

# School of Ministry

## Week 4 – Reformation Church Hist. – The Radical Reformation

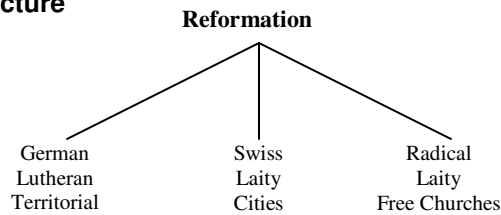
### Review of Week 3

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century church attendance was waning because of the penitential system. The clergy were seen as a burden because of their financial and legal privileges. One expression of anger at the church was the smashing of images, known as iconoclasm. Reformation teaching was attractive because of its assurance of salvation, its escape from church bureaucracy, and its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

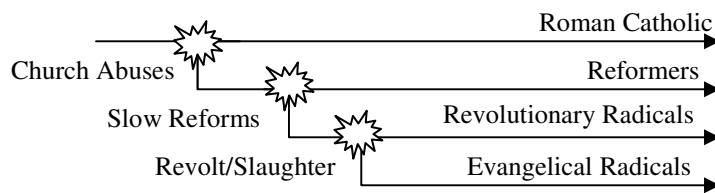
Magisterial reforms often started with lay-funded preacherships, followed by the preaching of protestant doctrine and calls for reform. This triggered controversial actions by the laity, forcing the city council to hold a disputation to be judged against scripture. The city usually declared itself for the winner, and then implemented the reforms.

### Radical Origins

- **Structure**



- **Development**



- **Streams:**

**Which source of authority is emphasized?**

**Bible**

**Anabaptists** (eg Grebel, Simons)  
 Questioned infant baptism  
 Wanted a return NT church  
 Personal discipleship key  
 Revolutionary & Evangelical types

**Experience**

**Spiritualists** (eg Muntzer)  
 Stressed the inner work of the HS  
 Apocalyptic and charismatic

**Reason**

*The World Turned Upside Down*  
 (J. Grunpeck, Leipzig, 1522)



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### Radical Beliefs

#### 1. Individual Discipleship

*Complained* about the lack of grass-roots morality in territorial reformations

*Responded* with an emphasis on personal discipleship and holiness, to the degree that piety was almost equated with holiness.

*Promoted* “Believers’ Baptism”

- Roman Catholics – water-baptism washes away original sin
- Reformers – an outward sign of inward Baptism of the Spirit through faith
- Anabaptists – only a conscious confessor (i.e. an adult) can be baptized, with faith and proven discipleship as preconditions.

2. **Love:** Including the ideas of pacifism and non-resistance, claimed to reflect the suffering of Christ, but also reflecting their persecution and lack of political power.

3. **Separation of church from state:** withdrawal from worldly systems of evil including government, taxes, oaths, and mixed communities.

4. **Charismatic/Apocalyptic:** among the revolutionary Anabaptists and Spiritualists, personal revelation by the Spirit was often claimed, and prophecies of the immanent end of the world often used to explain persecution and engender revolt.

**Reflection:** Which of the *Schleitheim Articles* would you agree to? (see Primary Docs)

1  2  3  4  5   
6  7

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### Radical Dangers

#### Social Order

- By controversial acts and promoting a separation of church and state, the Radicals were seen as hindering the reformation by alienating the governments and magistrates needed to implement reform.
- In the battle with Roman Catholic territories and the threat of the Turk, a single, unified, state church was seen as vital for the defense of a city or territory.
- By refusing the obligations of citizenship such as the tithe, oaths, and military service, they were seen as forming a divisive state within the state.
- Various outrages reflected badly on Anabaptist leaders and their doctrine. This included radical social reforms in Anabaptist cities such as polygamy and communism, as well as outright revolts such as the Peasants’ War.

#### Biblical Interpretation

- The removal of the church as the sole interpreter of scripture now multiplied into various competing ‘Reformed’ interpretations of scripture that argued against each other.
- Radicals pointed out that there was no explicit biblical command for infant baptism or a unified church and state.
- Spiritualists claimed personal revelation outside of the bible and made wild apocalyptic interpretations of scripture.

#### Theology of Salvation

- Luther and others argued that the Anabaptists were actually reverting to a Roman Catholic works-theology by making the changed life a precondition for baptism. Luther argued that it was a sign of an external change in the person’s standing before God, not of an inward change in the person’s life.
- Luther said Anabaptists were making the religious experience of Baptism a ‘work’, just as Roman Catholics were requiring ethical works for the believer’s salvation.

*“For faith doesn’t exist for the sake of baptism, but baptism for the sake of faith”*  
(LW 40:239)

**Reflection:** What is Zwingli’s main point against the Anabaptists in *On Baptism* (See Primary Docs). Do you agree with him?

#### Radical Examples

- **Müntzer**

A priest of Zwickau and Allstedt who studied under Luther but later denounced him as not going far enough, fast enough.  
Became **mystical and apocalyptic** in his understanding of God's method of revelation (i.e. *sola experientia* not *sola scriptura*).  
Modestly signed his letters 'Müntzer, Destroyer of the Ungodly'.  
Became a leader in the **Peasants' War**, declaring his affinity with the Peasants but ultimately blamed their mundane concerns for his defeat. Took over the peasant troops at **Frankenhausen** in 1525, but was surrounded by territorial armies. He declared a rainbow to be a divine omen of success, but 6000 peasants were subsequent slaughtered. Müntzer was discovered in the city, taken alive, tortured into recanting, and finally executed.
- **Münster**

The revolutionary Anabaptist, **Hoffman** preaches apocalyptically and declares himself the prophet Elijah, and Strasbourg the New Jerusalem, but is arrested by the authorities there and eventually dies in prison.  
Religious unrest in Münster, a city near the Dutch border with 15,000 people, picks up Hoffman's writings.  
The radical priest **Rothmann** opposes the local bishop and leads the declaration of the city as an "evangelical city". Thousands of Anabaptist refugees start fleeing there. Radicals win the town council with the burgeoning Anabaptist population.  
There are calls to kill all "the godless", but they are expelled instead. **Jan of Leiden** leads the city when Catholic and Protestant Princes attack, but repels the attacks and declares himself the "king of righteousness"  
Various Innovations are introduced, including **polygamy, communism,** and the **death-sentence** for specific sins and for the "unrighteous" in general.  
The city is under siege, suffers famine, and is eventually **betrayed and captured** in 1535, with the leaders tortured to death.
- **Grebel**

Considered the **founder of Anabaptism**. Was Swiss, but studied humanism in Paris and was converted through the preaching of **Zwingli** and supported him.  
Decided that Zwingli was more concerned about the government than the gospel, and was influenced by **Müntzer and Karlstadt's** radical writings.  
At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Zurich disputation (1523), there was agreement about the removal of images and the replacement of the mass with a memorial Lord's supper, but disagreement about how to proceed. Zwingli left it to the magistrates, wanting to protect the consciences of the people: "*But since these things cannot be abolished all at once, it is necessary to preach God's Word against them firmly and courageously*" (Lindberg, 127). Grebel and others wanted immediate abolishment of all abuses and began the **free church movement** – independent of the state. They took action by interrupting sermons, iconoclasm, and preaching against the tithe.  
In a new disputation (1524), Zwingli won out and infant baptism was ordered for all. Grebel and his circle ignore this and re-baptize each other. The **Diet of Speyer** (1529) renews an ancient death-penalty for re-baptism. Grebel dies of plague, but others in his circle are arrested and drowned.
- **Menno Simons**

A Catholic priest, reformed by **Luther's** teachings, who then moved to Anabaptism.  
His pacifism was a reaction to the **Münster** violence and he reorganized Anabaptist groups in the German north and Netherlands to be more biblically based, seeking **withdrawal** rather than revolution.  
He traveled around both evangelizing and engaging in debate with Protestants.  
His movement became known as the **Mennonites**, which is the ancestor of modern **Baptist** churches.

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#### Primary Sources (Lindberg)

##### **The Schleitheim Confession of Faith ('The Seven Articles'), Sattler et al, 1527.**

**First:** ... 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 of us and demand it for themselves...

**Second:** ... The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves to the Lord... and yet who slip sometimes and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken...

**Third:** ... All those who wish to break on bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ... shall be united beforehand by baptism in one body of Christ which is the Church of God...

**Fourth:** ... 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...

**Fifth:** ... The pastor in the Church of God shall... be one who out-and-out has a good report of those who are outside the faith. This office shall be to read, to admonish and teach, to warn, to discipline, to ban in the Church, to lead out in prayer... to lift up the bread when it is to be broken... and in all things to see to the care of the body of Christ...

**Sixth:** ... 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... simply the warning and the command to sin no more... it will be observed that it is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate...

**Seventh:** Christ, who teaches the perfection of the Law, prohibits all swearing to his [followers], whether true or false – neither by heaven, nor by the earth..."

##### **'Of Baptism', Zwingli, 1525.**

"The Anabaptists claim that only those who know that they can live without sin ought to receive the sign of baptism. In so doing they make God a liar and bring back the hypocrisy of legal righteousness... Is not that the height of presumption? As long as we are in the flesh, we are never without sin..."

Clearly, then, baptism cannot bind us in such a way that we must not accept it unless we know that we can live without sin: for if that be the case, baptism was instituted in vain, for not one of us can claim to do that before God. Therefore we will turn to the Word of God and learn there both what baptism is and when it was instituted. As regards the first question, baptism is a covenant sign which indicates that all those who receive it are willing to amend their lives and to follow Christ. In short, it is an initiation to new life. Baptism is therefore an initiatory sign...

Water-baptism cannot contribute in any way to the washing away of sin... Sin is taken away only when we have a good conscience before God. But no material thing can purge the conscience... The sacrament can never cleanse the soul, for it is only an external thing. The word which saves the soul is not the word outwardly spoken, but the word inwardly understood and believed."

##### **'Prague Manifesto', Müntzer, 1521**

"I have heard from them about mere Scripture, which they have stolen from the Bible like murderers and thieves; ...for they themselves have never heard it from God, from his very mouth... For anyone who does not feel the spirit of Christ within him, or is not quite sure of having it, is not a member of Christ, but of the devil..."

In order to bring such teaching to the light I am willing to sacrifice my life for God's sake, God will do wonderful things with his elect, especially in this land. For the new church will begin here, this people will be a mirror for the whole world. Therefore I summon every single person to help in the defense of God's word... If you refuse God will let you be struck down by the Turks in the coming year."

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#### Further Research (*if willing*) that will help exam preparation

What are six important points about Menno Simons or Thomas Müntzer that contributed to the European Reformation?

Read the Schleithem articles and for each article note what Catholic or Protestant doctrines it might be responding to, and any passages of scripture it seems to refer to.

#### Further Reading (*if eager!*)

Ozment, S., *The Age of Reform 1250-1550*. New Haven: Yale Uni Press, 1980. Chapter 10

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- Weaver, J.D. 'Radical Reformation' in Elwell, W.A. (ed.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, 903-05.