

# Anabaptism 101: Beginning of a Movement

# NT / Early Church

- Subversive Jesus Movement
- Gospel (*euangellion*) of God's Kingdom
- One God – Jesus is King & Lord
- Secret Meetings (baptism & communion)
- Holy Living (love, purity, non-violence, etc.)
- Counter-Cultural Lifestyle (Acts 2 economics)
- Local & State Mandated Persecution



# Rise of Christendom

- Constantine's vision at Milvian Bridge
- Edict of Toleration (311) & Edict of Milan (313)
- Emperor Constantine unites Empire (323)
- Political pandering to Christian “voters”
- Constantine presides over Council of Nicea (325) to ensure a common creed.
- Theodisius I authorizes official religion (380)

“Christendom is an effort of the human race to go back to walking on all fours, to get rid of Christianity, to do it knavishly under the pretext that this is Christianity, claiming that it is Christianity perfected. The Christianity of Christendom... takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces probability, the plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and this is the Christianity of Christendom, of us men. In the Christianity of Christendom the Cross has become something like the child's hobby-horse and trumpet.”

Soren Kierkegaard

“Surely Constantine had grasped little or nothing of the ideas set forth in the Cross of Christ! One need not go to the length of the writer who speaks of Constantine as “the murderous egoist who possessed the great merit of having conceived of Christianity as a world power and of having acted on this novel insight. We can easily imagine the joy of the Christians in having finally obtained a firm guarantee against the persecutions, but we are not obliged to share that elation”; but one cannot stomach any longer the hundreds of pages of extravagant praise heaped on Constantine by his biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea! For it is and remains a fact that “Christianity grows alien to its essence when it is made into law for those who have been merely born instead of reborn.” Yet that is what the Constantinian change effected.”

Leonard Verduin, ***The Reformers & Their Stepchildren*** (p.31)

“Catholic Christianity becomes the state religion and an exchange takes place: the church is invested with political power, and it invests the emperor with religious power. We have here the same perversion, for how can Jesus manifest himself in the power of domination and constraint? We have to say very forcefully that we see here the perversion of revelation by participation in politics, by the seeking of power. The church lets itself be seduced, invaded, dominated by the ease with which it can now spread the gospel by force (another force than that of God) and use its influence to make the state, too, Christian. It is great acquiescence to the temptation Jesus himself resisted, for when Satan offers to give him all the kingdoms of the earth, Jesus refuses, but the church accepts, not realizing from who it is receiving the kingdoms.”

Jacques Ellul, ***The Subversion of Christianity*** (p. 124)

# Church History

“The history of the working of the Spirit of God is not the history of any organization, and what usually goes by the name 'Church History' is only too often a sorry tale of bigoted quarrels and selfish intrigue. Yet the history of the two, the spiritual movement, and the earthly institution, are sometimes so closely intermingled that it is impossible to give an account of one without referring to the other.”

James W. Kennedy, *The Torch of the Testimony* (p.56)

# The “Radical” Reformation

- Oct 31, 1517 – Martin Luther (95 Theses)
- 1521 – Luther stands trial at Diet of Worms
- 1522 – Ulrich Zwingli leads Swiss reform;  
Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, & George Blaurock dissatisfied with reform
- **Jan 21, 1525** – Conrad Grebel re-baptizes George Blaurock  
in Zurich, Switzerland (i.e. “Swiss Brethren”)  
**“Ana-baptism” is born!**
- 1527 – Schleitheim Confession (Anabaptist Creed)  
chaired by Michael Sattler



# Schleitheim Confession

## **Baptism**

Baptism is administered to those who have consciously repented and amended their lives and believe that Christ has died for their sins and who request it for themselves. Infants, therefore, were not to be baptized.

## **The Ban** (Excommunication)

A Christian should live with discipline and walk in the way of righteousness. Those who slip and fall into sin should be admonished twice in secret, but the third offense should be openly disciplined and banned as a final recourse. This should always occur prior to the breaking of the bread.

## **Breaking of Bread** (Communion)

Only those who have been baptized can take part in communion. Participation in Communion is a remembrance of Christ's body and blood; the real body and blood of Christ is not present in the sacrament.

## **Separation from Evil**

The community of Christians shall have no association with those who remain in disobedience and a spirit of rebellion against God. There can be no fellowship with the wicked in the world; there can be no participation in works, church services, meetings and civil affairs of those who live in contradiction to the commands of God (Catholics and Protestants). All evil must be resisted including their weapons of force such as the sword and armor.

# **Confession, cont.**

## **Pastors in the Church**

Pastors should be men of good repute. Some of the responsibilities they must faithfully carry out are teaching, disciplining, the ban, leading in prayer, and the sacraments. They are to be supported by the church, but must also be disciplined if they sin.

## **The Sword**

Violence must not be used in any circumstance. The way of nonviolence is patterned after the example of Christ who never exhibited violence in the face of persecution or as a punishment for sin. A Christian should not pass judgment in worldly disputes. It is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate; a magistrate acts according to the rules of the world, not according to the rules of heaven; their weapons are worldly, but the weapons of a Christian are spiritual.

## **The Oath**

No oaths should be taken because Jesus prohibited the taking of oaths and swearing. Testifying is not the same thing as swearing. When a person bears testimony, they are testifying about the present, whether it be good or evil.

7 articles of the Schleithem Confession (abridged) February, 1527.

# The Spread of Anabaptism

- 1527 – Schleithem Confession
- 1528 – Balthasar Hubmaier baptizes thousands; burned at the stake
- 1531 – Menno Simons convinced of Anabaptism
- 1536 – Menno receives believer's baptism; organizes scattered Anabaptists; spent life as fugitive; helped to preserve biblical Anabaptism—tradition continues through Mennonites
- Late 17<sup>th</sup> century – Anabaptists arrive in North America
- Penn's colony (Pennsylvania) becomes refuge for Anabaptists

## **Anabaptist Expressions**

Mennonites, Old Order Amish, Hutterites, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ, and Mennonite Brethren.

# Anabaptism Today

1. Descendants of early Anabaptists:  
Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites
2. Denominations inspired by Anabaptists:  
various Brethren groups, Bruderhof  
movement, and some Baptists
3. New Anabaptist churches around the world  
as a result of Menno & Brethren missions
4. Neo-Anabaptists belonging to other traditions  
but acknowledge influence of Anabaptism.

“The Anabaptist tradition has never been uniform. From the earliest years there were different emphases and divergent practices. Anabaptists today will interpret the Anabaptist vision in ways that make sense in our various cultures and contexts. But there are foundational insights, deep convictions, and enduring values that have shaped this tradition, for which the first Anabaptists were willing to die, and which all who accept the label “Anabaptist” recognize and want to embody.”

Stuart Murray, ***The Naked Anabaptist*** (p.159)



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