

The Nature of the Anabaptist Protest

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to delineate the main features of the Anabaptist protest. We shall see this protest in the religious, social, and political context of the time, take note of the way in which this protest was viewed by Catholics and Protestants, and get some feeling of the Anabaptist consciousness of the radicalness of their protest.

Anabaptism was part of that vast religious upheaval known as the Reformation. Its basic impulse was religious as it was for Luther and Zwingli, a yearning for a church, more faithful to the vision of its founder.¹

But if in its origins Anabaptism was a religious movement, and if generally speaking it remained such, its peculiar characteristics made it the bearer of revolutionary social and political potential. This is, of course, no secret. Traditional Catholic and Protestant historiography made this the basis of the rejection of Anabaptists from the ranks of humanity. Their judgments were usually slanderous and self-justifying.² Even today so notable an historian as G.R. Elton rather uncritically reflects this tradition. He writes:

During the heyday of Anabaptism it appeared to contemporaries that there were now three religions to choose from: the popish, the reformed, and the sectarian. It has sometimes been argued that the effective elimination of that third choice wrecked the prospects of early toleration and liberty for the private conscience. This is to mistake the true nature of Anabaptism. Since it always embodied a conviction

of sole salvation for the particular group of believers, and often also the chiliastic dreams of salvation realized in the destruction of the wicked with the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, it was in its essence markedly more intolerant than the institutional church. Its victory, where it occurred led to terror, and that was in the nature of things. No one will deny that the movement also gave prominence to men of true piety, simple belief and gentle manner; but this does not take away from the fact that its enormous appeal rested on the claim to bring power and glory to the poor, the weak and the resentful. The Anabaptism of the early Reformation - no matter what pious and respectable sects may today look back upon it as an ancestor - was a violent phenomenon born out of irrational and psychologically unbalanced dreams, resting on a denial of reason and the elevation of that belief in direct inspiration which enables men to do as they please. Not even the terrible sufferings of its unhappy followers should make one suppose that the salvation of mankind from its own passions could have been found by the path which runs along the clouds.³

This statement is suffused with hostility as indeed in his whole treatment of Anabaptists. Because of it he appears unable to bring discrimination to the problem leaving his conclusions so inaccurate as to be virtually worthless. It will simply not do to say "that was in the nature of things". Is religious separatism really determinative of violence? He presents no evidence for his conclusion either from primary sources or secondary literature; his judgment appears to be made on the basis of an abstract law of history. Besides that he applies this law to the Anabaptists only. It should perhaps be applied at least to Zwingli, since he too was a separatist, but there is no trace of it.

On the other side are the confessional apologists who, with some exceptions, have shied away from facing the revolutionary potential of Anabaptism. The movement has been interpreted in theological and apologetic terms. Were one not aware of the social and political setting of Anabaptism this interpretation would

never lead one to suppose that it had been a truly radical movement. The movement is adequately described but the obvious conclusions are not drawn.⁴

It is to the credit of some of the recent followers of Marx and Lenin that they have pointed out and documented the social revolutionary nature of Anabaptism.⁵ They too, as we know, write from within a confessional stance. Mennonite and other sympathetic historians⁶ have clearly shown the basically religious origins of Anabaptism; the Marxist historians have shown that such religious convictions can have radical economic and political consequences.

This paper is intended to be seen as an addition to the summaries of the Anabaptist vision made by H.S. Bender,⁷ Robert Friedmann,⁸ and John H. Yoder.⁹ Taking it beyond confessional concerns may help to provide a fuller picture of the movement and its fate.

I. The Religious Protest

Anabaptists, one and all, would have agreed with Luther's protest against Rome as described in his main writings of 1520, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church and The Liberty of the Christian Man. They accepted his doctrines that a man is saved by grace through faith and that every believer becomes a priest. They also constantly emphasized the Scriptures as the ultimate authority for the believer.

The first Anabaptists were the disciples of Huldreich Zwingli and followed him enthusiastically on his path to reform the church. The late Fritz Blanke stated in his conciliatory Brüder in Christo

that Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and the Zürich Brethren were Zwinglians to core, the only difference being that they were more biblicistic than Zwingli.¹⁰ John H. Yoder wrote that the Anabaptists "wanted only to correct the inadequacies of the other Reformation attempts which they saw around them."¹¹

It is time to raise the question again as to whether it is sufficient to say that all they wanted was a little more of what Luther and Zwingli had to offer. It is the thesis of this paper that the matter went deeper than that. It was not simply a question of playing oneupmanship with the Reformers. The Anabaptists started farther back religiously, economically, and politically. They not only agreed with the necessity for correcting abuses, but they raised questions about the basic assumptions of European religion and culture.

1. Against the traditional view of the sacred.

The first question is that of religion, the basic question of which is about the sacred, the holy. They do not ask whether God is or not; that is assumed and never argued. But how does God manifest himself among men? What is the nature of the holy, the sacred? They arrive at an answer quite different from that of the old church and most protestants.¹²

Basic for their position is the letter which Conrad Grebel and his friends wrote to Thomas Müntzer in September 1524.¹³ In it they describe their vision of the Christian life and the church. The document reveals nothing so much as a repeated and careful reading of the words of Jesus in the Gospels, Paul's words about the law, and the oracles of the Old Testament prophets about religious observances and ceremonies and the divine demands for

justice and love and mercy. It is the old question already asked centuries before Christ as to what constitutes the holiness which God is and demands of men.

It is the uniform testimony of Anabaptism that holiness does not belong to special words, objects, places, or persons. Grebel's letter is the first and representative example of this conviction, with which they rejected a centuries-long christian and an even longer pre- and para-christian understanding, of the sacred, a tradition that is still strong in Christianity.

The point at which the question focused most acutely was the Eucharist. There were the sacred words which were part of the miracle of transubstantiation;¹⁴ the sacred objects, the bread and the wine; the sacred place, the sanctuary, and the sacred person, the priest, without whom the miracle could not take place.¹⁵ Grebel and his friends reject the validity of the assumption that holiness is of that sort, for God neither instituted it nor demands it.¹⁶ That is to say, it is not Biblical.

More broadly the Anabaptists challenged the claim of the Roman Church to holiness. Because of its claim to supernatural origin and the presence of the Holy Spirit the church was regarded as holy in and of itself in its essence and being and visible manifestation. But Anabaptists applied a test other than that of sacramental holiness. Menno Simons, leader of Anabaptists in the Netherlands and North Germany, insisted that no matter how vaulting the claims of holiness, they are an abomination unless they are expressed in true love of God and man. He and his brothers could see in it only exploitation, deception, and on the part of its

chief representatives, the clergy, only evil living.¹⁷ Holiness divorced from truth and love is a deception and a lie. The institutions of the Catholic and Protestant churches were rejected as carriers of God's revelation since they lacked the true holiness which is moral and ethical in nature and not sacramental.

Holiness is not ontological but relational in nature. Thus baptism and the Supper had significance not in terms of the rites themselves but in terms of their function in the community. In baptism one joined the disciplined group of the followers of Jesus; the Supper was a sign "that we are and wish to be true brethren with one another."¹⁸ Anabaptists therefore do not view themselves as another cultic institution, but as the community of love and truth resolved to realize in the present God's will for the whole of mankind.¹⁹ Holiness therefore has to do with relationships and life style and behaviour.

2. Against intellectualizing Christian faith.

Paul Tillich describes the Catholic religious system of the later Middle Ages as follows:
 The Catholic system is a system of objective, quantitative, and relative relations between God and man for the sake of providing eternal happiness for man. This is the basic structure: objective, not personal; quantitative, not qualitative; relative and conditioned, not absolute.....
 It is a system of divine-human management, represented and actualized by ecclesiastical management.²⁰

Along with Luther and Zwingli Anabaptists rejected this heritage. But they charged the Reformers with not having put anything concrete in its place. So far as they could see Protestantism was another form of religious abstraction which left Europe no better or worse off than before. The doctrine of

sola fide, as they heard Luther preach it, was to them merely an intellectual concept because it did not call for a change in the style of life.²² They believed they had first-rate evidence of the basically anti-christian nature of an ontological approach to christian faith and life in that the clergy, who preached it showed no evidence of a Christ-like life.²³ Said one Anabaptist: "Certainly Christ died for us and redeemed us, but no one is saved by such redemption unless he follow Christ in his daily life to do and to suffer as he did and suffered."²⁴ Knowledge of Christ does not come from an intellectual concept. Menno Simons touches on this point in his work The New Birth:

Some may answer: Our belief is that Christ is the Son of God, that His word is truth, and that he purchased us with his blood and truth. We were regenerated in baptism and we received the Holy Ghost; therefore, we are the true church and congregation of Christ.

We reply: If your faith is as you say, why do you not do the things which he has commanded you in His Word?..... Since you do not do as He commands and desires, but as you please it is sufficiently proved that you do not believe²⁵ that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, although you say so.

In similar vein Hans Hut wrote in his Mystery of Baptism: "No one can attain to the truth unless he follows in the footsteps of Christ.... For no one can learn the mysteries of divine wisdom in the den or murderer's cave of all knavery, as they think in Wittenberg or Paris". Truth is therefore not abstract and ideological but existential in nature. It is not discovered in the universities but in the footsteps of Christ in everyday living. Thus the learned are not in the universities, courts, or bishop's palaces. In the school of discipleship God constantly reveals himself to the learned and unlearned alike. The measure of understanding is not relative to the level of intellectual ability, but to the measure of openness, of abandonment to God and his

3. Against the captivity of the church.

Had there been Anabaptists in 1520 Luther would undoubtedly have spoken for them in his Babylonian Captivity of the Church. But again they went behind all that to question the assumptions about the church and its place in European society. The church, they insisted was captive to ancient crippling assumptions to such a degree that it was really no longer the church. The Anabaptists rejected the whole notion of the corpus christianum or the communitas christiana, and in so doing consciously set themselves against the whole traditional, venerable, 1000-year-old order of society.²⁸ This order is aptly and concisely summarized by Gerhard Zschäbitz:

In the rite of baptism the Catholic Church received the new terrestrial citizen without delay into its ranks and thus bound him ideologically to his role in the order of society which the Church helped to form. Already in his minority she committed him to the recognition of the ecclesiastical and with it the magisterial role and function. This spiritual bonding to the magical effectiveness of the sacraments which enclosed all of life paralyzed the thought and action of man, for outside the Church eternal damnation threatened the rebellious who, in heretical rejection of the spiritual commandments, at the same time stood in opposition to the total apparatus of secular authority.²⁹

Allowing for individual differences in development and formulation a similar situation became normative in Protestantism. Both Luther and Zwingli initially had difficulty with the rite of infant baptism because of their emphasis on faith, but both retained it because infant baptism was the link between church and society.³⁰ Zwingli made the baptism of infants a civic obligation,³¹ and Luther too appears to have regarded the opposition to infant baptism as seditious.³² The reason for the gradual dependence on the support of secular authority for both Luther and Zwingli was

the desire to preserve the cultic unity of the people in the given political jurisdiction.³³ The magistrate was the only authority, however, who could enforce that unity. It was natural therefore that in 16th-century Protestantism as in medieval Catholicism the secular authority became the church disciplinarian.³⁴

Anabaptists regarded this fusion of church and society as the "Fall" of the church. Membership in the church, the company of Jesus, was to them a matter of personal faith and commitment since Jesus made serious demands on his followers. The church was therefore the company of disciples, consciously committed to his way. Questions of faith could not be made matters of law since faith was God's gift and could not be either awakened nor extinguished by legal means.³⁵ Therefore matters of faith were to be dealt with within the community of faith and not by a power outside of it.

This was in fact the enunciation of the principle of religious liberty. It was already included in Grebel's letter to Müntzer,³⁶ and turns up in Anabaptist writings everywhere.³⁷ In 1534 the Anabaptist Kilian Aurbacher wrote to Martin Bucer:

It is never right to compel one in matters of faith, whatever he may believe, be he Jew or Turk. Even if one does not believe uprightly or wants to believe so, i.e., if he does not have or want to have the right understanding of salvation, and does not trust God or submit to Him, but trusts in the creature and loves it, he shall bear his own guilt, no one will stand for him in the Judgment.... And thus we conduct ourselves according to the example of Christ and the apostles and proclaim the Gospel according to the grace that He has entrusted to us; we compel no one. But whoever is willing and ready, let him follow Him, as Luke shows in Acts. That this then also is an open truth, that Christ's people are a free unforced, and uncompelled people, who receive Christ with desire³⁸ and a willing heart, of this the Scriptures testify.

Hans Denck, one of the most attractive of the early Anabaptist leaders, put the matter this way:

Such a security will exist, also in outward things, with the practice of the true Gospel that each will let the other move and dwell in peace - be he Turk or heathen, believing what he will - through and in his land, not submitting to a magistrate in matters of faith. Is there anything more to be desired? I stand fast on what the prophet says here. Everyone among all peoples may move around in the name of his God. That is to say, no one shall deprive another- whether heathen or Jew or Christian, but rather allow everyone to move in all territories in the name of his God. So may we benefit in the peace that God gives.³⁹

All of this was a repudiation of the concern for cultic unity. It is no wonder therefore, that the reformers one and all vehemently rejected religious liberty. For them it was anarchy.⁴⁰ In calling for religious liberty Anabaptists exposed themselves to the charge of sedition. It was in fact a call for a pluralistic society; that meant the dismantling of the monistic ones in which they found themselves. And when they proceeded in January, 1525, to the formation of a new community the chief offence was not a theological but a political one.⁴¹ The nature of the sacred, of faith, and of the church were the points at which the religious protest was made.

II. The Economic Protest

This is really, so far as Anabaptist thought and practice is concerned, a part of their view of the church. But the issue too easily gets hidden within the religious framework which does not deal with its broader social implications.^{41a} Hence the special isolation and treatment of the subject here.⁴² We should be reminded that Anabaptist views on the matter of private property and interest and usury were scripturally based and assumed to be an integral part of a christian life style.⁴³

Rarely do Anabaptists get as passionate as they do when they deal with economics. Their indignant statements usually constitute part of the reply to the charge of communism of property. Thus Menno Simons wrote in 1552 about the Protestant clergy:

Is it not sad and intolerable hypocrisy that these poor people boast of having the Word of God, of being the true, Christian church, never remembering that they have entirely lost their sign of true Christianity? For although many of them have plenty of everything, go about in silk and velvet, gold and silver, and in all manner of pomp and splendour; ornament their houses with all manner of costly furniture; have their coffers filled, and live in luxury and splendour, yet they suffer many of their own poor, afflicted members (notwithstanding their fellow believers have received one baptism and partaken of the same bread with them) to ask alms; and poor, hungry, suffering, old, lame, blind, and sick people to beg their bread at their doors.

...Shame on you for the easygoing gospel and barren breadbreaking, you who have in so many years been unable to effect enough with your gospel and sacraments so as to remove your needy and distressed members from the streets⁴⁴

Peter Rideman, writing in 1542 makes a broad indictment of the whole private commercial enterprise:

This only we regard as wrong: when one buyeth a ware and selleth the same again even as he bought it, taking to himself profit, making the ware dearer thereby for the poor, taking bread from their very mouths and thus making the poor man nothing but the bondman of the rich....They say, however, "But the poor also profit in that one bringeth goods from one hand to another!" There they use poverty as a pretext, seeking all the time their own profit first, and thinking only of the poor as having an occasional penny in their purse.⁴⁵

As can be gathered from these statements it is a protest against the neglect and economic exploitation of the poor by the rich. But for Anabaptists this was a question of faithfulness to the Gospel. Hence their own attitude to property and its use.

All Anabaptists agreed that in the Kingdom of God of which they knew themselves to be citizens there could be no "mine" and "thine." Among the Hutterian Anabaptists in Moravia and the

Anabaptists of Münster this developed into a complete community of goods involving both production and consumption.⁴⁶ Among the majority a community of goods involving only consumption was normative. In both instances the community of goods was part of their ordering of the new community of the disciples of Jesus. They had no intention of implementing it as a program for the whole society. Much less did they accept as an economic principle that the poor anywhere had a right to the possessions of the rich.⁴⁷

They simply believed that within the community of faith there should be no need. The earliest records testify to this. Georg Blaurock and Felix Manz, two of the original leaders in Zürich said that a good christian would distribute what he had to those in need.⁴⁸ A year later Balthasar Hubmaier stated:

Concerning community of goods, I have always said that everyone should be concerned about the needs of others, so that the hungry might be fed, the thirsty given to drink, and the naked clothed. For we are not lords of our possessions, but stewards and distributors. There is certainly no one who says that another's goods may be seized and made common, rather, he would gladly give the coat in addition to the shirt.⁴⁹

Ambrosius Spitelmeier insisted in 1527 that a true christian should own nothing, everything should be "ours", since christians say "our Father."⁵⁰ These statements could be multiplied many times over.⁵¹ With the above-named exceptions (Hutterians and Münsterites) personal property was allowed among Anabaptists. It was not made common, but was treated as such.

But for the Reformers and the magistrates such a distinction was difficult to take seriously, for to say that a christian ought never to claim anything as his own was, in their estimation, like throwing a torch into the tinderbox. There was in fact some basis for their apprehension, for the poor suffered especially between

1500 and 1565 from a combination of wage stability and steep price increases for goods.⁵² Despite the fact that Zwingli and Melanchthon had both at one time spoken like Anabaptists on the question of private property,⁵³ they now regarded such convictions as seditious. In 1525 Zwingli was carefully inquiring into this view among his former followers.⁵⁴ Melanchthon became particularly fearful. He wrote in 1535. "This article attracts the undisciplined rabble, who don't want to work and waste more than they can earn honestly. That this teaching instigates robbery and sedition anyone can easily understand."⁵⁵

While Anabaptists therefore expected a new attitude to property to prevail in their own community, and at no time advocated its extension to the whole society, it nevertheless represented a threat to the stability of society. Had the movement had a chance to grow it could most certainly have had major economic consequences. Of this the established authorities were properly apprehensive.

A further facet of this protest was the practice of usury, the charging of exorbitant interest. It follows naturally from the general argument of the exploitation of the poor by the rich. P. J. Klassen states that "any thought of exacting usury was foreign to a movement that was characterized by constant emphasis upon, and practice of, mutual aid."⁵⁶ Among the early Swiss Anabaptists abandonment of usurious enterprise was a condition for membership.⁵⁷ No clergyman should have anything to do with usury, particularly as it affected his living.⁵⁸ Pilgrim Marpeck also rejected usury as unbecoming to a Christian.⁵⁹ Menno Simons frequently listed usury as a vice along with others which any disciple of Jesus would avoid.⁶⁰ He was especially incensed at the exploitation of the poor by this means.⁶¹ An Anabaptist from Hesse named Georg Schnabel bitterly

charges that among Lutherans usury continues to exploit the poor man, in fact that the situation is now much worse than under the pope. Even among pagans such oppression has not been heard of. And now those who draw this injustice to their attention are tortured with dungeon and rack. No wonder he threatens them with God's word. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay everyone according to his works."⁶²

While the Anabaptists for the most part emphatically did not cherish dreams of violent overthrow and enforcing of communism, their views and practices did represent a threat to the established order since they set about to realize a counter-society. It will not do, therefore, to say that they were simply misunderstood.⁶³ They were understood very well, hence the violent opposition and efforts to exterminate them.⁶⁴

III. The Political Protest

The caveat introduced at the beginning of part II applies here as well. The political protest is not to be isolated from the religious basis in which Anabaptism was rooted. All the separate parts were defended on the basis of the Gospel, but especially the political protest along with the economic one drew against them the ire of theologian and magistrate, Protestant and Catholic alike.

When Conrad Grebel and his friends drew up the blueprint for a new church they made no place for the magistrate or Obrigkeit.⁶⁵ Not only that, but they insisted that no christian could hold a governmental office.⁶⁶ The refusal to participate in the magistracy is founded upon the biblical conception of the two orders, the old

and the new.⁶⁷ The Schleithem Confession of 1527 states that the role of the magistrate, while it is a necessary and God-given function, is exercised "outside of the perfection of Christ."⁶⁸ Menno Simons writes of two opposing princes and two opposing kingdoms, the one characterized by peace, the other by strife.⁶⁹ Government or the magistrate functions in that kingdom where strife is the norm writes Peter Rideman. Its citizens are those who do not subject themselves to God, and the magistrate was appointed to restrain them from evil. It is the "servant of God's anger and vengeance" and carries out its function with the sword, "to shed the blood of those who have shed blood."⁷⁰ Its function is God-given and consists of punishing the evil and defending and protecting the pious.⁷¹ Menno Simons states it thus in addressing magistrates:

.....You are called of God and ordained to your offices to punish the transgressors and protect the good, to judge rightly between a man and his fellows; to do justice to the widows and orphans, to the poor, despised stranger and pilgrim; to protect them against violence and tyranny, to rule cities and countries justly by a good policy and administration...⁷² to the benefit and profit of the common people.....

The state then is the restraining authority in that spiritual area which has not accepted the Lordship of Christ, but is subject to the prince of strife. The state exercises its restraint upon the violent with violence.

But the other area is that which has willingly and joyfully accepted the Lordship. It is the domain of the prince of peace.

Menno writes:

The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; His kingdom is the kingdom of peace, His Word is the word of peace, His body is the body of peace; His children are the seed of peace; and His inheritance and reward are the inheritance and reward of peace. In short, with this king,⁷³ and in His Kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace.

The Anabaptists knew themselves to belong to this kingdom of peace. They belonged to the new order in which radically different ways of acting were the norm, and they could not participate in any actions that belonged to the old order. Therefore also they could not participate in the magistracy because that belonged to the old order of strife. "No Christian who makes his boast in his Lord is allowed to use and rule by violence," wrote Hans Denck. "It is not that the (magisterial) power is wrong in itself from the point of view of the evil world, for it serves the vengeance of God, but that love teaches her children a better way."⁷⁴ Menno Simons put it in this moving way: "Therefore we desire not to break this peace, but by His great power by which he has called us to this peace and portion, to walk in this grace and peace, unchangeably and unwaveringly unto death."⁷⁵

Thus they did not reject government as such but rather considered it as absolutely essential. Since however it was instituted by God because of human sin, and was not an order of creation, it had only penultimate validity for them.⁷⁶

The evident reason, then, for their inability to participate in the function of the state was that, because the kingdom of which Jesus was king claimed their first loyalty, they also had to live and act by its rules, and not by the rules of a penultimate order. The norm of the penultimate order in which the magistrate had his function was violence and strife, and the means to deal with it were violent, i.e., the sword. But the norm in the ultimate order of Jesus is love. Thus all violence is forbidden the disciple. Therefore also, he cannot participate in war.

This was a particularly sore point in the Europe of the 1520's,

for all of Europe feared the aggressiveness of the Ottoman Turks. When Michael Sattler said he would not fight against the Turks that was something like saying today that one will not fight against communism or against decadent capitalism, depending upon who the objector is. Refusal to fight meant that one was ready to let the infidels conquer Christian Europe. Even to say one would not fight without actually refusing, weakened the defense of Europe. Thus the Anabaptist protest against war was not made in a vacuum by any means.

Moreover we must remember that whenever Anabaptists spoke on this matter they were addressing themselves to professing Christians, and that the European wars were always wars between professing Christians. Anabaptists were therefore giving evidence of ecumenical concern by directing themselves against what they insisted was a glaring contradiction, Christian oral confession of allegiance to the Prince of peace and the denial of it in action. Sattler's words are to the point:

If warring were right, I would rather take the field against so-called Christians who persecute, capture, and kill pious Christians than against the Turks....The Turk is a true Turk, knows nothing of the Christian faith, and is a Turk after the flesh. But you who would be Christians and who make your boast of Christ persecute the pious witnesses of Christ and are Turks after the spirit!⁷⁸

In this context of fear and apprehension they nevertheless completely rejected the use of the sword. Conrad Grebel wrote that the "gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves..... True Christian believers.. do not use worldly swords or war, since all killing has ceased with them - unless, indeed, we would still be of the old law."⁷⁹

Menno Simons wrote:

All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?

Formerly people who knew no peace, he writes, they are now called into peace.

Therefore we desire not to break this peace, but by His great power by which He has called us to this peace...to walk in this grace and peace, unchangeably and unwaveringly unto death.

And Peter Rideman once more:

There is therefore no need for many words, for it is clear that Christians can neither go to war nor practice vengeance. Whosoever doeth this hath forsaken and denied Christ and Christ's nature.⁸¹

It is at this point also that the issue of religious liberty enters the picture again. Since the Middle Ages it had been accepted practice to put dissenters and unbelievers to death. It was done for their own good, it was argued. It prevented them from falling even further into error and sometimes torture and the stake brought them to "repentence." A variant of that position showed up in Anabaptism at the notorious Kingdom of God of Münster. These people argued that the only way to deal with the wicked persecuting unbelievers who would not join them was to kill them all. About these Menno writes:

Some say, the Lord wants to punish Babylon and that by His Christians. They must be His instruments.

And to this he replies:

All of you who would fight with the sword of David, and also be the servants of the Lord, consider these words, which show how a servant should be minded. If he is not to strive or quarrel, how then can he fight? If he is to be gentle to all men, how can he lay aside the apostolic

weapons? He will need them. If he is to instruct in meekness those that oppose, how can he destroy them?⁸²

Men will not come to the truth by violence and killing. Only patience and love and gentleness can accomplish that. Violence and killing are rejected in obedience to Christ because they are not the means to be used to achieve Christian ends.

The third issue in the political protest was the oath. The basic statements on the oath simply restate the dominical prohibition of swearing any oath at all.⁸³ The oath is not used by disciples of Jesus since it is designed to ensure that truth is spoken. The disciple speaks the truth as a matter of course since he belongs to the Truth which is Christ.

But the refusal to swear oaths brought them into direct conflict with the states of the time. For the function of the oath was not only to assure that truth was spoken; it was also employed to ensure political loyalty. It had been the adhesive of feudalism and was still used in 16th century Europe as a means of cementing the body politic. Melanchthon, for example, "felt that the very structure of civil order and government was secured by the swearing of oaths. Without the civil oath, society would disintegrate into anarchy, since people would have no compulsion to obey the God-ordained authorities in society."⁸⁴ Thus the city of Strassburg, for example, had an institution known as the Schwörtag (the Day of the Oath), on which all citizens swore an oath of allegiance to the state in front of the Cathedral.⁸⁵ This oath involved fidelity as well as the readiness to support the state in time of war. Recorded incidents from 1531 and 1534 indicate that Anabaptists refused to take this oath. Thus Anabaptists were well enough aware that when they refused to swear oaths that included the

loyalty oath.⁸⁶ This refusal to swear the loyalty oath of course cut very close to the foundation of the state. When citizens refused to swear allegiance the state was in danger, and prosecution was the natural consequence. But Anabaptists could not in good conscience swear the oath of allegiance because it committed them to the exercise of violence and confirmed a view of the function of the state which they could not hold. No wonder that they were always suspected of sedition.⁸⁷

By their theology of the state and its practical consequences as outlined they clearly rejected the absolutist divine right claims of the state and severely restricted its area of jurisdiction. No 16th century authority could ignore such a challenge.

The authorities, civil and ecclesiastical saw in Anabaptism a conspiracy against the social order.⁸⁸ In fact this was the chief basis for their persecution by Protestants as well as Catholics. The good moral lives of these people no one could deny⁸⁹, but it was uniformly interpreted as hypocrisy. They were wolves in sheep's clothing.⁹⁰ Zwingli could think only of insurrection when he encountered their views⁹¹; Luther and Melanchthon both regarded the Anabaptist view of the state, rejection of oaths, and community of goods as incontrovertably seditious.⁹² Moreover for both of them any false teaching was blasphemy and that in turn was seditious.⁹³ The Anabaptist teaching about baptism or the Supper or good works was therefore an offence against the state.

By the imperial decrees of Jan. 4, 1528 and April 23, 1529 Anabaptism became an imperial offence, a crimen publicum. The Anabaptist had become an enemy of the state. The latter decree states that no ecclesiastical action against them is necessary.⁹⁴ Horst Schraepler claims that not one single Anabaptist was tried

before an ecclesiastical court in all of the 16th century.⁹⁵

Anabaptism was therefore a religious movement that was neither Catholic nor Protestant. It was a christian movement of the most radical sort in that it questioned virtually all of the assumptions upon which 16th century society, culture, and church rested. A society with a still basically medieval mentality toward dissent could not allow Anabaptism to grow unhindered. Its assessment of the danger of Anabaptism to the existing culture was clearly perceived. Prelates and Reformers were wrong when they were certain that the movement must turn to violence, that "it was in the nature of things," to use Elton's phrase, but it was a threat even in its basic nonviolent stance.

Today, in a world finally recognized by Protestants and Catholics as secular, their challenge to the absolutism of secular church and sacral state has become the banner of many a Catholic and Protestant alike.⁹⁶ It turns out that the Anabaptist understanding of the relationship of church and state in terms of its basic assumptions is much more suited to today's situation than that of 16th century Catholic or Protestant. And we even see the development of similar consequences. The names of Daniel and Philip Berrigan and William Sloane Coffin Jr., Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhöffer, Dom Helder Camara and Father Antonio Henrique⁹⁷ of Brazil make the point clear enough. Anabaptists are becoming the heroes of the New Left, and have been adopted by the followers of Marx as early proletarian revolutionaries.

Notes

1. Hajo Holborn, "The Social Basis of the German Reformation," The Reformation: Material or Spiritual?, ed. by Lewis W. Spitz, Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1962, 41-42.
2. For examples see Heinrich Bullinger Der Widertöufferen vrsprung, fürgang, Secten, wäsen, fürnemme vnd gemeine jrer leer Artickel... Zürich, 1561; Christoph Erhard, Gründliche kurzverfaste Historia Von Münsterischen Widertaufern: vnd wi die Hutterischen Brüder so auch billich Widertaufer genet werden im Löblichen Marggraffthumb Märhern deren vber die Sibenzehen tausent sein sollen gedachten Münsterischen in vilen änlich gleichformig vnd mit zustimmet sein, München, Adam Berg, 1588; Johann Jakob Hottinger, Historia der Reformation in der Eidgenossenschaft... Zürich: Bodmerischen Truckerey, 1708; Johann Kurtz, Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte für Studierende, 9th ed., Leipzig: August Neumann, 1885. See also Harold S. Bender, "The Historiography of the Anabaptists", Mennonite Quarterly Review XXXI (April, 1957), 88-89. This journal hereafter referred to as MQR.
3. G. R. Elton, Reformation Europe 1517-1559, London. Fontana Library, 1963, 103.
4. Much of the material in the MQR is of that nature as are most monographs up to the present. Even P. J. Klassen, The Economics of Anabaptism, The Hague. Mouton, 1964, and Clarence Bauman, Gewaltlosigkeit im Täufertum, Leiden: Brill, 1968, dealing with the most explosive issues of economics and the state do not clearly place them in the social and political context of the time. Beginnings are made by Cornelius Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968, who does not posit the oftenmade radical discontinuity between the "peaceful" and the "revolutionary" Anabaptists, John Oyer, Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964, 235 - 237, who refers to Anabaptists as revolutionary and radical in a socio-political sense, and John H. Yoder, Täufertum und Reformation im Gespräch, Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968, 143. A recent popular treatment which shows the social and political relevance of Anabaptism is Arthur G. Gish, The New Left and Christian Radicalism, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970, chapter 2.
5. Gerhard Brendler, Das Täuferrreich zu Münster, 1534-35, Berlin, 1966; Gerhard Zschäbitz, Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung nach dem grossen Bauernkrieg, Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1958.
6. A good example is Fritz Blanke, Brothers in Christ, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1951.
7. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," Reprint from MQR (April, 1944), 1945.
8. Robert Friedmann, "Das täuferische Glaubensgut: Versuch einer Deutung," Sonderdruck aus Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, Jahrgang 55, 1964, Heft 2.

9. John H. Yoder, "A Summary of the Anabaptist Vision", in An Introduction to Mennonite History, ed. C. J. Dyck, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1967, 103-111. Hereafter referred to as Summary.
10. Op. cit., p.
11. Summary, 103.
12. It should be clarified here that they stood much closer to Zwingli on this point than to Luther, which is to be expected. Luther retained a sacramental position, i.e., that God's grace comes to man through the medium of Word and Sacrament. For Zwingli the sacraments are symbols. Nevertheless both Luther and Zwingli argued about the presence of Christ in the Bread and Wine, and it was at this point that Anabaptists parted company with both.
13. Printed in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, ed. G.H. Williams and A.M. Mergal, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957, pp. 73-85. Hereafter referred to as SAW. See also a new translation along with photocopy and transcription of the original by J.C. Wenger, The Programmatic Letters of Conrad Grebel 1524, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1970.
14. Ray C. Petry. A History of Christianity, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice-Hall, 1962, 446-7.
15. Ibid., 327-8.
16. SAW, especially pp. 76-77.

The words at the Supper are words of institution, not consecration. "The bread is nothing but bread"; "an ordinary drinking vessel too ought to be used." The Supper is "not to be used in temples" which creates "external reverence." Peter Rideman in 1542 explicitly describes the Anabaptist rejection of church buildings as suitable places for worship:

"With regard to the buildings of stone and wood - these originated, as the history of several showeth, when this country was forced by the sword to make a verbal confession of the Christian faith. Further, men dedicated temples to their gods, and then made them "Churches", as they are wrongly named, of the Christians. Thus, they originated through the instigation of the devil and are built up through sacrifice to devils.... For that is also not God's will, for Christ hath no fellowship with Belial. Therefore, also, hath he commanded in the Old Testament that they should utterly destroy and break down such places, that they might not share in that fellowship. Nowhere doth he say, change it and use it aright; but saith break it down utterly.

Now, because the people did this not, but left the root in the earth, they not only brought not the heathen practices to the right usage, but they themselves forsook the right usage and surrendered themselves to all manner of idolatry, and they have now changed so much that they call "saints" what those called "gods". And for the same reason because the root is left in the

earth - they have gone farther and have built one house after another for their gods (or "saints" as they call them, and filled them with their gods and idols, and thereby show that they are the children of their fathers and have not left their fellowship." (Confession of Faith, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950, 94-5.) Further Grebel states that "a server from out of the congregation" should say the words, and the whole rite should be conducted "without priestly garment or vestment." Finally, "none is to receive it alone", since "that was the beginning of the Mass that only a few would partake." See also SAW, 140-141 for statements on the sanctity of persons by Michael Sattler.

17. "It is true enough that the papists teach and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he sacrificed his flesh and shed his blood for us. But they also say that if we wish to partake thereof and share in it we must obey the pope and belong to his church, hear mass, receive the holy water, go on pilgrimages, call upon the mother of the Lord and the deceased saints, go to confessional at least twice a year, receive papistic absolution, have our children baptized, and keep the holy days and fast days in Lent. The priests must vow "chastity"; the bread in their mass must be called the flesh of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ.....

And all of this the poor ignorant people call the most holy Christian faith and the institution of the holy Christian church. Although actually it is nothing but human invention, self-chosen righteousness, open seduction of souls, manifest deception of the soul, an intolerable make-a-living and gain of the lazy priests, an accursed abomination, provocation of God, shameful blasphemy, an unworthy despising of the blood of Christ, invented notions, and a disobedient refusal to bow to the holy Word of God. In short, a false, offensive religion and open idolatry, things concerning which Jesus Christ... has not left nor commanded us a single letter.

And this is not yet enough that they practice such abominations. But they proceed also to despise as vain and useless all the true fruits of faith, commanded by the Son of God himself. the genuine, pure love and fear of God, the love and service of our neighbours, and the true sacraments and worship."

Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. J. C. Wenger, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956, 332-333. Hereafter referred to as CWMS.

18. SAW, 76.
19. Ulrich Stadler, a leader of Moravian Anabaptists says in his Cherished Instruction that the ordinances of Christ "should constitute the polity for the whole world." Since, however, not everyone will follow Christ, those who do form the community which God desires and live according to his will in mutual truth, love and aid. (SAW, 278)

Similarly Peter Rideman writes:

"The Church of Christ is the basis and ground of truth, a lantern of righteousness, in which the light of grace is borne and held before the whole world, that its darkness, unbelief and blindness be thereby seen and made light, and that men may also learn to see and know the way of life. Therefore is the Church of Christ in the first place completely filled with the light of Christ as a lantern is illuminated and made bright by the light, that his light might shine through her to others." (Op. cit., 39-40).

20. A Complete History of Christian Thought, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, 228.
21. John S. Oyer, Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1964, 143. This was the view not only of Anabaptists. Oyer states and documents that this was the view of so important a person as Melancthon.
22. Hans Hut, "Of the Mystery of Baptism", appendix to G. Rupp, Patterns of Reformation, London, Epworth, 1969, 380. "For the teaching one hears from them is nothing else than: Have faith! and goes no farther." Cf. D. Bonhoeffer's discussion of "cheap grace" in Cost of Discipleship, London: SCM Press, 1959, 35-47.
23. Oyer, op. cit., 222 footnotes 1 and 2; Zschäbitz, op. cit., 79-80, cites a series of statements by Anabaptists which may be taken as representative of the movement as a whole. For an excellent statement by Menno Simons see CWMS, 209.
24. Elsa Bernhofer-Pippert, Täuferische Denkweisen und Lebensformen im Spiegel oberdeutscher Täuferverhöre, Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967, 127.
25. CWMS, 96. Hans Denck said, "No one can know Christ unless he follow him in his life." On this further, Bender, op. cit., 15 and Friedmann, op. cit., 145.
26. Translated from Der Linke Flügel der Reformation, ed. H. Fast, Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1962, 82.
27. For a further aspect of this protest see Walter Klaassen, "The Bern Debate of 1538: Christ the Center of Scripture," MQR, XL, 151.

Because Anabaptists were concerned not with an ontological or essential state of justification but with a direct following of Christ according to his example in the Gospels, they had relatively little interest in the traditional doctrines of atonement and christology. Statements on these matters can be found especially in Menno Simons, but discussion of them is normally the result of being drawn into controversy. See Friedmann, op. cit., 153-4.

28. SAW, 74; Die älteste Chronik der hutterischen Brüder, hrs. A.J.F. Ziegelschmid, Carl Schurtz Memorial Foundation, 1943, 47.
29. Op. cit., 88.
30. Oyer, op. cit., 29-30; Zschäbitz, op. cit., 89-91.
31. Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz I. hrs. von L. von Muralt und W. Schmid, Zürich, 1952, nos. 24, 25, 26.
32. Oyer, op. cit., 126.
33. Yoder, op. cit., 141.
34. Ibid., 145-6; Oyer, op. cit., 174-5, 198-200.
35. Both Zwingli and Luther had also held this view but their concern for cultic unity won out over an initial leaning in the direction of liberty of conscience.
36. SAW, 79-80.
37. Balthasar Hubmaier, "Von Ketzern und ihren Verbrennern," Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften, hrs. G. Westin und T. Bergsten, Gütersloh, 1962, 95-100.
Leopold Scharnschlager, "Aufruf zur Toleranz" in Der Linke Flügel der Reformation, hrs. Heinold Fast, Bremen, Carl Schünemann, 1962, 119-130. Menno Simons, "A Pathetic Supplication to All Magistrates", CWMS, 525-531; Harold S. Bender, The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the 16th Century, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970, has numerous other statements on religious liberty, as also Henry Kamen, The Rise of Toleration, New York: World University Library, 1967, 56-66.
38. Bender, The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty, 10-11.
39. Hans Denck: Schriften 3. Teil, hrs. W. Fellmann, Gütersloh, 1960, 66.
40. See John H. Yoder's discussion of the Urfehde as the way in which the Swiss Reformers insisted that they stood for religious liberty in Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch, pp. 142-4. Cf. Luther's statement that though he did not intend to prescribe to anyone what he should believe yet he would not tolerate a dissenter in his principality. Quoted in Kamen, op. cit., 35.
41. Both Zwingli and Luther knew from their own thought the vision of the church the Anabaptists advocated. Frequently in the early 1520's Zwingli had spoken against any magisterial interference in the affairs of faith. See John H. Yoder, "The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation," MQR, XXXII (April, 1958), 128-40. Luther's delineation of such a church is found in the preface to his "The German Mass, 1526," Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1523-1526, ed. J. G. Tappert, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967, 387-403.

- Zschäbitz is again right when he says: "Trotz allem ist die Taufe eine Verpflichtung zur Anerkennung des Vorrangs der Sondergemeinde, die sich schon durch ihre blosse Existenz gegen die obrigkeitlichen Instanzen und deren normative juristische und ethische Gesetzgebung richtete." op. cit., 93. See also Paul Peachey, Die Soziale Herkunft der Schweitzer Täufer in der Reformationszeit, Karlsruhe: Schneider, 1954, 102.
- 41a Such a treatment is D. Sommer, "Peter Rideman and Menno Simons on Economics", MQR, XXVIII (July, 1954), 205-223. He has assembled a lot of material but there is no indication that these views had any broader social implications.
- 42 See Zschäbitz, op. cit., 16.
- 43 This is also clearly recognized by the most critical of the Marxist interpreters Gerhard Zschäbitz in op. cit.
- 44 CWMS, 559. See also CWMS, 195, 528.
- 45 Confession, 127.
- 46 Johann Loserth, Der Communismus der mährischen Wiedertäufer im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte, Lehre und Verfassung, Archiv für österreichische Geschichte, Bd. LXI, Wien, 1894. John Horsch, The Hutterian Brethren, Goshen, Ind.; The Mennonite Historical Society, 1931; Robert Friedmann, Hutterite Studies, Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1961, 76-85; 103-122. The bibliography on Münsterite Anabaptism is vast. See Cornelius Krahn, op. cit. 288-291 for the most significant titles.
- 47 P. J. Klassen, op. cit., 46.
- 48 Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz. I Bd.: Zürich. hrs. v. L. v. Muralt u. W. Schmidt, Zürich: 1952, 216, 217. Hereafter referred to as TAZ.
- 49 Quoted in P. J. Klassen, op. cit., 32.
- 50 Else Bernhofer-Pippert, op. cit., 105, contains a lengthy quote from Spitelmeier's confession.
- 51 Other statements to be found in Klassen and Bernhofer-Pippert. Further see Zschäbitz, op. cit., 102-104; Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte, IV Bd, Wiedertäuferakten, ed. G. Franz, Marburg, 1951, 174-175, (hereafter referred to as TA Hesse); CWMS, 558; Rideman, Confession, 88-91; SAW, 277-284.
- 52 Zschäbitz, op. cit., 160-161.
- 53 See H. S. Bender, Anabaptist Vision, footnote 53, p. 21. Zwingli said in 1523, "Even if we were not sinful by nature, the sin of having private property would suffice to condemn us before God; for that which he gives us freely, we appropriate to ourselves." Quoted in John Horsch, op. cit., 132.

- 54 TAZ, 121; Zwingli and Bullinger, ed. G. W. Bromiley, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953, 276.
- 55 Quoted in P. J. Klassen, *op. cit.*, footnote 76, p. 41. Translation by W. Klaassen. See also Oyer, *op. cit.*, 152-3 on Melanchthon's response to the Anabaptist position in detail.
- 56 *Op. cit.*, 105.
- 57 H. S. Bender, Conrad Grebel, Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1950, 276.
- 58 TAZ, 16; TA Hesse, 75.
- 59 Kunstbuch, 80.
- 60 CWMS, 213, 301, 424, 442, 444.
- 61 CWMS, 368-369.
- 62 TA Hesse, 175.
- 63 As P. J. Klassen does in The Economics of Anabaptism, 24-26.
- 64 This same phenomenon was present in the nonviolent civil rights movement of Martin Luther King and to some degree also in institutional reaction to the New Left. See Gish, *op. cit.*
- 65 SAW, 80.
- 66 "The Schleithem Confession., The Protestant Reformation, ed. H. Hillerbrand, "An Early Anabaptist Treatise on the Christian and the State", MQR, XXXII (Jan. 1958), 44, Fol. Ciiij (This reference is to a photocopy of the treatise). Pilgram Marbeck's Antwort auf Kaspar Schwenckfelds Beurteilung des Buches der Bundesbezeugung von 1542, hrs. J. Loserth, Wien und Leipzig, 1929, 303-04; Rideman, Confession, 105-108; Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter II, hrs. Robert Friedmann, Gütersloh, 1967, 270-273; CWMS, 198.

While Conrad Grebel and the Hutterian Anabaptists insisted that no christian could be a magistrate this did not strictly apply to all Anabaptists. Menno Simons does leave that possibility open although he is not optimistic on the matter in the light of his experience (CWMS, 197, 204, 299, 922). Pilgram Marpeck takes a similar cautious position when he leaves open the possibility of a christian being a magistrate although it would be very difficult (Loc. cit., 304).

Anabaptists have frequently been charged with inconsistency in that their acceptance of the legitimacy of the state and their refusal to participate in it involves them in an insolvable contradiction. On this the following can be offered.

Leaving aside for the moment the theoretical question, it is clear that because of their basic espousal of nonviolence and refusal to use power in the traditional way of government or to

coerce anyone in matters of faith the question of their participation in government then is a purely academic one. The governments of Europe in the middle half of the 16th century were absolutist one and all, uniformly rejecting the principle of religious liberty.

On the theoretical question both Menno Simons and Pilgram Marpeck had some views. Neither sensed any inconsistency in calling on magistrates to exercise justice and righteousness since virtually all European magistrates and rulers claimed to be Christian. Since they professed to follow Christ there was in fact no inconsistency in the numerous Anabaptist calls on the magistrates to exercise Christlike behaviour, even though they themselves would not hold that office (even had they been able to do so). (CWMS, 117, 191, 299, 528-9). Again the magistrate was not exempt from the Gospel call to repentance and following Christ. Since Anabaptists believed that it was possible for all men to respond to the Gospel and become disciples that was true for magistrates and rulers as well. Hence frequent appeals to them to abandon their godless and violent ways and become humble followers of Jesus.

Directly related to this was the call to exercise their calling faithfully because it was given them by God who would, in the final judgment, require an account of them. They too were responsible to God (CWMS, 118-119, 194, 206).

What God required of them was to keep order "outside the perfection of Christ." Marpeck writes that God has erected natural statutes that are applicable to all men everywhere. They are not the sum of what men are capable of by God's grace, but they are sufficient for man's external needs (Kunstbuch, 47v). Marpeck as well as Menno saw rulers in Old Testament times appointed by God to exercise justice. They insisted that the rulers who were their contemporaries likewise could be expected to exercise justice and adequately fulfil their function according to God's will. Marpeck quotes Proverbs 8: 15-16 in support of his contention that all rulers, be they Jews, gentiles, or heathen, have available to them God-given natural wisdom to rule justly (Kunstbuch, 65v). But the magistrate does not need the wisdom of Christ for his function as a ruler, although it would most certainly be highly desirable. Nevertheless, the wisdom of Christ includes love of enemy, the cross, patience, nonviolence, all of which fit only with difficulty into the function of a ruler ("Vorrede zur Testamentserläuterung", in Pilgram Marbeck's Antwort, pp. 580-581). Menno insisted that the rulers could exercise their function faithfully and adequately with a lot less violence and oppression than they do, and quotes the Old Testament prophets at length to make his point (CWMS, 193; 196-197).

That a problem nevertheless remains is strongly felt by some Anabaptists. One response to a demand for explaining the contradiction referred to was much like Calvin's final justification for the uncomfortable doctrine of predestination:

Since the issue of magistracy and coercion surprises you so, namely that God ordained and instituted you and that you should yet be condemned and not saved in your office... My dear man, who are you to quarrel with God? Does that which is made say to the maker. Why have you made me thus? Where then lies the problem in the claim that God, when he desired to show his wrath and reveal his power, in great patience brought forth the vessels of wrath?

(Quoted in H. Hillerbrand "The Anabaptist View of the State", MQR XXXII (Apr. 1958) 101. My translation).

Nowhere in Anabaptist literature is there an attempt at a rational defence of their position. This quotation drives us back to their final authority, "the life and doctrine of Christ and the apostles." To this faith was subject and so was reason even if a clear inner consistency was not visible.

- 67 Robert Friedmann, "The Doctrine of the Two Worlds", Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, ed. Guy Hershberger, Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957, 105-118.
- 68 See note 66.
- 69 CWMS, 554.
- 70 Confession, 104-105.
- 71 SAW, 141.
- 72 CWMS, 551
- 73 CWMS, 554.
- 74 Hans Denck: Schriften 2. Teil, hrs. W. Fellmann, Gütersloh, 1956, 85.
- 75 CWMS, 555. For further statements in the context of a thorough treatment of this issue see H. Hillerbrand, "The Anabaptist View of the State", MQR, XXXII (April, 1958), 83-110.
- 76 See John H. Yoder's very penetrating analysis of this whole issue in Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch, 155-177.
- 77 SAW, 141.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 SAW, 80.
- 80 CWMS, 555.
- 81 Confession, 109. For further evidence of this position see John Horsch, The Principle of Nonresistance as held by the Mennonite Church, A Historical Survey, Scottdale, Pa.: 1927;

H. S. Bender, Anabaptist Vision, p. 22-3; Bernhofer-Pippert, op. cit., 133-134.

82 CWMS, 46.

83 CWMS, 517-521, Confession, 114-5; Schleitheim Confession, article 7.

84 Oyer, op. cit., 171, 193; Bernhofer-Pippert, op. cit., 132.

85 Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer. Elsass, hrs. M. Krebs und H. G. Rott, Gutersloh, Vol. I, no. 238, Vol. II, nos. 355, 359, 374, 539.

86 Examples of this in TA Hesse, 395; H. Hillerbrand, "The Anabaptist View of the State", 105, footnotes 125, 126, 127.

87 Op. cit., 118-164.

A word should be said about the Münster episode of 1534-1535, since this was often appealed to as proof of the ultimate intentions of Anabaptists. The best recent summary has been made by Cornelius Krahn. It began with the chiliasm of Melchior Hofmann who preached about the coming Kingdom of God on earth although he never approved of militant chiliasm. When he was imprisoned in Strassburg the movement quickly passed into other hands. The chiliastic temperature went up as the persecution grew fiercer, and with it a stronger hope and expectancy of the coming of the Kingdom. Deprived of their rights in this world by church and state Anabaptists began to harbour thoughts of revenge and announced the coming judgment of God. The next step was the conviction that God would exercise his judgment on the wicked oppressors through the saints. But even though these views developed among the leaders, many simply looked to Münster, which had been identified as God's chosen city, as a city of refuge to save God's chosen ones. Once the city was besieged that fact itself contributed to the military action in the city as well as to the later reign of terror. Careful research has shown that there is no evidence of insurrection against authority or government on the part of the thousands who headed towards Münster upon invitation from those inside. The call to arms did not really come until the end of 1534, when plans were made to break the siege. There was violence in the city; those who did not accept baptism were given the choice of death or leaving the city. It is also unquestionably true that these people were Anabaptists. Further they were condemned as strongly by Menno Simons as by anyone for the godlessness of their chosen way. Nevertheless, without the slightest intention of defending the Münster Anabaptists Krahn's judgment is unquestionably correct when he says.

This event was no different from all other religious wars including those that led to the independence of the Netherlands and to the establishment of numerous territorial and state churches in various countries. (Krahn, op. cit., 260)

So is Yoder's:

....The revolution of Münster, with which uninformed historians still blacken the Anabaptist name, was not consistent Anabaptism, it was a reversion to the same heresy accepted by Lutherans and Catholics alike - the belief that political means can be used against God's enemies to oblige an entire society to do God's will. (Peace Without Eschatology? Scottdale, Pa.. Mennonite Publishing House, 1954, 15).

- 88 For a series of examples see Zschäbitz, op. cit., 145-148.
- 89 Bender, Anabaptist Vision, 16-17 gives a number of testimonies by enemies to their moral excellence.
- 90 Zschäbitz, op. cit., 159.
- 91 Yoder, Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch, 139.
- 92 Oyer, op. cit., 122, 126-128, 169.
- 93 Ibid., 136-139 (Luther), 175, 176, 155, 156 (Melanchthon), 198-9, 205 (Menius); Zschäbitz, op. cit., 153.
- 94 Zschäbitz, op. cit., 149-150, Horst Schraepler, Die rechtliche Behandlung der Täufer in der deutschen Schweiz, Südwestdeutschland und Hessen 1525-1618, Tübingen: Ekkehart Fabian-Verlag, 1957, 21-22.
- 95 Schraepler, op. cit., 16.
- 96 See Michael Novak, "The Meaning of 'Church' in Anabaptism and Roman Catholicism: Past and Present", Voluntary Associations, ed. D. B. Robertson, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966, 91-108.
- 97 National Catholic Reporter, May 29, 1970, p. 1.