The Swiss Cradle of Anabaptism

by John Christian Wenger

The sermon explores the origins and significance of Anabaptism in Zurich, focusing on the life of Conrad Grebel and the movement's early challenges and triumphs.

Scripture: Matthew 10:37
Topics: "Church History", "Anabaptist Theology"

Description

John Christian Wenger preaches about the origins of Anabaptism, tracing it back to Zurich, Switzerland, with Conrad Grebel as the chief founder. Grebel's journey from a prominent family to his conversion to evangelical faith by Zwingli, his marriage against parental objection, and his eventual commitment to a genuine Christian life are highlighted. The sermon delves into Grebel's dissatisfaction with Zwingli's reformation program, leading to the establishment of believer's baptism and the formation of the first free church. The narrative continues with the spread of Anabaptism through key figures like Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Michael Sattler, and Pilgram Marpeck, showcasing their evangelistic efforts, theological writings, and martyrdom for their beliefs.

Transcript

For many years the real origin of Anabaptism was not known. It has now been demonstrated beyond doubt that the true cradle was Zurich, Switzerland, and the chief founder was Conrad Grebel. The definitive biography of Grebel[1] was published in the year 1950, and this monograph, together with the Swiss archival materials on Anabaptism which apeared two years later,[2] are decisive that the original TÃ¤ufer ("Baptists") were the 1525 dissenters from Ulrich Zwingli, founder of the German Swiss reformation. Grebel himself, son of a prominent patrician family of the city and canton, was led to evangelical faith by Zwingli; and for a number of years he looked to Zwingli as his spiritual father, and as the hope of the coming Swiss evangelical church.

Grebel had a short career. Born about the year 1498 he was the son of the iron merchant Jacob Grebel and his wife Dorothea Fries Grebel. From the age of about eight until he was sixteen Grebel studied in the Carolina, a Latin school in Zurich named for Carl the Great (Charlemagne). In the fall of 1514 Conrad matriculated in the University of Basle and studied there for one year. A year later he enrolled in the University of Vienna where his father had secured for him a royal stipend. He remained at Vienna for three years and became an accomplished humanist scholar. In 1518 he transferred to the University of Paris where he also enjoyed a royal stipend, again arranged by his father. After two years in Paris he returned

home, although at that point he still intended to resume his academic training-this time at the University of Pisa where he was to enjoy a papal grant. But his plan to study at Pisa never materialized, and he failed ever to earn a doctorate. Grebel was not outstanding as a Christian during his university days; he was far more an average sample of the careless living characteristic of the university youth of the period.

Grebel had other troubles. Not only was he unsuccessful in completing his doctoral studies, he also began to suffer with ill health, and his parents were unhappy with his life in general. Father and son were especially critical of each other. The some what impudent son could write to Vadian (Dr. Joachim von Watt), married to Martha Grebel, Conrad's sister: "Sniff onions, and go hang." Conrad complained bitterly that his father had never taught him how to use money, and he demonstrated rather well the truth of his complaint. Thus the unhappy youth returned to Zurich from Paris in 1520. The climax of the tension with his parents came in another form of "trouble"-that is, trouble for the parents but ecstasy for young Conrad. In 1521 he fell in love with a Zurich girl with all the intensity of youth. Unfortunately she did not spring from a patrician family like the Grebels, and her name has come down to us only as Barbara. The Grebels were determined to crush the affair, and Conrad was just as determined to have his Holokosme ("all the world") as he called her. On February 6, 1522, Conrad courageously married her, despite violent parental objection. Three children graced their home: Theophilus (born 1522), who died unmarried; Joshua (born 1523), who married Catherine Steiner, and whose descendants, the Von Grebels, still live in Zurich (Pastor Hans Rudolf von Grebel is now pastor of Zwingli's Great Minster in the City); and Rachel (born 1525), who died as an infant.

Grebel's conversion to a genuine obedience to Christ, to a real Christian life, and to an evangelical faith came the spring or summer of 1522, and the pastor responsible for the conversion was Zwingli himself. Grebel then looked upon Zwingli with eyes of love and admiration and hope, for it was inevitable, he thought, that Master Ulrich (Huldrych in Swiss) would cleanse and reform the Zurich church and restore it to New Testament purity.

At the time of the October 1523 Disputation (a theological debate on the issues facing the Zurich state church), Grebel became much disappointed with Zwingli's reformation program. Grebel wanted immediate action. Zwingli was minded to rely upon the Zurich council for the determination of the tempo of the reform. Why, asked Grebel, should the Mass not be abolished at once? And why does Zwingli not set up a free church of converted believers such as one finds in the New Testament? Grebel became impatient during the Disputation (October 26-28) and began to ask questions which reflected his earnest desire to obey the Scriptures: Since the Latin Bible calls the bread used in the communion panis, just why should not the church employ ordinary bread? And why should water be mixed into the communion wine when the New Testament gives no such instruction? Further, why should the officiating clergyman insert the wafer into the communicant's mouth as if he had no hands of his own? And if Christ instituted the communion service at night, perhaps that would be the time to observe it now! These questions were certainly not central in Grebel's mind, yet they do bear testimony to a seeking soul, hungering to align all of life with the written Word of God. Grebel's immediate concern, of course, remained the abolition of the Mass, for he saw no possibility of moving forward to the establishment of a truly New Testament church until the central papal ceremony was abolished. His deepest longing was to witness the creation of a free church of converted disciples such as one finds in the first-century Acts of the Apostles.

In an undated deposition of Zwingli, but stemming from late in 1525 or early in 1526, Zwingli testified that Simon Stumpf of HÃ¶ngg (near Zurich), Conrad Grebel, and Felix Manz, had each come to him separately, "and more than once," requesting him to set up a separatist church which should live aller

unschuldigisten (most piously). The consequence was, reported Zwingli, that they began to hold night meetings in the residence of the mother of Felix Manz. The meetings to which Zwingli alludes were the so-called "Bible schools," which were actually small Bible study groups.

The other issue which worried Grebel was the proper subjects of baptism. From Zwingli he had learned that it would be the part of wisdom to postpone baptism until the children of the church had come to years of understanding. Grebel was later to insist on this point, a rather galling reminder for Master Ulrich after he had firmly decided to retain infant baptism. (Zwingli was man enough to admit that this "error" had formerly misled him for a time.) Neither Zwingli nor Grebel assigned any supernatural efficacy to water baptism: for both it was a symbol. But for Grebel both the Christian life and church membership presupposed a free and personal commitment to Christ as Saviour and Lord. The baptism of infants would have made sense to Grebel if he could have brought himself to believe in baptismal regeneration. But Zwingli's teaching had so completely settled for him the symbolic character of baptism that he simply could not conceive of any form being scriptural except the baptism of accountable persons who had been converted through the gospel.

Zwingli, of course, continued with his glorious ministry of the Word in the Great Minster along the Limmat. Grebel began, as Zwingli reported, to hold Bible study classes in private homes in Zurich. He used the Greek New Testament, and expounded its rich truths to the small circle of friends who gathered around him. Likewise Felix Manz, illegitimate son of the Great Minster's chief canon, lectured to the group from the Hebrew Old Testament. They frequently met in the home of Manz's mother in Zurich.

Zwingli was finally goaded into action by Grebel and Manz and their supporters, who blamed him for being too mild in his reformation program. In December of 1524 he held a preliminary discussion with them, and on January 10, 1525, a second meeting took place. Finally, on Tuesday, January 17, 1525, a major disputation was held in Zurich before both the regular council and "the Great Council of the 200." Zwingli's opponents were Grebel, Manz, and Wilhelm Reublin, pastor of the church in Wytikon, near Zurich. All three "radicals" contended for the biblical basis of believer's baptism. But the councilmen were not convinced. On Wednesday, January 18, the Council announced that any parents who did not baptize their infants within eight days would be banished mit wib, kind und sinem gut (with wife, child, and property). On Saturday, January 21, the Zurich Council decreed that Grebel and Manz should cease holding their Bible classes and that they should stop "disputing." The following leaders were banished: Wilhelm Reublin (in Swiss, RÃ¶ubli), pastor in Wytikon; Johannes BrÃ¶thi, assistant pastor in Zollikon, a village near Zurich; Ludwig Haetzer, a Swiss priest and sympathizer with the Anabaptists; and Andreas Castelberger of GraubÃ¼nden-none of them Zurich citizens.

Grebel and his friends now faced a crisis. They were officially forbidden to hold any more Bible study meetings. What should they do? They met together quietly that Saturday night, January 21, 1525, to think and pray and deliberate. An account of this meeting has been preserved in a sixteenth-century Anabaptist tome, The Oldest Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren, the account probably having its source in a participant, George Blaurock. The group evidently came together to discuss how best to cope with the latest mandate of the Council. The Chronicle reports that "anxious fear" came upon them, and they were "moved in their hearts." Thereupon they knelt in prayer and called upon God to "enable them to do His divine will." An amazing scene then transpired. Following the prayer, George Blaurock, a former priest from the Swiss canton of Grisons, stepped up to Conrad Grebel, whom the group recognized as its natural leader, and asked for baptism. Blaurock knelt before Grebel and was baptized forthwith! The Chronicle rather naÃ¯vely explains that "at that time there was no ordained minister to perform such work." The

others then asked George Blaurock to baptize them, which he did at once. Perhaps even more astonishing is the report: "Each ordained the other to the ministry of the Gospel." Thus the mandate which was intended to suppress forever the minority party which agitated for a free church, led instead to the actual establishment of the first free church! The die was cast, and Grebel either had to yield to what he felt was a mandate which violated his conscience, or defy the Zurich Council in the name of Christ. As a Christian he felt that he had no choice but to follow the Apostles of old and "obey God rather than men."

Grebel immediately plunged into a program of evangelism in the territory of Zurich. For ten days he stayed in his home community, but in February 1525, he removed to Schaffhausen where he remained as a missioner until toward the end of March when he returned to Zurich. Late in March and early in April he evangelized in St. Gall with great success. On Palm Sunday (April 9), 1525, he baptized large numbers of converts, so that the Anabaptist congregation there reached a reputed membership of 500. He returned to Zurich where he remained until June. Here he wrote his last letter which has been preserved; it was dated May 30, 1525, and addressed to his brother-in-law Vadian, reformer and civic leader in St. Gall, his "brother in the Lord." The letter is a vigorous plea not to attempt the suppression of Anabaptism by fines, confiscation of property, imprisonment, or death. Grebel solemnly declared that any blood shed in this matter is innocent blood: "Innocent it verily is, both if you know it and if you do not." The suffering of the Anabaptists, "and the end of their lives, and the great day of the Lord" will demonstrate their innocence.

But Anabaptist blood had been spilled already, although Grebel did not know it. On May 29, just the day before Grebel wrote, a minister of the Anabaptists named Eberli Bolt had been burned to death in his home town of Lachen in the Catholic canton of Schwyz. (He had been converted to the Anabaptist faith by some Anabaptists who escaped from prison in Zurich.) The Swiss chronicler Kessler reports that he went to the fire in good cheer, "and died willingly and undismayed."

The remaining months of Grebel's life rolled by rapidly. About June 1525, he was in Waldshut briefly. Then for three months he evangelized in the GrÃ¼ningen area east of Zurich, where he enjoyed the greatest success of his short preaching career. In July he was given a summons to stand trial in Zurich for "slandering" Zwingli's booklet on baptism. Upon being denied safe conduct he refused to present himself for trial. On October 8, however, he was apprehended at Hinwyl, whither he had gone to preach, and was imprisoned in the GrÃ¼ningen castle. Meanwhile George Blaurock was arrested for his faith on October 8, 1525, and Manz was captured twenty-three days later. On November 6, Grebel and Manz were given a hearing by Zwingli; and twelve days later Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock were sentenced to prison on a diet of gruel, bread, and water, with no visitors permitted. There was a new trial on March 5-6, 1526, which eventuated in a sentence of life imprisonment. But strangely enough, the opportunity to escape came only two weeks later. After earnest debate (some of the imprisoned Anabaptists thought it not right to escape from a legally imposed sentence, while others regarded the rope which hung by their window as a divinely appointed means of escape) the group decided to flee. Grebel later turned up as a preacher and evangelist in Appenzell and GraÃ¼bunden, or Grisons as it is called in English. In the village of Maienfeld in the canton of Grisons lived Grebel's oldest sister, and to her he evidently turned, hoping as a weary and sick man to find a bit of rest. But the plague struck him down, and he died in the summer of 1526, a young man of twenty eight, broken in health and no doubt uncertain as to the very survival of his little group of followers.

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The Spread of Anabaptism

Before many years had passed, the Anabaptists of Switzerland came to be known as Swiss Brethren. Congregations of the Swiss Brethren appeared not only in various cantons of German speaking Switzerland, but in Alsace, Bavaria, Baden, WÃ¼rttemberg, Hesse, Thuringia, Franconia, the Palatinate, and the Tirol. The two chief centers in South Germany for many years were Augsburg and Strasbourg, and the two most effective early leaders were Michael Sattler and Pilgram Marpeck. With the exception of Grebel, who died of the plague before the executioner was able to do away with him, most of the early leaders were executed for the "crime" of practicing the baptism of adults, and for setting up free churches, that is, congregations which were not a part of a state or territorial church. State churches were established by civil law as the required religion of the territory. (The state or territorial churches were Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed, depending upon the territory involved.)

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The First Martyr in Zurich

One of the most attractive figures in early Swiss Anabaptism was Felix Manz. Manz was born about the year 1498, the son of a Zurich canon. A master of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, Manz put all his talents to work in the building up of the Anabaptist Brotherhood through evangelism and nurture. Late in March 1525, Manz was imprisoned along with thirteen men and seven women of the Anabaptist group in the building known as the Hexenturm (witch tower) in Zurich. These twenty-one religious prisoners managed to make their escape on April 5, perhaps with the connivance of friends and sympathizers. Within two weeks Manz had resumed baptizing converts. But he was soon captured and was given a thorough examination. He stated openly that he had never rejected the institution of human government, nor had he opposed the charging of interest, nor the payment of the compulsory tithes of that period in Switzerland. He admitted being opposed to capital punishment and to "the sword," that is, to participation in warfare. He had not taught "community of goods," which meant a congregation having "all things common," following the primitive Christians at Jerusalem (Acts 4:32). Manz stated that he had taught only that Christians should be willing to share with those who were in need. The Zurich authorities were sufficiently satisfied to release him.

Following his release Manz evangelized briefly in GrÃ¼ningen in the canton of Zurich. By the middle of May he was at Chur in the canton of Grisons, working co-operatively with George Blaurock. On July 18 he was apprehended by the authorities and returned to Zurich for imprisonment. The magistrate at Chur reported that Manz could not be dissuaded from preaching and baptizing people, even by the threat of death. "He is an obstinate and recalcitrant person." Manz was imprisoned in the Wellenberg prison in Zurich until October 7, 1525. He was then freed, only to be arrested on October 30 for renewed activity as an Anabaptist. He was in and out of prison a number of times during the winter of 1525-26. On March 7, 1526, he was imprisoned for life. But in a month or so he had somehow regained his freedom. In April he was evangelizing in Grisons and Appenzell. He was once more captured December 3, 1526, for his final imprisonment. On January 5, 1527, the Zurich authorities sentenced him to death by drowning-a mode designed to show in what great dishonor he was to be executed, for execution by drowning was the customary mode for women. The sentence included the following details:;

Manz shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall tie his hands, put him into a boat, take him to the lower hut [in the Limmat river which flows through the city of Zurich], there strip his bound hands down over his knees, place a stick between his knees and arms [locking him in a doubled-up position], and thus push him into the water, and let him perish.3 As Manz was being bound he sang out in Latin, In manus

tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum (Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit). Thus perished the first Anabaptist martyr in Reformed territory.

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George Blaurock, Evangelist

The first man baptized by Conrad Grebel on January 21, 1525, was a former priest named George of the House of Jacob. He soon became a dynamic evangelist, with perhaps a touch of what would now be considered fanaticism; at least he is reported on one occasion to have taken over a Reformed minister's pulpit without permission. He was born in Bonaduz, a village in Grisons, Switzerland, and served as a Roman priest prior to his conversion to Anabaptism. He is described as a tall man with a powerful physique, fiery eyes, black hair, and a small bald spot. His real name was George of the House of Jacob, but his common appellation stemmed from his habit of wearing a blue coat (Blaurock in German). A man of tremendous energy, he went about Switzerland as an evangelist, warning sinners to turn to Christ and to seal their faith with water baptism. Many converts accepted his message and united with the Swiss Brethren. On the day of Manz's execution, Blaurock as a noncitizen of Zurich was stripped to the waist and beaten with rods as he was marched from the Fish Market to the Niederdorf gate and expelled from the city. His last field of evangelism was the Tirol: Clausen, Guffidaun, Ritten, Vels, and Breitenberg. Here he gathered the scattered Anabaptists and strengthened their faith. On June 2, 1529, a Tirolese Anabaptist preacher and pastor named Michael KÃ¼rschner was burned at the stake by the Catholic authorities, and Blaurock hastened to take charge of the pastorless flock. The Tirolese authorities sought to apprehend him, and on August 14, 1529, they were able to report success. On August 24 he was severely tortured, and on September 6 burned at the stake. He was executed on a fivefold charge: (1) he left the priesthood, (2) taught against infant baptism, (3) repudiated the Mass, (4) rejected the confessional, and (5) taught that people should not pray to Mary the mother of Christ. It has been estimated that he won a thousand converts in the short period of his evangelistic career.

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Michael Sattler and the Seven Articles

One of the most attractive figures of the Swiss Brethren movement was Michael Sattler of Staufen in Breisgau, South Germany. He came to Zurich soon after the establishment of Anabaptism and united with the Brethren there. Banished from Zurich on November 18, 1525, he removed to southern Wurttemberg and became an active evangelist in that territory. On February 24, 1527, he presided at an Anabaptist meeting at Schleitheim, a Swiss village near Schaffhausen, and the Anabaptists present adopted a confession of faith which he had written, entitled Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles.

These seven articles treat of: (1) Baptism. This sign shall be performed on those who have turned from sin and are living a holy Christian life, who believe that Christ has taken away their sins, who wish to die with Christ and to "walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and who request it for themselves. This excludes infant baptism, "the chief abomination of the pope." (2) Excommunication (the "ban"). A brother or sister in the church who lapses into sin shall twice be warned in secret, and the third time openly excommunicated according to the word of Christ in Matthew 18.

Any disciplinary cases in the church shall be taken care of before the communion of the Lord's Supper so that a united church may eat and drink in love. (3) The Breaking of Bread. Christians must be united beforehand, by baptism, in the one Body of which Christ is the Head, if they wish to commune together. Members of Christ's church cannot commune with those who are not walking in the obedience of Christ. (4) Separation from the World. God calls upon his children to come out of the world and to have no fellowship with those who are not in Christ.

This separation involves breaking spiritual and social fellowship with papal and Reformed church services alike (all churches were then calling for the death penalty for Anabaptists), no patronizing of drinking houses, and no participation in civic matters, that is, no participation in the magistracy. (5) Pastors in the Church. The pastor or shepherd (Hirt) is to be a man with a good name. He shall read God's Word to the people, admonish and teach them, warn and discipline, excommunicate, lift up the bread in the communion service, and lead out in the prayers of the church.

He shall receive his support from the gifts of the church (not from taxes or beneficences). If a given pastor is martyred, another shall be chosen at once so that the church may not be destroyed. (6) Nonresistance. Outside the church God has ordained the sword for the maintenance of law and order in a wicked society. The sword of Moses passed to the magistrates of the world (not to the church). The only way the church can deal with wicked sinners is to excommunicate them. Members of the church must follow under all circum stances the law of love and the example of Christ in his non resistant suffering. (7) The Oath.

Because of the express prohibition of Christ, Christians ought not to swear under any circumstances. Swearing is not consistent with the finite limitations of earthly creatures. God can swear because in his omnipotence he has no limitations and can perfectly carry out his intentions. (Even today Mennonites still baptize after personal conversion and commitment, and upon confession of faith; they practice church discipline, excommunicating those who cease to live a holy life; they generally practice "close communion"; they maintain an emphasis on "nonconformity to the world"; they insist on high standards of life on the part of their ministers, and many congregations still give their pastors "love offerings" rather than a stipulated salary; they hold strictly to nonresistance, and therefore refuse to serve in the military; and they give only a solemn affirmation of the truth in lieu of the legal oath.)

Zwingli considered Sattler's Schleitheim Articles of Faith to possess sufficient merit to write a refutation of them in Part Two of his Elenchus (1527). And John Calvin based his polemic against the Anabaptists in part upon the Schleitheim Articles: A Brief Instruction to Equip All the Good Saints Against the Errors of the Communistic Sect of the Anabaptists, 1544.

It was but a short time after the Schleitheim meeting until Sattler "of the white overcoat," as he is called in the Zurich archives, was arrested and tried as a heretic. He was arrested at Horb in Wurttemberg, imprisoned in Binsdorf (whence he wrote a moving letter to the Anabaptist congregation at Horb, urging them to faithful adherence to their confession, and to a faithful Christian life), and tried at Rottenburg on the Neckar, a city in Catholic Austrian territory. The trial took place May 17-18, 1527. Nine charges were brought against Sattler: (1) He was guilty of disobedience to the imperial mandates, all of which had, from the Diet of Worms in 1521, sanctioned only one faith within the Holy Roman Empire, that of the Roman Catholic Church (Sattler denied disobedience, for he claimed that the mandates called only for adherence to the Word of God). (2) He denied the real presence of Christ in the sacrament (this charge he admitted). (3) He taught that infant baptism does not conduce to salvation (this he admitted teaching). (4) He rejected the sacrament of extreme unction (he claimed not to reject the oil of James 5, but denied that said oil was

"the pope's oil"). (5) He despised and condemned the Mother of God and the saints (he denied the charge, but held that Mary was not a Mediatress; the saints are simply the believers, and "the blessed" are those who have died). (6) He taught that men should not swear before the authorities (this he admitted, basing his position on the word of Christ). (7) He inaugurated a new form of the Lord's Supper, eating the bread and wine from a plate (he made no recorded reply, but this he evidently learned from Zwingli, for that is how the Lord's Supper was set up in Zurich in Holy Week, 1525). (8) He had abandoned his Catholic order and married a wife (he claimed that this was his right, for the New Testament condemns compulsory celibacy). (9) He taught that Christians ought not to fight against the Turks, and that if he had his choice he would rather fight on the side of the Turks, if war were right (he replied that Christians ought not indeed to take life, but should cry to God for his protection; the reason for his remark about siding with the Turks was that they knew no better, while the professing Christians who killed the Turks were "Turks after the spirit").

After this he suffered some abuse in court-the clerk declared that if there were no other executioner, he himself would destroy Sattler and reckon that he had done God a service! When Sattler attempted to reason with him, the clerk cut him off, saying that the hangman would dispute with him, "You arch heretic!" After retiring, the judges re-entered the room and passed sentence that Sattler should be led to the place of execution, his tongue should be cut off, his body should six times be torn with red-hot tongs, and then he should be burned to powder as a heretic. The date of his death was May 21, 1527. His wife was executed by drowning a few days later. A description of Sattler's trial and death was written to the Swiss Anabaptists in the Zurich area by Wilhelm Reublin. The account of his martyrdom, together with his letter to the Horb congregation, was soon printed in booklet form, and both found a place in the Martyrs Mirror, 1660.

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Pilgram Marpeck

One of the most interesting leaders of the South German and Swiss Anabaptists was a man named Pilgram Marpeck. A native of the Tirol, his home was at Rattenberg on the Inn River. By 1520 he was married, and in that year he was received into the miners' brotherhood of Rattenberg. By 1523 he was a member of the outer council of the city and by 1525 of the inner council. In the latter year he was appointed a mining judge with an annual salary of sixty-five pounds, with an additional three pounds allowed for court dress. That he was a young man of wealth is evident from the fact that in 1525 he loaned 1,000 guilders to the state treasury. (A guilder or form in Austria was roughly the equivalent of an American dollar.) He also owned at least two houses. Just when Marpeck turned to Anabaptism is not known. The movement had reached Rattenberg by 1527, and on January 28 of the next year Marpeck was removed from his office. Two weeks before this an Anabaptist leader named Leonard Schiemer was executed as a martyr in Rattenberg; and on February 4 another, named Hans Schiaffer, met the same fate. Marpeck found it advisable to flee Rattenberg. His property was confiscated at once. In 1529, when he should have received his inheritance, in value perhaps guilders, that too was confiscated.

About February 1528, Marpeck, with his wife Anna, left Rattenberg. But where should he go? With all security gone Marpeck became a sort of pilgrim on the face of the earth. It is reported that he first located in Augsburg. In October 1528 he arrived in Strasbourg, where be soon became the leader of the Anabaptist congregation. He did not live in the city at first; his residence was in a nearby village, Steintal. Soon he was employed in the city forest some twenty-five miles southwest of Strasbourg.

He had been known in Rattenberg as a man with engineering gifts, and he now put his talent to work for the city of Strasbourg. He constructed a complex system of waterways and wood-floating flumes in the valleys of the Ehn and Brerisch in Alsace, and of the Kinzig and Murg in Baden. When he moved to the city of Strasbourg in 1530 he was at first a popular man; his followers, it was said, honored him like a god. Even the state clergy were fond of him for a time. But he was an outspoken man and given to sharp language.

He not only taught the principle of believer's baptism, but he labeled infant baptism a "sacrifice to Moloch," words which understandably did not increase the love of the state clergy for him. Martin Bucer, a leading theologian in Strasbourg, regarded him as self-willed, although Bucer admitted that Marpeck and wife were both of unblamable character. By the year 1531 Marpeck felt constrained to call for a public debate with the clergy. A colloquium was granted him on December 9 of that year, but not a public one; the discussion was held before the city council and the so-called Committee of Twenty-one. (Sometime before this Marpeck was imprisoned briefly, but the intercession of a prominent churchman of Strasbourg, Wolfgang Capito, and probably Marpeck's own valuable work with the waterways, effected his release.

He had written two booklets defending the doctrine of nonresistance and opposing the swearing of oaths, but the city censors had suppressed them.) The outcome of the colloquium was that Marpeck was ordered to leave if he stuck to his erroneous views that infant baptism ought to be discarded and if he intended to set up a separatist church. He in turn requested a period of grace to allow him opportunity to sell his home. He also managed to have another disputation on January 18, 1532, but again he failed to convince the council of the biblical basis for his position.

So once more he took to the road. The old records indicate that he was back in Strasbourg in 1534, but only briefly. In 1540 he wrote a letter from near Ilanz in Grisons. The next year he seems to have visited the Hutterian Brethren in Moravia. In 1544 he was again in Grisons. That same year he located in Augsburg, and here he managed to live until his death in 1556. During his residence in Augsburg he secured employment with the city, and he is referred to in the city records as the Stadtwerckmeister, probably a sort of city engineer.

All the while, of course, he was also busy as an Anabaptist leader. The consequence was that the civil authorities were annoyed; they sent him warnings about his Anabaptist activities in 1545, 1550, 1553, and 1554, but he was not to be intimidated.

Marpeck is remembered for two reasons: for his long and tedious controversy with the Spiritualist, Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig, who claimed that the Anabaptists had no right to set up a church organization; and for his literary efforts.

In 1542 Marpeck translated and revised a new edition of Bernt Rothmann's book of 1533, Confession of Both Sacraments, Baptism and Lord's Supper. The book, however, gives no indication either of the original writer nor of its translator and reviser. Schwenckfeld at once wrote a Judicium (critique) of the volume, attacking it at many points. This unprovoked attack was a source of irritation to Marpeck, and he and his colleagues wrote an enormous manuscript Answer to Schwenckfeld, which was published for the first time in 1929. In the course of preparing the Answer to became clear to Marpeck that what was really needed was a treatise setting forth the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. This was accordingly prepared and printed, the Testament Explanation. The period of the Old Testament, "Yesterday," was set over against "Today" on a vast array of subjects: grace, forgiveness, salvation,

sword, and many others. The thesis of the book is that the period prior to Christ's incarnation was one of promise, while this age is that of fulfillment. There was no real forgiveness prior to Calvary, for Christ's sacrifice had not yet been offered.

Recent research suggests that Marpeck's Anabaptist followers may not have been one group with the Swiss Brethren, although any differences were trivial. Indeed he labored long and hard to effect one large and united brotherhood of all the Anabaptists, which union seems to have been accomplished at a conference in Strasbourg in 1555. Marpeck was one of the few Anabaptist leaders prior to 1530 who did not die a martyr's death.

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Anabaptist Tracts

Larger books such as the Answer to Schwenckfeld and the Testament Explanation were but rarely written by Swiss and South German Anabaptists. Their literary efforts were for the most part confined to tracts. One of the most effective of these tracts was a little jewel entitled Two Kinds of Obedience, which appeared in the period 1525-30. The anonymous writer, perhaps Sattler himself, begins by explaining that the two kinds of obedience are filial, which springs from love for God, and servile, which is selfish in character. Filial obedience, that of a child, is far better and more effective than the servile variety, that of a slave. Only Christian freedom makes possible the creation of Christian character. Legalism, whether of the Old Testament type or a more modern vintage, starves the souls of men. Law had, to be sure, a good function; it was to prepare sinners for redemption. Apart from the law of God men would go to perdition, drowned in an ocean of "love for the creature." The author makes quite a point of the higher ethical standards of the New Testament-the theological justification which the Anabaptists commonly made for such doctrines as nonresistance and the rejection of the civil oath. This tract dispels once and for all the notion that the Anabaptists held to a weak view of grace, or that they believed in "works-righteousness." It demonstrates that the Anabaptists had a keen awareness of the grace of God, a wholesome emphasis on love, and a fear of every kind of legalism. The tract closes with a ringing reminder that the church will not always be a maligned and persecuted body; the day will come when the tabernacle of God will be among men, and he shall dwell with them and be their God, and they shall be his people.

Another interesting tract from the same period is Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ. Writers as early as the Dutch martyrologist, P. J. Twisck (1565-1636), ascribed it to Michael Sattler, with good grounds but no absolute proof. One picks up this tract expecting it to be a brief treatise on the atonement of Christ, but it turns out to be a discussion of the question, "To whom do the blessings of the atonement apply?" Who is it that can make the claim, "Christ died for me"? The writer holds that the atonement is potentially universal in its scope. Although it would be sufficient for all men, if they became believers on Christ, yet it is actually efficacious only for those who really believe. And who are the believers? What does it mean to have faith? Far more, insists the writer, than renouncing Catholicism, the religion of works. And far more than making the ("Protestant") claim that Christ is our mercy seat. It is not a mere matter of lip profession. To have faith is to live the Christian life, to follow Christ in holiness, love, and obedience. Real faith is not a matter of works of merit, but it does involve being prepared to take up the cross and follow Jesus Christ even to the martyr's stake. And only those who take up the cross and follow Christ have the right to think of themselves as Christians. So what starts out to be a treatise on the atonement ends up as a call to what we would now call existential Christianity. Yet with all his emphasis on good works and obedience, the author avoids the pitfall of human merit. He recognizes that a good Christian life is not a matter of human

volition but is the fruit of God's working within. The writer closes on a rather bitter note as he laments that the Reformers stopped short in their program by their retention of infant baptism. He regards this as nothing less awful than the second beast of Revelation 13-the beast which calls down fire from heaven upon its opponents (a protest against the violent suppression of Anabaptism). Little wonder that the tract closes with the New Testament call: "Come out of her, my people . . . .'

Another fine example of Anabaptist theology is the little tract entitled Concerning Divorce, also of the first years of the Anabaptist movement. P. J. Twisck (1565-1636), who was married to Menno Simons' granddaughter, assigned it to Sattler. The anonymous author begins by asserting that monogamous marriage was God's original plan for the race, but that Moses permitted divorce for rather trivial reasons. It was Jesus who restored the original Ordnung (regulation or ordinance) of God; and he permitted divorce for only one reason: marital infidelity. Christ's word on this subject is only one example of his advance over the lower ethical standards of the Old Testament. But, says the tract, if one is married to an unbeliever, it is likely that the Christian life and witness of the believer will so arouse the enmity of the non-Christian as to terminate the union. In any case the Christian's union with Christ is more significant than any earthly marriage. It is better to separate from an unbelieving spouse than to suffer damage to one's spiritual life. The main thrust of the tract is not on divorce and its limitation at all; rather it is on the primacy of loyalty to Christ. Nevertheless, the church must scrupulously obey her Lord; she cannot therefore tolerate remarriage unless the divorce was granted because of unfaithfulness to the marriage vows.

Mention must also be made of the vigorous Anabaptist polemic of Martin Weninger, nicknamed Lingki, entitled Rechenschaft (Vindication), 1535. Little is known of Lingki's life. He was banished from Zurich in November 1525, the same day as Michael Sattler. Six years later an Anabaptist named FlÃ¼ckiger reported that he had been baptized the previous Easter by a leader named Lingki. Lingki also served as the chief spokesman for the Swiss Brethren in the disputation or debate held between the Anabaptists and the Reformed at Zofingen, Canton Berne, in 1532. Haller, the Reformed leader of Berne, described Lingki as "a learned and cunning man, an eloquent and amazing hypocrite, especially gifted in deception"-which is another illustration of sixteenth-century polemics. When Lingki, in the course of the Zofingen debate, demanded scriptural proof for infant baptism, the Reformed spokesman replied, "Dear Lingki, tell me where it is written that the apostles baptized a German or a Swabian."

Weninger's Vindication may be said to provide the standard Swiss Brethren statement as to why they withdrew from the state church. Fully aware of their own depravity, the Brethren nevertheless felt that unless a professing believer lived a holy life he was not one of Christ's disciples. The evident carnality of many state churchmen, even of numbers of the clergy, compelled grave doubts about their salvation and about the right of their fellow ship to be considered a true church. Some of Weninger's statements, taken alone, could actually be interpreted as teaching a naÃ¯ve perfectionism; yet in the Zofingen disputation he said expressly: "In me there is nothing good. I am unable of myself even to think anything that is good, but am as others flesh and blood, and subject to temptation. But that I should let these reign I answer, No. Therefore God must give me grace to over come." Weninger was one of the few Anabaptists who returned to the Reformed Church. It is not known what considerations of logic or torture or threatened martyrdom moved him to publicly renounce Anabaptism at Schaffhausen in 1538.

The Vindication was bitterly critical of the "hirelings," the salaried clergy of the state church, whom Lingki regarded as bloodthirsty (because of the executions of Swiss Brethren leaders which they incited). Furthermore, these state church clergy "teach contrary to Paul (Romans 6) that one cannot be free of sin and live in righteousness: 'One must sin to the grave; no one can keep the commandments of God' (I John

3, 5), which is not true." Thereupon he quotes all sorts of passages on the victory over sin which Christ has enabled his saints to attain by his atoning death. But Lingki asserted that when he inspected the lives of the members of the state church he found all sorts of gross sin tolerated: "adulterers, heavy drinkers, blasphemers, misers, usurers, dancers . . . without a ban to make any difference." This absence of church discipline was, in the mind of Lingki, simply fatal. Of course, he continued, the priests who ought to discipline such open sinners are unable to do so for the simple reason that they themselves live the same way! But the true children of God are those who allow him to work out his gracious will in their lives, and such holy people are acceptable to him. As Lingki put it in his Swiss German-and these are the closing words of the tract-Der recht thut uss forcht Gottes ist Gott angenÃ¤m (The right done from the fear of God is acceptable to him).

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Swiss Anabaptism and Other Movements

Modern research has revealed that besides the three main streams of the Reformation, that is, Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican, there were three similar Anabaptist movements: (1) the original Swiss Anabaptists, or Swiss Brethren, founded by Conrad Grebel; (2) the Austrian branch of the movement which added the Christian "community of goods" (compare Acts 4:34-35) to its practice, the so-called Hutterian Brethren, named for Jacob Hutter who was burned at the stake February 25, 1536, at Innsbruck in the Austrian Tirol; (3) the Dutch Anabaptists, later known as Mennists (now Mennonites) after Menno Simons; as well as (4) the free-lance movement led by an independent ex-Lutheran named Meichior Hofmann, which-contrary to Hofmann's intentions-culminated in the awful MÃ¼nster episode in Westphalia, 1534-35. (The Spiritualists and the anti-Trini tarians constituted additional and basically independent streams, as Professor Fritz Blanke of Zurich has pointed out.4) The first three Anabaptist groups were never totally destroyed, and today number several hundred thousand in Europe and the Americas, the Mennonites, while the MÃ¼nsterite movement with all its tragedy and horror lasted for only a few short years in the sixteenth century. But the memory of MÃ¼nster served for four centuries to obscure and divert attention from the true nature of original Anabaptism with its remarkable concept of Christian discipleship

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