

## Part Two:

### IN SEARCH OF THE TRUE DOCTRINE

#### I. Introduction

How we conduct ourselves in our daily living was a concern to both Luther and the Swiss Anabaptists. They both wanted an active, vital faith that made of the convert to Christianity a new creation, a new being. This change in lifestyle must be predicated upon the notion that the believer has found something, has heard something and inwardly digested it, that has brought about this turning point and new direction. There must be a crucial cause and effect relationship at work. The role of correct teaching and doctrine becomes paramount. The basis for a new way of life is all-important. If it is grounded in the fanciful imaginings of the human mind, frustration and failure are the inevitable results. If, however, it is grounded firmly in God's Word, the peace of God which passes all understanding is the ultimate reward. The Bible speaks repeatedly about the importance of doctrine, as in Colossians 2, where we read: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Again, in Ephesians, the Apostle Paul warns: "...no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

If we are to reach a satisfactory conclusion in our search for the true Christian life, we must be absolutely certain in our conscience that our teachings are, indeed, the true doctrines. We must not follow our own head, nor teach according to our reason or wisdom. We must not be found seeking our own advantage, good, or honor from the world through our own

teachings. We must be about the business only of teaching, preaching, and praising God's Word and work alone. Obviously, true doctrine will beget true living. It can be no other way. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." If we have the true and correct teachings from God's Word, our lives will be well-seasoned and illuminated and God will bless us and use us as a means through which He may bless others.

In this section of the paper, I wish to examine in a comparative way the basic doctrinal positions of Swiss Anabaptism and confessional Lutheranism. Scripture will serve as a means by which we may judge who was in possession of the true doctrines and, as a result, also well the way toward living the true Christian life. Scripture must be the final judge. As Luther himself said, "Do not make articles of faith of your own thoughts as that abomination at Rome does, lest your faith perchance turn out to be a dream. Stick with Scripture and God's Word. There is the truth; there you will be safe; there are reliableness and faithfulness, completely, purely, sufficiently, and constantly." <sup>1</sup>

## II. Chief Articles of Faith

### A. Concerning God

1. **The Lutherans** subscribe to the Nicene Creed and teach that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> In a sermon of 1538 on Luke 9: 19-36, Martin Luther had this to say about the Trinity: “We should stay with the true, ancient belief that there are three distinct Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – in the eternal Godhead. This is the most sublime and the first article of Christian faith.”<sup>3</sup> Not only did Luther see the Trinity revealed in the New Testament, but he also stated that it was discerned in Old Testament times and believed, although not emphasized, by the prophets.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Scripture, according to Luther, opens with the revelation of a triune God, the Father who creates the universe through his Son, the Word, and the Holy Spirit who broods over all things.<sup>5</sup>

2. **In examining the Swiss Anabaptist position** on the doctrine of the Trinity, it is important to exercise care in sorting out which Anabaptists were saying what. The Swiss Brethren said that “God is the highest good – almighty, all-knowing and all-merciful.”<sup>6</sup> In their confessions of faith to the authorities they accepted the Apostolicum without hesitation.<sup>7</sup> Grebel and his comrades were often fond of using this somewhat vague analogy to describe their understanding of the Trinity: “As fire, heat, and light are three names and yet but one substance, even so are God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three names yet one being...just as breath determines the word and gives it shape and sound, so does the breath, wind, and Spirit of God make the word living and active within us.”<sup>8</sup>

Such a picture of the Trinity does not reveal a clear distinction of the persons, and sounds somewhat like a conceptual view of the divinity in which what we might call emanations of the Godhead are active, rather than distinct Persons. Admittedly, this is not clear and concise teaching on the Trinity and it is also interesting to note that a study of a rather vast compilation of primary source material penned by Grebel, Blaurock, Hubmaier, and other early influential Swiss Anabaptist leaders reveals absolutely nothing by way of actual dogmatic statement concerning their beliefs relative to the Trinity.

Whether this silence is damning or merely to be interpreted as a “given” in that they were acknowledging their agreement with the church’s position on this doctrine by not refuting it is difficult to determine with absolute accuracy. It would seem that, given Grebel’s outspoken nature and his lack of hesitancy in vehemently attacking other doctrinal positions of Luther and Zwingli that he considered to be in error, he would have somewhere delineated his beliefs concerning the Trinity if he was, in fact, in disagreement with the standard position on this issue.

Not all were as reluctant to share their views on this subject. It seems that Antitrinitarianism first appeared in Protestant circles in Nürnberg as early as 1524. When asked by the council of the city as to what to do with people who deny the doctrine, Luther ascribed their heresy to the influence of Carlstadt and Muntzer and counselled to regard the persons involved as Turks and apostates.<sup>9</sup> Martin Cellarius may have been the first Protestant to express Antitrinitarian views in writing. After a heated quarrel with Luther he left in 1525 for East Prussia where he defended Anabaptism and was imprisoned for his radical views.<sup>10</sup>

Michael Servetus is often lumped by church historians into that broad Anabaptist category, though he may have more properly belonged to a grouping all his own. In 1531, he penned a book entitled On the Errors of the Trinity. In this work he developed the Antitrinitarian theme and also attacked Luther’s justification by faith in

strong language. In 1553, Servetus was charged with Antitrinitarianism, pantheism, psychopannychism, and, as perhaps a sort of catch-all for heretics – Anabaptism. He was found guilty of all charges and burned at the stake.

Servetus' name is associated with Antitrinitarianism and Anabaptism, yet it is difficult to find any connection or contact between him and the Swiss Anabaptists of the 1520's. Indeed, he would have only been 14 years old when Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock in Zurich.<sup>11</sup> Many during the 1500's stumbled over the mystery of God's triune nature, and other Anabaptists such as Menno Simons, the Melchiorites, and the followers of David Joris certainly did not distinguish themselves as far as definitively defending the doctrine. I was unable to find, however, any concrete and indisputable evidence that the Swiss Anabaptists of Grebel's persuasion were Antitrinitarians. At the same time, there is little evidence to support the supposition that they were staunch proponents of the doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

3. **The Bible** clearly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity though the word itself is used nowhere in Scripture. The account of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3: 13-17, reveals to us the three Persons of the Godhead. Jesus indicates his unity with the Father in John 17: 11 and with the Spirit in John 15:26. God reveals himself as three Persons yet one God in numerous passages, including Genesis 1:26, 2 Corinthians 13: 14, and Deuteronomy 6:4. I Peter 1:2 indicates the Trinity's hand in dealing with the human race when Peter writes that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We also see the three Persons at work in Hebrews 9:14 where we read, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The Bible speaks of three Persons, yet one God, but it is beyond our human understanding to comprehend or explain how this can be. Luther sensed this

when he wrote, “To be sure, it is not very good German and does not sound good to designate God by the word *Dreifaltigkeit* (threefoldness). Even the Latin *trinitas* does not sound very good. But since we have nothing better, we must speak as we can...I cannot give this Being a fitting name.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, our belief in this teaching of Scripture becomes a matter of faith, not reason or logic. We cannot explain it well enough to suit a rationalist or skeptic, but we are still obligated to believe it and defend it since the teaching is found in the authoritative and unerring Word of God.

In his Against the Antinomians, Luther emphasized that human reason is inadequate to deal with the mystery of the Trinity. In fact, it is a dangerous undertaking to reason about it, and we must avoid assuming any distinction between the three Persons because each Person is the very God and God in His entirety.<sup>14</sup> For Luther this article of faith was a matter of either believing it or being lost.<sup>15</sup> In 1529 he explained: “We could never attain to a knowledge of the Father’s favour and grace except through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a mirror of His Father’s heart. Outside Christ we see in God nothing but a wrathful and terrible Judge. But about Christ we could know nothing if the Holy Spirit had not revealed it to us.”<sup>16</sup>

**4. In conclusion,** we remain in a state of uncertainty concerning the Swiss Brethern’s understanding of the Trinity; however, Luther’s position is crystal clear and founded squarely on Scripture. True Christianity believes and teaches the doctrine of the Triune God.

## B. Original Sin

1. **The Lutherans** teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mother's wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.<sup>17</sup> They emphasized that this is not merely an unfortunate deviation from God's will or a semi-permanent clouding of man's disposition, but is truly sin that damns and condemns all who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

2. **The Anabaptists** define sin as every movement or appetite against the will of God which can occur in thoughts, words, and actions.<sup>18</sup> As to when this awful condition invades the human soul and begins to wage its deadly battle for the right to dictate man's eternal destiny, they concocted a rather strange theology, otherwise unknown in Christian tradition.<sup>19</sup> In 1531, Sebastian Franck outlined the Anabaptist position in his Chronica, Zeytbuch und Geschychtsbible:

*Concerning original sin nearly all Anabaptists teach as follows: Just as the righteousness of Christ is of no avail to anyone unless he makes it part of his own being through faith, so also Adam's sin does not impair anybody except the one who makes it a part of his own being and brings forth fruits of this sin...Adam's sin condemns only non-believers who become Adam not by the mere fact of being born but by their particular faith, or rather unfaith, and by the fact that they bring forth fruits of this kind of faith.*

*Nearly all Anabaptists consider children to be pure and innocent blood and they do not consider original sin as a sin which of itself condemns both children and adults. They also claim that it does not make anyone unclean except the one who accepts this sin, makes it his own and is unwilling to part with it. <sup>20</sup>*

Several Anabaptists, including Ulrich Stadler and Hans Hut, refer to I Peter 2:2 as a kind of proof passage to defend the position cited by Franck: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk... we ought to be as pure as infants who know neither good nor evil."<sup>21</sup>

3. **The Bible** says we have a heart and mind which by nature are inclined only toward evil because all people are conceived and born in sin as a result of Adam's fall into sin. This we now call inherited or original sin. Psalm 51:5 says, "Surely, I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Other pertinent Scripture references include Romans 5:12, John 3:5-6, and Ephesians 2:3. By nature, we are spiritually dead in sins, spiritually blind, under the power of the devil and bitter enemies of God (Romans 8: 6-7).

4. **True Christianity** must always rest on the sure foundation of God's Word. Undeniably, the preponderance of Biblical citations upholds the Lutheran understanding of original sin. The importance of a clear view of the Old Adam, or a sinful nature, is pivotal in the formation of the rest of one's doctrinal positions. This realization of man's utter helplessness before God was central to Luther's awakening to the awesome grace of the cross, for as long as there should remain even a tiny crumb of spiritual self-worth the possibility exists that a person can please God and thereby earn, at least in part, a seat at the Great Banquet. When Luther accepted the absolute worthlessness of his own innate powers and deeds to work redemption, the only course left was to unreservedly throw himself headfirst into the refreshing streams of God's mercy.



The Anabaptists insisted that in Adam's fall the human race inherited temporal death, but certainly not the damnation of innocent children. They could acquiesce in the notion that every inclination of man's heart is evil from early youth, but then claim that only when the inclination is acted upon are there any soul-threatening repercussions. The Anabaptists made careful distinction between possessing the essence of sin and actually committing sin. One could draw the analogy of carrying a loaded gun in your holster from conception to grave — no damage is actually done unless the gun is fired. "Having sin" could not damn a person. "Committing sin" would.

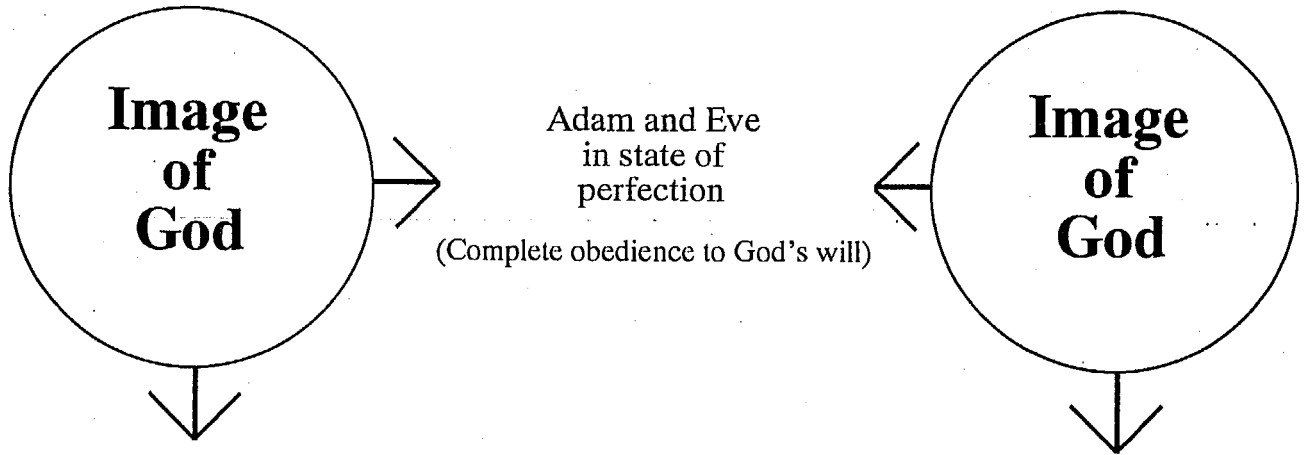
As a consequence, the rest of the Anabaptist theology is an attempt to keep the gun holstered, to avoid shooting oneself in the foot. Their lives must have been a wretched agony of carrying within themselves through life a gun cocked and ready to fire at any time when they might even temporarily let down their guard. Hence the repeated admonitions in Anabaptist literature to fight the good fight, to discipline oneself, to keep reign on that inclination toward sin. If they could prevent the concept of or proclivity toward sin from actualization, they would surely remain members of the brotherhood of true believers.

To be sure, Luther himself advises the Christian to daily drown the Old Adam; however, it must be emphasized that Luther's "Old Adam" and Balthasar Hubmaier's *Neiglichkeit* (inclination to sin) are altogether birds of a different feather. Even though the Anabaptists could say that the Holy Spirit was the One who would enable them to deprive the tendency toward sin within them from bearing fruit, the simple fact that they refused to admit that they had inherited a sinful nature from the time of conception that would certainly damn them to hell, indicates a partial reliance on man's own ability, or at least a lack of acquiescence toward the sinful act, as part of the means of grace.

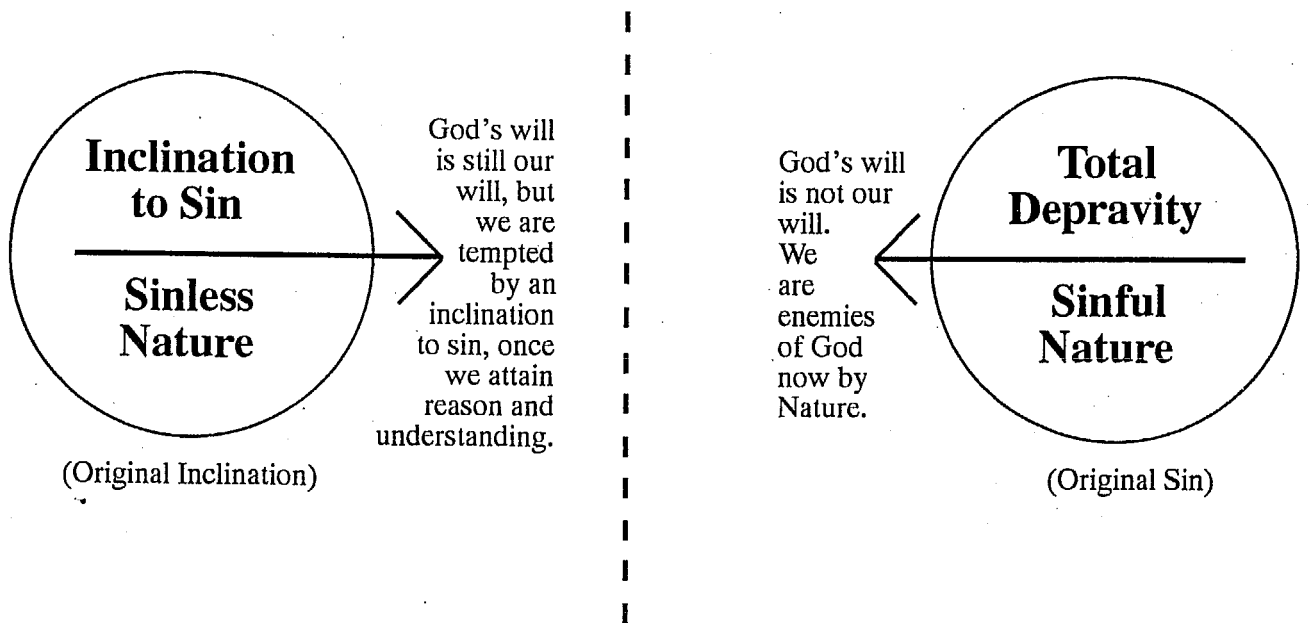
# CONFLICTING VIEWS OF ORIGINAL SIN

## Swiss Brethren

## Lutherans



## THE FALL INTO SIN



In this, the Swiss Brethren could be accused of Pelagianism, which teaches that man is not sinful by nature, but can, in fact, be rescued from damnation by a conscious exercise of his will assisted by an influx of God's grace. It is interesting to note, particularly in light of the connections the first-generation Anabaptists had with the man, that Ulrich Zwingli was charged with Pelagianism by the Lutheran reformers.<sup>22</sup> And yet, the Anabaptist brand of Pelagianism is a strange bird to be sure. Perhaps it could be labeled "inclination Pelagianism." Whereas the "real" Pelagians would crassly uphold natural man's inherent righteousness at the expense of any notion of a sinful nature, Anabaptists seemed willing to go at least partway with Luther in declaring humankind's total depravity. The unique twist they added to all of this was their concept of a sort of veiled original sin which didn't become the real thing until the person attained their reason, at which point justification by faith was achieved through believer's baptism.

The role of reason in this process then achieves a significance which anticipated the advent of rationalism by many years. The exercise of reason, through which the properly instructed catechumen confesses his faith and is initiated into the body of Christ, becomes a good work, insignificant though it may be in comparison with the availing power of the Holy Spirit which ultimately prompts the conversion. We can then no longer say that coming to faith has been totally and solely the work of the Holy Spirit without any merit or worthiness in us playing a contributory role. The person's efforts in subjugating the *Neiglichkeit* from birth through that time when a sufficient maturity has been reached to exercise reason, and the subsequent utilization of that inherent reason to come to faith, gives to man a somewhat prominent role in working out his own salvation and disparages the sufferings and work of Christ. The Anabaptists betrayed the spirit of true Christianity by their unwillingness to suppress human pride in admitting their natural condition as lost and condemned creatures deserving only of God's wrath and eternal punishment.

## C. Baptism

1. **The Lutherans** taught that baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to Him.<sup>23</sup> It is most certain that the promise of salvation also applies to little children. It does not apply to those who are outside of Christ's church, where there is neither Word nor sacrament, because Christ regenerates through Word and Sacrament. Therefore it is necessary to baptize children, so that the promise of salvation might be applied to them according to Christ's command (Matthew 28: 19), "Baptize all nations." Infants should be baptized because salvation is offered with baptism. That God does approve the baptism of little children is shown by the fact that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who were baptized this way. For if this baptism were useless, the Holy Spirit would be given none, none would be saved, and ultimately there would be no church.<sup>24</sup>

It is further pertinent to our discussion to note that in his Small Catechism, Martin Luther says that baptism with water means that our Old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and die, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.<sup>25</sup> Here the Old Adam, or original sin, again assumes a paramount position in the Lutheran theology, especially in regard to the baptism of infants. If there is no original sin in a baby, there is no necessity for administering a sacrament which is designed to cleanse that very defect; however, since Luther believed in a very real sinful nature which is received at conception, he saw baptism as the means of grace by which a gracious God was offering salvation to those who would be unable to receive it through hearing and inwardly digesting the written Word. To jump ahead in our outline momentarily, it is then easier to understand why the Anabaptists were so adamantly opposed to infant baptism. If they accepted the

premise that Luther offered as justification for it, their entire system of potential and actualized sin would be destroyed, and with it their hopes of constructing a church composed only of true disciples who had cognizantly stymied their sinful urges. Infant baptism so clearly taught a total reliance on God's mercy that it wiped away their concept of a righteousness before God that consisted not solely in the merit of Christ alone, but in great part upon one's own special, self-chosen (and humanly devised) spirituality.<sup>26</sup>

2. **The Anabaptists** taught that there were three kinds of baptism: baptism of the Spirit, baptism of water, and baptism of blood. The baptism of the Spirit was an inner illumination of our heart which is brought about by the Holy Spirit through the living word of God. Baptism of water was merely an external sign of the internal baptism of the Spirit which man gives with the reception of water, whereby he confesses his sins before all men. The baptism of blood is a daily mortifying of the flesh until death.<sup>27</sup> They derived this threefold distinction from I John 5: 6-8, even though baptism is not specifically discussed there.

Concerning the baptism by water, the Anabaptists denied any divine efficacy in working forgiveness of sins. Baptism by water was an avenue toward incorporation into the community of the church. Before this church the person openly and verbally makes a vow to God and promises that he will from now on believe and live according to his divine word.<sup>28</sup> Hubmaier, in his Christian Catechism, called this the correct baptismal vow which he said had been lost for a thousand years.

The most complete statement of early Anabaptism on the question of baptism, called On the Christian Baptism of Believers, was also written by Hubmaier after Zwingli had refused to answer his letter inviting the reformer to debate the subject. In this short book Hubmaier concluded that there are no examples of infant baptism in the Bible and that everywhere baptism followed only after some kind of preaching or

instruction, and after faith in the message had been expressed. The infant baptism of the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans was not considered to be baptism by Biblical standards.<sup>29</sup>

From the very beginnings of the movement, Felix Manz emphasized that baptism should be administered only to those “who reform, take on new life, lay aside sins...” He wrote that “just as John baptized only those who reformed, forsook evil works, and did good...so also the apostles received from Christ...the command...[to] teach...that forgiveness of sins in His name should be given to everyone who believing on His name should do righteous works from a changed heart...so they also were poured over with water externally to signify the inner cleansing and dying to sin.”<sup>30</sup> Baptism becomes a sign of an inward conversion which marked for Conrad Grebel the parameters of true Christianity. Baptism, as found in Romans 6, is representative of killing the old life and a resurrection to a new, Christ-like holiness. It is important to note once again that the Swiss Brethren did not believe that baptism actually worked forgiveness or could deliver from sin, death, and the devil.

I have chosen to consider Anabaptist teachings on the baptism by water first since this is an obvious point of departure between the Swiss Brethren in Zurich and the Lutherans in Wittenberg. The Anabaptists themselves considered the inner rejuvenation of the Spirit's baptism (John 3:5) as the central feature of their new life in Christ. Hubmaier called this a turning toward God (*mit Gott*) actuated by the good conscience of an inner faith.<sup>31</sup> The Spirit, working in close harmony with human reason, which It convinces of the nobility and virtue of its call, engages the converted in a covenant. This covenant aspect of Spirit baptism is somewhat analogous to taking monastic vows, a sealing (*versiegung*) of a pledge to discipleship. Zwingli also noted that comparison when he likened baptism to the “cowl” that introduces initiates into a monastic order. Erasmus had said that baptism “pledged” one to the Christian or penitent life.<sup>32</sup> It seems the Anabaptists elaborated on these thoughts to develop an

actual monastic view of the Spirit baptism. The world became their cloister, a cell from which they would be released only through the blood baptism of persecution and martyrdom.

In summary, baptism with water was an outward confirmation, as much for the benefit of others as for the individual, that an inner covenant with God had already been signed. This might be compared to a man who writes a letter and then asks that it be sealed. Nobody gives his seal or testimonial unless he knows the contents of the letter. This theology established their notion of a believers-only baptism and simultaneously resulted in the conclusion that whoever baptizes a child seals an empty letter.

**3. The Bible** says “Repent and be baptized, every one of you...The promise is for you and your children.” (Acts 2:38, 39 NIV) The Bible further teaches that baptism is not just the use of plain water since it is water connected with God’s Word. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her by the washing with water through the word.” (Ephesians 5: 25-26) Baptism’s blessings include forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. This is shown to us from Acts 22:16, Hebrews 2:14-15, and Mark 16:16.

The Bible teaches a baptism of little children because they are included in Christ’s words, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Psalm 51:5 indicates that children, also, are sinful by nature and must be born again in order to be saved. Luke 18:15-17 tells us that Jesus said babies are able to believe through a miracle of God’s grace. Since babies are unable to come to faith through hearing the Word, it follows that baptism must be the means by which the Holy Spirit works through the Word connected to the water to create faith in their hearts.

4. **True Christianity** must rest squarely on the Scriptural teaching that we are saved by grace alone. This requires an unquestioning faith which is ready to accept what Paul called “the foolishness of the Gospel.” In true Christianity there is no room for human reason, desire, or ability as they relate to justification. The monstrous irony in all this is that the Swiss Brethren, who so demanded a life of conviction, zeal, and unswerving dedication to God’s divine will for their lives, were at the same time unable to submit themselves to the simple request God makes of us to accept baptism as a means of grace wholly dependent on the power of His Word. Surely, this is once again human pride rearing its ugly head to delude even well-intentioned people into thinking that they must have some role, however small it may be, in resolving their own sinful predicament and winning salvation for their souls.

The Anabaptists were trying to imitate Christ and felt they should be as pure after baptism as Jesus was after His. This purity was evidenced through an outward life of discipleship, but had been assimilated through an interior regeneration that brings salvation through the Christian’s conscious effort. Regeneration is thoroughly spiritual and is not to be equated with the sort of external penance used in the confessional system, but it was still a work and something that the Christian could actively do. In short, the Anabaptists made the individual Christian again responsible to work for his own salvation – after Luther sought to relieve him of that burden.



## D. Lord's Supper

1. **The Lutherans** confessed that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of the Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. In regards to both sacraments (baptism and communion), it was taught that they were not instituted only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith.<sup>33</sup>

2. **The Anabaptists**, largely following the lead of Ulrich Zwingli, considered the supper to be a public sign and indication of love, in which a brother pledges with the others before the church that, as they now break bread and eat together, and distribute the cup and drink, so they wish to surrender and pour out their body and blood for each other in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose suffering is now commemorated in the supper by the breaking of bread and distributing of drink; and they also pledge that they wish to proclaim His death until He comes. This is the loving obligation of the supper of Christ which Christians do together, so that each brother knows what good things he can expect from the others.<sup>34</sup>

They did not accept a real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, viewing the bread and wine only as commemorative signs of the suffering and death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Hubmaier concluded the section on the Lord's Supper in his Christian Catechism by saying that "the supper is a dutiful sign of brotherly love, just as baptism is a sign of the vow of faith."

For Conrad Grebel, the observance of the Lord's Supper reflects primarily a continuing personal commitment to the brotherhood as the visible body of Christ. "The right discernment of the body of Christ requires a willingness by the participant to live and suffer for Christ and for the other members of His body in the brotherhood."<sup>35</sup>

Grebel and the others denied the supernatural properties of both baptism and communion and for this reason may be called Sacramentarians. They believed in neither transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Rather, the meal was intended to provide a symbol of brotherly unity and togetherness. It was a parallel to the first Supper preceding Calvary, and its symbolism was slanted toward suffering. This idea is illustrated in a parable popular among the Anabaptists:

*With the bread the unity among brethren is symbolized. Where there are many small kernels of grain to be combined into one loaf there is need first to grind them and to make them into one flour...which can be achieved only through suffering. Just as Christ, our dear Lord, went before us, so too we want to follow him in like manner. And the bread symbolizes the unity of the brotherhood.*

*Likewise with the wine: many small grapes come together to make the one wine. That happens by means of the press, understood here as suffering. And thus also the wine indicates suffering. Hence, whoever wants to be in brotherly union, has to drink from the cup of the Lord, for this cup symbolizes suffering.* <sup>36</sup>

**3. The Bible** tells us that Christ's real body is present with the bread and that his real blood is present with the wine as recorded in Mark 14:22-24, "Take it, this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said. In Holy Communion, then, we receive the true body and blood of Christ in a miraculous way in, with, and under the bread and wine.

The blessings of the sacrament are forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7 – "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."), salvation, and eternal life. In I Corinthians 11:24, 25 Paul quotes Jesus in saying that the Lord's Supper is "the new covenant in my (Christ's) blood." By this he meant that God has

promised to bless and save us in this sacrament. These tremendous blessings can be offered to us as a result of the power of the Word connected to the eating and drinking. “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (John 6:53).

4. **True Christianity** must follow the Biblical lead in professing the real presence and the efficacy of the sacrament in offering forgiveness and eternal life to the faithful. We should never minimize or alter this teaching; however, in the process of upholding the real presence the true Christian must also take care that he does not neglect another aspect of this sacrament which Christ referred to as the new covenant in His blood. The Lutherans accepted the truth concerning the real presence while the Swiss Brethren rejected it. Concerning the covenant which is established through the sacrament, it might be said that the Lutherans understood it but, for various reasons, did not seem to emphasize it, while the Swiss Brethren also understood it but, in a sense, emphasized it too much, to the point of actually altering the teaching. Since I feel confident that the disagreement concerning the real presence is a relatively black-and-white proposition insofar as examining the relative positions and uncovering which party had the true teaching, I propose now to spend a little time with this covenant of which Christ spoke when instituting the sacrament.

When Christ said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (I Corinthians 11:25), He meant that when the Lord gave the cup to His disciples, they received his blood as the sacrificial blood that ushered in the new covenant God made with man. The Lord’s Supper places us into the very heart of our blood-bought redemption won for us by Christ’s death on the cross. Each time we receive the Lord’s Supper we proclaim to both Christians and non-Christians that Christ gave His body and blood to redeem all mankind. We remember His death, that pivotal, that crucial event upon which the salvation of everyone depends.<sup>37</sup>

To speak of a new covenant implies that there must have been an old one. The old covenant, under the law of Moses, was certainly very burdensome and laborious since the people in Old Testament times were compelled to offer many and various sacrifices.<sup>38</sup> Their life of service was quite prescriptive and, due to its repetitive nature, could become quite mechanical and less-than-heartfelt. Malachi indicted the Israelites for corrupt and unwilling service. The people of Israel had to submit to very detailed laws that governed the political, social, and religious life of Israel if they wanted to remain even outwardly members of the covenant-nation. The Lord put His people under a code of laws which would be binding until the promised Messiah made His appearance.<sup>39</sup> This Messiah would remove the heavy yoke of laws and ordinances. He would establish peace of conscience and win rest for guilty souls incapable of keeping the Mosaic Code by establishing a new covenant in His holy, precious, innocent blood.

Since we were utterly at a loss to maintain the perfect obedience that God's covenant of law demands, Jesus took our place, living a perfect life to fulfill its demands, and then offering His body and blood on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice to satisfy the wrath the Father directed toward the human race, which falls short of the required righteousness. Thus Jesus Christ removed the curse of the law setting those who, in faith, cling to His promise of salvation through the Gospel in Word and sacrament, free.

Now there is a better service of God in the new covenant. God had made believer's hearts and spirits joyful through His dear Son, whom He offered for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who earnestly believes this cannot keep quiet about it; he must sing about it joyfully and exult over it and speak about it so that others also hear and come to it.<sup>40</sup> This is precisely why the somber attitude with which we may sometimes approach the Lord's table is highly inappropriate. Communion is cause for rejoicing and celebration.

The Swiss Anabaptists, it might be ventured, read too much into the new covenant relationship Christ had established with His new Israel, or more precisely, they misread it. That they understood the significance of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross seems apparent from Grebel's talk about the "bitter Christ" who endured terrible suffering and pain on our behalf so that we might walk freely in a new family headed by God where the devil dares never to rear his ugly head.<sup>41</sup> Sadly, however, their failure to grasp the concept of original sin and its debilitating effect on the human ability to effect justification of the soul, seems also to have resulted in gross aberrations regarding the true meaning of this new covenant offered through the blood of Christ.

Just what is this covenant? Christ speaks of it in Luke 22: "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" In and through the blood of the Savior the New Testament is established. He has removed the wall of separation between the holy, righteous God and the sinful world by the shedding of His blood and wants to give the glorious benefits of His atonement to all that believe in Him, through the sacrament. Through the eating and drinking of His body and blood, the forgiveness of sins is assured, sealed to the believer. We Lutherans believe and confess that the Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.<sup>42</sup> Through the sacrament we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The new covenant in Christ's blood is a solemn agreement in which Christ promises to bless and to save us.<sup>43</sup>

The early Anabaptists viewed all of this in a slightly different light. A covenant between God and His people is comprised of two parts: promise and commitment, the promise being of God, the commitment being the part that man plays. God promises forgiveness for transgression, peace, and to be our God; we commit ourselves to be His people, taking upon ourselves the vows that are a part of being united with Christ

through baptism. The Swiss were fond of using the image of marriage to describe the relationship of the church to Christ because in that ceremony a vow is taken. Likewise, in the sacrament, they said, a Christian vows an oath of commitment to the Lord. The Anabaptists insisted on making the covenant a mutual relationship and emphasized man's responsibility and commitment, through they did exercise some care in retaining God's initiative in proposing the covenant arrangement.<sup>44</sup>

For these early Anabaptists, the Lord's Supper signaled a covenant pledge in which the believer reaffirmed his oath or commitment to serve God. The emphasis of the new covenant is upon man's dedication to God. Man makes this covenant, even though he makes it on God's terms and in God's power.<sup>45</sup> The new covenant is a covenant within the heart of the believer, a heart cleansed and renewed by the grace of Christ of which we are reminded in the symbolism of the Supper. This brings comfort to the soul, for the Christian now participates in Christ's conquest of the powers of evil. The Gospel comforts because it can perform within the world what was once only promised.<sup>46</sup>

Here we see the Anabaptist doctrine of regeneration, which we covered earlier when discussing baptism. Luther said that the regenerative process is not completed in a moment, but requires a whole lifetime. The Anabaptists preferred to think of it in greater measure as a present transformation already accomplished through the Spirit of God.

Hubmaier linked the idea of regeneration with the common Anabaptist emphasis on human free will. He said that to accept predestination would be to threaten the reality of the redemptive events, for the doctrine undermines the substantiality of the created order. The institution of the new covenant in Christ's blood, then, would be little more than a stage play. Predestination would deny God's creatures their own place in the order of things and would reduce the realm of human action to little more than monkey-business and mimicry.<sup>47</sup>

The point here is that the Anabaptists held that man does possess freedom and responsibility within the process of redemption. The reception and manifestation of salvation require man's voluntary participation. Conversion and regeneration are within the individual, not just in heaven, as some of the brethren thought Luther's doctrine of forensic justification implied.<sup>48</sup> In regard to the Lord's Supper specifically, then, the new covenant is not the outpouring of God's grace in which He, in His great love and mercy, comes to us to bless and save without any merit or worthiness in us motivating Him to do so. Instead, the Sacrament of the Altar, as is also true of the Anabaptist conception of baptism, becomes an act of the faithful, a work in which they bind themselves to God and to the fellow believers in the church. Only those possessing a prior regeneration had the spiritual wherewithal to covenant themselves to God and to the fellow believers in the church. The sacraments included the commitment to abide wholly to the teaching of Christ and the discipline of the church which applied the Bible to life.<sup>49</sup> For the Lutheran, baptism and the Lord's Supper are acts of God through which He comes to us with the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life. For the Swiss Anabaptists, the sacraments were the acts of individuals personally pledging themselves to God.

Justification and an entry into the new covenant are the result of God's electing those whom He predestined to become His children. God takes the initiative. He brings about the faith relationship and He maintains it, constantly strengthening the believer through the sacrament to remain true to Him and calling him back to the covenant relationship through repentance when he falls away. Our standing in grace with God is not dependent on our faithfulness, as we read in 2 Timothy 2:13 – "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful."

Another sorry ramification of this Anabaptist teaching concerning the new covenant is once again a heretical confusion of justification and sanctification. In a sense, we can say that the Swiss wished to preface the call of the Lord to discipleship

with a sort of novational period of obedience to prove their mettle or worthiness. The Anabaptists would ask for a demonstration of Christianity prior to the actual “conversion experience,” which is really another designation for their believer’s baptism. But obedience is possible only after we have been called out of the darkness of this sinful world into the marvelous light of the Gospel’s new covenant. That calling is singularly the work of the Holy Spirit, as Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Or we read again in 1 Corinthians 6:11 – “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” In Titus 3:5 – “He saves us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” This is all God’s work. The Swiss Brethren’s attempts to return to a true Christianity in reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and a proper understanding of the new covenant relationship with God is really a stroll down heresy lane and represents a significant step away from a correct understanding of Christian doctrine and life.

#### **E. Justification**

1. **The Lutherans** say that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.<sup>50</sup>



2. **The Swiss Brethren**, as evidenced by the preaching of George Blaurock, believed that justification, or a coming to faith to receive forgiveness of sins, must be a radical event in the life of a person.<sup>51</sup> A new beginning was fundamental. This beginning must be recognizable and publicly decisive. In this the Swiss Brethren are quite reminiscent of the Spener's and Francke's of a later time who would point to their own conversion experiences as evidence of faith and a source of proof that they were, indeed, members of God's kingdom. The preaching of the Gospel was viewed as a standing invitation to any man to make a personal confession of sins and pledge to enter into a covenant with God whereby he would promise to lead a new life in service to God and His community of fellow believers. I believe that this could be called a type of "decision theology." This idea is enforced by the following exchange between Blaurock and a young man named Marx:

*"Marx, you must have been before now a light-hearted young fellow, and must become another man, to put the Old Adam from you and take on a newer and better self." Marx answered, he would do his best. Then Blaurock asked if he longed for the Grace of God and when he answered, "Yes," Blaurock spoke: "Come here, and I will baptize you!" Then Marx went and at that Blaurock baptized him. 52*

Note the stress on the need for a better and more righteous lifestyle. The baptism was Marx's pledge to renounce sin and take up the cross of Christ in his own life.

The Anabaptists, I believe, saw the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as not being all-sufficient. It did not render true satisfaction toward the Father and reconciliation with Him by itself. That was accomplished only after the person had experienced the baptism of the Spirit and had accepted God's call to an inner obedience and the challenge of obeying the eternal will of the Almighty God. The Anabaptist view of justification can be interpreted as a covenant wherein God offers His grace through Jesus Christ, and man pledges to desist from sin and follow God.

The Catholics, it might be claimed, were justified through obedience to the church. The church served as their mediator in offering, and then securing, justification for the laity. The Lutherans removed the obstacle of approaching God only through the auspices of church mechanics and stressed the personal God who justified individuals through faith alone. No one or nothing else was needed. The Swiss Brethren emphasized the importance of the brotherhood of believers and their role in justification. In a sense, the brotherhood-church (*Gemeinde*) of the Anabaptists replaced the priesthood-church of the Catholic Church as the mediator between God and man. God justified the individual only after he vowed a dual obedience to God and the brotherhood.

3. **The Bible** defines justification in Romans 4:6-8. "David...speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.'" God forgives sins like a judge in a courtroom who tells the criminal that there is no longer any charge against him and so declares him innocent or not guilty. God is able to declare guilty sinners righteous only because Jesus served as our substitute and paid for our sins in full (II Corinthians 5: 19-21). This declaration of justification is totally God's doing and is in no way dependent on us. (Titus 3:5)

4. **True Christianity** must always proclaim with Luther the importance of clinging firmly to the divine order of justification and sanctification as revealed in Scripture. Luther says:

*...the putting to death of the old man, wherein we follow the example of Christ, as Peter says (I Peter 2:21), does not come first, but comes last. No one can mortify the flesh, bear the cross, and follow the example of Christ before he is a Christian and has Christ through faith in his heart as an eternal treasure. You don't put the old nature to death through words, but through the hearing of the gospel. Before all other works and acts you hear the Word of God, through which the Spirit convinces the world of its sin (John 16:8). When we acknowledge our sin, we hear of the grace of Christ. In this Word the Spirit comes and gives faith where and to whom he wills. Then you can proceed to the mortification and the cross and the works of love. Whoever wants to propose to you another order, you can be sure, is of the devil. 53*

Faith in God's Word is a much different and deeper thing than that which the Brethren's reason does with God's Word. Faith is God's work alone beyond all reason.<sup>54</sup> Once again the early Anabaptist movement provided us with an example of the dangerous pitfalls awaiting anyone who desires to live for Christ without allowing Christ to first inject the faith to enable such a life to be lived. When the order of justification and sanctification is disturbed, the resulting tremor quickly becomes an earthquake which threatens the very foundation upon which true Christian faith is built; namely that, far from man choosing God, God has mercifully deigned to choose us.

## F. The Church

1. **The Lutherans** taught that the church is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. The Augsburg Confession, Article VII, says that it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. In Article VIII, again the point is made that the Christian church is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints.<sup>55</sup> So the marks of the true church are a proper preaching and administration of the Word and sacraments.

2. **The Zurich Anabaptists'** view of what constituted the true church was shaped by their effort to carry through a program of the restoration of primitive Christianity. They saw the early church as being composed of only heartfelt believers. They also recognized that the early church was always persecuted, despised, and rejected, a church of martyrs.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, they felt those signs should still be visible. If they weren't, then there was serious question as to whether or not the real Christian church existed. This exemplifies the notion that the Swiss and other Anabaptists were interested more in "restitution" than "reformation." They weren't sure there was anything left to reform. Instead, a return to the old church of the early days as recorded in Acts was their goal.

The ideal Anabaptist church should be a brotherhood or community of believers who strived to live in compliance with the new covenant. They called for a strict morality and, at least in their outward conduct, seemed to have achieved it. Ulrich Zwingli commented that "...at first contact their conduct appears irreproachable, pious, unassuming, and attractive. Even those who are inclined to be critical will say that their

lives are excellent.”<sup>57</sup> This exemplary outward conduct was a cardinal sign of the true church. In Anabaptist writings with regard to the church there is little mention of the Word and sacraments as manifestations of the visible Kingdom of Grace. In their place were stressed believers’ baptism (which, as we have seen, was not a sacrament as Lutherans define the word), spiritual government, and the baptism of blood. Later Anabaptist groups also included the concept of community, a spiritual and physical pooling of goods, but I could find no evidence of this among the Swiss Brethren.

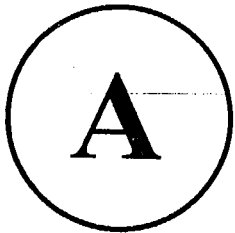
We have already discussed believers’ baptism, so let us briefly examine their thoughts concerning “spiritual government.” Spiritual government rests upon the threat of expulsion from the congregation of believers. This “ban” generally followed a breaking of trust insofar as maintaining the group’s high ethical standards, and it generally meant the loss of privileges within the brotherhood. Their motivation for this ostracism was Matthew 18: 15-17, as well as a zealotry to avoid hypocrisy at all costs.<sup>58</sup> Their doctrine was molded around and dominated by a theology of ascetic holiness. The Swiss Brethren absolutely rejected any notion of an exclusively internal holiness, or of an invisible church, which failed to have a corresponding external, holy manifestation. They refused to recognize any congregation as a valid expression of the Christian church if its corporate conduct was widely divergent from the Biblical ideal of the holiness of the mystical (Apostolic) church. The “brotherhood-church” represents not only a fellowship whose goal is the perfection of its individual members, but also a fellowship which must exhibit, corporately and at all times, a measure of outward perfection in reference to the conductal ethics of the Gospel. The church must not be an obviously mixed society. It must not tolerate open sin.<sup>59</sup>

A third sign of the true church here on earth for the Swiss Brethren was the baptism with blood or fire. Grebel, Sattler (in his *Schleitheim Confession*), and Hubmaier all saw martyrdom as the final cleansing from sin. One who endured the tribulation of martyrdom would have little room for the temptations of sin. For support

of this view they turned to I Peter 4:1 – “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.” The Anabaptists in Zurich had ample opportunity to experience this last and greatest purification. By February, 1525, prison, fines, and sometimes torture were standard procedure for those found guilty of the rebaptizing heresy. Felix Manz was drowned in the Limmat River in Zurich on January 5, 1527. Michael Sattler, who was the primary force behind the Brotherly Agreement, or Schleitheim Confession, which sought to lay down in simple terms the beliefs of the Swiss Brethren, was arrested in February of 1527. On the day of his execution his tongue was cut out, he was torn seven times with red hot irons, and finally, burned. His wife, who also refused to retract their errors, was drowned. Four others among the Swiss Brethren were executed with the sword.

The Brethren had foreseen all of this and accepted it as a natural consequence of the world’s intolerance toward the true church.<sup>60</sup> The world will always be the partner of the devil and will always attempt to revile, reject, and crush the church. The very fact that they were so viciously persecuted convinced the Brethren of the righteousness of their cause.

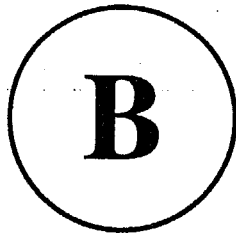
**CONFLICTING VIEWS**  
**OF THE**  
**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION**  
**AND THE**  
**CHURCH**



**GOD**



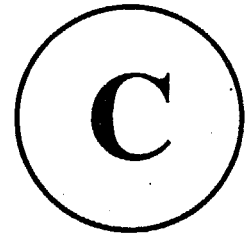
Believers



**GOD**



Believers



**GOD**



Fellow Believers  
or Brothers

**CATHOLICISM**

**PROTESTANTISM**

**ANABAPTISM**

*Gemeinde*  
Brotherhood Church

Justified  
through  
the Church

Justified  
through faith  
individually

Justified  
through the  
brotherhood

*SOLA FIDE*

*SOLA FIDE GEMEINDE*

3. **The Bible** says that the church is all those everywhere who believe in Jesus as their Savior. In I Corinthians 1:2 we read, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The holy Christian church will only be found where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are used as we read in Matthew 18:20 – “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Gathering together in God’s name presupposes that those present are preaching and teaching all that is connected with that Name, including the Gospel message and Christ’s commands concerning the sacraments.

Though we are to test every visible church carefully (I Thessalonians 5: 21-11 – “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”) to examine whether or not it adheres to Christ’s teachings, it is also true that only God really knows who the members of the holy Christian church are, as we read in II Timothy 2:19 – “The Lord knows who are his” and in I Samuel 16:17 – “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Since we are unable to judge the hearts, motives, and intentions of people accurately, it follows that we are able to determine the presence of God in a church through correct preaching and teaching. Excommunication from the fellowship comes only after gross public sin and the sinner’s refusal to repent of the sin that is clearly in violation of God’s Law and is causing offense to the faithful (Matthew 18:17). It is important to note that Christian usage of the binding and loosing keys demands that excommunication be an act of love designed to win the impenitent back to Christ. A Christian congregation will use its loosing key to forgive and welcome back an excommunicated person who repents and professes a willingness to amend his sinful ways. Paul writes in II Corinthians 2:6-10, “The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm



your love for him...If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him...in the sight of Christ for your sake.”

Amongst the Anabaptists it seems that the practice of shunning, or banning, the sinner from the Brotherhood was not so much done out of love as out of anger and frustration that one who was supposed to be a true Christian had fallen away even after the confirmatory experience of believer's baptism. Their rigorous execution of this form of spiritual government was a result of the realization that a brother fallen away undermined the foundation upon which their whole system of belief and church organization was built; namely, the supposition that theirs was the only true gathering of saints on earth composed, exclusively of real Christians who evidenced their true faith through an exemplary outward moral conduct. Since the Anabaptists placed little emphasis on the doctrine of original sin, it follows that their tolerance of weaker brethren would be quite low since a person's successful conclusion of a spiritual, probationary, or testing period before. Believer's baptism would have theoretically weeded-out all the hypocrites.

4. **True Christianity** teaches that there is on earth one holy Christian Church. This church is the congregation and number or assembly of all Christians in all the world, Christ's own bride and His spiritual body, of which He also is the only one Head.<sup>61</sup> Corporeally, Christendom is scattered throughout the world, but spiritually it is assembled in one Gospel under one Head which is Jesus Christ.

It is important to realize that the gathering together of this communion of believers is totally the doing of the Holy Spirit who works faith in the hearts of the sinful. This does not mean that the members of the true church are sinless, holy men, though. Luther once said, “God has nothing to do with holy men. A holy man is a fiction.”<sup>62</sup> The saints are simply the justified. The only holiness they have is, and grows out of, the righteousness of faith.

Here the Swiss Brethren and the Lutherans again part company. I believe that, as Luther taught, true Christianity's view of the church is predicated upon the doctrine of justification through faith. Our notion of what the church is, as should be true of all of our doctrines, is based upon what God has done for us and not upon what we have done, are doing, or will be doing for God. The Swiss Brethren's idea of a believer's baptism at the expense of the true sacraments knocks the wind out of justification through faith. For the Anabaptists, entry into the church should always follow a conversion that was inspired not by a gracious act of God working through the Gospel, but really by a slavish observance of the law and a human decision to abandon the old, sinful life for a new life in Christ.

Since the church is established only where there is justifying faith, and since faith arises only through the means of grace, it follows that the true church will be found only where the Gospel is rightly taught and represented in word and sacraments. The means of grace, not outward moral conduct, identify the church because God works justifying faith through the Word, and does not grant it to people on account of their own righteousness. Remember that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham's personal piety and good works, or his obedience, counted as nothing toward winning him salvation.

The true church, then, can exist wherever God's Word is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered according to God's command. These are the marks by which a believer can positively identify the presence of the church in any given community. Anywhere they cease to be the vehicles of justifying faith, the church has vanished.<sup>63</sup> The central emphasis must be upon justification through faith alone and on a right understanding of how that justification happens.

A word or two must also be mentioned here concerning the Anabaptist's understanding of the visible and invisible church. As Augustine and Luther both taught, the invisible church is God's kingdom of grace within us. It is the faith that binds the communion of saints throughout the world together. It is the believer's personal relationship to God, which is not dependent upon the outward, organized church body for significance. Faith creates salvation, not faith in conjunction with, or through, the church. The church does not need to play a mediating role.

For the Anabaptists though, there was no distinction between the visible and the invisible church. In part, their adamant call for observable spiritual fruits as a proof of faith is commendable since it stresses that faith is not a philosophical notion or pronouncement but is a state of being, a way of life. Unfortunately, their desire to translate a personal spiritual relationship with God into an external covenantal system demanding visible expressions of inner convictions is nothing more than a new brand of legalism. It is a return to the curse of the law from which Christ has already freed us. It is a hesitancy to cast the eternal welfare of our souls upon God's grace alone. It is, once again, a misunderstanding of what original sin is and how God saves us from it through justifying faith. The true church stands only on Christ, the one and sure Foundation.

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