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The Rebaptizers

By Jim Myers

The **Anabaptists** began as a “separatists group” who rejected infant baptism and believed that the church should consist only of saved and baptized believers. They would **rebaptize** Christians who professed Christ and had previously been baptized as infants by the Roman Catholic Church or other Christian groups. The preposition *ana* means “again,” thus *Anabaptists* were those who “baptized again.”

The Anabaptists were one of several branches of "Radical" reformers (i.e. reformers that went further than the mainstream Reformers) to arise out of the Renaissance and Reformation. Two other branches were **Spirituals** or **Inspirationists**, who believed that they had received direct revelation from the Spirit; and rationalists or anti-Trinitarians, who rebelled against traditional Christian doctrine, like Michael Servetus.



Blaurock



Grebel



Manz

The Anabaptists movement originated in Zurich in the **1520's** as a result of the teachings of **Ullrich Zwingli**. Zwingli did not go far enough, they believed, and so **George Blaurock**, **Conrad Grebel**, and **Felix Manz** began to agitate for their version of “biblical reform,” which included

believer's baptism and a "gathered" church, i.e. a church where members were there because they had believed and been baptized, not because of State intervention or mandatory church attendance.

Conrad Grebel (ca.1498-1526), born probably in Grüningen Zurich, was the son of a prominent Swiss merchant and councilman. He spent his early life in Grüningen, and then came to Zurich with his family around 1513. He spent several years abroad in study, worked as a proofreader in Basel, married in 1522. The Grebels had been a prominent Swiss family for over a century before Conrad's birth.

Conrad was a prominent member of the church in Zurich. He had been led to the faith by Zwingli, and heartily approved his work of reformation. But he soon became disappointed with Zwingli and Luther. Grebel felt the church was not being reformed along New Testament lines. Grebel's group wanted to end the practice of the baptizing of infants because the New Testament seemed to suggest that candidates for baptism had to be old enough to understand the nature of the commitment they were making.

In January, 1525, a man named **Blaurock** asked Grebel to baptize him again, although he had been baptized in infancy. Grebel complied. Thereupon, Blaurock rebaptized others. Thus the Anabaptist movement had its beginnings with Conrad Grebel. The Anabaptist name was not taken by themselves. They called themselves: **brethren** and **believers** and **Christians**.

*It is important to note that the Anabaptists were first persecuted by the Reformers under Zwingli. They had arisen on his watch, in his town, and were his former disciples. Perhaps he was afraid that the existence of several rival versions of "Reformed Christianity" would irreparably harm his chances of accomplishing any reform. He had the magistrate's ear; he was in charge of Reform. **The council declared** that infant baptism was the proper interpretation of scripture and that **rebaptizing was a capital crime.***

Felix Manz became the first Anabaptist martyr in 1527, ten short years after Luther had nailed up his theses. At three o'clock in the afternoon on this day, January 5, 1527, a thirty-year-old-man was led out from a prison cell in Zurich. His arms were tied -- a reasonable precaution, since he had already escaped once. Authorities brought him down to the nearby **River Limmat**. If this man, Felix Manz, wanted so badly to be rebaptized as an adult, then he should die in a very cold baptism. Preachers from the official church (Zwingli's church) pleaded with him to change his views and save his life. Felix refused. Encouraging him to stand fast were his mother and brother. Saying, "Into Thy hands, O God, I commend my spirit," he was plunged under for an icy death. Thus he became the first of many Anabaptists who gave their lives for their faith.

On May 20, 1527, Michael Sattler, the author of the Anabaptist *Schliethem Confession*, was executed by Catholic authorities. Even though the Catholic King Ferdinand had declared drowning (the "third baptism") the best antidote to Anabaptism, Sattler was sentenced to have his tongue cut out, his flesh cut with hot irons, and then to be burned at the stake. Others were burned or drowned by Catholic authorities. Burning seems to have been favored by Catholics, less by Protestants.

Separation of Church and State

As a result of persecutions like those above, the Anabaptists developed a belief in and demanded a strict separation of church and state, for the purity of the church and for the protection of the church from persecution by the state.

Some of the other beliefs of the Anabaptists were:
 (1) *Baptism was to be administered to believers only. Infant baptism, "the greatest and first abomination of the pope," is not to be practiced.*
 (2) *The bread and wine should only be broken with baptized believers, and no others.*
 (3) *True Christians should be separated from the world system, including its "church attendance", oaths, the sword, etc.*
 (4) *There should be shepherds among the flock, who will preach, etc., and will be supported by the church.*
BHR

FEBRUARY MEMORIALS

*May the memories of our loved ones
 inspire us to seek in our lives
 those qualities of mind and heart
 which we recall with special gratitude.
 May we help to bring closer to fulfillment
 Their highest ideals and noblest strivings.
 May the memories of our loved ones
 deepen our loyalty to that which cannot die --
 Our faith, our love, and devotion to our heritage.*

(Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)

In Loving Memory of **ALBERTA HARLESS MYERS**

Born: August 18, 1887
Died: February 5, 1979

In Loving Memory of **JAMES HENRY MYERS**

Born: September 6, 1881
Died: February 13, 1953

In Loving Memory of **MARIA ESTELLA RUIZ**

Born: UNKNOWN
Died: February 22, 1996

The Biblical Heritage Center Guiding Principle

Our respective systems of beliefs serve as the foundation for our security, the basis for our values and way of life, and the standard to which we turn when faced with important decisions. Such beliefs are primary factors in forming the way we see the world – our reality.

Living in a post September 11th era, we are now facing a challenge that hits at the very heart of our spiritual foundation – the potential deadly consequences of religious belief systems. History reveals that people who blindly follow dogmatic religious belief systems represent a threat to civilized society and the quality of life of their fellow man. Religious beliefs have been at the heart of countless conflicts ranging from interfamily fights to bloody wars between nations. This cycle of conflict has been repeated countless times throughout the history of mankind.

The Biblical Heritage Center has concluded that the only healthy solution to this situation is the voluntary incorporation of factual information by individuals who sincerely desire and search for spiritual truth. The result of the inclusion of factual information is that the belief system is expanded and the person becomes more open to examining their personal beliefs, as well as becoming more willing to change when error or incomplete information is discovered. Those who follow this principle become more compassionate and tolerant, thereby making our world a safer and happier place.

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