

# ***The Anabaptists***

## *Sources*

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Roland Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus* (1953)

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## I. Introduction

### A. Their Place in the Reformation

1. Continuation of pre-Reformation groups?
2. Culmination of the Reformation? (Bender)
3. Mislabeled socio-economic group?
4. Radicalization of the Reformation of Zwingli in Zurich?

### B. Approach to Reform

1. Tension between “reformation” (Zwingli) and “restoration” (Anabaptists)
2. Anabaptists sought to restore the NT church instead of reforming the Catholic Church

### C. Are Anabaptists Baptists?

1. Some similarities, notably baptism & church govt.
2. Some differences, such as pacifism
3. Tenuous historical connections
4. Many later Baptists distanced themselves from Anabaptists

## II. Analyzing the Anabaptists

### A. The “Radical Reformation”

1. Luther, often called a conservative among the Protestants, was radical in his approach to Catholic soteriology
2. Politically, the Anabaptists were clearly radical; hence the persecution
3. Doctrinally & ecclesiastically, the Anabaptists were often radical, but on some points (e.g., justification), they were actually the most conservative

### B. Classification

1. Revolutionary Anabaptists
  - a. Münster fanaticism (González, 73-74)
  - b. Untrue that they had nothing to do with Anabaptist teaching, but they were a fringe
2. Mystical Anabaptists
  - a. Mystical teaching
    - 1) Stressed inner leading of the Holy Spirit
    - 2) “Excessive experience”: Downplayed the Bible
  - b. Example: “Zwickau Prophets” (González, 38)
3. Rationalist Anabaptists
  - a. “Excessive reason”: Stressing the role of human reason to the point of modifying the teaching of the Bible to conform with reason.
  - b. Unitarians (Socinians)
    - 1) Michael Servetus: Burned in Geneva

- 2) Strong in Eastern Europe
- 4. Evangelical Anabaptists
  - a. Sought to be regulated by commands of the Bible supremely, rather than being speculative (like rationalists) or overly subjective (like mystics)
  - b. Centered in Switzerland and southern Germany
  - c. Major Milestones
    - 1) Swiss Brethren of Zurich: first group
    - 2) Balthasar Hübmaier: “Greatest intellectual”
    - 3) Schleitheim Articles by Michael Sattler first Anabaptist confession (González, 70-71)
    - 4) Menno Simons
      - a) Brought discipline & order to movement
      - b) Eschewed politics

### III. Views of the Evangelical Anabaptists

#### A. Nature of the Church (“Radical”)

- 1. Gathered Church
  - a. The church “gathered out” from society
  - b. Church as a brotherhood or family
  - c. Stress on defining the church “counterculturally” against society, leading to simple worship
    - 1) Practiced congregational polity, almost no liturgy or church decoration
    - 2) Strong emphasis on community, making the church a society within a society
- 2. Believer’s Baptism
  - a. “Anabaptist” means “re-baptizer”
  - b. Reinforced their idea of conscious, voluntary choice in joining the church

#### B. Separation of church and state

- 1. Differed here from the Magisterial reformers → state should have no involvement with the church
- 2. Often called “soul liberty” to stress its nature as a religious rather than political tenet. Religious belief and practice cannot be coerced but must come from the heart.
- 3. Anabaptists went further than modern advocates: opposed serving in the army (pacifism), voting, taking oaths, and in some cases paying taxes
- 4. Radicalism led to their bloody persecution

#### C. Soteriology

- 1. *Accused* of being closer to Rome in soteriology
- 2. Sin and justification
  - a. Some charged justification by faith alone was inimical to good works
  - b. Other reformers actually agreed on importance of good works but insisted on teaching that good works contributed nothing to justification
- 3. Anabaptist focus → Church issues & Christian living
- 4. Applied theology colored their approach to other issues