

Church History

Lesson 30 - The Radical Reformation

1. Introduction - The Reformation Outside of the Magisterial Reformers

- 1.1. In the last three sessions we focused on the extraordinary life and ministry of Martin Luther, and then looked at the life and ministry of Zwingli and Bullinger in Zurich. In future sessions we will look at John Calvin. Although Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin have some theological differences, they are usually grouped together as the “magisterial Reformers.” They are called this because they led Reformations that worked with the civil government in their geographical area.
- 1.2. Today we want to look another group that began in Germany and the German speaking regions on Switzerland. This group, which was dubbed “Anabaptists” by those who opposed them, was consciously distinct not only from the Roman Catholic church but also from the magisterial Reformers.
- 1.3. As we will see, this group was not nearly as cohesive as the other groups, theologically or as a movement. However, there were a number of factors that united the group, and so we will look at them together.

2. Precursors to the Anabaptist Movement (See Lesson 28)

- 2.1. During Luther’s time in the Castle at Wartburg, Karlstadt had become increasingly radical in his views. He had begun to lead reform much more quickly than Luther had. This led to uprisings within the city, and the smashing of images in the churches.
- 2.2. Around the same time, the so called “Zwickau prophets” had come to Wittenberg. These three men were spreading the ideas of Thomas Muntzer, and greatly de-emphasized Scripture, preferring to say that God was giving them direct revelation. This too create problems within Wittenberg.
- 2.3. Consequently, Luther ended his time in the Castle, and returned to Wittenberg to restore order. He was able to do this, but it clearly showed Luther (and others) the dangers in calling for Reformation of the church. Once Reformation began, some would inevitably attempt to go further than the Reformers intended.
- 2.4. Eventually, however, Muntzer led the peasants into a revolt in Germany in 1524-1525. Although Luther was initially sympathetic to many of the complaints of the peasants, when they went into open revolt, he turned against them. He spoke harsh words, which were taken by the Princes as license to crush the peasants in a bloody campaign. It is estimated that perhaps 100,000 peasants died. Muntzer, who had led the peasant army was killed, and the affair ended.
- 2.5. However, this event left a deep impression on Luther and others. The leaders feared such radicals, and were willing to take the harshest measures to prevent them from overturning society at large. As for the peasants, many of them felt betrayed by Luther, and were deeply suspicious of both Rome and the magisterial Reformers.
 - 2.5.1. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,751 - Sickingen’s revolt, Karlstadt’s radical reforms, the iconoclasm in Wittenberg, the Zwickau Prophets, and the peasant revolts were signs of the turbulent times.
 - 2.5.2. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,755 - These episodes were a mere foretaste of the troubles that would plague the new movement and thus validate one of the fundamental fears of Rome: rebels beget rebels.

- 2.5.3. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,762 - At the outset, the modern student must distinguish between a “reformer” and a “revolutionary.” The magisterial reformers emphatically denied they were revolutionaries. They sought orderly reform through the city magistrates and princes — thus the term “magisterial.” The reformers sought to return and rebuild the true historic church, which they were convinced had been corrupted by centuries of greed and idolatry sanctioned by Rome.
- 2.5.4. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,767 - The magisterial reformers ardently sought to distance themselves from the revolutionaries, who were viewed as anarchists, charlatans, or demon-possessed lunatics stirring up violent mobs of illiterate and uninformed peasantry. This pejorative assessment was shared by magisterial reformers and Catholic conservatives alike. Indeed, the greatest threat to a civil society was neither a Protestant nor a Catholic, but a radical.
- 2.5.5. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,745 - His harsh treatise Against the Robbing and Murdering Peasants only served to deepen the sense of betrayal peasants felt toward Luther.
- 2.6. For a more detailed look at these incidents, see Lesson 28 - Luther’s Later Life and Theology - From Wartburg to Death.

3. The Beginnings of the Anabaptists in Zurich

- 3.1. As we have seen, Zwingli tried to rigorously teach and follow Scripture. This led him to even more extensive Reforms of worship and the Eucharist than those instituted by Luther. Among the differences, Zwingli seemed inclined to teach that the efficacy of sacraments was dependent on the faith of the recipient, and to stress their symbolic nature. Furthermore, Zwingli was even more radical in his calls for Reformation than Luther, stressing that only what was positively found in Scripture should be practiced. However, this led to the question - if that is so, then why baptize an infant? They can neither perceive the symbol, nor can they exercise faith personally. Furthermore, where do we have a clear, actual example of infant baptism in the New Testament? Some even see evidence that Zwingli considered abandoning infant baptism, but ultimately decided against this, largely because he viewed the church and the state as coextensive.
 - 3.1.1. Zwingli was not willing to abandon infant baptism—an action that would have undermined his view that church and state are coextensive. But, if the efficacy of the sacrament is merely symbolic, why perform it on those who cannot perceive the symbol? It was this inner tension in Zwingli’s theology that would be laid bare in Zürich by the first Anabaptists (see Chapter 6). - Gonzales, location 1107
 - 3.1.2. There is some suggestion that Zwingli himself had at one time contemplated abandoning infant baptism. The Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier claimed that in May 1523 he and Zwingli had discussed the matter and agreed that “children should not be baptized before they were of age.” Whatever hesitations Zwingli may have once entertained, he had firmly resolved those doubts by 1524. - Woodbridge and James, location 3105
- 3.2. Some of Zwingli’s followers began to urge him to undertake even more radical Reformation in Zurich. In particular, this group (which called themselves the brethren) wanted to see a church comprised of only believers. This group believed

that the church and the world were so inherently at odds, that it was important for the church to separate itself from the surrounding culture. In fact, this radical separation between the church and the surrounding culture and state is the most defining characteristic of what became known as Anabaptism.

- 3.2.1.** Gonzales, 67 - THE FIRST ANABAPTISTS According to these critics, Zwingli and Luther forgot that in the New Testament there is a marked contrast between the church and the society surrounding it.
- 3.2.2.** Gonzales, 67 - Therefore, the compromise between church and state that took place as a result of Constantine's conversion was in itself a betrayal of primitive Christianity.
- 3.2.3.** Gonzales, 67 - The essential difference between the two is that, while one becomes a member of a society merely by being born into it, and through no decision on one's own part, one cannot belong to the true church without a personal decision to that effect.
- 3.2.4.** Gonzales, 67 - In consequence, infant baptism must be rejected, for it takes for granted that one becomes a Christian by being born into a supposedly Christian society. This obscures the need for a personal decision that stands at the very heart of the Christian faith.
- 3.2.5.** Gonzales, 68 - The resultant community of faith is then responsible for disciplining its own members, whose purity of life must be a witness to the gospel—a purity that cannot be guaranteed nor enforced by the civil government.
- 3.2.6.** Gonzales, 69 - In that city, there was a group of believers who urged Zwingli to undertake a more radical reformation. These people, who called themselves the brethren, insisted on the need to found a congregation of true believers, in contrast with the multitudes who called themselves Christian simply because they had been born in a Christian country and had been baptized as infants.
- 3.2.7.** Shelley, page: 248 - To most of them, however, the fundamental issue was not baptism. It was the nature of the church and its relation to civil governments.
- 3.2.8.** Shelley, page: 248 - They had come to their convictions like most other Protestants—through Scripture.
- 3.2.9.** Shelley, page: 248 - They found no state-church alliance, no Christendom. Instead they discovered that the apostolic churches were companies of committed believers, communities of men and women who had freely and personally chosen to follow Jesus. And for the sixteenth century, that was a revolutionary idea.
- 3.2.10.** Shelley, page: 249 - In spite of Luther's stress on personal religion, Lutheran churches were "established" churches. They retained an ordained clergy who considered the whole population of a given territory members of their church. The churches looked to the state for salary and support. Official Protestantism seemed to differ little from official Catholicism.
- 3.2.11.** Shelley, page: 249 - The true church, the radicals insisted, is always a community of saints, dedicated disciples, in a wicked world.
- 3.2.12.** Shelley, page: 249 - They steadfastly refused to be a part of worldly power including bearing arms, holding political office, and taking oaths. In the sixteenth century that sort of talk was inflammatory.

- 3.3.** Eventually, it became clear that Zwingli would not follow this course of action. And when Conrad Grebel (a leader of the new movement) had a child born in late 1524 and he did not baptize the infant, the lines were drawn. Thus, on January 17, 1525 a public debate was held before the city council between Zwingli and Conrad Grebel, and Zwingli was declared the winner. The city council declared that the doctrines of this new group were not to be followed. All infants were to be baptized within eight days of their birth, or the family would be banished from Zurich. Consequently, the followers of Grebel began to act on their own. On January 21, 1525, a group of these people, who simply called themselves “the brethren” took a decisive action. Meeting at the home of the priest George Blaurock, Grebel baptized Felix Manz. Later, at the fountain in the city square, the priest George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him. Following his own baptism, Blaurock then baptized several others. The Anabaptist movement in Zurich thus began. It is from this act or “re-baptism”, which is what the Greek word anabaptizo means, that the enemies of the movement gave them their name. (It should be noted that the group did not call themselves this, for they did not think they were “re-baptizing” anyone, since the act of baptizing infants was invalid and therefore did not count as baptism in the first place.)
- 3.3.1.** Gonzales, 69 - When it finally became apparent that Zwingli would not follow that course of action, some of the “brethren” decided that it was time to found such a congregation. George Blaurock, a former priest, asked another of the brethren, Conrad Grebel, to baptize him. On January 21, 1525, at the fountain that stood in the city square in Zürich, Grebel baptized Blaurock, who then did the same for several others.
- 3.3.2.** Gonzales, 69 - Their enemies soon began calling them anabaptists, which means rebaptizers. Such a name was not quite accurate, for the supposed rebaptizers did not hold that one should be rebaptized, but rather that infant baptism was not valid, and therefore the first real baptism takes place when one receives the rite after having made a public confession of faith.
- 3.3.3.** Zwingli’s friend Conrad Grebel (1448–1526) took Zwingli’s words to heart, searched the Scriptures, but could not find any examples of infant baptism. He reached the conclusion that therefore only those professing faith should be baptized. A circle of supporters grew up around Grebel, calling themselves the Swiss Brethren. - Woodbridge and James, location 3097
- 3.3.4.** Zwingli actually debated the issue with Grebel before the city council on January 17, 1525, and was officially declared the victor. Grebel and the Swiss Brethren were admonished and told to cease pressing the matter. Grebel responded in defiance on January 21, 1525, when he baptized Georg Blaurock in the home of Felix Manz. This event is generally considered the beginning of Anabaptism. - Woodbridge and James, location 3099
- 3.3.5.** Shelley, page: 247 - UNDER the cover of darkness a dozen or so men trudged slowly through the snow falling in Zurich on 21 January 1525.
- 3.3.6.** Shelley, page: 247 - The City Council of Zurich had that day ordered their leaders Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz to stop holding Bible classes. Opposition was mounting! Only four days before the council had warned all parents to have their babies baptized within eight days of birth or face banishment from the territory. What were the brethren going to do? They agreed to meet at the Manz house to decide.

- 3.3.7.** Shelley, page: 247 - George Blaurock, a former priest, stepped over to Conrad Grebel and asked him for baptism in the apostolic fashion—upon confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Grebel baptized him on the spot and Blaurock proceeded to baptize the others. Thus, Anabaptism, another important expression of the Protestant Reformation, was born.
- 3.3.8.** Shelley, page: 248 - Actually, the Anabaptists rejected all thoughts of “rebaptism” because they never considered the ceremonial sprinkling they received in infancy as valid baptism. They much preferred “Baptists” as a designation.
- 3.3.9.** Shelley, page: 250 - Grebel and Manz, both well-educated men of standing in Zurich, supported Zwingli’s initial reforms. But following the reformer’s lead—the study of the Bible—they came to see the obvious differences in the apostolic churches and those of their own day.
- 3.3.10.** Shelley, page: 250 - In Zurich’s city-state, as in the rest of the Christian world, every newborn child was baptized and considered a member of the church. As a result, church and society were identical.
- 3.3.11.** Shelley, page: 250 - That is the kind of church Grebel and Manz wanted in Zurich, a church free from the state, composed of true disciples. The baptism of believers was merely the most striking feature of this new kind of church. Zwingli, however, would have no part of this revolution. He needed the support of the city fathers.
- 3.3.12.** Shelley, page: 250 - In the fall of 1524, when Grebel’s wife gave birth to a son, all the theories faced the test of action. Would the baby be baptized? The Grebels refused and other parents followed their example.
- 3.3.13.** Shelley, page: 250 - To deal with the crisis, the City Council of Zurich arranged a public debate on the question for 17 January 1525. After hearing arguments on both sides of the issue representatives of the people declared Zwingli and his disciples the winners. As a result the council warned all parents who had neglected to have their children baptized to do so within a week or face banishment from Zurich. That was the background for the historic baptism at the Manz house on January 21. It was clearly an act of defiance. But it was much more. Grebel, Manz, and their followers had counted the cost. That is why shortly after the baptism the little company withdrew from Zurich to the nearby village of Zollikon. Here, late in January, the first Anabaptist congregation, the first free church (free of state ties) in modern times, was born.
- 3.3.14.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,789 - From the outset, however, it was the sacrament of baptism that came to be the primary signifier of this diverse conglomerate of individuals and ideas. All, or nearly all, rejected infant baptism and affirmed the need for “rebaptism”—hence the term “Anabaptist,” from the Greek words ana (again) and baptizō (baptism). It was the one theologically distinctive conviction that was common amid all the diversity.
- 3.3.15.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,805 - The traditional view holds that the Anabaptist movement arose from the Swiss Brethren. The origins are dated quite specifically to January 21, 1525, when Conrad Grebel baptized Felix Manz in the home of George Blaurock in the Swiss canton of Zürich.
- 3.3.16.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,844 - His colleague, the patrician Conrad Grebel, took Zwingli’s teaching seriously. As they studied the Scriptures, they

could find no explicit warrant for infant baptism in the New Testament, so they rejected it as unbiblical and adopted adult baptism.

- 3.3.17.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,847 - These Anabaptists were concerned that the mainstream Reformers were still under the influence of the medieval church and had failed to do justice to the teaching of the New Testament.
- 3.4.** After a brief imprisonment, the new group he new group would not be silenced, and began to grow. This was unacceptable to almost everyone else. The Anabaptists were viewed as a threat by the rest of society - the civil government, Roman Catholics, and the Protestant Reformers in Germany and Switzerland. Their beliefs were seen as destructive to the very fabric of society. At this time everyone - Roman Catholics and Protestants, and even the barely religious - agreed that the Church and State must work together for a good society. Thus the Anabaptist teaching that Church and society were in radical tension was viewed as not only religiously problematic, but as actual treason. The same was true of their views on water baptism, since baptism served as not only a sacrament but virtually as a birth certificate and mark of citizenship. It did not help that Grebel had been in communication with Thomas Muntzer in 1524 as the Peasants Revolt was heating up. Thus, it was nearly a universal opinion that the group must be stamped out for the survival of society.
- 3.4.1.** Gonzales, 69 - The Anabaptist movement drew great opposition from Catholics as well as from other Protestants.
- 3.4.2.** Gonzales, 69 - In spite of their radical views on other matters, both Luther and Zwingli accepted the notion that church and state must live side by side, supporting each other, and both refrained from any interpretation of the gospel that would make it a threat to the established social order.
- 3.4.3.** Gonzales, 69 - The Anabaptists, without seeking to do so, did threaten the social order. Their extreme pacifism was unacceptable to those in charge of maintaining social and political order, particularly amidst the upheavals of the sixteenth century.
- 3.4.4.** Gonzales, 70 - This certainly did not preclude repeated clashes between church and state. But there was at least a body of common presuppositions that provided the framework for the solution of such conflicts. All this the Anabaptists undid with their insistence on the church as a voluntary community, totally distinct from the civil community.
- 3.4.5.** As important as one's understanding of the Bible was to Zwingli, the perception that Grebel and company were social revolutionaries also informed his judgment. It could not be denied that there were some connections between Anabaptist leaders and the Peasants Revolt of 1524–25. Indeed, Grebel had been in communication in 1524 with one of the leaders of the Peasants Revolt in Thuringia, Thomas Müntzer, - Woodbridge and James, location 3111
- 3.4.6.** Social upheaval would never do for Zwingli or the Zürich magistrates. - Woodbridge and James, location 3114
- 3.4.7.** Shelley, page: 250 - The authorities in Zurich would not overlook the rebellion. They sent police to Zollikon and arrested the newly baptized men and imprisoned them for a time. But as soon as they were released the Anabaptists went to neighboring towns in search of converts.
- 3.4.8.** How does one explain such a harsh response to these Anabaptists? Part of

the explanation lies in the fact that infant baptism not only was a religious rite of entrance into the church, but also was viewed as a civic rite of entrance into citizenship of the canton. - Woodbridge and James, location 3118

- 3.4.9.** There was no separation of church and state, as evinced by Zwingli's famous assertion: "A Christian city is nothing other than a Christian church." - Woodbridge and James, location 3120
 - 3.4.10.** Hence, rejection of infant baptism was not just religious heresy, but a political act of treason, for which death was seen as the only appropriate punishment. - Woodbridge and James, location 3121
 - 3.4.11.** This helps to explain why the Catholics and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, made Anabaptism a capital offense. - Woodbridge and James, location 3122
 - 3.4.12.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,794 - To embrace adult baptism was in effect a public declaration of independence from the authority of the medieval church and its traditional interpretation of the Bible. Therefore "Anabaptist" became the signature designation for a host of other theological convictions, all of which depended on an individual interpretation of the Bible.
 - 3.4.13.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,796 - It is noteworthy that baptism also had significant political overtones. In Zürich, for example, infant baptism not only signified church membership, but also was identified with citizenship. To reject infant baptism was tantamount to treason.
 - 3.4.14.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,801 - It is worth noting that Anabaptists did not aspire to be identified as Protestants. Instead, they actually repudiated the Protestantism of the Lutherans and Reformed. Anabaptists acknowledged that Protestants were right to break away from the Roman Church, but they judged that the Protestants fell well short of the more extensive social, moral, ecclesiastical, and theological reforms that were needed and had succeeded only in creating another institutional church, to which the Anabaptists were equally opposed.
- 3.5.** Eventually the frustrated the city council lost patience and had a number of the leaders jailed on March 7, 1526. They were to remain in jail "until the die and decay." Furthermore, it decreed that anyone who was involved in a "re-baptism" would be put to death by drowning. The first Anabaptist martyred under this statute was Felix Manz, who was put in a boat with his hands and feet bound, and then pushed overboard into the Limmat River in Zurich. For his part, prior to his martyrdom Manz declared "That is a real baptism." This began a wave of increase pressure and persecution. Many fled to Germany (where they received no better treatment). Thus, the entire movement around Zurich was almost entirely eradicated within four years.
- 3.5.1.** Shelley, page: 251 - Finally, the Zurich council lost all patience. On 7 March 1526, it decided that anyone found rebaptizing would be put to death by drowning. Apparently their thought was, "If the heretics want water, let them have it." Within a year, on 5 January 1527, Felix Manz became the first Anabaptist martyr.
 - 3.5.2.** Shelley, page: 251 - Within four years the radical movement in and around Zurich was practically eradicated.
 - 3.5.3.** In December 1526, Felix Manz was rearrested and the Zürich officials were true to their word. On January 5, 1527, Manz was pushed, hands and feet

bound, from a boat into the Limmat River, thereby becoming Zürich's first Anabaptist martyr. - Woodbridge and James, location 3115

3.5.4. Upon hearing the sentence, Manz is reported to have declared, "That is real baptism." - Woodbridge and James, location 3117

4. The Spread of the Anabaptist Movement

4.1. In response to the growth of the movement and the growing persecution it faced, a number of leaders from the Anabaptist groups met in Schleithem, Switzerland, in 1527—barely two years after the beginning of the movement—and issued the Confession of Schleithem. This document outlined seven fundamental practices and principles held by most Anabaptists. Among these were that baptism was only for believers, that church discipline ("the ban") should be practiced for those not repenting of sin, that communion should only be offered to those who had been baptized as adults, the need for believers to separate themselves from all that united with God and Christ, the responsibilities of pastors, pacifism, and the rejection of taking oaths or civil service of any sort. This confession is notable for several things. First, it is mainly practical rather than theological. Second, it was meant to curb extremism among their ranks. Third, it did nothing to allay the fears of everyone else, and in fact only confirmed their fears.

4.1.1. Gonzales, 70 - It was partly as an attempt to curb extremism among their ranks that a number of Anabaptist leaders met in Schleithem, Switzerland, in 1527—barely two years after the beginning of the movement—and issued the Confession of Schleithem, a brief document that expounded on the seven fundamental practices and principles held by most Anabaptists.

4.1.2. Gonzales, 71 - All this appeared highly subversive, and therefore Anabaptists had to face severe persecution.

4.2. The condemnations of the Anabaptists continued in all quarters. In 1528, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, declared that Anabaptism was a heresy, and thus according to an ancient Roman law directed against the Donatists (the enemies of Augustine) they should be put to death. Further, at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 the group was condemned as a heresy, and thus every court in Christendom was required to condemn the heretics to death. George Blaurock, who had fled Zurich but continued to spread the message of the Anabaptists, was burned at the stake on September 6, 1529. Many Anabaptists were killed over the next century as virtually everyone attempted to stamp out every remnant of the group. However, despite this intense persecution - and often because of how they faced it - the group continued to grow.

4.2.1. Gonzales, 71 - In 1528, Charles V ordered that they be put to death on the basis of an ancient Roman law, directed against the Donatists, that established the death penalty for all guilty of rebaptizing.

4.2.2. Gonzales, 71 - In some areas, including Luther's Electoral Saxony, Anabaptists were accused both of heresy and of sedition.

4.2.3. Gonzales, 71 - The martyrs were many—probably more than those who died during the three centuries of persecution preceding Constantine.

4.2.4. Gonzales, 71 - The stories of heroism in such difficult circumstances would fill several volumes. And still, the more fiercely it was persecuted, the more the movement grew.

4.2.5. Shelley, page: 251 - Many of the persecuted fled to Germany and Austria, but

their prospects were no brighter there. In 1529 the imperial Diet of Speyer proclaimed Anabaptism a heresy and every court in Christendom was obliged to condemn the heretics to death.

- 4.2.6. Shelley, page: 251 - During the Reformation years, between four and five thousand Anabaptists were executed by fire, water, and sword.
- 4.2.7. Shelley, page: 251 - Among the early Anabaptist missionaries who carried their message east along the Alps to the region called Tyrol was George Blaurock. Catholic authorities there persecuted the Anabaptists intensely. On 6 September 1529, Blaurock himself was burned at the stake.
- 4.3. As a result of this persecution, the movement spread into other lands looking for a place of peace and rest. Many of them found refuge in the land of the very tolerant princes of Moravia. The groups here began to settle and practice their beliefs. They attempted to show the nature of a true, separate, Christian community built on brotherly love. One such group was led by Jacob Hutter (until his martyrdom in 1536) became known as Hutterites, and after his death they went to Moravia and they continue to the present day. They also founded the Christian economic community known as the Bruderhoff, an early Christian commune. These groups remained peaceful, though separate from the surrounding communities.
 - 4.3.1. Shelley, page: 251 - The persecution forced the Anabaptists north. Many of them found refuge on the lands of some exceptionally tolerant princes in Moravia. There they founded a long-lasting form of economic community called the Bruderhof, a Christian commune.
 - 4.3.2. Shelley, page: 251 - Their communities attempted to show that in the kingdom of God brotherhood comes before self. Consolidated under the leadership of Jakob Hutter, who died in 1536, these groups came to be known as "Hutterites."

5. The Revolutionary Anabaptists - The Munster Affair

- 5.1. In Strasbourg, the Anabaptists were given an unusual degree of freedom, and they had become fairly strong. One of the leaders, Melchior Hoffman, began to announce that the Day of the Lord was near. Many began to flock to Strasbourg, thinking it was to be the New Jerusalem. Hoffman announced that he would be imprisoned for 6 months and then be released, and then the end would come. He also rejected the Anabaptist principle of pacifism, declaring that as the end approached it would be necessary for the righteous to take up arms against the children of darkness. When he was imprisoned as predicted, even more people poured into Strasbourg and began to amass arms. However, Hoffman remained in prison and the predicted second coming did not materialize, and the authorities began to repress the movement. (He was eventually released, but later returned to Strasbourg and was arrested again in 1533, and he remained in prison until his death in 1543, though Bucer had visited and plead with him to recant his views.)
 - 5.1.1. Gonzales, 72 - In Strasbourg, where a measure of tolerance had allowed Anabaptism to become relatively strong, Hoffman began announcing that the Day of the Lord was near. His preaching inflamed the multitudes, which flocked to Strasbourg in the hope that the New Jerusalem would become a reality there.
 - 5.1.2. Gonzales, 72 - Hoffman himself announced that he would be imprisoned for six months, and that then the end would come. He also rejected the initial

Anabaptist pacifism on the grounds that, as the end approached, it would become necessary for the children of God to take up arms against the children of darkness. When he was imprisoned, thus fulfilling the first half of his prediction, even more people went to Strasbourg, there to await a sign from heaven that the time had come to take up arms. But the growing number of Anabaptists in the city provoked authorities to take repressive measures, and in any case Hoffman was still in prison after the predicted day of the Second Coming.

- 5.1.3. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,950 - A third distinctive brand of Anabaptism arose in tolerant Strasbourg that was associated with the furrier and lay preacher Melchior Hoffman (c. 1495–1543).
- 5.1.4. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,951 - Before coming to Strasbourg, Hoffman had been an early advocate of Luther's ideas in Scandinavian lands from 1522 to 1529, but ran afoul of the Lutherans and was banished to southern Germany. It was not until he arrived in Strasbourg in 1529 that Hoffman embraced the Anabaptist movement.
- 5.1.5. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,954 - persuaded Hoffman that he was Elijah of the last days (as prophesied in Revelation 11:3).
- 5.1.6. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,956 - However, Hoffman's most distinctive teaching was his apocalypticism. He declared that Strasbourg was the "New Jerusalem," where Christ would establish his millennial kingdom upon his return.
- 5.1.7. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,957 - Borrowing from the medieval Calabrian Joachim of Fiore, Hoffman believed that the third stage of history was imminent
- 5.1.8. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,962 - Hoffman returned to Strasbourg in 1533, where he was arrested and imprisoned. Reformers Bucer and Wolfgang Capito attempted to persuade Hoffman to moderate his views, and he did in fact yield on the issue of requiring adult baptism (although he still rejected infant baptism).
- 5.1.9. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,964 - Hoffman languished in prison until his death in 1543. His theology was an unstable mixture of late medieval mysticism, Joachimite apocalypticism, quasi-Lutheranism, Zwinglian sacramentarianism, Spiritualism, and Anabaptism.
- 5.2. At this point, someone suggested that the New Jerusalem was actually to be founded in Munster. That city had been evenly split between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, which allowed breathing room for the Anabaptists. As Anabaptists began to flood into the city, they eventually took over the city under the leadership of a Dutch baker named John Matthys and his disciple John of Leiden. Once in control, they immediately expelled the Roman Catholics from the city. Eventually the Roman Catholic bishop was forced to leave, and he promptly raised an army and laid siege to the city. Moderate Protestants, even Anabaptists, were also expelled, and all items of traditional churches such as paintings and sculptures were destroyed. For his part, the bishop killed every Anabaptist that fell into his hands.
 - 5.2.1. Gonzales, 73 - Then someone suggested that the New Jerusalem would not be established in Strasbourg but rather in Münster. In that city, the existing balance of power between Catholics and Protestants had forced a measure of tolerance, and therefore Anabaptists were not persecuted.

- 5.2.2. Gonzales, 73 - Soon the number of Anabaptists in Münster was such that they took over the city. Their leaders were John Matthys, a Dutch baker, and his main disciple, John of Leiden. Abandoning the Anabaptist principle of religious tolerance, one of their first acts was to expel the Catholics from the city. The bishop, forced to leave his see, gathered an army and laid siege to the New Jerusalem.
- 5.2.3. Gonzales, 73 - Moderate Protestants were also expelled. Sculptures, paintings, and all sorts of items connected with traditional belief and worship were destroyed. Outside the city, the bishop killed every Anabaptist who fell into his hands.
- 5.2.4. Shelley, page: 252 - But then new immigrants, who were apostles of a strange figure called Jan Mattheijs, led to fanaticism among those in power. Many looked for the creation of the Lord's earthly kingdom in Munster.
- 5.3. During this time, Matthys began to prophesy dates for the 2nd Coming (Easter, 1534). Unfortunately, unusual phenomena appeared in the sky, which heightened the frenzy. Munster was a communist state with all possessions held in common - by mandate. When a blacksmith resisted this, he was killed by Matthys himself. Matthys also began to state that the righteous must bear the sword against the wicked. However, in general he simply banished those who refused to follow his madness rather than killing them. Eventually Easter came and passed with no 2nd coming. Matthys then claimed he had a vision saying that he was invulnerable to the weapons of the wicked, and he led a force against the besieging army and was crushed and killed. John of Leiden then took control of the city.
 - 5.3.1. Gonzales, 73 - There were daily claims of visions and revelations. In a military sortie against the bishop, John Matthys was killed, and John of Leiden became the leader of the besieged city.
 - 5.3.2. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,976 - When the second coming failed to materialize, Matthys prophesied a new date (Easter/April 5, 1534) and amid the frenzy sent his proxy John of Leiden (Jan Bockelson) to prepare the way in January 1534. Unusual astral phenomena appeared in the sky in mid-February, and Matthys himself arrived shortly thereafter to take personal control of the city he now declared was the New Jerusalem.
 - 5.3.3. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,979 - Following the example of the early Christians, he pronounced Münster to be a communist state with all property held in common. This new way of life was mandatory, not voluntary. When a blacksmith resisted the new order, he was killed immediately by Matthys himself. Many people fled the city, but many more radicals arrived.
 - 5.3.4. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,982 - Matthys advocated the Melchiorite apocalypticism that the elect should wield the sword against all ungodly persons in preparation of the millennial reign of Christ. He announced plans to slay all the "godless"—that is, those who refused to be rebaptized — but he was persuaded to banish the ungodly instead of executing them.
 - 5.3.5. Woodbridge and James, location: 3,985 - Easter arrived, but the Messiah did not. In a vain attempt to enhance his dwindling credibility, Matthys claimed to have received a divine vision in which he was told he was invulnerable to the weapons of the godless. So he launched a suicidal attack on the much larger besieging army outside the city wall and was immediately struck down. It is difficult to imagine more harrowing circumstances, but Matthys's death led to

madness in Münster.

- 5.4.** Things actually grew crazier under John of Leiden. In early May he ran naked through the streets, followed by a three day trance. He then demanded absolute obedience on penalty of death. He instituted polygamy, called himself King David, and soon had a harem of 16 wives! The city was feeling the effects of the siege, but John lived in splendor while others went hungry. Still, people followed him. However, when one of his wives had the temerity to disobey him, he publicly beheaded her for the offense. Meanwhile a Protestant army had joined the siege, so that a Roman Catholic army and a Protestant army stood side by side in the field. Eventually the people began to tire of the mania, and a few people simply opened the city gates one evening and invited in the besieging army. After a battle, John was captured and paraded around with two of his lieutenants. All three were then tortured and executed, and their bodies were hung in cages on the church building to warn others against such treason - and the cages can still be seen on the cathedral in Münster to this very day! This event was to be associated with the Anabaptists in the collective memory of Europe for years, despite their official position of pacifism.
- 5.4.1.** Gonzales, 73 - John of Leiden decreed the practice of polygamy, following the example of the patriarchs of the Old Testament.
- 5.4.2.** Gonzales, 73 - But shortly after these events some of the inhabitants of the city, tired of the excesses of the visionaries, opened the gates to the bishop. The king of the New Jerusalem was captured and exhibited throughout the area, jointly with his two principal lieutenants. Then they were tortured and executed. Thus ended the primary outburst of revolutionary Anabaptism.
- 5.4.3.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,988 - Upon hearing that Matthys was dead, his lieutenant, John of Leiden, assumed the prophetic mantle. In early May, Leiden ran naked through the streets and fell into a trance for three days, after which he insisted on absolute obedience upon penalty of death. He soon introduced polygamy, arguing an Old Testament precedent and asserting that the resultant population growth in the New Jerusalem would hasten the second coming.
- 5.4.4.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,991 - In reality, he seems to have hankered after Matthys's beautiful young widow, Divara. In short order, he accumulated a harem of sixteen wives. When one of his new wives resisted his authority, Leiden himself publicly beheaded her in the marketplace.
- 5.4.5.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,993 - After successfully resisting attacks from the Catholic army (May and August 1534), Leiden, full of messianic pretension, declared himself the "king of righteousness" and absolute ruler of the New Jerusalem.
- 5.4.6.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,996 - In one of the oddest alliances in the sixteenth century, the specter of a radical Münster persuaded Philip of Hesse to send his Protestant troops to join the Catholics besieging the city. As the siege tightened its grip, famine ravaged the city and reports of cannibalism seeped out.
- 5.4.7.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,998 - Finally in June 1535, two hungry Münster deserters revealed the vulnerable points in the city's defenses.
- 5.4.8.** Woodbridge and James, location: 3,999 - After a furious battle, the city was taken on June 25. "King John" was captured and held up to public display for

several months before his execution (January 22, 1536). It was a slow and painful execution with red-hot irons.

- 5.4.9.** Shelley, page: 252 - When the bishop of the region massed his troops to besiege the city, these Anabaptists uncharacteristically defended themselves by arms. As the siege progressed, the more extreme leaders gained control of the city. In the summer of 1534 a former innkeeper, Jan of Leiden, seized the powers of government and ruled as an absolute despot. Claiming new revelations from God, Jan introduced the Old Testament practice of polygamy and by September took the title “King David.”
- 5.4.10.** Shelley, page: 252 - With his harem “King David” lived in splendor, yet by a strange cunning he maintained morale in the city in spite of widespread hunger. He was able to keep the bishop’s army at bay until 24 June 1535. The fall of the city brought an end to David’s reign. But for centuries thereafter Europeans upon hearing “Anabaptist” thought of the Munster rebellion. It stood for wild-eyed, religious fanaticism.

6. Menno Simmons

- 6.1.** Menno Simons (1496-1561) was a priest serving in East Frisia (the northern coastland of Germany) in the late 1520’s and early 1530’s, when he began to read Protestant writings. He began to doubt some Roman Catholic doctrines including transubstantiation and infant baptism, but he kept his doubts to himself. Around the same time his brother had become part of a group associated with the Anabaptists at Munster. He was not part of the events there, but was eventually put to death, and this had a profound effect on Menno, who by the mid 1530’s had fully embraced the tenets of Anabaptism. He ceased being a priest, and founded a Anabaptist church.
- 6.1.1.** Gonzales, 74 - The principal figure in this new generation was Menno Simons, a Dutch Catholic priest who was led to reconsider the matter of infant baptism by the martyrdom of an Anabaptist in 1531. Five years later, in 1536 —the same year that John of Leiden and his cohorts were executed—Menno left his position as a parish priest and embraced Anabaptism. He joined a Dutch Anabaptist fellowship, and eventually his followers came to be called Mennonites.
- 6.1.2.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,008 - his role among the Dutch Anabaptists was so significant that it has taken his name, “Mennonites.
- 6.1.3.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,009 - Around 1525 he was serving as a village priest in Pingjum, East Frisia, when he came into contact with Protestant writings and seems to have acquired doubts about the doctrine of transubstantiation, but harbored his doubts in secret.
- 6.1.4.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,013 - In 1531 Menno began to question infant baptism, but again said nothing publicly and continued his ministry as a Catholic priest.
- 6.1.5.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,015 - His brother, Pieter Simons, cast his lot with followers of the revolutionary Münsterites and stormed the Cloister at Bolsward in Friesland, only to lose his life in the retaliation of the authorities. His brother’s death marked a turning point for Menno.
- 6.1.6.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,018 - By January 1536, Menno fully embraced Anabaptism and dedicated himself to rescuing the scattered

remnant from Münster and giving it a nonviolent focus.

- 6.2.** Menno worked tirelessly to establish and strengthen Anabaptist congregations and groups. He was convinced that pacifism was an essential part of New Testament Christianity, and through him this was re-established within Anabaptism at large. He also taught that Christians should not take oaths or any position that required them (thus eliminating civil service). He continued believers baptism, and taught that both baptism and the Lord's Supper were not sacraments that conferred grace, but only symbols that pointed to God's inward work in the believer. Additionally, Menno and his followers practiced foot-washing. Through his labors and his magnum opus *The Fundamentals of Christianity*, Menno became the most influential Anabaptist, and the largest group of Anabaptists today are called Mennonites after him.
 - 6.2.1.** Gonzales, 74 - He was convinced that pacifism was an essential part of true Christianity, and therefore refused to have anything to do with the revolutionary Anabaptists. He also felt that Christians ought not to offer any oaths whatsoever, and that they should not occupy positions requiring them. But they should obey civil authorities, as long as what is required of them is not contrary to Scripture. Baptism—which he performed by pouring water over the head—should be administered only to adults who confess their faith publicly. Neither that rite nor communion confer grace, but rather are outward signs of what takes place inwardly between God and the believer. Finally, following Jesus' example, Menno and his followers practiced footwashing.
 - 6.2.2.** Woodbridge and James, location: 4,019 - Menno's basic beliefs are summarized in his magnum opus, *The Fundamentals of Christianity*.
 - 6.2.3.** Shelley, page: 252 - In the aftermath of the suppression of Münster, the dispirited Anabaptists of the lower-Rhine area gained new heart through the ministry of Menno Simons (about 1496 –1561). Although always in great personal danger, Menno, a former priest, traveled widely to visit the scattered Anabaptist groups of northern Europe and inspire them with his nighttime preaching. Menno was unswerving in commanding pacifism.
 - 6.2.4.** Shelley, page: 252 - Although Menno was not the founder of the movement, most of the descendants of the Anabaptists are to this day called "Mennonite."
- 6.3.** Despite their staunch pacifism and desire to simply live a separate life, Menno and the other Anabaptists continued to be viewed as subversive. Their refusal to take oaths, serve in the government or military seemed like they were traitors living in the midst of society. However, over time they were regarded as odd, but not dangerous, a tradition that continues today as people consider groups such as the Amish or the Mennonites. Furthermore, due to their selfless acts of service, they had even won the respect of many outside of their communities.
 - 6.3.1.** Gonzales, 75 - In spite of their refusal to participate in subversive acts, Mennonites were considered subversive by many governments because they would not take oaths or offer military service.
 - 6.3.2.** Gonzales, 76 - By the twentieth century, Mennonites were the main branch of the old Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, and they still insisted on their pacifist stance. But persecution appeared to be chiefly a matter of the past, and Mennonites had gained an honored place in society through their social service.

7. The Lasting Legacy of the Anabaptists

- 7.1. The initial legacy of the Anabaptists was that of a marginalized, despised, radical sect given to occasional extreme excesses. Given the background of the Peasants War, and then the horrors of Munster, this was inevitable - especially given their commitment to separatism.
- 7.2. There were also problems within Anabaptism that were more theological in nature. Their extreme separatist views are hard to reconcile with the totality of Scripture. They undermine the call to love our neighbor and to penetrate the world with the Gospel. They are also based on an often simplistic, non-theological, ahistorical reading of Scripture and church history. This impulse has found its way into many subsequent groups and movements, often with tragic results.
- 7.3. The Anabaptists also challenged certain assumptions held by both Roman Catholics and the magisterial Reformation, such as the linkage of church and state, and practice of infant baptism, and the overly optimistic assumption of a Christian society. This is the same impulse that drove many reform movements in the history of the church, such as the various monastic movements, and such questioning of assumptions is important and healthy if done correctly.
- 7.4. Many Anabaptist teachings and practices have continued to be rejected by the majority of Christians. These include pacifism, refusal to take oaths or serve in the government, and total separation from the unbelieving culture. The majority of Christians, even if they accept other Anabaptist tenets and practices, continue to reject these ideas.
- 7.5. The Anabaptist impulse to separation has influenced many other groups down to the present. From the Puritans, to the fundamentalists, the attempt to create a pure church and to live radically separate and distinct from the surrounding culture has been repeatedly embraced and attempted, with varying degrees of success.
- 7.6. Obviously, a large number of Christians today have embraced the teaching of believers baptism. This practice, which had disappeared after the first few centuries of the church, was first practiced again by this group, and then picked up by the larger and more mainstream various forms of the Baptist, Restorationist, and Pentecostal churches so that it is no longer a fringe movement.
- 7.7. The Anabaptist understanding of the separation of church and state has become very widely accepted. Even the Magisterial Reformers themselves began to see the need for marking a distinction between the government and the church. Most obviously, this became a founding principle of the American experiment, and through that the idea has spread far and wide. Even denominations claiming direct descent from the magisterial Reformers have now almost universally accepted the idea that church and state must be kept very distinct, and that the power of the civil government can not truly serve the cause of the Gospel. Though elements of this can be traced back to Luther's two kingdom concept for example, the fullest explication of the idea was found in the Anabaptists. Thus, their legacy has in many ways made the the mainstream rather than the radicals on this point.

For further reading: Roland Bainton *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*;
Michael Reeves *The Unquenchable Flame*

Next Class: John Calvin

Reading: Chapter 7 - John Calvin

Date: August 26????