

# The Radical Reformation

*Anabaptists, Mennonites, Hutterites, and Amish — believer’s baptism, nonviolence, separation, and the Baptist conscience • c. 1525–1700*

By Shane Gunn • Primary-source study

← [Church History Archive](#)

**Where this fits:** Lesson 17 of the Pleasant Springs *Church History* series — a supplementary lesson. The Anabaptist movement *split off* from the Reformed Reformation in Zurich in January 1525, six years after Zwingli began preaching at the Grossmünster (see [Lesson 16](#)). For the European context, see also [Luther at Worms \(Lesson 15\)](#). See the full [Series Timeline](#).

## WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

---

On 21 January 1525, in a private home on Neustadtgasse in Zurich, a small group of young men who had been Zwingli’s students gathered in defiance of the city council. One of them, a former Catholic priest from the Tyrol named **George Blaurock**, knelt before another man and asked to be baptized — despite the fact that he had been baptized as an infant decades earlier.

**Conrad Grebel**, a 26-year-old patrician from a leading Zurich family, poured water over Blaurock’s head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Blaurock then baptized the others present. The Swiss Reformed Reformation had just produced its first great schism. The **Anabaptists** — “re-baptizers” — had arrived.

Both Luther and Zwingli wanted a *magisterial* Reformation — a reform carried out under the civil magistrate, with state-sponsored infant baptism, the parish system, and the territorial

church. These young radicals wanted something different: a *gathered* church of believers only, baptized as adults on confession of faith, separated from the state, committed to non-violence, refusing to swear oaths or bear the sword. Within months of their first baptism they were being hunted, imprisoned, drowned, and burned — by Catholics, by Lutherans, and by Zwinglians. Within two decades the movement had produced its first martyrology. Before the century was out, tens of thousands had died for the conviction that only a believer should be baptized.

Their direct descendants today are the **Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites**, and various Brethren churches. Their theological children include every baptistic, free-church, and separation-of-church-and-state tradition — which, in America, means a large majority of evangelical Protestantism, including most of our own congregations. This is a lesson about the third stream of the Reformation — the one that paid the highest price and whose convictions still shape how American Baptists think.

*Greek NT (Matt 28:19–20): πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλαμην ὑμῖν.*

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV): “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

The Anabaptists read that verse literally: *disciple first, then baptize*. That simple reading cost thousands their lives.

## PART 1 — THE THIRD STREAM

---

Historians typically divide the sixteenth-century Reformation into three streams:

### **MAGISTERIAL — LUTHERAN**

Under the magistrate.  
Infant baptism retained.  
Territorial state church.

### **MAGISTERIAL — REFORMED**

Under the magistrate.  
Infant baptism retained.  
City-church or state-

### **RADICAL — ANABAPTIST**

Apart from the  
magistrate. Believer’s  
baptism only. Gathered

Real presence in the Supper. Liturgical continuity. **Luther and Wittenberg.**

church. Spiritual or memorial Supper. Regulative principle of worship. **Zwingli and Calvin.**

free church. Memorial Supper. Discipleship (*Nachfolge*) as the center of Christian life. **This lesson.**

**A note on the word “radical.”** Not “radical” in the modern political sense; “radical” from the Latin *radix* (“root”) — people who wanted to go to the root of the Christian life and rebuild from there. The Radical Reformation includes not only the Anabaptists of this lesson but also some stranger figures who have mostly been forgotten — spiritualists like Caspar Schwenkfeld and Sebastian Franck, and rationalists like Michael Servetus (whom Calvin burned, see **Lesson 16 Part 10**). We focus here on the Anabaptists, the only radical branch whose theological descendants are still a substantial worldwide family today.

## **PART 2 — THE FIRST BAPTISM (21 JANUARY 1525)**

---

Zwingli’s reform of Zurich (**Lesson 16 Part 2**) had attracted a circle of enthusiastic young men — Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Simon Stumpf. By 1523, reading the New Testament on their own, they began to draw conclusions Zwingli himself rejected:

- **Baptism in the New Testament is always for believers.** There is no explicit New Testament case of an infant being baptized; every recorded baptism follows hearing, repenting, and believing. Therefore infant baptism has no biblical warrant; the practice must cease and every baptized infant must, upon becoming a believer, be baptized again.

- **The Christian community cannot be identical with the civil community.** A city-church that baptizes every infant born in the city is, by definition, a mixed body of regenerate and unregenerate. Christ’s true church must be visibly distinct — a disciplined, gathered community of confessing believers.

- **Reforms must proceed at the pace of Scripture, not the city council.** Zwingli had slowed reform for political reasons; the radicals thought this compromised

obedience.

**The 17 January 1525 disputation.** The Zurich city council convened a formal debate. Zwingli defended infant baptism; the radicals argued against it. The council ruled for Zwingli and ordered all children baptized within eight days, the radicals silenced, and their leaders expelled from the city. Felix Manz was ordered to remain quiet under pain of banishment.

**The private baptism.** Four days later, on the evening of 21 January 1525, the group gathered secretly at the home of Felix Manz's mother. According to a Hutterite chronicle compiled from eyewitness sources:

*“After the prayer, George of the House of Jacob stood up and besought Conrad Grebel for God’s sake to baptize him with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with that request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained deacon to perform such work. After that was done, the others similarly desired George to baptize them, which he also did upon their request. Thus they gave themselves to the name of the Lord, with the high promise of faith, knowing well that they had chosen for themselves a narrow and difficult way.”*

— *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren, recording the events of 21 January 1525*

The Anabaptist movement had begun. It would spread across German-speaking Europe within three years.

## PART 3 — THE SWISS BRETHREN (1525–1535)

---

### Conrad Grebel (c. 1498–1526)

PATRICIAN ZURICH FAMILY • EDUCATED BASEL, VIENNA, PARIS • THE FIRST ANABAPTIST • DIED OF PLAGUE IN EXILE, AGE 28

First Anabaptist

Swiss Brethren

The son of a member of the Zurich council, Grebel was by all accounts a restless, dazzlingly educated young man who came to faith under Zwingli. He wrote a decisive

letter to Thomas Müntzer in September 1524 arguing for believer's baptism, nonresistance, and a pure gathered church — the earliest surviving Anabaptist theological document. After the 1525 break he travelled from town to town in Switzerland and southern Germany baptizing converts. He was arrested, escaped, arrested again, escaped again, and died of the plague in the summer of 1526 at about 28. His brief, brilliant ministry set the Swiss Anabaptist pattern.

## **Felix Manz (c. 1498–1527)**

ZURICH HEBRAIST • FIRST ANABAPTIST MARTYR AT THE HANDS OF PROTESTANTS • DROWNED IN THE LIMMAT RIVER, 5 JANUARY 1527

First Anabaptist martyr

Drowned

Manz was a gifted Hebraist who had planned to produce an Old Testament commentary. After the January 1525 baptisms he became the most visible Anabaptist in Zurich. Arrested repeatedly, he was finally condemned by the Zurich council under a statute specifically against re-baptism. The sentence was “the third baptism” — a cruel Protestant joke. On 5 January 1527, in the waters of the Limmat River flowing past Zurich, his hands and feet bound, he was drowned. His mother and brother called from the riverbank to strengthen his resolve. He sang “*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*” (Luke 23:46) as he went under.

## **George Blaurock (c. 1491–1529)**

FORMER CATHOLIC PRIEST FROM BONADUZ, GRAUBÜNDEN • THE FIRST ANABAPTIST “RECIPIENT” • BURNED AT THE STAKE, KLAUSEN, TYROL, 6 SEPTEMBER 1529

Blaurock (his nickname: “Blue-coat” or “Blue-cloak”) became the great Anabaptist missionary after 1525, baptizing thousands across Tyrol and Graubünden. He was captured, tortured, and burned by Catholic authorities in 1529.

## Michael Sattler (c. 1490–1527)

FORMER PRIOR OF THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF ST. PETER'S,  
BLACK FOREST • ADOPTED ANABAPTISM 1525 • AUTHOR OF THE  
SCHLEITHEIM CONFESSION • TORTURED AND BURNED AT ROTTENBURG  
AM NECKAR, 21 MAY 1527

Schleitheim Confession

Martyr

Sattler was a highly educated Benedictine who left his monastery after the Peasants' War convinced him of the corruption of the state church. He became the most influential voice in the Swiss Anabaptist movement between Grebel's death and his own, twelve months later.

**The Schleitheim Confession (24 February 1527).** In a secret meeting at Schleitheim on the Swiss-German border, Sattler and about twenty Swiss Brethren leaders drafted the first substantial Anabaptist statement of faith. The *Schleitheimer Artikel* are not a systematic theology; they address seven specific points of dispute and were circulated as working agreement among the Swiss Brethren. The seven articles:

### THE SEVEN ARTICLES OF SCHLEITHEIM (24 FEBRUARY 1527)

1. **Baptism** shall be given only to those who have been taught repentance, who believe in Christ, and desire it themselves.
2. **The ban** (congregational discipline) applies to those who slip into sin, who are privately admonished first; and finally publicly excluded from the Lord's Supper.
3. **Breaking of bread** is for the baptized believers only, who are truly one body of Christ.
4. **Separation from the evil and wickedness** of the world — from Catholic and Protestant worship, from worldly courts, from all works of darkness.
5. **Pastors** (shepherds) shall be those chosen by the congregation, supported by it, and subject to its discipline.
6. **The sword** — the magistrate rightly uses it outside the perfection of Christ; but Christians do not employ the sword, do not serve as

magistrates, do not resist evil by force. Christ “is the head of his church,” not the magistrate.

7. **The oath** — Christians do not swear oaths (Matt 5:33–37), because their yes should be yes, and their no, no.

**Sattler’s arrest and martyrdom.** Austrian authorities captured Sattler and a group of his followers within weeks of Schleithem. His court trial at Rottenburg on 17–18 May 1527 produced a nine-count indictment. Sattler defended every point from Scripture. The sentence:

*“Michael Sattler shall be committed to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue; then throw him on a wagon and there tear his body twice with red-hot tongs; and after he has been brought outside the gate, he shall be thrown upon it [a fire] five times more, and then burned to powder as an arch-heretic.”*

— **Sentence of the Austrian court at Rottenburg, 18 May 1527**

The sentence was carried out on 21 May 1527. Sattler sang “Father, I commend my spirit” as they tore at him with hot tongs. His wife Margaretha, who had been a Beguine before her conversion, was drowned in the Neckar eight days later.

*“It may be seen whether we are heretics or not. It is not our doctrine but theirs who persecute us that tears at the very heart of the Christian religion.”*

— **Michael Sattler, at his trial, Rottenburg, 17 May 1527**

## **PART 5 — THE MÜNSTER CATASTROPHE (1534–1535)**

---

No lesson on Anabaptism is honest without addressing Münster. This is the catastrophe that shaped the movement’s reputation for centuries.

In 1533–1534, a millenarian Dutch Anabaptist named **Jan Matthys** proclaimed that the city of **Münster** in Westphalia was the New Jerusalem and that Christ's return was imminent. Thousands of radicals flooded into the city. In February 1534 they took over the city council by democratic election, expelled all Catholics and Lutherans who refused re-baptism, and declared Münster the holy city. Matthys died in a suicidal sortie against besieging Catholic forces in April 1534. His successor, **Jan van Leiden** (a 25-year-old Dutch tailor and former actor), then declared himself the successor of King David, instituted compulsory polygamy (taking sixteen wives himself), abolished private property, executed dissenters, and held a blasphemous coronation.

A joint Catholic-Protestant army under the Bishop of Münster besieged the city for sixteen months. On 24 June 1535, the city fell. Jan van Leiden and his two chief lieutenants were tortured publicly for an hour with red-hot iron tongs, then killed and their bodies placed in three iron cages suspended from the tower of St. Lambert's Church in Münster as a warning.

**The three cages are still there today.**

**The effect on the Anabaptist movement.** Münster was catastrophic for peaceful Anabaptists. Jan Matthys and Jan van Leiden had called themselves “Anabaptists,” and the broader European public now associated the word with polygamy, apocalyptic violence, and revolution. Catholic and Protestant authorities took Münster as proof that all re-baptizers were a danger to civil society. Persecution intensified everywhere. Within three years the Swiss Brethren were scattered, the South German movement decimated, and the Dutch movement reduced to hiding.

Into this wreckage stepped a middle-aged Dutch Catholic priest named Menno Simons.

## **PART 6 – MENNO SIMONS & THE DUTCH MENNONITES (1496–1561)**

---

### **Menno Simons**

BORN 1496 IN WITMARSUM, FRIESLAND (NETHERLANDS) • CATHOLIC  
PRIEST 1524–1536 • ANABAPTIST LEADER 1536–1561 • DIED 1561,  
WÜSTENFELDE, HOLSTEIN

Menno was a Frisian Catholic priest with growing doubts about transubstantiation and infant baptism in the early 1530s. Three events pushed him to leave Rome:

**c. 1531** • An Anabaptist named Sicke Freerks Snijder is executed in Leeuwarden for being “rebaptized.” Menno, a priest in the area, is shocked and troubled: he reads the New Testament carefully on baptism and finds no case of infant baptism.

**1534–1535** • The Münster catastrophe. Menno’s own brother Pieter joins a radical Anabaptist uprising at the Oldeklooster monastery near Bolsward and is killed when the Catholic army takes it in April 1535. Menno is devastated — and further convinced that he must speak out against the violent distortion of the movement. He writes *The Blasphemy of John of Leiden* (1535), attacking the Münster theology.

**January 1536** • Menno leaves the Catholic priesthood. He goes into hiding, is rebaptized by Obbe Philips (an older peaceful Anabaptist), and begins a twenty-five-year ministry of rebuilding the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands and North Germany on explicitly non-violent, biblical, community-based lines.

Menno travelled constantly under threat of arrest, with a price on his head, always slightly ahead of the authorities. He wrote voluminously — his collected works fill nearly 1,000 pages in English. His most-quoted line, inscribed over the door of his own house and painted on many Mennonite churches since:

*“For no one can lay any other foundation than the one that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” — Menno’s motto, from 1 Corinthians 3:11, which he placed at the head of nearly every book he wrote.*

— **Menno Simons, motto (1 Cor 3:11)**

By his death in 1561, the peaceful Dutch Anabaptists who followed him were already being called **Mennists** or **Mennonites**. The name has stuck. Modern Mennonites in the Netherlands, Germany, America, Russia, Paraguay, Ethiopia, Congo, and many other countries are his spiritual heirs.

## PART 7 — JAKOB HUTTER & THE HUTTERITES

### Jakob Hutter (c. 1500–1536)

TYROLEAN HATMAKER • MORAVIAN ANABAPTIST ELDER • BURNED AT  
INNSBRUCK, 25 FEBRUARY 1536

Moravian Anabaptists

Community of goods

Hutterites

While Menno Simons was organizing the peaceful Dutch movement, a separate strain of Anabaptists took shape in Moravia (modern Czech Republic) under the protection of tolerant local lords. The Moravian Anabaptists, under the leadership of **Jakob Hutter**, took a distinctive step: they abandoned private property altogether, modelling themselves on Acts 2:44–45 and Acts 4:32–35.

*Greek NT (Acts 2:44–45): πάντες δε ὁί πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπι τὸ αὐτὸ  
καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά, καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον  
καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἄν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν.*

Acts 2:44–45 (ESV): “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

The **Hutterian Brethren** gathered on large rural estates called *Bruderhofs* (“brother-farms”) where all property was common, members ate together, worked together, and raised children together. Over four centuries they were driven out of Moravia into Slovakia, Transylvania, Romania, Ukraine, and finally (in the 1870s) the Dakota territories of the United States and the Canadian prairies. Today about 50,000 Hutterites live in roughly 500 colonies on the American and Canadian Plains, still practicing community of goods, still speaking German in their services, still baptizing only adult believers.

Jakob Hutter himself was captured in Tyrol in 1535, tortured in Innsbruck through a brutal winter, and burned at the stake on 25 February 1536. His wife Katharina was killed two years later.

## PART 8 — THE MARTYRS MIRROR (1660)

---

In 1660 a Dutch Mennonite pastor named **Thieleman J. van Braght** compiled what is still, in many Mennonite and Amish households, the most important book outside the Bible: *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*. It runs to over 1,100 pages in its English translation and recounts the stories of thousands of Christians who died for their faith — from Jesus and the apostles, through the early martyrs, through the Waldensians and Hussites, and down to the Anabaptists of the 16th and 17th centuries, whom it documents in extraordinary detail.

Van Braght counted 4,011 Anabaptist martyrs whose stories he could document. Modern estimates of total Anabaptist martyrs during the 16th and 17th centuries are typically between 4,000 and 10,000. The *Martyrs Mirror* and its engraver **Jan Luyken's** 104 etchings shaped Anabaptist identity for centuries.

*“The old Dutch Bible and the old Martyrs Mirror have been a great blessing to our people. From these books our fathers have drawn their strength and their faith, and upon these two books we still build.”*

— **Amish bishop, quoted in a 20th-century oral history**

One famous story from the book — **Dirk Willems**, a Dutch Anabaptist, escaped from prison in 1569 by crossing a frozen pond. His pursuer fell through the ice. Willems stopped, turned back, and pulled the man out of the water — and was re-arrested on the spot. He was burned at Asperen on 16 May 1569. The Luyken etching of Willems stretching his hand to his pursuer has become, for many Christians, the single most unforgettable image in the *Martyrs Mirror*.

## Jakob Ammann (c. 1644–before 1730)

SWISS MENNONITE ELDER • LED A SPLIT FROM THE SWISS MENNONITES IN 1693 • FOUNDED THE AMISH

Amish

1693 schism

By the late 17th century the Swiss Mennonites had, under persecution, relaxed some of their distinctive practices. Jakob Ammann, a bishop in the Emmenthal, argued for stricter observance of three things:

- **Meidung — shunning.** Ammann insisted that excommunicated members should be shunned in all social and familial contact, not merely excluded from communion. This reading of 1 Cor 5:11 and 2 Thess 3:14 was the sharpest issue.

- **Footwashing.** He wanted the practice restored as a regular church ordinance, based on John 13.

- **Simplicity of dress.** He called for fixed, plain clothing and (for men) untrimmed beards as visible markers of separation from the world.

The dispute led to mutual excommunication between Ammann's followers and the broader Swiss Mennonites in 1693. Ammann's faction became known as the **Amish**. A large proportion of them eventually emigrated to Pennsylvania starting in the 1720s, invited by William Penn.

Today the Old Order Amish number approximately 400,000 in North America, concentrated in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Wisconsin. They continue to practice believer's baptism (typically around age 18), to reject state power and modern communications in varying degrees, to speak Pennsylvania German in their homes, and

to shun the excommunicated. Their particular form of Anabaptist life has had, on American popular culture, a visibility entirely disproportionate to their numbers.

## PART 10 — ANABAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

---

**1. Believer's baptism (*credobaptism*) only.** Baptism is a confession of personal faith, a “walking in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) that presupposes conscious repentance and faith. Infant baptism is rejected as unbiblical.

**2. The gathered church.** The church is not the territorial parish; it is the voluntary assembly of baptized believers. The civil magistrate has no authority over it. This is the Reformation's earliest and clearest statement of what we now call the separation of church and state.

**3. Nonresistance (*Wehrlosigkeit*).** Christ's Sermon on the Mount rules out the sword in the hands of Christians. Christians do not serve as magistrates who wield the sword, do not serve in armies, do not return violence for violence. This is the Anabaptist reading of Matt 5:38–48 and John 18:36. It is the most difficult of their distinctives for magisterial Protestants to accept; it is also the one modern Mennonite peace theology has carried most faithfully.

**4. No oaths.** Christians do not swear — not in court, not in civic ceremonies (Matt 5:33–37). The Christian's yes is yes and no is no; no external invocation of God is needed or permitted.

**5. Discipleship (*Nachfolge Christi*).** The heart of the Christian life is obedience to Christ in the visible pattern of his life. The Protestant tradition's suspicion of “works-righteousness” is set aside; Anabaptists insist that faith must produce visible discipleship

or it is not faith. The word *Nachfolge* — “following after” — would later shape Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937), whose original German title is *Nachfolge*.

**6. Church discipline (“the ban”).** Matt 18 is read as the church’s disciplinary pattern. Unrepentant members are admonished, then publicly rebuked, then excluded. In its healthy form, this produces a disciplined believing community; in its worst form, it can become cruelty dressed as holiness.

**7. Memorial Supper.** The Lord’s Supper is a memorial and a sign of Christian fellowship, following Zwingli more closely than Calvin. Feet-washing is often added as a supplementary ordinance.

**8. Simplicity and separation from the world.** Christians are resident aliens (1 Pet 2:11). This is lived out in varying ways — modestly among modern mainstream Mennonites, visibly among the Old Order Amish.

## PART 11 — DESCENDANTS AND LEGACY

---

### Mennonites

Global family of c. 2.2 million today. Largest national bodies now in Ethiopia, Congo, and India. American Mennonites cluster in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, and Canada. Modern Mennonite denominations in the U.S. include Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Brethren, Brethren in Christ, Conservative Mennonite Conference, and various Old Order and plain groups. *Mennonite Central Committee* has become one of the most respected evangelical relief agencies in the world.

### Amish

c. 400,000 in North America; rapidly growing (doubling every generation). The Old Order Amish remain the most culturally visible Anabaptist group in the United States.

## Hutterites

c. 50,000 in about 500 colonies across the U.S. and Canadian plains, still practicing the full community of goods Jakob Hutter organized.

## The Baptist Conscience

Modern Baptists have a distinct historical origin — in the English Separatist tradition — and do not descend directly from the Continental Anabaptists. But the key convictions they share are not accidental:

- Believer's baptism only.
- Congregational gathered-church polity.
- Separation of church and state.
- Religious liberty as a primary theological conviction, not just a political arrangement.

These were Anabaptist convictions a century before John Smyth founded the first English Baptist congregation in Amsterdam in 1609 (where, notably, he sought recognition from the Dutch Mennonites). Smyth's successor Thomas Helwys, and the American Baptist heroes who followed — Roger Williams at Providence, Isaac Backus in New England, John Leland in Virginia — all argued positions the Swiss Brethren had articulated at Schleithem in 1527, usually at the cost of their lives. When the American founders settled on no religious establishment and the free exercise of religion (see **our Founders & Faith study**), the Baptists who lobbied for it were standing on the shoulders of martyrs who had been drowned in a Swiss river 260 years earlier.

• **Paid-for convictions.** Every time a Baptist congregation practices believer's baptism, or insists that government has no business in the sanctuary, or refuses the sword of coercion to enforce doctrine — we are standing on convictions that cost Felix Manz his life in a Swiss river and Michael Sattler his tongue at Rottenburg. A Baptist conscience that does not know its own history is a cheap conscience.

• **The danger of apocalyptic certainty.** Münster is the permanent warning of what happens when a movement allows its apocalyptic expectations to override its ethics. Every tradition that thinks itself uniquely faithful is a few bad decisions away from Jan van Leiden's throne. The correction is always the same: humility, Scripture, the peaceful example of Jesus.

• **Nonviolence deserves a fair hearing.** Most American Baptists today are not pacifists; but Anabaptist peace theology reads the Sermon on the Mount more consistently than most of us do. Whether or not we follow them all the way, engaging their argument honestly — as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin largely failed to do — is a Christian duty.

• **Discipleship is the heart of faith.** The Anabaptists' insistence that real faith produces real discipleship is the single best corrective to the American evangelical temptation to “pray a prayer” and move on. *Nachfolge* — actually following Jesus, at cost — is not works-righteousness. It is what faith looks like when it is alive.

*Greek NT (Matt 5:38–39):* ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη· ὀφθαλμοῦ ἑνὸς ἀντιὸν ὀφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντιὸν ὀδόντος. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ.

Matthew 5:38–39 (ESV): “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

**1.** The Anabaptists argued that every recorded New Testament baptism follows hearing, repenting, and believing. Where in the New Testament do you find the strongest case for infant baptism, and where the strongest case against it?

**2.** Felix Manz was drowned by a Protestant city council, for disagreeing with a Protestant reformer about the age of baptism. Does that fact change how you think about the magisterial Reformation?

**3.** Schleithem Article 6 says Christians do not serve as magistrates who wield the sword. Most of us do not live that way. What is the argument against it that actually convinces you, and how secure is that argument?

**4.** The Münster catastrophe was the work of a radical Anabaptist minority. How should the mainstream of a movement handle its extremists — in the 16th century, and now?

**5.** Dirk Willems turned back to save the man chasing him. Would you have? What does that story reveal about the Anabaptist understanding of who our enemy is?

**6.** The Amish dress, travel, and live differently from their neighbors to make a theological point. Is the plainness *obedience*, *testimony*, *legalism*, or some mixture? What parts of the Anabaptist simplicity could modern American Baptists receive without becoming Amish?

## CLOSING PRAYER

---

Lord Jesus, King of the kingdom that is not of this world, we thank you for Grebel in his young restlessness, for Manz singing as the water closed over him, for Sattler holding his tongue in hot tongs, for Menno writing from one hiding place to the next, for Hutter burning in Innsbruck, for Dirk Willems turning back for his pursuer. Thank you for every nameless martyr in the *Martyrs Mirror* whose death our congregation benefits from daily. Forgive the magisterial churches that drowned, burned, and imprisoned them — forgive us the ways we would have joined in if we had lived then. Give us a Baptist conscience, an Anabaptist humility, a Christ-shaped nonresistance, and a discipleship that costs us something. Our yes be yes; our no, no. Through your good name. Amen.

## FURTHER READING

---

### Primary sources:

- The *Schleitheim Confession* (1527) — the foundational Swiss Anabaptist document.
- The *Dordrecht Confession of Faith* (1632) — the foundational Dutch Mennonite confession.
- Conrad Grebel, *Letter to Thomas Müntzer* (5 September 1524).
- Michael Sattler, *Trial Record* (17–18 May 1527).
- Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings* (ed. J. C. Wenger, 1956).
- *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* (the *Geschicht-Buch*), 16th–17th century.
- Thieleman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror* (1660) — Herald Press reprint still in print.
- George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (eds.), *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, Library of Christian Classics vol. 25 (1957).

### Modern studies:

- George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (3rd ed., 2000) — the definitive comprehensive study.
- C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (rev. ed. 1997).
- Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (1944) — the classic modern recovery.
- Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (3rd ed., 2001).
- Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (1964) — Mennonite critique of the magisterial Reformers.
- Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (2011) — contemporary Mennonite retrieval.
- John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (2nd ed., 1994) — modern Anabaptist ethics. (Note: Yoder's own record of sexual misconduct has been publicly reckoned with by Mennonite bodies; his writings are still widely read with that caveat.)
- Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (3rd ed., 2018).

## Pleasant Springs Church — Church History Series

[Archive](#)[← Calvin & Zwingli \(Lesson 16\)](#)[Series Timeline](#)[↓ Download PDF](#)

*Next in series: The English Reformation — Noll TP 7 — Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy, Cranmer, and the Book of Common Prayer*