

Anabaptism 101: Radical Discipleship

“The Christendom era has bequeathed a form of Christianity that has marginalized, spiritualized, domesticated, and emasculated Jesus. The teaching of Jesus is watered down, privatized, and explained away. Jesus is worshipped as a remote kingly figure or a romanticized personal savior. In many churches (especially those emerging from the Reformation), Paul's writings are prioritized over the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. And in many Christian traditions, ethical guidelines derived from the Old Testament or pagan philosophy trump Jesus' call to discipleship.”

Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (p.55-56)

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”

Matthew 16-24-27 NIV

- January 21, 1525 – Conrad Grebel re-baptizes George Blaurock in house church meeting. The “Swiss Brethren” (Anabaptist) movement begins. Persecution ensues against them.
- May 29, 1525 – Eberli Bolt was first to be martyred in Switzerland by Roman Catholic authorities. He was burned at the stake.
- 1527 – Felix Manz drowned; Michael Sattler chairs the Anabaptist creed known as the *Schleitheim Confession*; martyred several months later; his wife, Margaretha, is drowned in nearby river.
- 1528 – Balthasar Hubmaier baptizes thousands; burned at the stake for opposing infant baptism and the state church.
- 1529 – George Blaurock burned at stake with fellow Anabaptist; Mass executions; hundreds of troops sent out to kill Anabaptists.
- 1536 – Menno Simons receives believer's baptism; organizes scattered Anabaptists; spent his life as a fugitive.
- From 1525 to 1618 – It is estimated that about 1,200 Anabaptists are executed in Southern Europe (Switzerland, South Germany, Austria).

Baptism by Blood & Fire

Catholics & Protestants see Anabaptist movement made up of “perverted sects” with eccentric individuals, “unbelievably stubborn” and “wildly obstinate” heretics worthy of death.

- “These miserable fanatics have no other goal than to put everything into disorder...They reveal themselves to be the enemies of God and of the human race...” ~ John Calvin
- “My struggle with the old church (Catholicism) was child's play compared to my struggle with the Anabaptists.”
~ Ulrich Zwingli
- “For think what disaster would ensue if children were not baptized? Besides this the Anabaptists separate themselves from the Churches... we conclude that the stubborn must be put to death.” ~ Martin Luther (pamphlet of 1536)

“Do not worry about the authorities. Just do what God has told you to do.” Conrad Grebel (1525)

“They threatened us with bonds, then with fire and the sword. But in all this I surrendered myself completely into the will of the Lord, together with all my brothers and with my wife, and prepared myself to die for his testimony.”

Michael Sattler (1527)

“We would rather suffer our bodies to be burned, drowned, racked or tortured, whatever you may wish to do with them, and we would rather be whipped, banished, or driven away, or robbed of our goods, than show any disobedience contrary to the Word of God.”

Hans van Overdam (1551)

“Now let us hear what true surrender is: It is to let go of all things for God's sake... and to turn to God so that he may lead us. Jesus Christ called it hatred: “He who does not hate his father and mother and renounce everything he has is not worthy of me.”

True surrender is to put to death the flesh and to be born another time. The whole world wants to have Christ, but they pass him by. They do not find him because they want to have him only as a gift, only as a giver of grace and a mediator which he certainly is, but they do not want to have him in a suffering way. The same Christ who says, “All who are heavy laden come to me and I will refresh you,” also says, “Whosoever will not forsake father and mother cannot be my disciple.” Whoever loves truth must accept the one as well as the other. Whoever wants to have Christ must have him also in the way of suffering. It is foolish to say: “We believe that Christ has redeemed us, but we do not want to live like he lived.”

Hans Haffner, “About the True Soldier of Jesus Christ”
1530's from a castle dungeon in Bavaria

“As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God!”

Franz Agricola, *Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists* (1582)

“Following Christ, for the Anabaptists, was much more than obeying his commandments. It was much more than confessing him publicly or being willing to die for him. It was knowing Christ, and living like the first disciples in full community with him.” The words of Paul in Philippians 3:10 stated distinctly the goal of the Anabaptists: **“I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”**

Peter Hoover, *The Secret of the Strength* (p.27)

On Protestant Grace

“Luther was primarily interested in pardon, rather than in renewal. His theology was a theology that addresses itself to the problem of guilt, rather than to the problem of pollution. There is an imbalance in this theology between what God does *for man* and what He does *in man*. It was this imbalance that caused Luther to collide with the Epistle of James. The (Anabaptists) showed from the very first a critical attitude toward Luther's disparagement of good works. They did not go along with his one-sided forensic theology. They complained that **“Luther throws works without faith so far to one side that all he has left is a faith without works.”**”

Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers & Their Stepchildren* (p.12)

“We with a sincere heart desire to die to sin, to bury our sins with Christ, and to rise with him to new life, just as our baptism signifies. We seek to walk humbly and in a holy way with Christ Jesus in this covenant of grace... For even as the death of our Lord would not have profited us, had he not risen from the power of earth... so it will not help us anything to bury our sins in baptism if we do not rise with Christ from the power of sin unto a new life.”

~ Menno Simons (1539)

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