



Why Baptists are not Protestants

The Origin and the Doctrines of the Anabaptists of the Reformation

By Raul Enyedí

The eBook Provided By The International Missionary Baptist Ministries Publishing

Why Baptists are not Protestants
Or
The Origin and the Doctrines of the Anabaptists of the Reformation

By Raul Enyedi

Introduction

THE SUBJECT OF ANABAPTISM of Reformation times is one of the most debated subjects in world history. Every aspect of their existence – their origin, their doctrines, their practice, their influence upon the world – has been affirmed and questioned over and over again in a number of ways. Both their defenders and their accusers find that keeping their composure and objectivity while investigating the Anabaptists is the hardest thing they can do. The Anabaptists were known as men who shunned compromise, and one will either love or hate their positions, but he cannot pass them by with indifference.

We consider that the world has reached a point, especially in the religious realm, in which there is a need that the doctrines of the Anabaptists be known and proclaimed. This is an edifying but also challenging task for those who care for the continuation of pure Christianity and of churches shaped after the New Testament pattern (Epistle of Jude, vs. 3).

We live in an age in which declaring a doctrinal or denominational identity is considered to be obsolete. One who declares the Baptist identity is called “narrow,” “bigot,” “fanatic” or “lacking common sense.” As Baptists it is impossible to know who we are and where we are heading if we do not know our history. No Baptist can properly know his identity and origin, from where he comes and where he is going, unless he is acquainted with the Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists significantly marked the history of Christianity and that of the world. The modern man who lives in a society that grants him the right of free expression, and the right to believe whatever he considers proper, is greatly indebted for his privileges to the sixteenth century Anabaptists. A great host of them perished at the bloody hands of the executioner or in the flames of the heretic’s stake for proclaiming and defending these fundamental rights the civilized world enjoys today.

To the persecuted, hunted and martyred Anabaptist that lived five centuries ago, the modern Baptist owes his existence, the doctrinal frame upon which his church is built and also the direction he follows. Having such an inheritance, any Baptist should glory in his forefathers, and humble himself before such a great cloud of witnesses.

Today Baptists ignore or repudiate the Anabaptists, being embarrassed if identified with them. Moreover, there are some who call themselves Baptists, but openly confess that they would rather identify with the Protestant or even the Catholic party than with the Anabaptists. This sad situation has two main causes. The first is ignorance; the second is the involvement in the ecumenical movement.

Ignorance, on the part of the common member is due mainly to the fact that the teaching on our Baptist origins ceased to be proclaimed from the pulpits long ago. Nevertheless, we remind every member that he is responsible before God to search for the truth, to judge what is being preached – and what is not preached, to watch over the doctrinal and practical purity of the church to which he belongs.

The second cause is much more dramatic. Most Baptist leaders cannot be accused of ignorance – not an innocent one, at least. The times in which the Baptists were refused access to higher education or to information are long past. The information exists and is available for any one who wants to study it. The teaching on Baptist origins is not preached because it is unknown, but because it does not fit in the program followed by the higher Baptist ranks. This is the ecumenical program pursued by all great Christian denominations. The ecumenical movement does not look favorably upon the insistence on denominational histories, because it pursues the bringing of the churches into a post-denominational era. History (which inevitably emphasizes denominational peculiarities) is minimized or even changed by those from the large ecumenical circle.

More than any other denomination, the Baptists have a history that does not fit with ecumenical patterns, being thus extremely inconvenient. It is not to be wondered that once the Baptists became involved in ecumenism they changed their position regarding their origin. First they gave up the *“succession view”* (this view states that the Baptists are the successors of the original Christians and that Baptist type churches, though known under different names, existed in every century of the Christian era); then the *“Anabaptist influence view”* was given up, since the Anabaptists were drastically separated from the Catholics and from the Protestants and were stigmatized as fanatics, being made responsible for two tragic episodes from the time of early Reformation: *The Peasants’ War* (1524-1525) and *the Kingdom of Munster* (1535-1536). The *“English separatism outgrowth view”* was chosen, which states that the Baptist origins are found in 1609, when John Smyth baptized himself and then the others that were with him, organizing the first Baptist church in the world. Such a view is very convenient to the ecumenical cause because it places the origin of the Baptists in late Protestantism, being merely continuers of the Reformation. They are also in this way separated from the troubled sixteenth century and from all the medieval dissident parties that opposed Catholicism vehemently, sometimes even to extermination.

The purpose of this article is to bring to light a small part of the history of the early Anabaptists, of their vision, of their specific doctrines, of their life standards and struggle for preserving the faith, and of their sufferings and persecutions. Having access to essential information, quotes from original sources and quotes from the most important researchers of Anabaptist history, we hope that the reader can form a general but fair opinion about the Anabaptists, in such a way that, at the

end of his reading, he would be able to answer two questions: who were the Anabaptists? And what did they believe?

Defining the Term “Anabaptist”

The name “Anabaptist” was given to a movement that blossomed during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Its main characteristic was the protest against the baptism practiced by the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches, which they considered unscriptural and invalid. The word “Anabaptist” means “re-baptizer” and was applied to them deprecatingly by their enemies. They never accepted the name because they did not see themselves as re-baptizers. They thought that the Catholic and the Protestant baptism was not validated by the Holy Scriptures, therefore they did not consider it baptism. In their opinion, the only true baptism was the one given to persons that were mature enough to express their own faith in Christ. Among themselves, they called one another “brother” and “sister” and wanted to be known simply as “Christians.” They insisted so much on brotherhood, that the general name applied to them by their friends was “*The Brethren.*”

They also firmly held to the New Testament as sole authority in matters of faith and practice. They opposed the clergy and believed in the equality of all church members. They believed that following Christ meant living a life of perseverance unto holiness. They believed that every man is free to choose what he wants to believe and in what church to be a member, regardless of where he finds himself.

From the very first it should be emphasized that the opponents of the Anabaptists labeled as Anabaptists any party that opposed infant baptism and the interference of the civil authorities in religious matters and the ecclesiastical authorities in civil matters. Thus, we shall meet under this name both peaceful and revolutionary groups, both evangelical and fanatical. This generalization by their enemies was not accidental, but intentional, with the purpose of making all of them hated by the common people. Modern historians have noted this distinction: “There are two kinds of Anabaptists, the sober and the fanatical. Failure to make this distinction has done mischief and caused modern Baptists to deny their connection with the Baptists of the Reformation, whereas they are the lineal descendants of the sober kind and have no reason to be ashamed of their predecessors” (Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 370). We will attempt in this work to distinguish the different groups catalogued as “Anabaptist” and to differentiate the “evangelical Anabaptists” from the revolutionaries and the fanatics.

Any historian encounters a serious problem when he studies dissent in a monolithic, totalitarian society. History is written by those in power, and this is true in the case of the Anabaptists, as well. In no state did they gain the power – in fact, this was not their purpose – and their principles were applied only in the small communities they formed. Schaff notices: “Information concerning the Anabaptists is largely derived from prejudiced and deficient sources” (Ibid.). The greatest host

of historical sources comes from their enemies, either from the Catholics or from the Protestants. These did not hesitate to bring accusations against them of the most horrible and monstrous crimes, calumny being considered as being part of the arsenal of the “man of God.” Franklin Littell says: “...the writings and records of the movement were successfully suppressed, whereas the polemics of their enemies circulated widely and were early translated into various languages (including English)” (*The Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 148).

For a long time historians built an image of the Anabaptists using the materials provided by their greatest enemies. Only their followers and few of those outside their circles did not consider them the yeast of society, devilish men, arch-enemies of Christ and of the social order.

In any age, those who identified themselves with the Anabaptists longed for their acquittal. C.H. Spurgeon hoped that “The time will probably arrive when history will be re-written, and the maligned Baptists of Holland and Germany will be acquitted of all complicity with the ravings of the insane fanatics, and it will be proved that they were the advanced-guard of the army of religious liberty, men who lived before their times, but whose influence might have saved the world centuries of floundering in the bog of semi-popery, if they had been allowed fair play” (Cook, *The Story of the Baptists*, p. 56) .

The times Spurgeon longed for have already started, but most of their successors are not interested anymore in their history.

The Anabaptists and the Radical Reformation

By their origin and particularities, the Anabaptists distinguished themselves both from Catholics and Protestants. They formed a distinct movement that did not identify with any of these parties, remaining always separate and independent from them. “From all sides we are coming to recognize in the Radical Reformation a major expression of the religious movement of the sixteenth century. It is one that is as distinctive as Lutheranism, Calvinism and Anglicanism, and is perhaps comparably significant in the rise of modern Christianity” (Williams, *Spiritualist and Anabaptist Writers*, p. 19).

The Anabaptist movement is a part of what historians call “*the left wing of the Reformation*” or the “*Radical Reformation*.” This wing encircled a broad variety of parties and ideas. There was little or no cooperation but rather controversy between these parties.

Henry Bullinger, the assistant of Zwingli, tried to distinguish them, suggesting the existence of thirteen different parties (see Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. 1, p. 87), but the number of these parties was even greater. Sebastian Franck, another contemporary, noted the variety of thought among the radicals: “...it appears to me that there are not two to be found who agree with each other in all points” (Ibid.).

Mosheim had the same opinion, writing his *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*:

“Whether the origin of this discordant sect which caused such mischief in both the civil and religious community, is to be sought for in Switzerland or in Holland or Germany, or in some other country is not important to know and is impossible fully to determine. In my opinion this only can be affirmed, that at one and the same time – that is not long after the commencement of the Reformation by Luther – there arose men of this sort in several different countries. This may be inferred from the fact that nearly all the first leaders of any note among the Anabaptists were founders of distinct sects. For though all these reformers of the church, or rather these projectors of new churches, are called Anabaptists, because they all denied that infants were proper subjects for baptism, and solemnly baptized over again those who have been baptized in infancy, yet from the very beginning, just as at the present day, they were split into various parties which disagreed and disputed about points of no small importance” (p. 686).

Philip Schaff, one of the chief figures in ecclesiastical history, states: “We must carefully distinguish the better class of Baptists and the Mennonites from the restless revolutionary radicals and fanatics, like Carlstadt, Muenzer, and the leaders of the Muenster tragedy” (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII., p. 396).

Fritz Blanke, in *Anabaptism and the Reformation*, says: “Beside the main channel of the Reformation there flowed three other streams: Anabaptism, spiritualism and anti-Trinitarianism. Although there were transitions and borderline phenomena between these three streams, they can nevertheless be held as essentially different. Anabaptism in turn can be divided into four branches: the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterian Brethren in Moravia; the Melchiorites, notorious for their apocalyptic kingdom in Munster, 1534-35; and the Mennonites” (Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, p. 57).

More recently, George Williams made one of the most thorough cataloguing of the different parties that formed together “*the left wing of the Reformation.*” “Common to all participants in the Radical Reformation were disappointment in the moral aspects of territorial Protestantism, as articulated by Luther and Zwingli, and forthright disavowal of several of its doctrines and institutions. Among the dissidents in the Radical Reformation, there are three main groupings: the Anabaptists proper, the Spiritualists and the Evangelical Rationalists” (Ibid., p. 20).

The Evangelical Rationalists were in their greatest part unitarians (anti-trinitarians). They were numerous in Poland and Transylvania, where they adopted socinianism in the last half of the sixteenth century. Their most prominent representatives were Michael Servetus, Faustus and Laelius Socinus and, in Calvin’s Geneva, Castellius and Crellius: some of the most ardent defenders of religious liberty.

The Spiritualists were named thusly because they believed in the immediate inspiration of the Spirit. They stressed the “*inner word*,” considering it superior to the written Scriptures. They aimed for the creation of a new church, composed of believers, but a return to the New Testament model of a church they considered unnecessary. They rejected baptism in general, just like the other sacraments. They opposed the association of the Church with the civil powers. They were nicknamed “*Schwärmer*,” i.e. enthusiasts, fanatics.

Williams identifies three great camps among the Spiritualists: the Rationalists (Sebastian Franck is the most representative); evangelicals (like Caspar Schwenckfeld) and the revolutionaries (Thomas Munzer, Andreas Carlstadt – Luther's former associate). The Revolutionaries preached the imminent end of the social order and the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. Munzer became the religious leader of the Peasants' War (1524-1525), trying to establish by the sword the peaceful Kingdom of Christ.

The Anabaptists, in their turn, were classified by Williams in three great parties: evangelical, contemplative and revolutionaries. All of them longed for a spiritual church. All baptized only adults. All struggled for religious liberty. All practiced "discipleship," the following of Christ. Nevertheless, the three parties differed one from each other in important points, and the cooperation between them was scarce and limited.

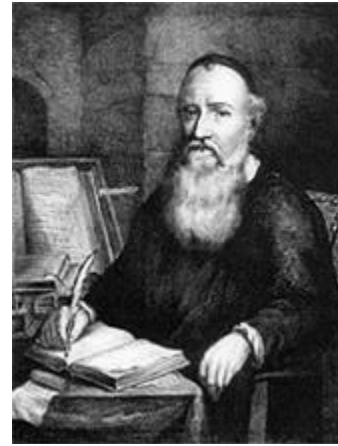
The Evangelicals represented the main stream of Anabaptism. Among their leaders, the most renowned were: in the Swiss cantons – Conrad Grebel (ca. 1498-1526); Felix Manz (ca. 1498-1527); Georg Blaurock (ca. 1492-1529); in the southern German provinces, Austria and Moravia – Michael Sattler (ca. 1490-1527); Wilhelm Reublin (dead after 1559); Balthasar Hubmaier (1480?-1528); Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556); in the Netherlands – Menno Simons (1496-1561); Dietrich (Dirk) (1504-1568) and Obbe (ca. 1500-1568) Philips, in the first part of his ministry. They were characterized by high moral standards, and were peaceful and prosperous. They thought that every individual should be free to believe according to the dictates of his conscience, and believed in a church composed of true believers, separated from the state and from the world of unbelievers. They stood against the use of weapons and refused to give oaths or to serve as magistrates, but they subjected themselves to civil authorities. From the main body of the Evangelical Anabaptists sprung the Hutterites led by Jacob Hutter, who preached communitarianism (the common possession of all the goods of the community).



**Balthasar Hubmaier
Blaurock**



Conrad Grebel



Menno Simons

George

The Contemplative Anabaptists were those who, like the Spiritualists, emphasized the illumination of the Spirit. They regarded the “*inner word*” and the letter of the Scriptures as the two scales of the same balance. Their prominent representatives were Hans Denck (ca. 1500-1527) (for a time he was the leader of the Evangelical Anabaptists in Augsburg); Hans Hut (d. 1527) (in his last years, however, he labored among the Evangelical Anabaptists); Ludwig Hatzer (1500-1529); Adam Pastor (died between 1560-70). Denck and Hatzer collaborated in the translation of the major prophets from Hebrew into the German language, five years prior to Luther’s translation. The death of Denck in exile and the martyrdom of Hatzer stopped the translation of the whole Old Testament.

The Revolutionary Anabaptists were those who insisted on the establishment of Christ’s theocracy on earth. They based their doctrine on the Old Testament prophecies and on their own “divine inspiration.” Their leaders, Melchior Hoffman and Jan Matthijs, considered themselves to be the

two prophets of the book of Revelation. Matthijs predicted the coming of the apocalypse and of the Kingdom, whose capital would be the German city of Muenster. After they successfully took over the control of the city council and cast out the opposition (1534) in anticipation of the coming of Messiah, Matthijs and his successor, Jan Bockhold of Leyden, lead the city (besieged by episcopal and princely troops) toward gross abuses, polygamy included. After the tragic end of Muenster's disorders (June, 1535), both the Catholics and the Protestants were quick to identify all the Anabaptists with that group of fanatics. The result was a terrible wave of persecution, after which many thousands of innocent Anabaptists fell prey to the sword of the executioner or to the flames of the stake.

The vast differences in doctrine and practice that existed among the parties gathered under the flag of the Radical Reformation were not left unknown to the Protestant and Catholic authorities. Their identification of all the Anabaptists with a fanatic and revolutionary minority was deliberate (this custom was old among the Catholics). Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and the other Reformers cannot be acquitted for their calumnies that brought repeated waves of persecutions and executions upon innocent Anabaptists who condemned and abhorred those abuses as much as the Reformers. "Yet the major Protestant Reformers and their associates were the bitterest foes and persecutors of the Anabaptists; and Protestant scholars and polemicists, beginning with Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Phillip Melancton, John Calvin and Henry Bullinger, drew and redrew a composite portrait of them as fanatics and revolutionaries" (Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 26).

Variety was the label of the century – and not only among the Radicals. The Catholic party was divided. Many opposed the excommunication of Luther and expressed similar sentiments. More voices, some even from the papal throne, asserted the need for a moral reformation. Humanism, which flirted with pagan philosophy, tended toward a rejection of the superstitions and "mysteries" of the Church. The Cistercians stirred trouble, pushing for the laymen to have access to the wine in the Eucharist.

There was no more unity in the Protestant camp either. A motley crowd of varied interests gathered under the flag of Luther. Hutten, Sickingen and Rubianus were pushed by nationalist emancipation, not by religious sentiment. Some princes supported him because they hated to see German gold draining toward Rome. The peasants and the burgers saw in Luther the man who would change the social and economic order by putting an end to feudalism.

The Swiss Reformation did not at first know more unity of thought. Fritz Blanke says: "In 1523-24 Zwingli himself distinguished three different groups within the population. There were people in Zurich (city and canton), he said, who were protestant out of hatred toward Catholicism. There was the category (still extant) of 'negative Protestants,' who are Protestant because they under no conditions wish to be Catholics. The second group is made up of libertinistic Protestants, who see in the Gospel nothing but an opportunity to lead a looser life. But there is also a third circle: those who 'work in the word of God,' who seek to live according to the word of God and to penetrate ever deeper into the Holy Scriptures. This last group is Zwingli's 'staff,' the narrow circle of his collaborators" (Hershberger, *Ibid.*, p. 58, 59).

The Evangelical Anabaptists are the predecessors of the Baptists, Mennonites and Hutterites. Therefore, keeping in mind the differences between all the parties classed as

“Anabaptists,” we will concentrate our efforts to demonstrate that the Evangelical Anabaptists did not identify themselves with the Protestant camp, having a different origin as well as different doctrines and practices. From this point forward, we shall employ the term “Anabaptist” not in its general sense, but, if no mention is made, in the sense of “Evangelical Anabaptists.”

What is the Origin of the Anabaptists?

Surprisingly enough, no historian can give a sure and definite answer to this question. There are two schools of thought that postulate two theories. The first states that Anabaptism was a “son” of the Reformation and a constitutive part of it. The movement should be analyzed in Reformation context, since it had no connection with the medieval dissident groups, even though they had similar doctrines and practices. The main arguments of this theory are: 1. There is no clear historical data that would confirm the descent of the Anabaptists from the Waldenses, the Bohemian Brethren and other such parties. 2. Most of the Anabaptist leaders came from Catholicism to Anabaptism via Protestantism. 3. Anabaptism spread successfully only in the territories where Protestantism gained the upper hand (this argument is brought by Fritz Blanke in *Anabaptism and the Reformation*). 4. There were doctrinal and practical differences between the Waldenses of Reformation times and the Anabaptists, and the former united with the Reformation party in 1532, not with the Anabaptists. Some of the most representative figures of this school, with some differences among them, are Bender, Littell, Estep, Blanke, Zijpp.

The second theory states that the Anabaptists are the heirs of the medieval evangelical groups. Some of the most important representatives of this school are the historians Keller, Vedder, Christian, Jarrel and Verduin. The absence of undeniable evidence that points to a direct descent from the medieval groups is admitted, but the following aspects are found to give enough evidence for an origin older than 1517 (the beginning of the Reformation):

1. All historians admit that Anabaptism started at once in Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands and other parts of Europe, apparently with no connection between these groups. Schaff says: “The Radical opinions spread with great rapidity, or rose simultaneously, in Berne, Basle, St. Gall, Appenzell, all along the Upper Rhine, in South Germany, and Austria” (Ibid., vol. VIII, p. 58).

Their extraordinary growth cannot be explained unless we admit a previously prepared material. Henry Vedder says: “The seemingly sudden appearance of the Anabaptists and their rapid growth in Germany is a remarkable phenomenon – one of the strangest things in history if we refuse to look below the surface. Some historians insist that the Anabaptists had no previous existence; that it is in vain to look back of the first mention of them for their origin. But this is to say that an event occurred without an adequate cause. No sect or party in the history of the world ever made such an extraordinary growth as the Anabaptists made during the early years of the Reformation unless it had a previous history” (*A Short History of the Baptists*, p. 146, 147).

2. The beginning of Anabaptism cannot be attributed to one leader, not even to a group. The Protestant churches can immediately identify the person who founded them. Mosheim declares: “The origin of that sect who, from their repetition of baptism received in other communities, are called Anabaptists, but who are also denominated Mennonites... is involved in much obscurity [another translation reads: “is hidden in the remote depths of antiquity]. For they suddenly started up in various countries of Europe under the influence of leaders of dissimilar characters and views...” (Ibid., p. 384, 385).

3. Their specific doctrines are not new. Schaff says: “The Anabaptists did not invent their rejection of infant baptism, for there have always been parties in the Church which were antipedobaptists” (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, vol. I, p. 370). The translator of Mosheim’s *Institutes* says: “Neither Menno nor the first Anabaptists had such disciplined intellects as to be able thus systematically to link together their thoughts. Their tenets had been advanced long before the Reformation by the Cathari, the Albigenses, and the Waldenses, as also by the Hussites. This can be shown by unquestionable documents, from the records of the Inquisition and from Confessions; and Mosheim himself maintains the fact in sec. 2 of this chapter. Those sects were indeed oppressed but not exterminated. Adherents to their tenets were dispersed everywhere in Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia and Moravia; and they were emboldened by the Reformation to stand forth openly, to form a closer union among themselves and to make proselytes to their tenets. From them sprang the Anabaptists, whose teachers were men for the most part without learning, who understood the Scriptures according to the letter and, applied the words of the Bible without philosophical deductions, according to their perverse mode of interpretation, to their peculiar doctrines concerning the church, anabaptism, wars, capital punishments, oaths, & c. Even their doctrine concerning magistrates they derived from Luke xxii:25 and 1 Corinth. vi.1, and the manner in which they were treated by the magistrates may have had a considerable influence on their doctrine respecting them” (Ibid., p. 694, note).

Leonard Verduin says: “What erupted at the Second Front [Verduin calls the struggle between the Reformers and the Catholics the First Front of the battle of the Protestants, and their struggle against the Anabaptists the Second Front] was a resurgence of those tendencies and opinions that had for centuries already existed over against the medieval order; it was connected with ancient circles in which, in spite of the persecutions, a body of ancient opinions and convictions was still alive. It was not a thing arising without deeper root out of the events that began in 1517” (*The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, p. 14). “The dissent against the medieval order was in 1517 already a millennium old and extremely widespread” (Ibid., p. 15). “The Protestant Left was the heir of the medieval underworld. It had categories of thought and a vocabulary emerging from late medieval heresies..., a vocabulary that pre-existed the Reformation and had its own power and momentum, quite apart from Luther” (Ibid, p. 35-36). “The sources single out no man as the originator of the sixteenth century rebaptism... How so radical a practice sprang up anonymously is passing strange – if it is assumed, as the vogue is, that Anabaptism was simply the product of the sixteenth century.

But this silence as to who must be credited with the idea becomes wholly explicable once it is realized that what was known as Anabaptism in Reformation times was in no sense a new thing...No one is credited with having invented the Anabaptism of the sixteenth century for the

sufficient reason that no one did” (Ibid., p. 189). “Rebaptizing is as old as Constantinianism [this is the name by which Verduin calls the doctrine of the union of the Church and State]” (Ibid, p.190).

Some argue that the Anabaptist leaders come from Protestantism, but this is not true of all. Leaders like Grebel, Manz, Blaurock or Hubmaier came indeed to the Protestant camp first, and after that they became Anabaptists, but there were some leaders that came to the Anabaptists from the Waldenses. Among them were Hans Hoch, Leonard Meister and others (see van Braght, *Martyr's Mirror*, p. 413).

Some argue that Anabaptism developed itself only in the territories in which Protestantism gained the upper hand, making Anabaptism an offshoot of Protestantism. But the Anabaptists were widely spread in several Catholic controlled territories, where Protestantism met with little success (Austria is an example). It should also be noted that Protestantism won the struggle against Catholicism in the territories where the medieval "heresy" (Waldenses and other similar groups) was largely spread and accepted, weakening the papal authority. The Anabaptist movement was also successful in the areas where the medieval "heresy" was common, and in most cases they owe their success to their medieval brethren, and not to the Protestants.

John T. Christian states: “In those places where the Waldenses flourished there the Baptists set deep root. This statement holds good from country to country, and from city to city.” (Ibid., p. 89). Will Durant says: “At first, the Anabaptists manifested themselves in Switzerland, where the peaceful Christianity of the Waldenses of Southern France or that of the Beghards from the Low Countries may have slipped in” (Durant, *Civilization and its Discontents* [The Story of Civilization], vol. 18, p. 85, translated from Romanian).

Mosheim, the Lutheran historian declares: “In the first place, I believe the Mennonites are not altogether in the wrong, when they boast of a descent from those Waldensians, Petrobrusians, and others who are usually styled the Witnesses of truth before Luther. Prior to the age of Luther, there lay concealed in almost every country of Europe, but especially in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, very many persons in whose minds was deeply rooted that principle which the Waldensians, the Wickliffites, and the Hussites maintained, some more covertly and others more openly...” (Ibid., p. 685).

Some argue that the Anabaptists could not be the heirs of the Waldenses because of the doctrinal differences between these two parties. Moreover, they point out, the Waldenses united with the Swiss Reformers and not with the Anabaptists. It should be noted that only the Piedmontese Waldenses accepted the pact with the Reformers, and not even all of them, for the older generation of *barbs* [pastors] refused the compromise, considering it an act of treason; sending delegations to their brethren in Strassburg, Bohemia and Moravia (see Verduin, Ibid., p. 179). The Picards [one of the general names by which the Waldenses outside the valleys of Piedmont were known], the Bohemian Brethren and the Hussites never united with the Reformation.

The Reformers themselves admitted the ancient and distinct origin of the Anabaptists. Christian quotes Zwingli as saying: “The institution of Anabaptism is no novelty, but for three hundred years

has caused great disturbance in the Church and has acquired such strength that the attempt in this age to contend with it appears futile for a time” (Christian, Ibid., vol. I, p. 86).

Luther accuses them, saying: “In our times the doctrine of the Gospel, reestablished and cleansed, has drawn to it and gained many who in earlier times had been suppressed by the tyranny of Antichrist, the Pope; however, there have forthwith gone out from us Wiedertauffer, Sacramentschwärmer und andere Rotengeister [Anabaptists, fanatics regarding the sacraments, and other faction makers]... for they were not of us even though for a while they walked with us” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 18).

Indeed, the separatist groups saluted the action of the Augustinian monk and hoped for a great revival. *Sola Scriptura* were the words that attracted them and caused them to support Luther. But when he compromised with the secular power, these groups ceased to support him and condemned him for stopping half way to a thorough Reformation.

Robert Barclay, who was a Quaker, said about the the Anabaptists: “As we shall afterwards shew, the rise of the "Anabaptists" took place long prior to the formation of the Church of England, and there are also reasons for believing that on the continent of Europe small hidden Christian societies, who have held many of the opinions of the "Anabaptists," have existed from the times of the Apostles. In the sense of the direct transmission of Divine Truth, and the true nature of spiritual religion, it seems probable that these Churches have a lineage or succession more ancient than that of the Roman Church” (*Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, p. 11, 12).

The Anabaptists claimed an origin more ancient than that of the Protestants. The Reformers and the Catholics also admitted it. Some of the greatest historians recognized a connection between the sixteenth century Anabaptism and the medieval dissenters. This is the historic Baptist position because the Baptists always claimed that their historical route never intersected with the Catholic or the Protestant one.

The Specific Doctrines of the Anabaptists, Compared with their Catholic and Protestant Counterparts

The differences between these three camps are most clearly seen on doctrinal grounds. We shall attempt to present the main theological differences (together with their practical applications) between the Catholic, the Protestant and the Anabaptist camps.

1. The Authority of the Scriptures

The fundamental difference between the Anabaptists and all the other parties is found in the way the Anabaptists perceived the Scriptures. This concept is the cause of all the other differences between the Anabaptists, Protestants and Catholics that sprang forth later. This can be noticed when observing that in the progress of some from Catholicism to Protestantism and then Anabaptism, the first doctrine they believed, the doctrine that caused their departure from papacy, was that of the sufficiency of the Scriptures in matters of faith and practice.

The Catholic Church did not consider the Bible as normative for their faith and practice. Her dogmas were founded on Tradition and on the decrees of the Councils and of the pope (see Neander, *History of Christian Dogmas*, Vol. II, p. 623, 624). Since these dogmas found themselves in contradiction with the letter of the Scripture, the papacy tried to hide the Bible away from the people. The Bible was not translated into the common languages, and the laymen were forbidden to read it. The average priests were ignorant of it. Menno Simons said that while in the Catholic priesthood, he avoided reading the Bible, being afraid it would lead him into error. “The Bible is like soft wax”, said Glapion, the confessor of Carol V to Spalatin, the chaplain of elector Frederic, warning that no system of faith could be built, without risks, entirely on the Bible” (Durant, *Ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 38 – translated from Romanian).

The initial position of the Protestants was similar with that of the Anabaptists. They considered the Scriptures as sufficient and normative for faith and practice. When Martin Luther stood before the imperial Diet at Worms, he requested that he be tried with the Scriptures, consenting to recant everything he wrote that was proven to be not in conformity with the Scriptures. Johann Eck, the Catholic spokesman before the Diet answered to him:

“Martin, your request to be tried after the Scriptures is that of all the heretics. You do nothing but to repeat the errors of Wyclif and Huss. How can you claim that you are the only one who understands the meaning of the Scriptures? Do you think your judgement to be above that of so many illustrious men and can you claim to know more than they? You have no right to question the holy faith ordained by Christ, the perfect lawgiver, spread in the whole world by the apostles, sealed with the blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the holy councils, defined by the Church... and about which the pope and the king forbid us to talk, because such a discussion will go nowhere. I ask you, Martin, and you answer honestly and frankly, do you retract or not your writings and the mistakes they contain?” (Durant, *Ibid.*, p. 41 – translated from Romanian).

Luther answered: “Only if I will be persuaded to do it by the testimony of the Scriptures or by the reason of evidence (for I do not believe either in the pope, or in councils: it is certain that they erred too often and contradicted themselves), otherwise I am bound by the texts I brought; my conscience is shut in the words of God. To recant anything I cannot and do not want to do. For acting against your conscience is dangerous and not honest. So help me God. Amen!” (Febvre, *Martin Luther, un destin*, p. 131 – translated from Romanian).

In 1521, in Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli, supported by the cantonal council, requested of the priests from that jurisdiction that they preach nothing that was not found in the Holy Scriptures (see Durant, *Ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 99). Among the theses defended by Zwingli in the dispute held on

January 25th 1523 against the Catholics, there were the following: “1. All who say that the gospel is nothing without the confirmation of the Church make a mistake and blaspheme God; 15. For in believing the gospel we are saved and in believing not we are condemned, for all truth is clearly contained in it; 24. Christians are not obligated to do works that God has commanded...” (Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, p. 40-42).

Sola Scriptura! Only the Scripture! This was the cry of the Reformers. They always appealed to it in the disputations against the Catholics. But when they found themselves before a major decision, that of keeping or forsaking Tradition, the Reformers wavered. Their cry decreased in intensity. The Reformers were backed in a corner. They were still bound by Tradition. Their vision of church and society was not the one of the ante-nicean but that of post-nicean Christianity. They were not prepared to take their Reformation beyond Emperor Constantine. It was then that Anabaptism raised its voice, appealing to Scriptures alone and accusing the Reformers of inconsistency, of stopping half-way to a thorough Reformation. This moment marks a clear separation between the Anabaptists and the Protestants. “Martin Luther broke the pope’s pitcher, observed one Anabaptist, but had kept the pieces in his hands” (Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, p. xvi).

The Protestants were caught between two fronts. Schaff says about the Reformation in Switzerland: “It was placed between the two fires of Romanism and Ultraprotestantism. It was attacked in the front and rear, from without and within, by the Romanists on the ground of tradition, by the Radicals on the ground of the Bible. In some respects the danger from the latter was greater...” (Ibid., vol. 8, p. 56). Zwingli himself confessed that the struggle against the Catholics was but “child’s play” when compared with the struggle against the Anabaptists (Verduin, Ibid., p. 11).

Samuel Haskell remarks: “Luther, Zwingli and others, in combating papal corruptions, claimed to stand solely upon the word of God; but their attempt to apply this principle was only partial. It was said of them at the time, with cutting truth and justice, that, when arguing against the papists, they took the Baptist position; but when arguing against the Baptists, they went over to the Romish position (Heroes and Hierarchs, p. 100, 101).

The Anabaptists were quick to remind the Reformers of their initial “*Sola Scriptura*” position. In their attempt to prove that they did not abandon this position and desperately seeking a scriptural warrant for their doctrines, the Reformers came in numerous occasions to strange and flexible hermeneutics that could be defended only with great difficulty. Most of the Reformers were using the covenants and the theocracy of the Old Testament, which allowed them to make analogies with their own conception of the church and society. But in their attempt to formulate a consistent doctrinal system, the Reformers came to stress more and more tradition, condemning what they boldly affirmed at first.

The Anabaptists were true “Biblicists.” For them, the Scriptures were the final standard of faith and practice. Depending on the way that a person regarded the Scriptures they considered him to be a true Christian or just a nominal one. Grebel wrote the following to Muentzer: “Just as our forebearers fell away from the true God and from the one, true, common, divine Word, from the divine institutions, from Christian love and life and lived without God’s law and gospel in human,

useless, unchristian customs and ceremonies, and expected to attain salvation therein, yet fell far short of it, as the evangelical preachers have declared, and to some extent are still declaring, so today too, every man wants to be saved by superficial faith, without fruits of faith, without baptism of trial and probation, without love and hope, without right Christian practices, and wants to persist in all the old manner of personal vices, and in the common ritualistic and anti-Christian customs of baptism and of the Lord's Supper, in disrespect for the divine Word and in respect for the word of the pope and of the anti-papal preachers, which yet is not equal to the divine Word, nor in harmony with it (Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 74). "We must not follow our notions; we must add nothing to the word and take nothing from it" (p. 76). "It is much better that a few might be rightly taught by the Word of God, believing and walking aright in virtues and practices, than that many believe falsely and deceitfully through adulterated doctrine" (p. 77).

For the Anabaptists, the New Testament was normative. The prescriptions of the New Testament were not only recommendable, desirable, yet optional, but both obligatory and possible. They rejected Protestant covenant theology and regarded the Old Testament just as a shadow of the New. They viewed the revelation of the Word to be progressive. In the Bern disputation (1538), the Anabaptists declared: "We believe in and consider ourselves under the authority of the Old Testament, in so far as it is a testimony for Christ; in so far as Jesus did not abolish it; and in so far as it serves the purpose of Christian living. We believe in and consider ourselves under the authority of the Law in so far as it does not contradict the new law, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe in and consider ourselves under the authority of the prophets in so far as they proclaim Christ" (Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 141).

Even in 1523, in the Zurich disputation, Balthasar Hubmaier, before becoming an Anabaptist, stated: "Wherefore also, those errors that have sprung up concerning images and the mass should be examined and corrected by the sole rule of the word of God. Moreover, whatever shall be founded on this shall endure forever; for the word of God is eternal and immortal" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 141). Challenging Eck, his former mentor, to a disputation, one of the articles Hubmaier announced to defend was that "...in disagreement regarding the faith, the Scripture is the only standard" (*Ibid.*).

The Anabaptists considered the simple letter of the Bible to be normative both for individual life and for the life of the church. This view of the authority of the Scriptures was the cause of all the other doctrinal and practical stands we shall study.

2. The Doctrine of Salvation

The second great doctrine that brought the Anabaptists in direct conflict with the Catholics and with the Protestants was the doctrine of salvation.

Catholicism asserted that salvation was contained in the Church and administered to all the members through the use of sacraments, of which infant baptism was the first. The faith, in the

Catholic view, was intellectual consent to the dogmas formulated by the Church. To the sentiment of guilt due to sin, the Catholic theology answered by the doctrines of confession of sin and penance. Sinners could have access to righteousness and paradise because of the surplus of merit provided by Jesus and the saints: this surplus having been given to the Church for administration. The Church administered this surplus to those who fulfilled their duties toward her. Man could, therefore, obtain salvation by his works.

Anyone who considers the Scriptures as normative, will come to question salvation by sacraments, by works. So did Luther. The reading of the Scriptures led him to affirm salvation by faith, not by works, by grace, not by merit, as the Catholic Church claimed. *Sola fide! Sola gratia!* Only faith! Only grace! – cried he. Salvation comes by grace! Justification is by faith! Luther's theology stressed liberation from guilt. Faith was regarded in its traditional sense, that of intellectual consent to the work of the historic Christ, but to this sense Luther added the sense of *fide*, total trust on God. Good works, a changed life, were desirable consequences of a Christian's experience, but their absence did not mean the lack of salvation.

Luther's theology contains a major inconsistency, eliminated by the other Reformers. He regarded infant baptism as a saving sacrament, while he affirmed salvation by faith. Estep remarks that "...in Lutheranism there has always been an irreconcilable contradiction between the theology of justification and the theological support of infant baptism" (Estep, p. 145).

For Zwingli, too, faith – a gift from God – could exist without works. He said: "Against those who unthinkingly accept the idea that signs confirm faith we may oppose the fact of infant baptism, for baptism cannot confirm faith in infants because infants are not able to believe" (Adams, Baptists, Thorough Reformers, p. 139).

The Anabaptists recognized salvation by grace, by faith, but for them faith was not merely an intellectual consent of certain truths, but the spring of a new life in Christ, following the new birth of the Spirit. In their view, there could be no faith without the new birth – that total transformation by which the man became pre-disposed to holiness, hating sin. "It was this constitutive element [the necessity of the new birth] that distinguished the Anabaptists from both the Roman Catholic 'work righteousness' and Lutheran *sola fides*" (Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 84).

Hubmaier, in his articles of faith from Waldshut, makes the distinction between Luther's theoretical faith and the practical faith of the Anabaptists.

"1. Faith alone makes us holy before God. 2. This faith is the acknowledgment of the mercy of God which he has shown us in the offering of his only begotten son. This excludes all sham Christians, who have nothing more than an historical faith in God. 3. Such faith cannot remain passive but must break out (*aussbrechen*) to God in thanksgiving and to mankind in all kinds of works of brotherly love. Hence all vain religious acts, such as candles, palm branches, and holy water will be rejected" (Estep, Ibid., p. 145).

For the Anabaptists, the faith that brings salvation was a living faith, one that produced works and could be tried by them. This faith did not provide only justification, as for the Protestants, but holiness.

3. The Doctrine of Discipleship

The different opinions of the three camps, Catholic, Protestant and Anabaptist regarding the authority of the Scriptures lead to different perceptions of the essence of faith and its role in salvation. These different perceptions resulted in different ways of living.

The Church of Rome preached the virtue of good works, but did not practice them. The laymen were urged to good works and virtuous life, but the Church also offered sinners alternative means to purchase or earn the right of paradise.

Luther and the other Reformers replaced good works for meriting salvation with faith. Faith was the epicenter of Protestant theology. Luther went so far that he refused to recognize the Epistle of James as inspired, calling it an “epistle of straw” because it insisted on a faith validated by works. But the combination of the doctrine of man’s inability to do something for his own salvation with the doctrine of a theoretical saving faith had unhappy consequences and resulted in the moral failure of Protestantism. “Provided one has faith, adultery is no sin,” said Luther in his famous sermon on marriage (Jarrel, Baptist Church Perpetuity, p. 228).

Luther wrote to Melachton from Wartburg, in a letter dated August 1st, 1521: “Come on, accept it! Be a sinner! And don’t sin half way: sin straightforwardly, all the way! Only half sins? No, but real, serious, enormous sins!” (Febvre, Ibid., p. 112 – translated from Romanian). In 1530, he wrote to Weller: There are moments in which you must drink one extra glass and amuse yourself, shortly, to commit some sin out of hatred and contempt toward the devil, not to give him enough room to make, for minuscule follies, use of your conscience... So, if the devil comes before you and tells you: ‘Do not drink!’ answer him immediately: ‘Nay, I will drink because you don’t allow me, and I’ll drink heavily!’ You must always do that which Satan forbids you!” And he adds: “What other reason do you think I have to drink more and more from my pure wine, to speak more and more words without restraint and to go more and more often to rich tables? To scorn the devil and to upset him, as he scorned me and upset me awhile back!” “Oh, if I could finally imagine an enormous sin to disappoint the devil and to make him understand for good that I do not recognize any sin and my conscience does not condemn me for any!” (Ibid, p. 193 – translated from Romanian).

The message of Luther is shocking, but even if we interpret these statements as mere exaggeration, after his well known custom, an analysis of the effect of his sermons among the Protestant population will show that these things were not taken figuratively by them, but were practiced literally. The doctrine of the bondage of the will, subjected to the sinful nature, the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of salvation by a historical or theoretical faith were associated in such a manner in the mind of the Protestant that he found in them only an excuse to sin. This dangerous combination triggered the assault of the Anabaptists against Protestant ethics.

Hans Denck wrote: “On the one hand, some say that they have freedom of the will. Yet they are unwilling to do even the smallest thing to please God. On the other hand, there are those who say that [they] do not have free will because they see they cannot do what is right. Yet they choose not to allow the Word [that is, the inner Word, in Denck’s understanding] to work in them (Matthew 23).

In themselves, both of these views are true, but they are both false also. For both speak of the human being as if there were no other foundation than in himself. One is boastful and arrogant about human freedom, while the other seeks only excuses – ‘God is finally responsible.’

The first view, that the will is free, is an obviously brazen and foolish claim which gives no place for the fear of God. It arrogantly assumes I can do whatever I want to do (James 4; Proverbs 12, 28). The second view is a kind of sham humility and craftiness that would have us believe that honor is being given to God and not to oneself. Yet it certainly is no denial of self – in fact, it increases selfishness. This is in the eyes of God the highest form of arrogance and pride” (Liechty, Ibid., p. 129-130).

Denck further writes: “Therefore, the whole of nominal Christendom (*Christenheit*) is full of adulterers, misers, drunkards, and more of the same” (Williams, Ibid., p. 106). “The Word of God is already with you before you seek it; gives to you before you ask; opens up for you before you knock. No one comes to himself to Christ except the Father draw him, which he truly does, of course, according to his goodness. Whoever on his own initiative, however, undrawn, wishes to come on his own, presumes to give God something he has not received from him. He wishes to be deserving from God in order he need not thank him for his grace... Therefore, no one can vaunt himself before God for his work or his faith, for whoever glorifies within himself has in himself sufficient satisfaction and is one of the rich whom God sends empty away. The poisoned selffulness of the flesh which man has taken on himself against God and without God ought and must be mortified. Where this has begun in a person and he ascribes to himself, such a one steals from God his honor and slurps up the poison and the devil’s milk and, more than that, all on his own wishes to be something against God – which he is not. But whoever does not want to endure this work of mortification but prefers to practice the works of darkness will not be able to excuse himself before any creature and much less before God” (Ibid, p. 107, 108).

Hubmaier said: “It is under just the cloak of these aforementioned half-truths [1. ‘We believe. Faith saves us. 2. We cannot do anything good, God works in us the willing and doing, we have no free will’] that all sorts of wickedness, unfaithfulness, and unrighteousness have completely gotten the upper hand. For as all histories demonstrate, the world is worse now (to God be our lament) than it was a thousand years ago. All this takes place, sad to say, under the appearance of the gospel. For as soon as one says to them it is written (Ps. 37:27): Depart from evil and do good – immediately they answer: ‘We cannot do anything good; all things occur by the determination of God and of necessity’ – meaning thereby that it is allowed them to sin. If one says further: It is written (John 5:29; 15:6; Matt. 25:41) that they who do evil will go to eternal fire, immediately they find a girdle of fig leaves to cover their crimes and say: ‘Faith alone saves us, and not our works.’ Indeed, I have heard from many people that for a long time they have not prayed,

nor fasted, nor given alms because their priests tell how their works are of no avail before God and therefore they at once let them go” (Ibid., p. 115).

Hans Hut asserted: “whoever leans on them [on the Reformers] will be misled, for their doctrine is nothing but faith and goes no farther... Oh, how lamentably do they in our times mislead the whole world... with their false and trumped up faith, a faith from which no moral improvement follows” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 105). Michael Sattler condemned the Reformers for the same things, saying that they “throw works without faith so far to one side that they erect a faith without works” (Ibid.).

In no other respect were the Anabaptists more prominent than in this practical aspect. Philip of Hesse, on whose domains the Anabaptists enjoyed more tolerance than in any other German territory, said: “I verily see more of moral improvement among them than with those that are Lutheran” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 108). So great was the difference between the Anabaptists and all the others that any one who attempted to live a clean life was suspected of being an Anabaptist. Harold Bender, in his famous *Anabaptist Vision*, quotes a positive testimony given by a fierce opponent of the Anabaptists: “And the Roman Catholic theologian, Franz Agricola, in his book of 1582, *Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists*, says:

‘Among the existing heretical sects there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptist. 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’” (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 45).

The Reformers themselves were forced to admit this fact. Capito, the Reformer of Strassburg, testifies that the radicals “guard themselves against the offensive vices which are very common among our people” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 108). The Reformed preachers of Bern noticed: “The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the other churches which in union with us confess Christ; and they avoid the offensive sins that are very common among us” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 109). Luther admits it, but he tries to take it lightly: “Doctrine and life are to be distinguished, the one from the other. With us conduct is as bad as it is with the papists. We don’t oppose them on account of conduct. Hus and Wyclif, who made an issue of conduct, were not aware of this... but to treat of doctrine, that is to really come to grips with things” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 108).

Caspar Schwenckfeld, a follower of Luther who latter became a Spiritualist, said: “I am being maligned, by both preachers and others, with the charge of being Anabaptist, even as all others who lead a true, pious Christian life are now almost everywhere given this name” (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 46-47). “Bullinger himself complained that there are those who in reality are not Anabaptists but have a pronounced averseness to the sensuality and frivolity of the world and therefore reprove sin and vice and are consequently called or misnamed Anabaptists by petulant persons. The great collection of Anabaptist source materials, commonly called the *Täufer-Akten*, now in its third volume, contains a number of specific illustrations of this. In 1562 a certain Caspar Zacher of Wailblingen in Wurttemberg was accused of being an Anabaptist, but the court record reports that since he was an envious man who could not get along with others, and who

often started quarrels, as well as being guilty of swearing and cursing and carrying a weapon, he was not considered to be an Anabaptist. On the other hand in 1570 a certain Hans Jager of Vohringen in Wurttemberg was brought before the court on suspicion of being an Anabaptist primarily because he did not curse but lived an irreproachable life" (Ibid.).

The Anabaptists were dedicated to "*discipleship theology*." For them, the Christian was saved from his sins, not in them. The Christian could fall into sin, but he could not live in it. Whoever lived in sin was considered to be lost, no matter how straight his doctrine was. The guidance of the Spirit was not limited only to guidance in true doctrine, but also in its application in everyday life. Bender says that "The great word of the Anabaptists was not 'faith' as it was with the reformers, but '**following**' (*nachfolge Christi*)" (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 43).

For them, loving the neighbor was the proof of the new birth. Thomas Manz wrote while in prison, in one of his last letters: "Therefore, following Christ in the true way which he himself showed us, his true servants should also hate no one. We have before us this light of life and we rejoice to walk in that way. But whoever is full of hatred and envy, whoever villainously betrays, accuses, beats and quarrels, cannot be a Christian" (Liechty, Ibid., p. 19).

This kind of life attracted the sympathy and the adherence of many. Wenger quotes Sebastian Franck, who wrote as early as 1530: "There arose from the letter of Scripture, independently of the state churches, a new sect which was called Anabaptists... By the good appearance of their sect and their appeal to the letter of Scripture to which they strictly adhered, they drew to themselves many thousand God-fearing hearts who had a zeal for God" (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 175). Harold Bender quotes Franck: "The Anabaptists... soon gained a large following,... drawing many sincere souls who had a zeal for God, for they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble, patient under much suffering; they brake bread with one another as an evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully, and called each other brothers... They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution" (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 46).

The Anabaptists were struggling, like the parties before them, against the moral standard commonly accepted by society/Church ["conductual-averagism," as Verduin called it]. This struggle was one of the reasons they were identified with the Donatists and the Cathars.

The Anabaptists were accused by the Protestants as thinking themselves to be sinless or saints. But they always rejected perfectionism. Menno said: "Think not that we boast of being perfect and without sin. Not at all. As for me, I confess that often my prayers are mixed with sin and my righteousness with unrighteousness" (Verduin, Ibid., p. 103). Hubmaier answers to the same accusation: "But the charge that we boast that we can sin no more after baptism, and such like things, is a monstrous injustice. For we know that both before and after baptism, we are poor and miserable sinners, and if we say we sin not, we are liars, and the truth is not in us" (Estep, Ibid., p. 155).

The following of Christ, His imitation, brought them hatred, contempt, sufferings, persecution, and many times even the tragic end by the hands of the executioner. The experience of the "*bitter Christ*," as they called all these sufferings, was for them a positive proof of true

discipleship. Persecution and martyrdom strengthened their conviction that they are the true flock of Christ, since He prophesied that His followers shall be persecuted. Indeed, many of them died the martyr's death with a prayer, a song or an exhortation for the spectators on their lips, dignified and unmoveable in their decision to follow their Lord to the end.

The three great camps each promoted a "Christianity" that was different not only in appearance, but in essence. Catholicism regards the essence of Christianity the reception of grace by the mediation of a sacramental-sacerdotal institution. Protestantism has as an essence the experiencing of the grace of God in the depth of the heart by faith. For the Anabaptists, the essence of Christianity is the transformation of life by faith, in imitation of Christ. These three concepts could not be fused together.

The person of Jesus Christ, as described in the Scriptures, was taken by the Anabaptists as their moral standard. They regarded the Catholic and Protestant world as fallen into sin and separated from God, being thus a hindrance in their attempt to come as close as possible to their standard. Therefore, trying to persevere unto holiness, the Anabaptists promoted a separation of the believer from the unbelievers. In the Schleithem Confession they declared:

"IV. We are agreed [as follows] on separation: A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; in this manner, simply that we shall not have fellowship with them [the wicked] and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations. This is the way it is: Since all who do not walk in the obedience of faith, and have not united themselves with God so that they wish to do His will, are a great abomination before God, it is not possible for anything to grow or issue from them except abominable things. For truly all creatures are in but two classes, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who [have come] out of the world, God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial; and none can have part with the other" (Noll, Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation, p. 52, 53).

But since they did not believe in an isolation of the individual from society, the doctrine of separation lead them to the greatest "radical" doctrine they preached:

4. The Doctrine of the Church

After the doctrine of the authority of the Scriptures, the doctrine of the church is the second greatest point of difference between the Anabaptists, the Catholics and the Protestants. This particular doctrine distinguishes the Anabaptists proper from the rest of the Radicals.

1. Church membership. All the parties admitted that society could be divided into believers and unbelievers. The disputes started from the attitude of each toward the unbelievers. Should these

be accepted into the membership of the church and then taught, hoping for their improvement? Or should the church be made of believers only? In this point there were only two camps, for the Protestants and the Catholics held the same position.

It was not a matter of importance for the Catholic Church whether a member was virtuous or not, if he fulfilled his duties towards the Church. No change in life was required for membership in the Roman Church, which incorporated members from their birth.

The matter was more delicate for the Protestants, since they tried to build their churches using the Scriptures [We underline “using,” because the Reformers were never devoted to the Scriptures alone, since they were not able to break loose from Tradition. Rather, they used a part of the Scriptures and tried to reconcile it with the Tradition]. The Scriptures showed a church of believers in a world of unbelievers. The Reformers seemed tempted by such a perspective, but they were afraid to adopt such a radical position, since it meant the loss of the support of the authorities and of the population. According to their view, the Church was not ready to exclude unbelievers. Society was not ready to be excluded from the Church. The Reformers chose to retain unbelieving members within their Church ranks. At least for a while, until they would be taught true Christianity, Luther thought. He even had a project according to which the lives of the members were carefully watched, and the names of those who proved to have Christian conduct to be written in a separate registry, these persons being gathered apart from the rest and taught the Scriptures more deeply. *Ecclesiola in ecclesia*, Luther suggested. He was forced to abandon the project, since he did not find enough people to fulfill the conditions.

In contrast, the Anabaptists, who were building a church after the apostolic pattern, claimed that believers only are proper candidates for church membership. The church had to be kept pure and purify itself continually. This difference was one of the causes of the rupture of the ties between the Anabaptists and the Protestants and the migration of many Protestants to the radical camp.

Because of their struggle for purity both at an individual and at a church level, the Anabaptists were accused of being Donatists and Cathars. Justus Menius, Luther’s associate and one of the greatest enemies of the Anabaptists, said about them: “Like the Donatists long ago, they seek to rend the Church because we allow evil men in the Church. They seek to assemble a pure Church and wherever that is undertaken the public order is sure to be overthrown, for a pure Church is not possible, as Christ cautioned often enough – we must therefore put up with them” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 104).

Luther stated: “From the beginning of the Church heretics have maintained that the Church must be holy and without sin. Because they saw that some in the Church were the servants of sin they denied forthwith that the Church was the Church and organized sects... This is the origin of the Donatists and the Cathars... and of the Anabaptists of our times. All these cry out in angry chorus that the true Church is not the Church because they see that sinners and godless folk are mixed in her and they separated from her [...] The Schwärmer, who do not allow tares among them, really bring about that there is no wheat among themselves – by this zeal for only wheat and a pure Church they bring about, by this too great holiness, that they are not even a Church, but just a sect of the devil” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 107). Later, Calvin states the same: “Long ago there were two kinds of heretics, Cathars and Donatists. These, the former as well as the latter, were in the same

phantasy in which the contemporary dreamers are when they seek for a Church in which there is nothing to censure. They cut loose from Christendom so as not to be soiled by the imperfections of others. And what was the outcome? Our Lord confounded them and their understanding so presumptuous. Let this be proof for us all that it is of the devil, who under cover of zeal for perfection inflates us with pride and seduces us by hypocrisy so as to get us to abandon the flock of Christ... For since there is no forgiveness nor any salvation anywhere else, Acts 4:12 [Calvin twists the meaning of this verse which states that there is no salvation outside the person of Jesus, not outside a church]. Therefore even though we should have the appearance of a sanctity more than angelic, if by such a presumption we come to separate ourselves from a Christian society we have become devils” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 102).

The arguments of Luther and Calvin, if taken further on their logical path, will come to bizzare conclusions: if living a life as immaculate as possible is a clear proof that one is lead by the devil, the reciprocal proposition must be true: the more depraved one is, the clearer proof he brings that he is lead by God.

The Anabaptists asserted the opposite in the Schleithem Confession: “From this we should learn that everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than an abomination which we should shun and flee from. By this is meant all Catholic and Protestant works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the oaths sworn in unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God, in accordance with all the unrighteousness which is in the world. From all these things we shall be separated and have no part with them for they are nothing but an abomination, and they are the cause of our being hated before our Christ Jesus, Who has set us free from the slavery of the flesh and fitted us for the service of God through the Spirit Whom He has given us” (Noll, Ibid., p. 53).

The Anabaptists envisioned the true church as being composed of believers only, as serving Christ in sound doctrine and purity of life, watching constantly to purify itself for her Head’s sake.

2. The Nature of the church

The Catholics affirmed that their Church was the only true one, was universal and visible, and the individual could not reach Christ but through the mediation of the Church. Neander says: “The whole Catholic Standpoint rests on this, that the relation of religious consciousness to Christ is made to depend on the mediation effected by the Authority of the Church, and hence the latter was made the grand and fundamental point” (Ibid., p. 684). Since Christ could not be reached apart from the Church, there could be no salvation outside of it; hence the doctrine that stated *extra ecclesia nulla salus* - there is no salvation outside the church.

When Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church, he used the old argument Augustine brought in his debates with the Donatists. Luther claimed the existence of an universal invisible Church, upon which the pope has no power. The Lutheran interpretation of *Ecclesia Catholica* [Universal Church] from the Apostle’s Creed was that the Church was “a community of men that are scattered throughout the World, but who agree with one another in the Gospel, who

have in common the same Christ, and Holy Spirit, and Sacraments, whether they adopt the same or different usages” (Neander, Ibid., p. 686). Zwingli developed the idea even further. He taught that the Church is the “community of men all bound together by one faith and one spirit” (Neander, Ibid., p. 686). He distinguishes between the visible Church, composed of all the nominal believers, and the invisible one, composed of the true believers only. Calvin understands the Church to be composed of all the elect that lived, live or shall live.

In the visible organization of their churches, the Reformers preserved the Catholic formula. They organized the masses into territorial churches, which included all the citizens of those territories [*Volkskirche*]. Their visible churches looked very much like the Catholic Church, except they were not “universal.” In the Protestant states, the administrative frontiers were the same with the religious ones. The Church confounded itself with the State.

There was a difference of opinion among the radicals as well regarding the nature of the church. The Spiritualists Frank and Schwenckfeld saw a purely invisible church, ungathered, spiritual, that had no external rite. Munzer and the revolutionary Anabaptists identified the Church with the Kingdom of Christ and with the secular State. The Anabaptist Hutterites saw the Church and the community as being identical, and they formed closed communities, separated from society. The Evangelical Anabaptists opposed all of the above concepts.

The Anabaptists generally rejected the idea of an “invisible church.” Franklin H. Littell says: “I agree wholeheartedly with Robert Friedmann’s denunciation of the doctrine of ‘the invisible church’ as alien to Anabaptism... This teaching, which is spiritualizing in effect and perhaps in origin, has been from the 16th century to the present day the major underground tunnel by which leaders of established Protestant churches have been able to escape from the position to which their biblical insurgency at first has led them” (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 122, [note]).

Harold Bender writes: “The original Anabaptist movement rejected the idea of an invisible church, which was the invention of Luther holding that the Christian community in any particular place is as visible as the Christian man, and that its Christian character must be ‘in evidence’” (Mennonite Encyclopedia, under *Church, doctrine of*).

In place of the universal invisible church and that of the church of the masses [*Volkskirche*, *Corpus Christianum*], the Anabaptists put the local, visible church, the “gathering of believers” [*Gemeinde*, *Corpus Christi*]. Only those who confessed their faith in Jesus had the right and the honor to be members in His Church. “The emphasis of sixteenth-century Anabaptism was on the New Testament concern for the gathered church of the regenerate” (Estep, Ibid., p. 182).

Such a visible church could be only a voluntary association of believers. The Anabaptists were averse to the usage of force. The idea of forced membership by forced baptism [the Catholics and the Protestants practiced it with the Jews and the Anabaptists] was foreign and repugnant to them. Hans Denk said: “...in matters of faith, everything should be free, voluntary and without compulsion” (Vedder, Ibid., p. 160).

About Grebel and his Zurich party, Fritz Blanke says: “They sought a free church in a double sense: a congregation free from the state and based on a voluntary membership. This was the first goal of the Anabaptists” (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 60).

The Anabaptists followed the New Testament principle, building independent churches composed of believers only, voluntarily associated for the common purpose of worshipping God, continuing the work of Christ, and ministering one to another.

5. The Doctrine of Baptism

Many historians consider that the principal doctrine that marked the Anabaptists as different from the Catholics, Protestants and the rest of the Radical parties was the doctrine of baptism. Some, though, like Bender, consider their main doctrine to be discipleship, while Estep thinks it is that of the church. This author's opinion is that the Anabaptist fundamental characteristic is their attitude towards the Scriptures. The recognition of the supreme authority of the Scriptures and its literal interpretation logically led to all the other differences. If the Reformers had applied completely, not just partially, the Sola Scriptura principle, as they started doing initially, there is no doubt that they would have arrived to positions similar – to say the least – with those held by the Anabaptists.

The doctrine of baptism was derived from the doctrine of the church and was secondary in importance to it. Says Schaff: "Radicalism [in Switzerland] was identical with the Anabaptist movement, but the baptismal question was secondary. It involved an entire reconstruction of the Church and of the social order" (Ibid., vol. VIII, p. 56).

Blanke writes: "Their real interest was not in baptism, but in the church... The baptism of believers was simply the most striking external manifestation of this new kind of church" (Hershberger, Ibid., p. 60). This is the true reason why they considered it so important.

The Catholic Church practiced the baptism of infants. It was associated with salvation, because it was thought to confer grace to the participant. It meant the integration of the infant in the Church and in society. The Catholic clergy arrogated to itself the right of being the proper administrator of Christian baptism. In the Council of Trent, which marked the tactics of Counter-Reformation, the canons regarding the sacrament of baptism state: "Whoever shall affirm that baptism is indifferent – that is – not necessary to salvation – let him be accursed." "Whoever shall affirm that the true doctrine of the sacrament of baptism is not in the Roman Church, which is the mother and mistress of all churches: let him be accursed" (Cramp, History of the Council of Trent, p. 129).

The Protestants eliminated the useless rituals, spittle, salt and oil. But they kept the practice. Even though few Reformers thought that infant baptism had saving power, they accused those who opposed it of preaching that the children who died before reaching the years of discretion were eternally lost.

For the Lutherans, baptism was the seal of faith, grace being received by it (Neander, Ibid., p. 688). The Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530 states under the ninth article, on baptism: "It is taught among us that baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to him.

On this account the Anabaptists, who teach that infant baptism is not right, are rejected” (Noll, Confessions, p. 90).

Zwingli did not consider infant baptism as saving, but rather as a sign of the new covenant, being thus the continuation of the circumcision of the old covenant. He alluded to 1 Corinthians 7:14, where apostle Paul discussed the holiness of the believer’s children. The Anabaptists asked Zwingli to bring scriptural proofs in support of infant baptism. Hubmaier wrote to him: “You said in opposition to Faber [the general vicar of the bishop of Constance] that all truth is clearly revealed in the Word of God. If now infant baptism is a truth, show us the scripture in which it is found. If you do not, the vicar will complain that you have used against him a sword which you now lay aside” (Haskell, Ibid., p. 101).

In his book against the Anabaptists, *On Baptism, Re-baptism and Infant Baptism* (1525), Zwingli tried to bring these proofs. But his hermeneutics made many to question the validity of his arguments. The following is an example: “In Matthew 3 we read: ‘In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,’ etc. And here they cry out: Do you not see that John preached before he baptized? We not only see, but freely concede it. And we ourselves follow the same practice, for we do not allow children to be brought to baptism unless their parents have first been taught... We firmly confess that John taught first and then baptized. But it cannot be denied that once his hearers had been taught, they had their untaught children baptized as well, that is, they dedicated them to God in baptism... Even if children were present and were baptized – and we cannot prove this absolutely – it would still be true that people confessed their sins, for all those who were able and sufficiently enlightened to confess their sins undoubtedly did so” (Bromiley, Zwingli and Bullinger, p. 146, 147).

In order to escape from the problem of re-baptism of the disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19), Zwingli invents a new meaning for the word ‘baptism.’ “Then Paul said: ‘Into what then were ye baptized?’ that is, into what then were ye instructed? as we shall show later. They replied that they had been instructed in the baptism that is the teaching of John” (Ibid, pag. 173).

Hubmaier’s answer was not late to come. He answered Zwingli in *Christian Baptism of Believers*, a treatise thought to be one of the best apologies for believer’s baptism ever written.

“Every pious Christian can see and comprehend that he who wants to purify himself with water must previously have a good understanding of the Word of God, and a good conscience toward God; that is, he must be sure that he has a graciously kind God, through the intercession of Christ...

Therefore baptism in water is not what cleanses the soul, but the ‘yes,’ [of] a good conscience toward God, given inwardly by faith.

Therefore the baptism in water is called a baptism *in Remissionem Peccatorum* (Acts second chapter), that is, for the pardon of sins. Not that through it or by it sins are forgiven, but by virtue of the inward ‘yes’ of the heart, which a man outwardly testifies to in submitting to water baptism, saying that he believes and is sure in his heart that his sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ” (Estep, Ibid., p. 59).

The Protestants were, again, in a delicate position. The Catholics freely admitted that the Scriptures do not offer a basis for infant baptism. They did not need one from the Scriptures. They based their argumentation on established Tradition.

The Anabaptists also claimed that the Scriptures do not offer a basis for such a baptism. Since they based their faith on the Scriptures alone, they rejected infant baptism. At first, the Protestants were inclined to reject it, as well. Zwingli complained in the beginning of his career: “Nothing grieves me more than that at the present I have to baptize children, for I know it ought not to be done” (Verduin, *ibid.*, p. 198). “I leave baptism untouched, I call it neither right nor wrong; if we were to baptize as Christ instituted it then we would not baptize any person until he has reached the years of discretion; for I find it nowhere written that infant baptism is to be practiced...” (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

Later, the Anabaptists were quick to remind Zwingli of his earlier stand. Hubmaier wrote to him: “You used to hold to the same ideas, wrote and preached them from the pulpit openly; many hundreds of people have heard it from your mouth. But now all who say this of you are called liars. Yes, you say boldly that no such ideas have ever entered your mind, and you go beyond that, things of which I will hold my tongue just now” (Verduin, *ibid.*, p. 200).

Answering back, Zwingli admits it hesitantly: “...For some time I myself was deceived by the error [of baptism as a sign of faith] and I thought it better not to baptize children until they came to years of discretion. But I was not so dogmatically of this opinion as to take the course of many today, who although they are far too young and inexperienced in the matter argue and rashly assert that infant baptism derives from the papacy or the devil or something equally non-sensical” (Bromiley, *Ibid.*, p. 139).

The Protestants chose to retain infant baptism, but there was difference of thought among them regarding the benefits of the rite, “...they united certain invisible benefits with baptism: some supposed it a physical cleansing from sin; others, a conveyance of moral qualities; and others a seal or sign of a contract between Almighty God and the faithful and the children of the faithful; or, as they by a Jewish figure expressed it, the seed of the godly, implying that godliness, and expressly declaring that sin, were both propagated by natural generation” (Robinson, *History of Baptism*, p. 478).

After the arguments of the Reformers failed to prove the scriptural propriety of infant baptism, they betrayed their *Sola Scriptura* position. Luther surprisingly stated: “There is not sufficient evidence from Scripture that one might justify the introduction of infant baptism at the time of the early Christians after the apostolic period... But so much is evident, that no one may venture with a good conscience to reject or abandon infant baptism, which has for so long a time been practiced” (Verduin, *Ibid.*, p. 203, 204).

Oecolampadius cried out against the Anabaptists using very un-Protestant terms: “I know only too well that you keep calling ‘Scripture, Scripture!’ as you clamor for clear words to prove our point... But if Scripture taught us all things then there would be no need for the anointing to teach us all things” (Verduin, *ibid.*, p. 204).

Melancthon vindicated infant baptism with Tradition (see Neander, *Ibid.*, p. 693). Zwingli brings the argument of silence, saying that the Scriptures do not clearly forbid infant baptism.

Hubmaier, on behalf of the Anabaptists, answers sarcastically: "It is clear enough for him who has eyes to see it, but it is not expressed in so many words, literally: 'do not baptize infants.' May one baptize them? To that I answer: 'if so I may baptize my dog or my donkey, or I may circumcise girls... I may make idols out of St. Paul and St. Peter, I may bring infants to the Lord's Supper, bless palm branches, vegetables, salt, land and water, sell the Mass for an offering. For it is nowhere said in express words that we must not do these things'" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 60).

For the Anabaptists, baptism was the entrance door into the church – the gathering of believers. Hubmaier said: "Where baptism in water does not exist, there is no Church, no brother, no sister, no fraternal discipline, exclusion or restoration... By receiving baptism the candidate testifies publicly that... he has submitted himself to his brothers and sisters... that is, to the Church" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 60).

In the Schleithem Confession, they declared:

"I. Observe concerning baptism: Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him and to all those who with this significance request it [baptism] of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the Pope. In this you have the foundation and testimony of the apostles. Matt. 28, Mark 16, Acts 2, 8, 16, 19. This we wish to hold simply, yet firmly and with assurance" (Mark Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 51, 52).

Conceiving the church as the assembly of believers and baptism as the entrance door into the church, infants could not be regarded as proper candidates for this act. They could not find any allusion to infant baptism in the Scriptures, therefore they condemned it as an invention of the devil. They did not associate salvation with baptism, therefore they did not believe, as they were slandered, that the infants that die unbaptized will go to hell. Some believed all infants that die will be saved. Hubmaier left the matter "in the hands of a gracious Father." He continued: "Into His hands will I commit them. [...] His will be done. And there I leave the matter. Without his will it would do no good for me to be baptized a thousand times. For water does not save" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 158, 159).

Indeed, all the Anabaptists insisted upon this truth, *water does not save*. "Not to be baptized does not damn... But not to believe, that damns," said Hubmaier (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 158). They insisted that baptism is a sign of existent faith, of Hubmaier's "yes" to the teaching of God. For them, baptism was a pledge to God and to the church in which they were entering, that they will live a life of obedience toward the Words of God to the end of their life.

In turn, Luther raged: "How can baptism be more grievously reviled and disgraced than when we say that baptism given to an unbelieving man is not good and genuine baptism! ...What, baptism rendered ineffective because I do not believe?... What more blasphemous and offensive doctrine could the devil himself invent and preach? And yet the Anabaptists and the Rottengeister [faction

makers] are full up to their ears with this teaching. I put forth the following: Here is a Jew that accepts baptism, as happens often enough [Luther refers to the forced baptisms, when, under threats, many Jews allowed themselves or their children to receive baptism], but does not believe, would you then say that this was not real baptism, because he does not believe? That would be to think as a fool thinks not only, but to blaspheme and disgrace God moreover” (Verduin, *ibid.*, p. 201).

The Anabaptists saw that once this baptism was enforced by law, the nature of the church would be drastically changed. The church would cease to be the assembly of believers in the midst of an unbelieving society, but an institution that would include the whole society, believers and unbelievers as well. The wheat and the tares from Jesus’ parable would not represent any more the assembly (the wheat) and the society (the tares), but believers and unbelievers in the church-society. Infant baptism would become not merely a sign of church membership, but also a sign of society citizenship. To reject it would mean the rejection of the whole social order. Grebel and Manz knew this well. Grebel stated that the medieval order “...can be laid low with nothing as well as with the termination of infant baptism” (Verduin, *Ibid.*, p. 205). Another Anabaptist leader, Hans Seckler from Basel, said: “Infant baptism is a supporting pillar of the papal order and as long as it is not removed there can be no Christian congregation” (*Ibid.*). The Anabaptists considered Protestantism as being part of the same order, calling the reformation doctrine semi-popery.

In the Protestant mind, the Church and the State were one. For them, the demolition of the Church meant also the demolition of the social order. “They don’t want to hear of infant baptism nor allow it; but this will at the last put an end to the secular rule,” said a clerk of Courts about the Anabaptists (*Ibid.*).

The Anabaptists viewed the church as a faction of society, and baptism as the sign that distinguished between believers and unbelievers.

The mode of baptism practiced by the Anabaptists has caused a fiery debate. Protestant historians claim that there was no prescribed mode, that the Anabaptists insisted only upon the candidate, not upon a certain mode, therefore they might have regarded it – immersion, pouring or sprinkling – as a matter of indifference, just as the Reformers.

The Mennonites today practice pouring, and the Mennonite historians are inclined to regard immersion as being an exception from the general custom. The Baptists practice immersion exclusively, and their historians try to prove the fact that this was the only way the Anabaptists practiced baptism. What can we learn from history?

After Grebel’s party separated from Zwingli on January 17th, 1525, they met at Zollikon, a village near Zurich where they performed the rite of believer’s baptism, most probably on January 21st, at night. An anonymous Chronicle, which began to be written in 1560s, called *The Large Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, also known as *The Moravian Chronicle*, records that Blaurock was baptized by Grebel by pouring, and in turn, he baptized the same way all those present. The accuracy of the report has been debated for a long time. The record came most probably from oral tradition and was about 40 years removed from the actual event. It also should be noted that

the account is not given by the mainstream Evangelical Anabaptists, but by their Hutterian offshoot, which were in several points in direct conflict with the former. There is no direct testimony of any of the persons present at that event to confirm the testimony of the Chronicle. However, there is positive proof as to the later practice of several of the persons involved in the event.

A month after Grebel reportedly was baptized by pouring, he was found in the canton of St. Gall, preaching and teaching adult immersion on profession of faith as the only valid baptism. Kessler, the reformed preacher from St. Gall, bears witness to this, telling about: “Wolfgang Ulimann, how he being taught earlier by Laurence Hochrutiner against infant baptism, pressed forward on a journey to Schaffhausen to Conrad Grebel, and coming through him to such a high knowledge of Anabaptism, would not be merely watered with a dish with water, but, fully unclothed and naked, he was drawn under and covered over out in the Rhine by Grebel” (Sabbata, vol. 1, p. 266 – translated from German). [It should be noted that being naked was not part of the rite, but they practiced it sometimes, in isolated cases, when they baptized at rivers, when the candidates did not have another change of clothes]. Immersion is here called “a high knowledge of Anabaptism.” In this knowledge they rejected sprinkling or pouring. It should be noted that it was not Ulimann’s previous knowledge that made him unwilling to be baptized by pouring, but the knowledge he received from Grebel. It would be strange, to say the least, for Grebel to strongly reject in February what he practiced in January. Moreover, the season of Ulimann’s baptism was winter. Considering the medieval man’s fear of cold water, if they thought the mode was not important, they would have used anything but immersion in the freezing cold waters of the Rhine. So we are inclined to doubt the report that Grebel baptized by pouring.

Furthermore, Arx, the Swiss historian, writes about the practice of Grebel in St. Gall: “They [Grebel and Hochrutiner] sought to persuade everybody to allow themselves to be baptized once more and preached in St. Gallen under the linden trees of Multerthore, in fields and forests. They were so successful that the people of the St. Gall territory, from Appenzell and from Toggenburg swarmed to the city of St. Gall asking about the baptistery and allowing themselves to be baptized there. The number of converts became so great that the baptistery could not contain the multitude of the candidates for baptism and they had to use the streams and the Sitter river; to which on Sundays those who desired baptism walked in similar numbers, their march in procession making them to be immediately noticed” (Geschichten des Kantons St. Gallen, vol. 2, p. 501 – translated from German).

These events took place in March. The baptistery was a great wooden cask. “Augustus Naef, Secretary to the Council of St. Gall, in a work published in 1850, records the success of the Baptist movement. He says: ‘They baptized those who believed with them in rivers and lakes, and in a great wooden cask in Butcher’s Square before a great crowd’” (Christian, Ibid., p. 119). The only reason they needed a cask and not a dish was because they practiced immersion.

Zwingli also bears witness to the practice of baptism among the Anabaptists when he sarcastically answers them: “Good news! Let’s all go for a plunge in the Limmat!” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 217). Quoting Manz, who spoke of baptism as “going under,” Zwingli said: “Let him who talks about ‘going under’ go under [the water]” (Ibid.). His words inspired the law issued by the Council

who stated: “Qui mersus fuerit mergatur,” *“Him who dipps shall be dipped.”* Under this law Manz perished having been sentenced to drowning in the waters of the river Limmat (Christian, Ibid., p. 122).

In the southern German territories, the Anabaptists practiced immersion. “The Anabaptist leaders, Hubmaier, Denck, Hetzer, Hut, likewise appeared in Augsburg, and gathered a congregation of eleven hundred members. They held a general synod in 1527. They baptized by immersion. Rhegius stirred up the magistrate against them: the leaders were imprisoned, and some executed” (Schaff, Ibid., vol. VII, p. 377).

Jarrel quotes the definition Hubmaier gives to baptism in *Christian Baptism of Belivers*: “To baptize in water is to cover the confessor of his sins in external water, according to the divine command, and to inscribe him in the number of the separate upon his own confession and desire” (Ibid., p. 200).

A few years later, Menno says: “...after we have searched ever so diligently, we shall find no other baptism besides dipping in water [doopsel inden water] which is acceptable to God, and maintained in his word” (Robinson, Ibid., p. 499).

The Protestants generally looked with indifference upon the mode, but they nevertheless preferred immersion. Luther recommended it. When defining the word baptism, Zwingli wrote: “First it is used for the immersion in water whereby we are pledged individually to the Christian life” (G.W. Bromley, Ibid., p. 132). The Schleithem confession does not mention the mode, but this because the Anabaptists were not condemned on account of practicing immersion, not because they regarded the mode as indifferent.

Baptism was important to the Anabaptists because of its meaning. “The baptism of a believer is a symbol of the sinking in the death of Christ and of being raised again (“new birth”) in His resurrection. No one can come into the Kingdom unless he be born again (John 3:3), and this was the spiritual event symbolized by water baptism into the community” (Littell, Ibid., p. 84). Immersion was the only mode of baptism that could properly symbolize “the sinking in the death of Christ” and the raising in His resurrection. Neither pouring nor sprinkling of water symbolizes properly the spiritual event portrayed in baptism.

The proofs in favor of immersion are overwhelming. If there were indeed exceptions from immersion in Anabaptist practice, these were scarce and were due to the transition period of the persons involved from Catholicism or Protestantism to Anabaptism.

The Anabaptists considered adults only as proper candidates for baptism, as a certain understanding of the responsibilities of a Christian was required; they thought the water to be a mere symbol of inward washing and cleansing; they thought immersion to be the proper picture of the inward work of the Spirit of Christ in regeneration; and they considered that only churches like theirs were baptizing and doing Christ’s work aright.

6. The Doctrine of Church Discipline

The doctrine of church discipline was another important point of difference between the Anabaptists and their opponents. In that age this doctrine was an Anabaptist distinctive since they were the only ones who practiced it after the New Testament pattern.

The Catholic Church practiced only excommunication, by which it taught the loss of salvation. No moral purification was enforced among its ranks, but only a doctrinal one. The “heretics” were confronted with the dogma, and if they did not conform, they were condemned to death, which punishment was most of the time carried through. But no one was ever burned for being depraved and immoral.

The issue of discipline among the Protestants was similar with the one from the Catholic camp, even though the Reformers wished for a moral improvement in their converts. But, keeping the vision of the sacral society, they could not exclude one from the church unless he was also excluded from society. They preferred to try to correct this handicap from within, but their failure is well known.

The local assembly of believers was, in the Anabaptists’ vision, Christ’s representative in the world, and therefore, it had to be preserved pure. The Anabaptists applied the New Testament model, found in Matthew 18, for the purging and purification of the assembly. Anyone who lived in sin or erred from the biblical faith was first taught, and if no change occurred, such person was excluded, or “left alone,” as Grebel said. Exclusion was necessary both for the perseverance unto holiness of the members and for the maintenance of spiritual and scriptural leadership of the church.

The Schleithem Confession states:

“II. We are agreed as follows on the ban: The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk in His commandments, and with all those who are baptized into the one body of Christ and who are called brethren or sisters, and yet who slip sometimes and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. The same shall be admonished twice in secret and the third time openly disciplined or banned according to the command of Christ. Matt. 18. But this shall be done according to the regulation of the Spirit (Matt. 5) before the breaking of bread, so that we may break and eat one bread, with one mind and in one love, and may drink of one cup” (Mark Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 52).

The doctrine of discipline throws a supplementary light on the Anabaptist view of the church. First, such a practice shows that the Anabaptists did not think the church to be just a fellowship of believers in which significant differences in doctrine and practice were tolerated. For them, the church was a body whose unity and purity was kept by a strict discipline. This was the main purpose of disciplining.

The secondary purpose of the ban was the straightening of the disciplined. It was not a revenge of the community against the one fallen into sin, but a means to restoration, by helping the disciplined to return to the blessed fellowship of the church, which he lost by being excluded.

Later, among the Dutch Mennonites, the ban came to affect not only the relationship of the excluded with the church, but also with his family. It was recommended that no kind word should even be said to the excluded by his family until he repents and returns to the church. But this form of the ban, called “shunning”, was not the general practice of the Anabaptists.

Among Anabaptists the disciplining was performed publicly, by the whole congregation who acted democratically. Hubmaier said, “By receiving baptism, the candidate testifies publicly that... he has submitted himself to his brothers and sisters... that is, to the Church” (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 60). “In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the excommunication of the one who has sinned, without putting the flesh to death - simply the warning and the command to sin no more” (Schleitheim Confession, Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 54).

The doctrine of church discipline was one of the Anabaptist particularities that kept them from gross sins, contributing to their living virtuous lives.

7. The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper

For the Catholics, the Eucharist, or the Mass, was a perpetual sacrificing or offering of Christ by the clergy. Under the intercession of the priest, the bread and the wine were transformed miraculously into the body and the blood of Christ. This dogma is called *transubstantiation*. The congregation had access only to His “body,” the “blood” being consumed only by the priests. The Mass was considered a sacrament, meaning that it conferred grace to the participants. It was one of the most important rites, since it united around it the whole society, whose borders were confounded with those of the Church.

Luther rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, but proclaimed Christ’s real presence to be with and around the elements. This doctrine is called *consubstantiation*. This is the way Luther explained it: “Just as in a red-hot bar the fire and the metal do not lose their identity, he reasoned, so is Christ in, with and under the elements of the eucharist. Or, just as God and man became one in Christ, so do the elements and Christ’s body become one, both retaining, however, their distinct essence” (Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals*, p. 41).

Zwingli rejected both the Catholic and the Lutheran doctrines, this being one of the reasons why the Lutherans and the Zwinglians never collaborated. For Zwingli and for the Swiss reformers, the Supper represented only a symbol, a commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice. This was one of the doctrines Zwingli defended from the very beginnings of his reformation. One of the theses defended by Zwingli and his partisans, among which there were at that time Hubmaier, Grebel, Manz and others who later became Anabaptists, was the following: “18. Christ, who has once offered himself as a sacrifice, is for eternity a perpetual enduring and efficacious sacrifice for the sins of all believers. Therefore we conclude that the Mass is not a sacrifice but a memorial of the one sacrifice and a seal of redemption that Christ made good for us” (Mark Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 41). This came to be the chief distinctive of Zwingli’s theology. “‘Zwinglianism’ came to be

identified not with any positive theological or liturgical construction, but with a denial of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist” (Lindberg, *The Reformation Theologians*, p. 157). According to Zwingli, Christ is spiritually, not physically present in the Supper. The rite presents the past work of Christ, but also the present one – this making the rite important. “...‘This is my body,’ that is This represents my body, the eating of this bread being the sign and symbol that Christ, the soul’s true consolation and nourishment, was crucified for us” (Bromiley, *Ibid.*, p. 226).

The Radicals rejected the doctrine of the real presence as held by the Catholics and the Protestants. The most ardent opponent of it was Carlstadt, who published treatises against this doctrine. “Carlstadt must be held responsible for initiating the so-called sacramental controversy which caused so much strife among the Protestants. Carlstadt’s views on the Lord’s Supper were shared, with minor variations, by most radicals and Anabaptists of the sixteenth century” (Harry Loewen, *Luther and the Radicals*, p. 40). Some historians consider that Luther never gave up the doctrine of the real presence because of his ongoing controversies with Carlstadt. In fact, this was one of the main causes that changed Luther from a persecuted “heretic” into a persecutor “pope”. All who opposed him, Protestants, Spiritualists or Anabaptists were persecuted by Luther and his followers on this account.

Even though the Anabaptists believed, like Zwingli and Carlstadt, in the Supper as a memorial, in the elements as symbols, they went further than them. Zwingli could only go as far as declaring that those who partook of it in an unworthy manner condemn themselves. For the Anabaptists, the Supper represented not only the remembrance of the death of Christ, but also the unity of the church. The Schleithem Confession states:

“III. In the breaking of bread we are of one mind and are agreed (as follows): All those who wish to break one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ, and all who wish to drink of one drink as a remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, shall be united beforehand by baptism in one body of Christ which is the church of God and whose Head is Christ. For as Paul points out, we cannot at the same time drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the devil. That is, all those who have fellowship with the dead works of darkness have no part in the light. Therefore all who follow the devil and the world have no part with those who are called unto God out of the world. All who lie in evil have no part in the good.

Therefore it is and must be (thus): Whoever has not been called by one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one Spirit, to one body, with all the children of God's church, cannot be made (into) one bread with them, as indeed must be done if one is truly to break bread according to the command of Christ” (Mark Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 52).

The Anabaptist stand implied the purification of the church before the rite, by admonition, discipline or the exclusion of those who were not in spiritual unity with them. The church unity that was so much desired by the Protestants – yet so absent in their churches as a whole – was magnificently and most simply attained by the local congregations of the Anabaptists.

8. The Anabaptist Public Worship

Public worship was an important part in the religious life of the Anabaptist people. Their church service differed largely from those of the other camps.

Catholic public worship was a complex ritual, announced in the community by the sounding of bells. The places of worship, of a unique and meaningful architecture, were decorated with many representations of God and the saints (statues, paintings and coloured glass windows). The services were liturgical, that is, they were carried on according to specifically prescribed rites. Their yearly liturgy was developed according to the celebrations of the Church. They chanted their prayers, Scripture reading and certain ritual sermons.

In keeping a clergy, in the performing the rite of infant baptism, in keeping the holidays, in their liturgy, in taking over the Catholic church buildings where they gained majority of population, the Protestants had a public worship that was similar with the Catholic one. The Reformers, however, opposed images and chanting, though they continued to keep them for some time. They emphasized preaching instead of rituals.

Public worship was a central element of the Anabaptists' church life, as well. Their meetings were not announced with bells, but were most of the time, held in the utmost secrecy, because of persecution. They never took over a church building, but met in private houses, in forests, in fields and sometimes on boats. Because of this they were nicknamed "Winckler" – people who gather in a corner or in hidden away places and their preachers were nicknamed "hedge-preachers." They opposed the use of images of God and did not need any images of saints since they rejected the doctrine of the saints' intercessions (they held that each believer had direct access to God by Christ). They had no sacerdotal class, since they thought that every believer is a priest before God.

Even though they opposed the chanting of sermons and prayers, they did sing in their services. The tunes were taken from popular folk songs of the day. Their songs expressed, probably even better than their writings, their spiritual and emotional state. Several songs were written during imprisonments, in expectation of the authors' execution. The following is an example. The song from which the following excerpts were taken was composed by Annelein of Freiberg. Nothing is known about this woman except that she was drowned and then burned in 1529, some sources indicating that she was only seventeen years old when imprisoned.

"Eternal Father in Heaven,

I call on you so ardently,

Do not let me turn from you.

Keep me in your truth

Until my final end.

O, God, guard my heart and mouth
Lord, watch over me at all times,
Let nothing separate me from you,
Be it affliction, anxiety or need,
Keep me pure in joy.

My everlasting Lord and Father,
Show and teach me,
Poor, unworthy child that I am,
That I heed your path and way.
In this lies my desire.

To walk through your power into death
Through sorrow, torture, fear and want,
Sustain me in this,
O, God, so that I nevermore
Be separated from your love.

...

They have imprisoned me
I wait, O God, with all my heart
With very great longing,
When finally you will awake
If you would only stir
And set your prisoners free. ...”

(Snyder and Hecht, Profiles of Anabaptist Women, p. 199, 200)

The Anabaptist church service was of an amazing simplicity. It had three distinct elements: prayer, singing and the preaching or exposition of the Bible. They were most emphatic on the latter, since

knowing the Scriptures was necessary in order to be faithful to Christ in all things, as their desire was.

9. Church Ministers

In a church of the Anabaptists, all members were equal. The preachers and the pastors were considered to be the servants of the church, and they did not form a special class, a ruling clergy. These had the responsibility of watching over the “flock,” for its spiritual and moral wellness.

The churches of the Anabaptists thought their ministers had to know a craft that could bring them an income if the church was unable to support them. They opposed taxes for the support of the clergy, considering that the needs of the ministers and the expenses of the ministry should be met by the local churches. “This one [the pastor] moreover shall be supported of the church which has chosen him, wherein he may be in need, so that he who serves the Gospel may live of the Gospel as the Lord has ordained” (Schleitheim Confession, Mark Noll, *Ibid.*, p. 54). All the Anabaptists felt a strong aversion toward preachers paid from the public budget. Hans Hut wrote: “Therefore I admonish all godly people who seek after and love righteousness to earnestly guard themselves from all usurious, haughty and hypocritical scholars who preach for money. They do not look out for your good, but only for their own bellies” (Liechty, *Ibid.*, p. 65).

To have been an Anabaptist preacher or pastor in that time meant to be in constant peril. If ordinary members were fined or banished, the leaders were always executed. They did not enjoy privileges or recognition from either the civil or ecclesiastical authorities of the established religions. Repeatedly, the Anabaptist ministers were called to seal their testimony with their own blood. Even in such times, they sought to honor their King, to be an example and an encouragement for their little flock.

10. The Roles of the Believer and of the Church in Society

If seen only from outside, Anabaptism best strikes the eye because of its radical stand on the place the Christian and the church must occupy in society.

The Catholic Church preached the doctrine of Constantine the Great, the merging of the borders of the Church with those of the State. The Church was "*Corpus Christianum*," the totality of Christians. Since infant baptism was enforced by law, *Corpus Christianum* also meant the totality of the citizens in a "Christian society." The civil authority was considered to be vassal to the ecclesiastical power, since the former was temporal and the latter eternal. In the Middle Ages, the pope installed and dethroned kings. The civil authority also had to serve the ecclesiastical one. The king had to serve the pope. The magistrate had to serve the priest.

Thomas Aquinas stated: "The State, through which earthly objectives are reached, must be subordinated to the Church; Church and State are two swords which God has given to Christendom for protection; both these swords however are by Him given to the pope and the temporal sword is then by the pope entrusted to the rulers of State" (Verduin, *Ibid.*, p. 43). This doctrine was not a mere theoretical scholastic subtlety, but an instrument frequently used by the papacy to reach its goals, when negotiation or persuasion failed. This concept made innumerable victims among those classed by the Catholics as "heretics."

The Reformers could not free themselves from this Constantinian doctrine. In this respect they always remained tributary to Rome. Wherever Protestants gained power, infant baptism continued to be imposed by law upon all citizens. The duty of the magistrates was to ensure the well-being of the citizens, including their spiritual well-being. Those who undermined the authority of the Church and led the people astray had to be punished by the magistrates.

Urbanus Rhegius, Protestant leader of Augsburg, expressed it in these words: "God raises up the magistracy against the heretics, faction-makers, and schismatics in the Christian Church in order that Hagar may be flogged by Sarah. The Donatists [by this he means the Anabaptists] murder men's souls, make them go to eternal death; and then they complain when men punish them with temporal death. Therefore a Christian magistrate must make it his first concern to keep the Christian religion pure..." (Verduin, *Ibid.*, p. 50). Calvin had the same sentiments: "The principal task of the magistrates is not the business of keeping their subjects in peace as to the body; rather is it to bring about that God is served and honored in their domains" (*Ibid.*, p. 58).

Just as in the case of infant baptism, when the Anabaptists requested from the Protestants Scriptural proofs for this doctrine, they brought the most fanciful interpretations in order to support the union of church and state. Beza, Calvin's colleague, found a support text for this doctrine in the book of Acts. "With what power, pray, did Peter put to death Ananias and Sapphira? And with what power did Paul smite Elimas blind? Was it with the power vested in the Church? Of course not. Well, then, it must have been with the power that is vested in the magistrate, there being no third kind of power" (Verduin, *Ibid.*, p. 54).

The Anabaptists believed in the complete separation of Church and State. They affirmed in the Schleithem Confession:

VI. We are agreed as follows concerning the sword: The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protects the good... In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the

excommunication of the one who has sinned, without putting the flesh to death - simply the warning and the command to sin no more (Mark Noll, Ibid., p. 54).

The Anabaptists did not try to overthrow the social order. They were not anarchists, neither were they revolutionary fanatics, even though they were accused of these things. Hubmaier's words are representative of their stand: "We confess openly that there should be secular government that should bear the sword. This we are willing and bound to obey in everything that is not against God" (Vedder, Ibid., p. 160). They opposed a sacral, monolithic society, in which there was no difference between the church and the world. They recognized the civil authorities as being ordained by God, but "outside the perfection of Christ," that is, outside the church. They distinguished between "general grace" given by God to society and represented by the social order and the "special grace" given to believers only and represented by the church. But in the society to which they belonged, in which the church meant the totality of the citizens, and the state meant the totality of the Christians, the true believer could not serve the state as a magistrate, since that meant also to bring service to a church that he thought to be apostate. Therefore, the Anabaptists affirmed that a Christian could not occupy public offices.

The Anabaptists required nothing from the authorities. They did not long for financial benefits, nor for the state's recognition. They only requested the right - banal now, but unacceptable then - to be allowed to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. They taught that a Christian cannot persecute, but rather suffers quietly all things. The church's role in society was to represent Christ, whom, though persecuted and killed, did not strike back, nor speak evil of his persecutors. They envisioned a society different from all the orders of the day - a society in which the civil authorities supervised only social matters, a composite society in which all its citizens could exercise the right to choose if they wanted to be part of a certain church or not.

11. The Struggle for Freedom

Baptists always have been the champions of human rights and liberties. In this, they followed their Anabaptist predecessors. Anabaptist thought was superior to the age in which they lived. The whole of modern free society is based on the principles for which the sixteenth century Anabaptists lived and died.

The sacral society, in which the authorities recognize one state religion/church, cannot allow its citizens to be free to choose their own religion. It cannot allow dissidence, faction, sect [this word comes from the latin *sequor* which gives the idea of following, and in religious context - following other ways than the one recognized or imposed]. It cannot allow the luxury of granting freedom to the individual to judge for himself and make a decision regarding his faith. In this vision, a centralized and controlled religion is absolutely necessary for the good order of the society. In such a society there can only be tolerance at best, and this only where Church-State relationship is less "intimate." But tolerance is not freedom. By its definition, tolerance is an allowable deviation from

the standard. In a sacral society, the State recognizes as valid only one faith. The rest of them are considered deviant.

The Catholic Church is the best example of this monolithic mentality. Armed with the doctrine of the two swords, the papal church started the battle of converting all those who differed from it. It is thought that during the dark ages millions of Rome's opponents were killed by the civil authorities who acted under the control of the pontiff. In Reformation times, after the Diet of Spires (1529) (which declared that "every Anabaptist and rebaptized person of either sex should be put to death by fire, sword, or some other way" – Hersherberger, *Ibid.*, p. 32), the repression against them grew to shameful proportions.

Before 1529, waves of persecution led to the beheading of early Anabaptism. In the Catholic territories, Michael Sattler, Balthasar Hubmaier, Georg Blaurock and Wolfgang Ulimann were burned at the stake and Hans Hut was killed in prison. Numerous other local leaders were also killed. Words cannot describe the cruelty of these acts. The trial and execution of Michael Sattler, on May 21st, 1527, is an illustrative example. This account is in the *Martyr's Mirror*, p. 416-418. The sentence passed by the judges was the following: "In the case of the Governor of his Imperial Majesty versus Michael Sattler, judgement is passed, that Michael Sattler shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution, and cut out his tongue; then throw him upon a wagon, and then tear his body twice with red hot tongs; and after he has been brought without the gate, he shall be pinched five times in the same manner." Estep, quoting another source adds "...and then burn his body to powder as an arch-heretic" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 40). He goes on describing the scene of the martyrdom: "The torture, a prelude to the execution, began at the market place where a piece was cut from Sattler's tongue. Pieces of flesh were torn from his body twice with red-hot tongs. He was then forged to a cart. On the way to the scene of the execution the tongs were applied five times again. In the market place and at the site of the execution, still able to speak, the unshakeable Sattler prayed for his persecutors. After being bound to a ladder with ropes and pushed into the fire, he admonished the people, the judges, and the mayor to repent and be converted. Then he prayed, 'Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the way and the truth: because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with thy help to this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood.'

As soon as the ropes on his wrists were burned, Sattler raised the two forefingers of his hands giving the promised signal to the brethren that a martyr's death was bearable. Then the assembled crowd heard coming from his seared lips, 'Father, I commend my spirit into Thy hands'" (Estep, *Ibid.*, p. 47).

After 1529, not only the leaders were executed, but ordinary Anabaptists as well. Seeing that the public executions only thickened their ranks, the authorities of Suabia called a special militia for the tracking down of the Anabaptists. This militia had authority to kill on the spot, with no trial and indifferent of sex and age, all those suspected of being Anabaptists. Many thousands Anabaptists perished this way. C.A. Cornelius, the Roman Catholic historian, described part of the results of the persecution that followed the Diet of Spires.

"In Tyrol and Görz, the number of executions in the year 1531 reached already one thousand; in Ensisheim, six hundred. At Linz seventy-three were killed in six weeks. Duke William of Bavaria,

surpassing all others, issued the fearful decree to behead those who recanted, to burn those who refused to recant... Throughout the greater part of Upper Germany the persecution raged like a wild chase... The blood of these poor people flowed like water so that they cried to the Lord for help... But hundreds of them of all ages and both sexes suffered the pangs of torture without a murmur, despised to buy their lives by recantation, and went to the place of execution joyfully and singing psalms" (Quoted by Vedder, *Ibid.*, p. 165).

The Anabaptists did not face a better treatment in Protestant territories. The initial position of the Reformers, when they were threatened by the Catholics, was similar to that of the Anabaptists. Luther said in 1520, "We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the old Fathers did. If there were any skill in overcoming heretics with fire, the executioner would be the most learned doctor in the world" (Vedder, *Ibid.*, p. 162). In 1527, writing against the Anabaptists, Luther maintained that "It is not right, and I am very sorry, that such wretched people should be so miserably murdered, burned, and cruelly killed. Every one should be allowed to believe what he pleases..." (Vedder, *Ibid.*, p. 162, 163). But the Muenster rebellion caused Luther to recommend the usage of the sword against all Anabaptists, peaceful or revolutionary (see Durant, *Ibid.*, p. 92).

Bullinger, in the beginning of the Reformation, declared: "One cannot and should not use force to compel anyone to accept the faith, for faith is a free gift of God. It is wrong to compel anyone by force or coercion to embrace the faith, or to put to death anyone for the sake of his erring faith. It is an error that in the church any sword other than that of the divine Word should be used. The secular kingdom should be separated from the church, and no secular ruler should exercise authority in the church. The Lord has commanded simply to preach the Gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true church of Christ has the characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict persecution upon anyone" (Hershberger, *Ibid.*, p. 31).

But as soon as the reformers gained the support of the authorities in a certain region, they went back on their words and promoted the old Catholic doctrine. The persecution suffered by the Anabaptists in Protestant territories was as cruel as the Catholic persecution. In Protestant territories, Felix Manz was condemned to death by drowning, Grebel and Denck, hunted and weakened physically, fell pray to an epidemic, escaping, thus from the hands of the executioners. Balthasar Hubmaier reproached the Protestants of Zurich for locking up in a tower some twenty Anabaptists, men, young women, pregnant women, and widows, sentencing them to be left there, on bread and water, without ever seeing the sun again, until they will all die in that cell. "'O God,' he further writes, 'what a terrible, severe, and rigorous sentence against pious Christian people, of whom none could say any evil thing, only that they, according to the commandment of Christ, had received water baptism!'" (van Braght, *Martyrs' Mirror*, p. 465). After Zwingli gained control of the religious affairs in Zurich, he advised that those who were immersed in baptism should be drowned.

Calvin, in his turn, was just as intolerant: "Whoever shall now contend that it is unjust to put heretics and blasphemers to death will knowingly and willingly incur their very guilt. This is not laid down on human authority; it is God who speaks and prescribes a perpetual rule for his Church. It is not in vain that he banishes all those human affections which soften our hearts; that

he commands paternal love and all the benevolent feelings between brothers, relations, and friends to cease; in a word, that he almost deprives men of their nature in order that nothing may hinder their holy zeal. Why is so implacable a severity exacted but that we may know that God is defrauded of his honor, unless the piety that is due to him be preferred to all human duties, and that when his glory is to be asserted, humanity must be almost obliterated from our memories?" (Schaff, *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 545, 546).

Erasmus did not hesitate to reproach the Protestants their inconsistency: "They who are so very urgent that heretics should not be put to death. did yet capitally punish the Anabaptists, who were condemned for much fewer articles, and were said to have among them a great many who had been converted from a very wicked life, to one as much amended; and who, however, they doted on their opinions, had never possessed themselves of any churches, or cities, or fortified themselves by any league against the force of princes, or cast any one out of his inheritance or estate" (*Epistolarum de Erasmus*, XXXI. 59. A. D. 1530, quoted by Christian, *Ibid.*, p. 100).

Hubmaier's position is that of all the Anabaptists. In a book called *Of Heretics And Those Who Burn Them*, he pleaded not only for the Anabaptists, but even for the atheists and the Muslims. "The burning of heretics cannot be justified by the Scriptures. Christ Himself teaches that the tares, should be allowed to grow with the wheat. He did not come to burn, or to murder, but to give life, and that more abundantly. We should, therefore, pray and hope for improvement in men as long as they live. If they cannot be convinced by appeals to reason, or the Word of God, they should be let alone. One cannot be made to see his errors either by fire or sword. But if it is a crime to burn those who scornfully reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ, how much more it is a crime to burn the true expounders and exemplars of the Word of God. Such an apparent zeal for God, the welfare of the soul, and the honor of the church is a deception. Indeed to every one it must be evident that the burning of heretics is a device of Satan" (Christian, *Ibid.*, p. 102). He continues: "Hence it follows that the inquisitors are the greatest heretics of all, since they against the doctrine and example of Christ condemn heretics to fire, and before the time of harvest root up the wheat with the tares... And now it is clear to everyone, even the blind, that a law to burn heretics is an invention of the devil. Truth is immortal" (Vedder, *Ibid.*, p. 161).

The Anabaptists were among the first defenders of human rights. They militated for all the people, not only for those of the same faith with them. The Anabaptist martyrs, whether illustrious scholars or unknown peasants, sealed with their own blood their plea for liberty. If their cry had been heard, the history of the world and of Christianity would have been different in these past five centuries.

Conclusion

Who were the Anabaptists, and what was their place in history? Bender quotes the answer given by Rufus Jones: "Judged by the reception it met at the hands of those in power, both in Church and

State, equally in Roman Catholic and in Protestant countries, the Anabaptist movement was one of the most tragic in the history of Christianity; but, judged by the principles, which were put into play by the men who bore this reproachful nickname, it must be pronounced one of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man's eventful religious struggle after the truth. It gathered up the gains of earlier movements, it is the spiritual soil out of which all nonconformist sects have sprung, and it is the first plain announcement in modern history of a programme for a new type of Christian society which the modern world, especially in America and England, has been slowly realizing – an absolutely free and independent religious society, and a State in which every man counts as a man, and has his share in shaping both Church and State" (Hershberger, *Ibid.*, p. 29).

The hope Spurgeon had, and many like him, that "The time will probably arrive when history will be re-written, and the maligned Baptists of Holland and Germany will be acquitted of all complicity with the ravings of the insane fanatics..." has been fulfilled. We salute the arrival of those times, and rejoice that the Anabaptists are finally acquitted from the many calumnies brought against them. We salute the enthroning of human rights and of the freedom to choose, the liberation of the State from servitude to a religious or political dogma, and the constitution of a democratic and composite society.

Truth flourishes in freedom!!!

* * *

What does the Anabaptist movement mean to us? A dramatic chapter of history, buried in the dust of time? In what measure are their doctrines, practices, and vision still actual?

Philip Schaff concludes: "The blood of martyrs is never shed in vain. The Anabaptist movement was defeated, but not destroyed; it revived among the Mennonites, the Baptists in England and America, and more recently in isolated congregations on the Continent" (Schaff, *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 64). Indeed, they were not utterly destroyed. Their spirit is alive and they still live and speak through their successors.

Even though the Anabaptist positions are largely deserted, they are as true today as five hundred years ago, the attacks of their opponents are just as furious as then, the controversies they raise are just as fiery. Their followers are under the same siege and are called today to stand and defend the doctrines of their predecessors, the doctrines of the Scriptures.

The fundamental Anabaptist doctrine – The Scripture as final authority – is mightily assaulted. Never was the authority of the Bible so much discredited and undermined as it is now. Even those who call themselves "Baptists," who were supposed to be "people of the Book," accept unbiblical doctrines and practices, forsaking the old Anabaptist position. For instance, the

liberal theological view of “once saved always saved” gained huge popularity, replacing the old theology of discipleship, causing the spiritual and moral standard to be in continual regression...

The doctrine of separation is assaulted by those involved in the ecumenical movement. Baptist leaders seek and accept the support of secular authorities, they recognize false churches as sisters, as equals, and work together with them, betraying the position for which their predecessors lived and died! Those who take a stand for separation are accused of legalism, hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. **But this is the old Baptist position!**

The Schleithem Confession declares: “From this we should learn that everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than an abomination which we should shun and flee from. By this is meant all Catholic and Protestant works and church services, meetings and church attendance...” (Mark Noll, Ibid., p. 53).

Bullinger describes their separation from the Protestant, “evangelical” perspective: “From the beginning it was principally a matter of separation for the purpose of creating a divided church..., because they wished to abandon the Papists and the Evangelicals... and live in a new Baptist order, which they call the true, blessed, Christian church, therefore their leaders received baptism... as a sign of the separation” (Verduin, Ibid., p. 208).

The modern Baptist movement denies this separation and cooperates with the “papists” and with the “evangelicals.” But doing this, do they not abandon the very “Baptist order,” thus switching camps?

Baptism was for the Anabaptists a sign of separation, of identity. They refused to accept the baptisms practiced by the parties that did not stand doctrinally with them, they did not recognize them to be true churches, and their rites were considered null and void. For this stand they met with hatred, calumny and persecution from the evangelicals.

Zwingli told them: “Run along, live as Christian-like as you please..., only lay off on the re-baptizings, for it is as plain as day that with it you are making a faction!” (Verduin, Ibid.). What are the implications of the compromise offered by Zwingli? To accept it meant to trespass a part of the Scriptures and to repudiate the most important Ana/Baptist doctrines (the authority of the Scriptures – by accepting or tolerating something condemned by the Scriptures; the whole doctrine of the church – its nature, ordinances, leadership, discipline, etc.; the doctrine of separation – from civil authorities, from false churches, from the so-called brethren, etc.).

By their origin, doctrines and practices, the Anabaptists could not be integrated in the Protestant camp. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin tried to reform the old Catholic Church, which they considered the true church, though polluted and corrupt. Like their predecessors, the Anabaptists regarded Catholicism, and later Protestantism as different forms of the same apostasy. They denounced the Reformation as semi-popery, and the reformed doctrines as half-truths, thought to be worse than error.

Baptists are not Protestants. Those who accept the compromise of Zwingli cease to be Baptists, even though they may keep the name and the appearance. They can be anything, Protestants, Neo-protestants, Evangelicals, but not Baptists, not in the same sense their forefathers were

Baptists. Not all the Baptists, though, accepted Zwingli's compromise, the Protestant, "evangelical" baptism. A minority still refuses it with the same stubbornness as their Anabaptist predecessors refused it.

The Anabaptist vision calls us today to take a stand. To take the Anabaptist stand means to live a life of discipleship, to persevere unto holiness, to depart from anything that is evil, be it worldly amusement, wicked company or false doctrine. It means to separate from compromised churches that either fell from the truth of the Scriptures or never held it, and to unite with the true churches of Christ, that stand for His teachings, and faithfully put them into daily practice!

If the struggle of the Anabaptists was wrong, if they died in vain, let us change camps, let us abandon the Baptist faith, for we fight against God! But if they suffered for a right cause, for the truth, for God, then we are called to follow their example, to walk on the same path, for it leads to the desired destination!

Bibliography:

Adams, John Q., *Baptists, The Only Thorough Religious Reformers*, Backus Book Publishers, New York, 1980

Barclay, Robert, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, Hodden and Stoughton, London, 1877

Braght, Thieleman J. van, *Martyr's Mirror*, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1950

Bromiley, Geoffrey W., *Zwingli and Bullinger*, Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia, 1953

Christian, John T., *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. 1, Bogard Press Edition, 1922

Cook, Richard, *The Story of the Baptists*, The Baptist Standard Bearer, Paris, AR, 2001

Cramp, J. M., *A Brief History of the Council of Trent*, published by Daniel Appleton, New York, 1831

Durant, Will and Ariel, *Civilizații istorisite [The Story of Civilisation]*, vol. 18, published by Prietenii Cartii, Bucharest, 2005

Estep, William, *The Anabaptist Story*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1986

Febvre, Lucien, *Martin Luther, un destin [Martin Luther: A Destiny]*, published by Corint, Bucharest, 2001

Haskell, Samuel, *Heroes and Hierarchs*, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1895

Hershberger, Guy, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, The Baptist Standard Bearer, Paris, AR, 1957. This is a compilation of several writings of important historians on the Anabaptists. The following works were quoted here: Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*; Fritz Blanke, *Anabaptism and the Reformation*; N. van der Zijpp, *The Early Dutch Anabaptists*; Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist Concept of the Church*

Jarrel, W.A., Baptist Church Perpetuity, publicată de autor, Dallas, TX, 1894

Kessler, Johannes, *Sabbata*, vol. 1, Scheitlin & Zollikofer, St. Gallen, 1866

Liechty, Daniel, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, Paulist Press, New York, 1994. This is a compilation of English translations of original writings of several Anabaptist leaders. The following works were quoted here: Thomas Manz, *Letter from Prison*; Hans Hut, *On the Mystery of Baptism*; Hans Denck, *Divine Order*

Lindberg, Carter, *The Reformation Theologians, An Introduction to Theology in Early Modern Period*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2002

Littell, Franklin H., *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, The Baptist Standard Bearer, Paris, AR, 2001

Loewen, Harry, *Luther and the Radicals: Another Look at some Aspects of the Struggle Between Luther and the Radical Reformers*, published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, ON, 1974

Mennonite Encyclopedia, www.gameo.org

Mosheim, Johann L., *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, William Tegg, Londra, 1867

Neander, Augustus, *Lectures on the Christian Dogma*, Vol. II, published by Henry G. Bohn, London, 1858

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1951, Vol. 1, Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Noll, Mark A., *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, BC, 2004. From this work Zwingli's Sixty Seven Articles of 1523, the Anabaptist Schleithem Confession of 1527 and the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530 were quoted.

Robinson, Robert, *The History of Baptism*, Press of Lincoln and Edmands, Boston, 1817

Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Second Revised Edition, vol. VII și VIII. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org

Snyder, C. Arnold and Linda Agnes Hubert Hecht, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth Century Reforming Pioneers*, Published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, ON, 1996

Vedder, Henry, *A Short History of the Baptists*, The American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1958

Verduin, Leonard, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1964

Williams, G. and A. Mergal, *Spiritualist and Anabaptist Writers*, Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia, 1957. This is a compilation of several writings of the most renowned leaders of the Radical Reformation. The following works were quoted here: Conrad Grebel, *Letters to Thomas Muntzer*; Hans Denck, *Whether God is the Cause of Evil*; Balthasar Hubmaier, *On Free Will*