

# Anabaptists

Historical Theology

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## I. The Beginning of the Movement

### A. Zurich, Switzerland

1. Were originally part of Zwingli's group
2. They pushed Zwingli to take the belief "that only that which had a scriptural foundation should be believed and practiced" to its logical conclusion.
3. Zwingli wanted to move slowly. He wanted to bring everyone in the city to his side. Several of his group saw this as hypocrisy. They believed they should start new churches with those that were ready to leave all of the Catholic Church trappings behind.
4. These men were:
  - a. Conrad Grebel. From a rich prominent family. Well educated. Scholar of both Greek and Hebrew languages. Zwingli led him to faith.
  - b. Felix Mantz. Brilliant scholar. Son of a high-profile family. Zwingli called him, "Apollo of the Anabaptists" for his speaking ability. Zwingli led him to faith.
  - c. George Blaurock. Former priest. Great speaker.
  - d. Simon Stumpf. Former monk, from Germany. One of the first to follow Zwingli's teaching.
5. Since Zwingli would not go with them on the belief that baptism was for adult believers, on January 21, 1525 several believers met at a home within blocks of the great church in Zurich.
  - a) George Blaurock (a former priest) asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him at the town square.
  - b) Then Blaurock baptized Grebel and several others
  - c) These baptisms were not immersions but later on these believers decided that the New Testament baptisms were by immersion so they changed from pouring to immersion.
6. Anabaptist belief:
  - a) Luther and Zwingli seemed to forget that First Century Christianity was persecuted by the state and not tied to it.
  - b) A person is born into a country-they have no choice in the matter, but a person is not born into Christianity-that is personal decision- therefore *NO infant baptism*. (Perhaps the biggest problem with other Reformers)
  - c) The community of faith is responsible for disciplining its members – not the state.
  - d) Pacifism is an essential element of Christianity
    - from the Sermon on the Mount
    - Christians are not to take up arms
    - Not even to defend their country(This tenet was not popular with the leadership of Austria, Germany, or Switzerland that were threatened by the Turks and Catholics)
7. These Swiss Anabaptists called themselves: the brethren
8. Their enemies called them "anabaptists" as a derogatory term. It means rebaptizers.

### B. Moves beyond Zurich

1. Balthasar Hubmaier was also deeply influenced by Zwingli. Hubmaier was from a southern German duchy, but spent a lot of time in Zurich. He started out as a Lutheran, but was convinced that Zwingli was right about practicing only what was in Scripture. He returned to the German city of Waldshut and brought with him Zwingli-style worship.
2. The Anabaptists were egalitarian. Women had the same rights as men. Poor and ignorant were as important as the rich and learned.
3. In order to keep the movement from extremism, Anabaptists leaders met at Schleitheim, Switzerland and set out Seven Fundamentals:
  - a. Baptism is only for those who have repented amended lives and believe in Christ (infant baptism is the worst of all abominations of the Pope)
  - b. Those who refuse to amend their lives are to be banned from communion.
  - c. Communion is a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and only for those who were baptized as adults.
  - d. Believers should separate from non-believers and believers are to shun non-believers.

- e. (outlined the duties of pastors)
  - f. No use of the sword. Do not participate in violence. Believers should not join the military.
  - g. No oaths. Do not take an oath to rulers or magistrates. (This is huge, because each member of a Swiss city was expected to swear an oath of allegiance every year.)
- (These all deal with practices, not theology.)
- 4. These fundamentals led to persecution in Catholic areas and eventually Protestant areas in Switzerland, as well.
  - 5. Many German areas were also dangerous for Anabaptists. Some rulers sought to execute Anabaptists.
  - 6. The number of executed Anabaptists exceeded the number of Christians killed in the Roman Empire prior to Constantine.
  - 7. Doctrinal differences to the other Reformers:
    - a. Modified or rejected doctrine of original sin.
    - b. All humans have the freedom to respond to God's saving grace.
    - c. The Augustinian theology of total depravity is more or less a license to sin.
    - d. God's grace is dependent on human free will for its effect.
    - e. For the Reformer's the main question is "What must I do to be saved?". For the Anabaptists the main question is "How should a Christian live?". For the Anabaptist the focus was not on justification but on subjective holiness. Luther referred to them as "the new monks".

## II. The Movement takes a change

- A. The first Anabaptist leaders were scholars and pacifists, but as those fell to persecution many of the new leaders were more radical and dumped the pacifism in favor of violent rebellion.
- B. Melchior Hoffman
  - 1. He was a Lutheran, then Zwinglian, then Anabaptist.
  - 2. He lived in Strasbourg which was tolerant of Anabaptists.
  - 3. Hoffman was probably influenced by the Zwickau prophets.
  - 4. Hoffman began to preach that the Day of the Lord was near.
  - 5. He and his followers began to believe that Strasbourg would be the New Jerusalem.
  - 6. He predicted that he would be arrested and imprisoned for six months. Then he would be released that the Lord would return.
  - 7. The movement gained great momentum during the six months, but died out when Hoffman was not released from prison on his predicted day.
- C. From Strasbourg to Munster
  - 1. Anabaptists in Munster began to believe the Kingdom would come in short order and that Munster would be the New Jerusalem.
  - 2. Munster had so many Anabaptists move there and people convert that Munster became an Anabaptist controlled city.
  - 3. As the majority, the Anabaptists abandoned their preaching for tolerance and began expelling Catholics from the city.
  - 4. The expelled Catholic Bishop collected an army of Catholics and laid siege to the city.
  - 5. The Anabaptist leaders also began to kick out moderate Protestants and destroying sculptures and paintings connected to worship.
  - 6. Outside of the city, the Bishop was killing every Anabaptist he could capture.
  - 7. Eventually, the leader of the Anabaptists claimed to be the King of the New Jerusalem.
  - 8. There were those in the city of Munster that were not convinced that leaders of the Anabaptists were going too far and so they opened the gates to the Bishop.
  - 9. The "King" was captured by the Bishop and executed.
  - 10. The failure of Munster led to Anabaptists to blame much of the problems on the failure to adhere to pacifism.

## III. Menno Simons

- A. Conversion
  - 1. Was a Dutch Catholic priest
  - 2. First began to question the Church and search for answers when he witnessed a martyrdom of an Anabaptist in 1531
  - 3. In 1536, he left Catholicism and initially worked with David Joris.
  - 4. He separated from Joris over the authority of faith. Joris emphasized "spirit and prophecy". Simons held to the scriptures.
- B. Leader

1. One of the few Anabaptist leaders that were not martyred
2. He wrote volumes including: *Foundations of the Christian Doctrine* (1539)
3. He embraced pacifism and refused to associate with revolutionary Anabaptists
4. Some main points:
  - a. Pacifism
  - b. No taking oaths
  - c. Obey civil authorities as long as not contrary to the Scriptures
  - d. Baptism only for confessing adults
  - e. Baptism does not confer grace
  - f. Communion does not confer grace
  - g. Foot washing is a good practice
5. Because of the disaster at Munster, many Anabaptist leaders were hunted. This includes Menno Simons.
6. He did a lot of his preaching at night in secret gatherings.
7. Simons is credited to bringing the Anabaptist movement back to pacifism and back to sounder doctrine and practice.
8. Mennonites were determined in theology and practice by the Scriptures, not of dreams and visions.
9. Simons believed in the doctrine that infants were guiltless until they reached the age of discretion and deliberately chose to sin. (He did believe that every baby had a seed of corruption.)
10. He rejected Zwingli's view of predestination. He said human's have a free will and need to self-generate a choice to cooperate with God's grace.
11. For Menno, Scriptures were only authority (He did accept the apocrypha) but in practicality, "sola Scriptura" meant the New Testament.
12. For Menno, unlike some of the other reformers, the old church creeds and theologians were not important authorities or sources. Only Scripture.
13. Disagreements over 'shunning' led to more division amongst the Anabaptist groups.
14. Shunning and banning were some of the main reasons Jakob Ammon led a group out of Mennonites to form the Amish in the late 1600's.

#### IV. Jacob Hutter

- A. Early days
  1. From Austria
  2. Became an Anabaptist through George Blaurock, when Blaurock was banned from Zurich and then martyred by Roman Catholic authorities.
  3. Hutter became convinced that he had a special apostolic mission
- B. Moravia
  1. He found many followers in this region
  2. He preached communal living- no private property – all goods jointly owned by the congregation.
  3. With this he set up several Hutterite communes
- C. Disaster for Hutter
  1. King Ferdinand of Austria gained control of Moravia
  2. Ferdinand put a bounty out on Hutter
  3. Hutter escaped but was caught in the city of Tyrol and was executed.
- D. Hutterites lived on
  1. They found new leadership in Peter Riedemann
  2. He wrote a theological work which became the basis for their creed
  3. Absent is the doctrine of justification
  4. He defined Christianity in terms of sanctification
  5. Also the church is not only a worshipping body, but also a socio-economic unit.
  6. Over the years they suffered much persecution, but in the late 1560's and 1570's they enjoyed a golden age and they numbered over 30,000 baptized adults



Jacob Hutter

60 BALTHAZAR HUBMOR



*Ille ego qui Viduarum mysteria sacra negavi  
Igne cremor fata dice caveri meo .*

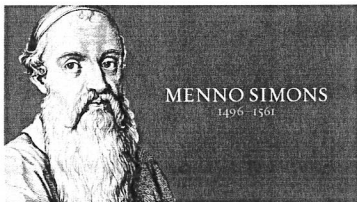


HIC FACILE JURE UTI ERAT CUIUS KATHE-  
DRAUTIANENSIS HIC HABIT. TERRE-  
HENRICH ALDORFENSIS SCOTTE. FACERAT  
ANNO IN. D. . . .  
GOTTES. MACHT IST. SEIN. GRADHE.

Melchior Huffman



Jakob Amman



Agree or disagree

1. Pacifism is an essential element of Christianity.
2. Only that which has a scriptural foundation should be believed and practiced.
3. Baptism is for adults that have made a confession of faith.
4. Baptism should be immersion.
5. Christians who are not living holy lives and refuse to repent should be banned from communion.
6. Women should have the same rights as men.
7. Believers should separate from and shun non-believers.
8. Believers should not take an oath.
9. Believers should not join the military.
10. Church and state should be separate.
11. Infant baptism is the worst of all of the abominations of the Pope.
12. Revelations from the Holy Spirit are more important than scripture.
13. Baptism is an outward and public testimony of the inward baptism of the Spirit.
14. Christ's death on the cross universally washes away the stain of original sin, so that makes babies innocent before God and do not need baptism. (Pilgram Marpeck)
15. True New Testament style churches should be communal. No personal property. All should be shared or jointly owned by the congregation.

