reformer, burned at stake
- 1540** Pope recognizes order of Jesuits; will make them the chief agents of Counter Reformation
- 1541** John Calvin establishes theocracy in Geneva
- 1541** John Knox establishes Calvinist Reformation in Scotland

Anabaptists

- 1521** Hubmaier comes to Waldshut, becomes friend of Zwingli
- 1522** Stump and Reublin challenge paying of tithes
- 1523** Hubmaier introduces German services in Waldshut, marries
- 1523** At Second Zürich Disputation radical followers break with Zwingli
- 1524** Manz brings Carlstadt's tracts on infant baptism and Lord's Supper to Zürich
- 1524** Swiss Brethren write to Muntzer, Carlstadt, and Luther
- 1524** Reublin and Brotli refuse to baptize infants
- 1525** January 17—First Zürich disputation with those opposed to infant baptism
- January 21—First believer's baptism in Zürich; Denck banished from Nuremberg for views on Lord's Supper and living personal faith
- January 21–29—First Anabaptist congregation of 35 converts established in Zollikon
- February—First imprisonment of Anabaptists occurs in Zürich; they escape
- Easter—Hubmaier establishes Anabaptism as state faith
- May—Bolt Eberle executed in Schwyz, becomes first Protestant and first Anabaptist martyr

November—Third Baptismal Disputation in Zürich held in Grossmünster to accommodate the crowd

1526 Grebel dies

1527 Schleithem Brotherly Union

1527 Denck and Hatzler publish first German translation of O.T. prophets

1527 Manz drowned in Zürich

1527 Sattler burned in Rottenburg

1527 Denck dies of plague in Basel

1527 Hut dies in Augsburg prison

1528 Hubmaier burned in Vienna

1529 Tyrolean Anabaptists flee homeland for Moravia

1529 Hoffman meets Anabaptists in Strassburg

1529 Blaurock burned in Tyrol

1530 Hoffman baptizes 300 Anabaptists in Emden and sends lay preachers to Netherlands

1530 Confession of Augsburg—Protestant form Schmalkaldic League against Emperor Charles V

1533 Hutter joins Moravian group who become known as Hutterites

1533 Baker Jan Matthijs claims Anabaptist leadership in Amsterdam and sends out 12 disciples in pairs

1533 Hoffman goes to prison in Strassburg to await Second Coming

1534 Jan van Leiden crowned king in Münster

1534 Matthijs moves to Münster; Anabaptists win local election and attempt by force to set up Kingdom of God

1535 Siege of Münster; falls. Persecution begins.

1535 Melchiorite Jan van Geelen storms Amsterdam's city hall

1536 Jan van Leiden executed; his remains swinging in cage from church serve as reminder into 20th century

1536 Menno Simons breaks with Rome; becomes Anabaptist leader in Netherlands

1539–40 Simons publishes the *Foundation Book* of Anabaptist faith

1541 Peter Riedeman writes Hutterite Confession of Faith

The Government

1591 Charles V succeeds Maximilian as Holy Roman Emperor

1520 Suleiman I the Magnificent becomes Turkish ruler

1521 German princes back Luther at Diet of Worms

1521 Pope Leo X calls King Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith" for anti-Luther tract

1524 In May peasants' revolt breaks out in southern Germany

1525 March 6—Peasant's Twelve Articles drawn up against lords

1525 April 15—Defeat of peasants at Frankenhausen; Müntzer captured and executed

1526 Archduke Ferdinand becomes Margrave of Moravia

1527 Sack of Rome by German troops

1527 Basel orders corporeal punishment and confiscation of property for adult baptism and sheltering Anabaptists

1528 Swabian League authorizes military division of 400 horsemen to scout for Anabaptists

1529 Diet of Speyer restores death penalty for rebaptizing

1529 Turkish siege of Vienna

1534 Henry VIII establishes himself as Supreme Head of Church and Clergy of England

1534 Strassburg decrees that Anabaptists must leave the city

1535 Charles V conquers Tunis and frees 20,000 Christian slaves

1538 Landgrave Philip of Hesse arranges debate between Anabaptists and Bucer; results in Hessian Anabaptists returning to state church and state church deciding to excommunicate immoral Christians

1541 Henry VIII assumes titles of King of Ireland and Head of Irish Church

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Showing Them How to Die; Showing Them How to Live

This story of the Michael Sattler family, the Paul Glock family, and the Klaus von Grafeneck family has never been told before. On the surface, it is not a story at all but two rather isolated Anabaptist events, one in the 1520s involving Michael Sattler and one in the 1550s–70s involving Paul Glock. The courage and spirit displayed in these events, however, touched the lives of the van Grafenecks and make one historical vignette about the witness of dying and living in the spirit of Christ.

LEONARD GROSS

Michael and Margaretha Sattler

The marriage of Michael and Margaretha Sattler was the most natural thing that could have happened, a logical outcome of a common vision of love, faith and hope. Except Michael and Margaretha were out of step with their times. For a simple priest to marry broke Catholic canonical law, and Michael was already a prior, second only to the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter's in the Black Forest in southern Germany. Margaretha, a refined and comely woman, had been a Beguine; even though it was a lay order, she, too, was breaking a vow. To compound matters, Michael and Margaretha had joined the fledgling Anabaptist movement. It was less than two years old, full of vitality yet without singleness of purpose, seen by the ecclesiastical and magisterial powers as dangerously virulent.

Michael and Margaretha Sattler must have felt the weight of their decision. Yet they took courage from their choices. They were part of a group composed solely of mature believers gathered in the name of Christ, giving their ultimate obedience to their Lord God and only a qualified obedience to the magistracy. They were committed to the principle of mutual address: Whatever they would do, would be done only in the light of careful counsel of the community of the faithful.

Sattler felt at home in this movement that he had joined in 1526. The choice of adult baptism as a nonconformist act paralleled in a way the adult, monastic vows of nonconformity he had taken earlier. Likewise, the posture of peace taken by the Zurich Brethren—Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Wilhelm Reublin and others—struck him as essential to Christian faith. In Strassburg that year he had realized that this movement needed a form. Perhaps his conversations with Reformers and other Anabaptists prompted this realization. A form must set boundaries and yet preserve freedom. It must equip its followers to resist the onslaught of fanatics, the coercion of "Christian" governments, and the cleverness of persuasive preachers. What he had put together in Strassburg, a group of Anabaptists meeting on 24 February 1527 in a small South German town of Schleithem adopted as the seven articles of their faith. This "Brotherly Union" (see The Schleithem Confession) was the essence of what they could agree upon; it organized them into a church.

It is one thing to witness through powerful words; quite another, to witness with one's blood. Yet with their adult commitment, Anabaptists invited a baptism of water, of the Spirit, and of blood.

On their return from Schleithem Michael, Margaretha, and others were captured. While searching Michael, officials found the "Brotherly Union" and some important notations on the plans and activities of the Swiss Brethren.

What a catch! Nine charges were assembled. When the two-day trial opened on Friday, 17 May, in Rottenburg, on the defendants' bench sat Michael, Margaretha, and nine other men and eight women.

The charges dealt with violations of Catholic doctrine and practice—the Eucharist, baptism, unction, and the veneration of the saints. Additionally, Sattler was charged with having left the monastery, marrying, and urging nonresistance toward the Turks. This last charge implied both sedition and heresy; however, this was a case largely of violations of church law.

Speaking for the group and for himself, Sattler refuted the charges. Concerning the last point, Sattler admitted that he had taught that if the Turk should come, no armed resistance should be made in accordance with the commandment: Thou shalt not kill. Sattler also admitted having said that if war were right, he would rather march against supposed Christians who persecute, capture, and kill the God-fearing. "The Turk knows nothing about the Christian faith; he is a Turk according to the flesh. But you want to be considered Christians, boast of being Christ's, and still persecute his pious witnesses. You are Turks according to the spirit."

In his defense, Michael Sattler said that the Anabaptists had done nothing contrary to God and the Gospel. He asked that a debate be arranged. The Anabaptists were ready to be taught from the Bible. If they were proved to be in error, they would gladly bear the punishment. "But if we are not shown to be in error, I hope to God that you will accept teaching and be converted," he said sincerely. That a defendant should propose to teach his judges caused a titter of laughter. Then the court secretary snapped, "You rascal of a monk, should we dispute with you? The hangman shall and will dispute with you!"

One and one-half hours later, the judges returned with the sentence: "Michael Sattler shall be committed to the hangman, who shall take him to the square and there first cut out his tongue, then chain him to a wagon, tear his body twice with hot tongs there and five times more before the gate, then burn his body to powder as an arch-heretic." At the marketplace and at the site of execution one-quarter mile outside the town Michael prayed for his persecutors. Among the chagrined onlookers was 25 year-old Klaus von Grafeneck. He had been summoned there to protect the court while it was in session. To his amazement, through the condemned man's slurred speech, Grafeneck heard Sattler pray specifically for him. He watched as the executioner bound Sattler to a ladder. Sattler admonished the crowd to be converted, and he prayed: "Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the way and the truth; because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with Thy help on this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood." With a sack of powder tied around his neck to hasten the death, Sattler was thrown into the fire. When the ropes on his hands burned through, the dying man raised his hands in a sign of triumph and prayed, "Father, I commend my spirit into Thy hands." Then three more men were burned.

Over the next few days the countess attempted to persuade Margaretha Sattler to recant and join her court, but Margaretha declared that she would be true to her Lord and to her Christian husband. Eight days after Michael's death she was drowned in the Neckar River that flowed past Rottenburg.

Klaus and Margareth Von Grafeneck

The martyrdom at Rottenburg was an event that sent shock waves throughout Europe. Strassburg Reformers had known Michael Sattler personally. Even though they considered him theologically misguided, he was, nevertheless a "dear friend of God." Not long after, Anabaptists began carrying the "Brotherly Union" and account of Sattler's death in miniature versions on their persons to give them courage to live their lives in the same way.

Young Grafeneck left Rottenburg shaken. A condemned man had prayed for him! His own prison experience two years earlier was still fresh on his mind (he had been imprisoned for leading a band of peasants during the Peasants' War in 1525). Someone must write down what had just happened. So Grafeneck set about doing that. "All this I saw with my own eyes. May God grant us also to testify of Him so bravely and patiently," he wrote at the end of his account.

Why would a newly married young man in 1533 ask his brother-in-law, a printer in Zurich, to risk publishing a sympathetic account of this renegade group called Anabaptists? "Because the kingdom of Christ is gaining ground in spite of the counterforces at hand, which are trying to seduce genuine believers," wrote Grafeneck in his preface. Second, he wanted to show "how God so marvelously deals with His saints here and tests them as gold through fire, so that everyone might use and strengthen his faith." In his horror at the cruel baiting of Sattler and others by judges and soldiers, Grafeneck must have resolved to be more tolerant should he ever have occasion again to cross paths with Christians imprisoned for their beliefs.

Paul Glock

Twenty-five years later, before breakfast one morning in September 1562, Klaus van Grafeneck, as head warden at the prison of Urach, joined some members of the nobility, some doctors of theology, and three Lutheran ministers in examining two prisoners. They were Hutterites named Adam Horneck and Paul Glock. After three hours, Grafeneck was getting hungry and good-naturedly suggested breakfast. During the meal he questioned Glock about his view of the magistracy, for Glock had insisted that a magistrate was not redeemed. The prisoner responded by comparing the two types of servants God placed on earth—the "Pharaohs" and the "Pauls"—who were mutually incompatible. Grafeneck must have been stunned by his prisoner's confident analysis. He was a devout man, used to rising at midnight for prayer and Bible reading. Indeed, his wife and daughters were Schwenkfelders, a loosely organized group with a certain kinship to Anabaptism except that it chose to remain within the larger Lutheran context.

For his part, Paul Glock welcomed this chance to witness to his faith. In his letter home the following spring to his wife Else, a teacher at a Hutterite school, he admonished her and his fellow brethren to become a "sweet fragrance to those who would be redeemed and a witness to those who would be lost. May the Lord align your hearts and ours with the image of Christ, our savior, that at all times we may conform to him in the whole of our lives, mirroring the life of Christ to the world, through which we and all godly people derive an abiding consolation and hope."

This was Glock's second time in prison. In 1550 he and his parents had been imprisoned for their faith. Sometime thereafter he had been released, joined the Hutterites located in Moravia (present-day Czechoslovakia), married, and gone on a mission to South Germany, where he was apprehended near Stuttgart in June 1558.

Little did Paul Glock realize then that he would be "mirroring the life of Christ to the world," not through a martyr's death like Michael Sattler but rather through 19 years of imprisonment. In 1564 he lost the company of his fellow believer, Adam Horneck, and the distant comfort of his wife and child, who had just died in Moravia. Then in the fall and winter of 1565, something highly unusual happened. For six months Paul Glock was given as pure a freedom as any prisoner would dare dream of—freedom to travel and visit friends merely by promising to return in the evening and the freedom of unlocked doors at night. He ran errands for one warden, dined regularly with Klaus and Margarete von Grafeneck, planted a vine in their garden, and traveled on an errand forty kilometers to Grafeneck's daughter. It was a freedom that made him hope for a speedy release from prison.

But the Lutheran ministers were looking for concessions on certain doctrines in exchange for such freedom, so that they could report to their congregations that the Anabaptist Glock had finally yielded. The doctrine they sought Glock's capitulation on concerned whether the princes and lords were good Christians and would be saved at death. Glock responded in the negative. Until he admitted that Lutherans were good Christians, it seemed better to hold Glock in prison for the rest of his days. Not even Warden Klaus and his wife were allowed to visit him.

In June 1567 believing that he was about to die from the scurvy that had wracked his body for the past

five weeks, Paul Glock wrote his "last letter" home to Moravia. Although the arrow of Job had pierced him, he was certain that God would never forsake him, and he asked for the prayers of the Brotherhood. He had dictated a letter to the authorities and let his condition be known. A simple recanting would have brought immediate relief but Glock was determined to witness as a living human being. Through his friends, Glock received a special medicine from the Hutterite pharmacy, a berry juice purgative that restored his body despite the starvation diet and solitary confinement. While the clergy saw this heretic Glock improve, among the magistrates at least one family—the Grafenecks—must have rejoiced to have their friend who could sing, talk about the weather, crops, and politics recover. They saw to it that Glock was moved to a pleasant, well-heated room and his bread-and-broth diet exchanged for a feast of two daily meals including wine. In return for the pleasant company provided by the Grafeneck family, Glock wrote home asking that some of the famous Hutterite carved antler handle knives and spoons be sent to his kind hosts and friends.

By 1571 Glock was again enjoying freedom on the basis of his promise not to escape. He was fetching wood, repairing shoes, doing odd jobs, but staying in his room when strangers approached so that the Lutheran ministers would not know about his freedom. Then for one year until the autumn of 1572 he became a guest in the home of Klaus von Grafeneck. During this time the Hutterite Brotherhood decided that Glock should attempt an escape and return to Moravia. Glock had often been tempted with this idea, but had always seen it as a temptation in light of his promise. Therefore, it was hard for him to accept the Brotherhood sentiment. What a dilemma! Klaus himself had often told Glock that were he in Glock's predicament, he would flee. Yet Klaus refused to give Glock an official pardon to leave legally. Therefore, if Glock had taken the Brotherhood's and Klaus' suggestions, Klaus and the other lords who had entrusted him with so much freedom, would have been in deep legal trouble. Furthermore, if he were to escape, future Anabaptists imprisoned in that area would at once be considered suspect. Because of Glock's actions, any Anabaptist would be categorized a "lying rascal." He did not want to be a hero in chains, nor was he unwilling to return to the Brotherhood—Glock wrote to them. But as a follower of Christ, he must be a person of his word. Attempting to escape might completely ruin the work of God, who had his own schedule.

In 1575 Klaus von Grafeneck died. Late in 1576 a fire broke out in the castle where Glock was. Glock and a fellow Hutterite prisoner, Matthias Binder, helped to put out the fire. Working rapidly, they saved more equipment and supplies than anyone else. After the fire was extinguished, Glock and Binder officially requested to be set free since they had never harmed anyone. They further promised that they would never attempt to avenge their time in prison. Before the "jealous Lutheran ministers" could stop the action, the prince commanded their release and ordered a traveling allowance for them. On New Year's Day 1577 Paul Glock returned to the Brotherhood, where he died a natural death in 1585. In far-off Ukraine, two centuries after his death, the Hutterites were still telling their grandchildren about "those wonderful events that came to pass in the life of Paul Glock."

In an era characterized by inflexibility and intolerance—where Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist alike had a hard time affirming God's hand in history among any group but their own—at least one witness—the von Grafenecks—could affirm and uphold another's faith across the barriers of religion, class, and role that otherwise separated them. Did they, too, like Anabaptists choose to take from the lives of Sattler and Glock lessons in how to die and how to live?

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 5: Radical Reformation: The Anabaptists

Telling Tales to Tell the Truth

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If you were to visit the Netherlands today and walk on one of their protective dikes, you would be enchanted with a tranquil setting. On your right would be water as far as the eye could see. To the left and lower than the water would be lush green pasture land which hosts small farms and grazing sheep. The serenity of the scene gives no hint of the once brutal religious persecution that swept over this land in the 16th century during the Reformation.

In 1531 the first Anabaptist or Doopsgezind was put to death in the Netherlands for his belief in the free church movement. By the end of the century, many hundreds of Anabaptists had been executed under various bloody decrees issued by government officials. The slaughter of innocent men and women, who asked nothing more than the right to worship God as their consciences directed, only subsided in 1578 when the Dutch provinces established a limited degree of religious toleration.

Thieleman van Braght (1625–1664) was a Dutch Mennonite minister who believed that even though the stories of the murders of Anabaptists from the previous century were horrible they needed to be remembered. What was the message in these descriptions of burnings and beatings, bold testimonies in prison to inquisitors, and letters of encouragement slipped out to brothers and sisters of the faith but still at large? As a successful pastor and author, van Braght worked diligently to keep Dutch Mennonites true to their historic faith. In his own day, the Dutch Mennonite church was divided into two main factions—one traditional in their Anabaptist theology and the other more progressive. These two groups were known as Coarse and Fine—the Coarse held more tenaciously to the old patterns of a vigorous use of church discipline, feetwashing, nonconformity and avoidance of the world in general, whereas the Fine were more liberal in church discipline and approach to the world.

The 17th century was a golden age in Dutch history. The Netherlands reigned as the Venice of the North. Because of a lack of natural resources the Dutch, early in their history, were compelled to prowl the seas as traders and carriers of Europe. The prosperity and opulence that emerged during the 1600's from shipping and trading resulted in a wealthy merchant class intent on spending vast sums of money. Craftsmen in numerous mediums were commissioned by this wealthy mercantile class to build elaborate homes, compose music, and author books. Yet the true genius of the Dutch has always been mainly expressed in their painting and drawing. The history of European painting in the 17th century is virtually a catalogue of Dutch names—Rembrandt, Hals, Vermeer, de Hooch, and Cuyp.

Among Dutch Mennonites there was also a golden age during the 17th century. While there were still some restrictions, Mennonites were able to earn and invest money. With newfound toleration, Mennonites entered the marketplace with abandon. They became the owners of companies and ships that brought in vast amounts of money. Like their non-Mennonite counterparts they could commission portraits and engage in cultural pursuits. Mennonites were confronted with a new set of questions that the previous generation did not have. Questions as to whether a Mennonite ship owner could in good conscience mount cannons on his ships to protect their cargo. Or may a Mennonite marry a non-Mennonite and still remain a member of the church? Where in the past Mennonites were a people literally without a home, now in the 17th century some Mennonites in Amsterdam built such large and imposing homes high above roads and canals that their neighbors pointed up at the Mennonites' homes and wagged their tongues about the "Mennonite heaven."

The greatest achievement of Thieleman van Braght was his attempt to keep Mennonites in touch with their own tradition of being a pilgrim people. To that end van Braght gathered together and published a massive book entitled The ***Martyrs' Mirror***. This tome contained not only the shocking record of the Reformation martyrs, but audaciously placed the 16th century martyrs in the same congregation of saints as Stephen and Jesus Christ. It was a book intended to bring about renewal and its theme was "the cost of discipleship."

The ***Martyrs' Mirror*** accomplished van Braght's objective when it taught its readers that the Anabaptist theology of martyrdom was to be found coursing through church history and true Christianity like a red thread. The martyr book assumes that to suffer for following Christ is part of recapturing the life and faith of the early church. The Christ they followed and emulated was himself a cross bearer, who called his followers to also take up the cross of suffering upon themselves. This theology of suffering proclaimed that it is not enough to only benefit from Christ's suffering. Sincere Christians became fellow partakers in Jesus' suffering, taught the Anabaptist martyrs.

The ***Martyrs' Mirror*** remembered those men and women who claimed that, "Suffering is the way, the door, and the means to God, the gate into the sheepstall." It is left to modern church historians to ponder what it does to a people to have placed in their hands a book that is a catalogue of martyrs starting with the apostolic church and concluding with martyrs from their own time and religious belief.

The ***Martyrs' Mirror*** has been second only to the Bible in importance to the thought and history of the Anabaptists and Mennonites. This remarkable book had its beginnings in a pocket-size volume published in 1562 entitled ***Het Offer des Heered*** ("Sacrifice unto the Lord"). In 1631 Hans de Ries enlarged the collection of martyr stories. Finally in 1660 the martyrologist van Braght updated and enlarged the collection of stories. In 1685 the largest edition ever produced included engravings by the Dutch artist Jan Luyken. The weight of this edition is 17 1/2 pounds and measures 16 1/2 x 11 x 7 inches.

Jan Luyken may well be the very kind of young man from a Dutch Mennonite home of the 17th century that Thieleman van Braght was attempting to speak to when he published his first edition of the martyrology in 1660. Luyken was far more interested as a young man in the bohemian artist's life of wine, women and song than in the appeals of his pious Mennonite mother. In 1672 he married a woman from a chorus called the "Amstelhymphlets" which entertained at a tavern called the "Sweet Rest" which Luyken and his friends frequented.

In time, Jan Luyken matured and became more serious about life and his Christian faith. Luyken's art and writing also changed. No longer was he willing to write and paint in worldly motifs. By 1675 Luyken had given all of his artistic gifts to the telling of the church's story. Art historians today know of 3,275 different works of art that Luyken produced. Thus it was in 1685, twenty-one years after the death of van Braght, that van Braght's 803 stories of Anabaptist martyrs and Jan Luyken's gift as an engraver-illustrator were brought together in one volume. Luyken created 103 copper etchings to illustrate the 1,290 page book that would prove to be a reminder to all future generations of Mennonites that to follow Christ means to take on his suffering.

The ***Martyrs' Mirror*** has not simply been a book that is an antiquarian's fancy. For over three hundred years various generations of Mennonites have rediscovered the power of its message. In colonial America Mennonite leaders became alarmed that their young people did not completely understand or embrace the nonresistant way of historic Mennonitism. Leaders of the church in the Franconia, Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference resolved to have the old Dutch martyr book translated into German in 1748 so that the young people would know and understand their own theological lodestar. Then in 1812 as a result of his reading of ***Martyrs' Mirror***, Klaas Reimer began a renewal movement among Russian Mennonites and this volume served to fuel the 1860's renewal movement among Mennonite Brethren in Russia. Mennonites once again found guidance from the pages of the ***Martyrs' Mirror*** when Adolf Hitler

came into power in Germany. In 1933, drawing on the theology found in the pages of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a Mennonite, Ethelbert Stauffer, wrote a long article entitled, "The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom," in a leading German magazine.

Has there been a continuing vision? There are 28 complete editions of the *Martyrs' Mirror*—three in Dutch (the most recent printed in 1984), 12 in German, and 13 in English—and numerous excerpted versions. For some Anabaptist descendants the drama of the martyrs is not very glamorous in an era of accommodation to the world. The Amish and conservative Mennonite groups continue to find the stories a source of encouragement in their countercultural stance.

In its story of men, women, and teenage martyrs, the *Martyr's Mirror* continues to speak forcefully to the question: Must followers of Christ suffer for their faith? Its tales are meant to keep the truth—of course the oppressed are then emboldened by them, and those weak of conscience, convicted.

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From the Martyr's Mirror

The Story of Hans Bret, Died January 1577

Since his English father was no longer living and his brother Daid had gone to England, Hans Bret was the sole support for his mother. They lived in Antwerp in the Netherlands, his mother's homeland. Hans worked in a confectionery with a baker, who like him and his mother was also an Anabaptist.

From the age of twenty-one Hans had distinguished himself as a serious student of the Bible. He spent his Sundays instructing recent converts and preparing them for baptism. Many sought him out for the privilege of studying with him because of his insight, kindness, and earnestness. But only a few months after his own baptism, something happened ...

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when a knock came at the confectionary door. Hans went to open it. There stood the bailiff of Antwerp and a number of his beadles. Seeing who was there, Hans ran back quickly to warn the baker and his family. They quickly went to leave by the back door. But the house was surrounded! All the occupants were arrested. While the beadles cruelly manhandled the men, Hans's mother and several others made their escape.

Not Hans. He was taken to the castle prison of Antwerp, and there tortured and questioned several times over the next few months. He took the occasion of his imprisonment to write letters of encouragement to his mother, his sister, his brother in England, to other friends, and the congregation. Part of Hans' suffering was to be imprisoned alone in a dungeon for weeks. From this dark hole he wrote several letters. Here is part of a letter he wrote to his mother:

Most dearly beloved mother, I am glad to tell you that I am well according to the flesh. But according to the spirit, I thank the Lord that he gives me strength by His Holy Spirit, so that my mind is unchanged. For from him alone we expect our strength to withstand these cruel wolves, so that they can have no power over our souls. They are really more cruel than wolves—they are not satisfied with our bodies, tearing at them; but they seek to devour and kill our souls.

I want to write you a little about how my examination by the priests passed off. The first time that I spoke with the priests, the dean came, that great large priest with another priest, whom we are in the habit of calling the inquisitor (my master knows him well) and who cries and storms the most. We talked for a long time, and I reproved their idolatry, as much as the Lord by His Holy Spirit gave me utterance. Then while we were talking a Jesuit came in, so that there were three of them sitting there. The priest began to speak of the Supper. So I asked them: "When Christ gave the bread, saying: 'Take, eat, this is my body; this do in remembrance of me,' did Christ himself remain sitting there?" The priest said, "Yes." I said, "So the interpretation cannot be as you understand it." And I told him that he did not understand the scriptures, because Paul says that a carnal man cannot understand that which is spiritual. Then he cried, "What can you say about me? Am I a drunkard?" I answered, "Your idolatries bear witness that you are." The Jesuit cried that the devil had me by the throat, and that I was a proud fool. I replied, "I rejoice that I am thus despised for Christ's sake." They shouted so loudly that one could scarcely utter a sentence. The dean cried to the others: "Domine, Domine, let him go, we shall gain no laurels with him."

After eight months in jail, the torture became more severe, but Hans Bret did not recant his beliefs. Finally he was brought before the court for a hearing. Hans testified boldly to his faith. A sentence was pronounced: Hans Bret would be burned at the stake.

Early in the morning of the day set for the burning, Saturday, 4 January, the executioner came to Hans' cell. The executioner ordered him to put out his tongue. Over it he placed an iron clamp, then screwed it tight with a vice-screw over the tongue. This done, he burned the end of Hans' tongue with a hot iron so that the tongue would swell and could not be withdrawn from the clamp. This tongue screw was to prevent Hans from speaking to the people when he was taken to the stake.

Then Hans was placed in a wagon and hauled through the streets still cluttered with the debris from the Spaniards' burning of the city. Stepping from the wagon at the marketplace where the stake was, Hans knelt to pray, his face toward heaven. Seeing this, the beadles jerked him toward the stake, wrapped his body to the stake with chains, stacked wood around him, and straw next to it to make the wood catch more quickly.

As Hans Bret was being chained to the stake, his pastor and friend, Hans de Ries stepped out of the crowd and as near to his friend as he dared. The fire blazed up, and Hans Bret's body went limp. After the body was burned to ashes and the fire cooled, Hans Ries retrieved from the ashes a memento—the tongue screw used to silence Hans Bret.

Shortly thereafter, Hans de Ries married Hans Bret's mother. In their family the tongue screw of this young martyr has been handed down from generation to generation.

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From the Archives: A Broadside

Translated by Miriam Usher Chrisman. Printed at Strassburg by Jacob Frölich Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Wick Collection PAS II 1/2. The broadsheet is dated in the collection as 1544.

This broadside has never before appeared in print. It was found in a sixteenth-century file of materials collected by a contemporary who was convinced that the world was coming to an end and considered it his business to amass the clues of that end. This version was written very near the actual event; the same story, with some important differences, also appears over a hundred years later in *Martyrs' Mirror*.

Miriam Usher Chrisman, Ph.D., who found and translated this broadside, is professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Here I will sum up what I have just heard about two young women who were burned to death recently for the sake of the Gospel near Deventer in the Netherlands. They were and are two noble women and pious Christians, who had no weakness. And God did not forget them.

They lived in Delden and often went from there to hear preaching, placing their souls in safekeeping which displeased the devil. But God assisted them because they preferred God's Word. May God be protected in all places. However, as God desired to take them together to his heavenly kingdom, he let the devil light up a fire in the world.

The young women were brought to Deventer. The stattholder, with his authority asked them about their beliefs. They replied that they believed in Christ's teaching and in his holy Word which had been so clearly revealed. They were then dragged to Zwigkel on a pole to frighten pious Christians—a terrible, tyrannical act done by the House of Burgundy.

There they asked the young women whether they believed the teaching of the Anabaptists. They spoke without hesitation: "We were truly baptized once according to Christ's teaching, as it is clearly explained in Mark 16. St. Paul is also clear on this point." Then they were asked more and they gave clear answers as to whether the papal mass is a sacrament. "We do not believe in any human teaching," they said. "We believe in Christ and in his Word. Our greatest treasure is his Testament which he instituted before his death; his precious body in the bread; his holy blood in the clear wine. For our sins and misdeeds he commanded us to eat and drink this in memory of him. True belief leads to the forgiveness of all our sins and we must also lead a just life, through good deeds, and do good to our neighbor as Christ did good to us."

For such profession of faith the youngest, named Mary, was taken. While she was burned, she prayed God for her enemies in their need. As she died she commended her soul into the hands of the Father for the sake of Christ's suffering.

The other young woman, named Ursula, asked if she would give up her belief to save her life. She answered, "Should I deny God's work because of the pain of death? No, death is my greatest refuge. I would rather die here and inherit heaven." Then she was sharply exhorted to plea for the sword instead of the fire and she spoke, very tenderly, "What my sister suffered, so will I suffer." And she was prepared in the same way.

Now hear an amazing story of how God manifests himself in wonderful acts, as a sign of Christian glory. As fast as the executioner toiled, he could not burn the body of the maiden. Her body, though dead, remained straight upright, as a powerful symbol. During the night the body was covered from view.

Do not scorn such signs—you members of the Christian band. Be thankful and praise God with strong voices for His wonderful deeds which He has manifested and because He gave us the Holy Ghost as promised in His holy Word. Let us stand by His Word alone, endow us with a believing heart according to the promise given us through our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom there is no other helper. Your mercy is great, may we share in it at all times.

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From the Archives: The Schleithem Confession

Translated by Miriam Usher Chrisman. Printed at Strassburg by Jacob Frölich Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Wick Collection PAS II 1/2. The broadsheet is dated in the collection as 1544.

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From the Archives: The Two Kingdoms

HANS SCHNELL, ca. 1575

Appearing for the first time in English is this essay found in a handwritten book owned by an Emmenthaler farmer. It is the "rod and staff" of Anabaptist belief—the doctrine of separation from the world.

Little is known about Hans Schnell except that he was a Swiss Brethren Anabaptist who sometimes went by the name Hans Beck. In 1541 his wife Margarete was imprisoned for her faith; he himself left the faith for some 14 years, but had returned by 1575 and was an elder, baptizing and preaching at night in the fields in the area of Urbach and Gottingen in south Germany.

This version is excerpted from a translation by Leonard Gross and Elizabeth Horsch Bender.

There are two different kingdoms on earth—namely, the kingdom of this world and the peaceful kingdom of Christ. These two kingdoms cannot share or have communion with each other.

The people in the kingdom of this world are born of the flesh, are earthly and carnally minded. The people in the kingdom of Christ are reborn of the Holy Spirit, live according to the Spirit, and are spiritually minded. The people in the kingdom of the world are equipped for fighting with carnal weapons—spear, sword, armor, guns and powder. The people in Christ's kingdom are equipped with spiritual weapons—the armor of God, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit to fight against the devil, the world, and their own flesh, together with all that arises against God and his Word. The people in the kingdom of this world fight for a perishable crown and an earthly kingdom. The people in Christ's kingdom fight for an imperishable crown and an eternal kingdom.

Christ made these two kingdoms at variance with each other and separated. There will therefore be no peace between them. In the end, however, Christ will crush and destroy all the other kingdoms with his power and eternal kingdom. But his will remain eternally.

Christ has chosen his elect from the darkness of this world and called them to his heavenly kingdom and enlightened them through the Holy Spirit with the true godly understanding of his eternal truth. One can distinguish the children of God and the children of this world by their fruits. The children of God let their light shine with good works before the children of this world, so that they shine amid this perverse generation like a light in all honesty.

When God made his covenant with Noah after the flood, he commanded vengeance and punishment with the power of the sword to punish the evil and to put to death the blood guilty and murderers, saying, "Whoso sheddeth men's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." This vengeance to punish evil has remained unaltered in the kingdom of this world with its temporal authority and will remain until the Last Day of his coming, when God will annihilate all the power of this world. Christ also testifies to this when he commanded Peter: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." From these words of Christ we learn that the power of the sword will remain in the kingdom of this world to put to death the blood guilty and murderers according to his Father's order.

But in his kingdom peace should be kept, as he says to Peter: Put up thy sword in its sheath and let them proceed. For that reason he healed Malchus' ear at once, and does not want Christians to fight with the sword for their lives.

Concerning this power of the sword Paul teaches us, saying: "The powers that be are of God ... For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil." Also: "He beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

The power of the sword in the kingdom of this world is ordained and commanded by God, and whoever resists the ruler, unless he orders what is against God, resists God's order. But if the authorities command something that is against God, I say with Peter and John: "It is better to obey God than men." Likewise the three men in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den.

Paul's words cited above prove that the vocation of government and the vocation of the Christian are diametrically opposed to each other, like light and darkness.

Therefore the government is a good institution in the world, in that it punishes the bad and protects him who does good. For if there were no government, one could not keep order on earth. Each would then do violence to the other.

But Christ has given those in his kingdom a very different calling and office. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Also: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.'" Further: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The government is taught to execute vengeance and slay the blood guilty and murderers. In the New Testament Christians are forbidden all revenge and resistance; they are not to resist evil. Peter merely wants permission to ask for revenge. But Christ not only refuses him this, but reprimands him for it, saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." A Christian in the peaceful kingdom of Christ has a loving, peaceable, merciful spirit in the manner Christ's. He forgives the penitent sinner all sin and transgression. He does not resist evil. He kills nobody physically. He does not preserve his possessions with force but rather presents also the other cheek rather than to oppose the one who strikes him with force. He does not war. He does not injure and kill people but prays for those who persecute and rob him. He who is born again through, the Spirit has his Father's nature and qualities in him and is minded as Jesus Christ was minded. Christ not only forbade revenge in his kingdom but also, by his death on the cross, left us an example for us to follow in his footsteps, and prayed for his foes on the cross, which believers also do.

When Paul explained the power of the government and what its calling and function imply, he called it not only a minister of God, but also says that it is our obligation to pay taxes in order that it may offer such protection. That was at the time when Nero reigned as Emperor, a pagan and a godless man who persecuted and destroyed the church of God and Christ as severely as possible. Nevertheless Paul calls him a minister of God. For God used him as a rod of punishment until the rod was worn out; then he cast it into the fire. Even Pharaoh, who is called a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, according to Paul's teaching was also God's minister. The governor Pilate was also a minister of God. To him was given the power from on high to crucify Christ. For Pilate and Herod performed what God had previously planned. Through Pilate's false sentence and great sin which he committed against Christ, the sins of all of us were reconciled and annulled in Christ's guiltless death.

Thus God uses the government as his minister, whether it performs well or badly. If they are tyrants, God uses them as his rod of punishment, who will, however at the proper time be held accountable to their Superior and will have to render an exceedingly strict account, as it is written: "The powerful will

suffer powerful pain.”

Christ said: “They which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them: and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever among you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto.” This proves that in Christ’s kingdom here on earth none should consider himself higher than another. For that reason Christ set us an example by washing feet. Believers are of one family and of equal rank. Much rather each shall esteem the other higher than himself.

It has now been sufficiently demonstrated that God has given to the unbelieving world the government to resist evil. As is written: “To all the nations God gave a ruler. But the Lord’s portion is Jacob.” Therefore God gave Israel its own laws and commandments, with which Israel was widely separated from the heathen and differentiated, among which laws and commandments God also gave them the power of the material sword to punish the evil, to execute vengeance, and to demand an eye for an eye and a limb for a limb; thus, he who broke the law had to die without mercy.

Therefore our opposites, the supposed Christians, insist in introducing into Christendom the power of the sword with the government to execute vengeance. But as God in the figurative law gave and commanded to Moses the vengeance and power of the sword to punish the evil, this does not apply to Christians in the New Testament. For Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, has cancelled it. We have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that we are now no longer under Moses but with another—of course, with him who was raised from the dead. Only what Christ teaches us by word and example applies to Christians. Therein they are to follow after him. For in his kingdom he has created a new order.

God gave Israel the law that through the law it might be made clear how great sin is. And for sin and transgression God set an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a body for a body. And this vengeance in the law, to punish transgression without pity, remained in force until the coming of the promised seed which is Christ Jesus.

When Christ, a king of peace, came into the kingdom of Israel and was seated according to the promise of God on the throne of his father David, he then inaugurated in his kingdom a new spiritual regime and a new covenant which he sealed and instituted with his own blood.

For the Prince of our salvation was made perfect through suffering, which testament is not made according to the old one, which executes wrath, but he has a new peaceable kingdom in which mercy and forgiveness of sins operate. As it is written: “Old things are passed away and he who sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.” And again: “Old things are passed away and all things made new.”

Just as Christ inherited the royal throne from the tribe of Judah, he also inherited the office of High Priest from the tribe of Levi, which two high offices Melchizedek, a priest and king, foreshadowed. As it is written: “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Therewith the annulling of the previous law takes place because of its weakness and uselessness. For of what benefit to us was the blood of oxen or rams? It was an introduction of a better hope in the blood of Christ, through which we are cleansed and washed, which blood cleanses us from all sin. But now that the priesthood was changed and passed on to Christ, Paul says, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. In the law sin takes the upper hand. In Christ, mercy still more takes the upper hand. Therefore he abolished vengeance.

Christ has redeemed us from the vengeance of the law and established a peaceable kingdom in which the vengeful sword is put away and broken, and warlike weapons have been recast. As Isaiah says: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.”

The believing and peaceable in the kingdom of Christ here on earth dwell safely among one another; none injures or kills another with weapons of war. With this Zechariah also agrees, saying: "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace to the heathen." Of this peaceable people the Holy Ghost speaks (Psalm 46): "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire." Also the 76th Psalm witnesses to this and says: "In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There he brake the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah."

All of these many cited Scriptures and Psalms pertain to all the peacemakers in the kingdom of Christ and his church, among whom all warlike weapons are broken to pieces and cast away, as has been frequently proved. You shall not resist evil, because Christ forbids ruling with force in his kingdom and says: The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you.

Leonard Gross has discovered that "The Two Kingdoms" was published in the German Pietist literature of the 1700's. However, the following section condemning Constantine was left out, probably because it was considered too jarring by those trying to make inroads into the state church.

The church of God and of Christ has been obedient to the Teacher's word and has never had the power of government within it; nor has it called upon this power to place the hangman beside them, but always suffered persecution until the reign of Constantine. He was baptized by Pope Sylvester, the antichrist, the son of perdition, whose coming took place through the work of the terrible devil.

Therefore he received the name Christian falsely. For the Christian church was thereby transformed into the antichristian church. This apostasy was foretold by Paul. Then the devil, who had hitherto been bound by the Christian church, was released from his prison and proceeded to lead the heathen astray in the four corners of the earth. For the shameful Babylonian whore has made all the heathen drunken from her golden beaker into which the wine of sorcery, i.e., a false, seductive worship, has been poured.

And although this Babylonian whore lives vilely and shamefully in sin and abomination and follows a devilish doctrine, it is nevertheless called the Christian and apostolic church by supposed Christians. Hence the lawless abomination exists in the holy place where it should not be.

Let him who reads this heed it. The reason why I am writing this is that now men want to introduce and mix the vengeful, bloodthirsty sword of secular government with its regime into the peaceable kingdom of Christ after the manner of the ancient serpent, as the devil in the beginning mixed lies with God's word. The supposed Christians who want to introduce the vengeance of the law into the kingdom of Christ cannot accomplish anything thereby. For Christ is the end of the law. We become dead to the law through the body of Christ, so that we have another law. There it is no longer a matter of body for body but only love and mercy, repentance and forgiveness of sins, loving the foe and praying for him.

If a ruler wants to be a Christian he must first be born again through the Holy Spirit, and must conform to the teaching of Christ and his example, and must be minded as Jesus Christ was minded. He must not resist evil, may punish no one according to the law, and no longer execute vengeance with the sword. Rather he must love his enemy, drink the cup of suffering, pray for his enemies, and turn the other cheek, as Christ teaches.

For it is certain that Christ has paved this only and narrow path for his followers, and neither emperor nor king, neither prince nor lord will find any other way to heaven than this way of the cross which he himself trod and which all those who will be saved must tread.

The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant. Psalm 25

Hans Schnell

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From the Archives: Concerning the Drawings of the Early History of Anabaptism in Zurich and on Hutterian Missionaries in Switzerland

Since in Switzerland no original drawings or paintings picturing any of the early Anabaptists or what they experienced have been known up to now, the presentation of the colored drawings in this issue deserves a short comment. The manuscript codex in which the drawings have been found has been preserved in the Central Library of Zürich and bears the signature Ms B 316. It contains the reformation history written by the Zürich theologian and church leader Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), completed 1567. It is, however, not the original manuscript by Bullinger himself, but a copy produced by the goldsmith Heinrich Thomanns, member of the city council of Zürich, in 1605/06.

The drawings illustrating the text of the reformation history, therefore, are not the pictures of an eyewitness. No individual similarities can be expected. But the scenery of the events, the Main Church (Grossmünster) or the place of the execution by drowning in the Limmat river or the "Witches Tower" where Anabaptists were held in prison and escaped, is pictured on the ground of experiences that were similar to those the Anabaptists had eighty years earlier.

The pictures of the Hutterite missionaries are from another source, i.e. the collection "Wickiana" in the same library. This collection was gathered by Johann Jacob Wick during the years 1560–1587 and contains the most diverse news, letters, pamphlets, reports, illustrations, etc. It is a treasure of obscure source materials and has served as such quite often already. The last two books dealing with this collection were written by Matthias Senn in 1974 and 1975. Especially the last one contains quite a number of pictures including the reports illustrated.

The colored drawings on the Hutterite missionaries must have been made chronologically very near to the events pictured. In their quality, however, they are not different from the pictures in the Bullinger copy. The unknown artist had to illustrate the texts which had been gathered by Wick and he did so according to his imagination and on the basis of a certain traditional way, typical for his time. Nevertheless, he was nearer to the events and his imagination may stimulate our minds.

The full value of the pictures, of course, is being disclosed in connection with the texts of Bullinger's chronicle as well as with other documents on the events. I have prepared an edition of these together with the other drawings of the Bullinger chronicle and of the Wickiana on Anabaptists and Hutterites and hope to present it to the public soon.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 5: Radical Reformation: The Anabaptists

The Radical Reformation - The Anabaptists: Recommended Resources

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