Gelassenheit: The Union of Self-Surrender and Radical Obedience

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**Gelassenheit: The Union of Self-Surrender and Radical Obedience**

**Introduction**

This study will trace the historical roots and expression of the Anabaptist understanding of *Gelassenheit*. The project will focus on two Anabaptist leaders who are known to have used the concept of *Gelassenheit* within their writing, namely Hans Denck and Peter Riedemann. It will present the view that these two early Anabaptist writers expressed their understanding of medieval *Gelassenheit*, together with an ethical dimension, as the underlying principle of their spirituality and theology.

To introduce this study, the term *Gelassenheit* will be examined as to the different ways it has been used and translated. In order to accomplish the goal of this study, the writings of Meister Eckhart will be considered as an influential example of medieval *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* continued to move forward through other writers including Andreas Carlstadt who will be presented as a contemporary to Anabaptist teachings. The main argument of the study will be examined through the writings of Denck and Riedemann which will bring to view how they developed an ethical dimension of the concept of *Gelassenheit*.

This study of Denck and Riedemann will display two writers who give examples of what *Gelassenheit* meant for Anabaptists. It shows the similarities that both developed as well as marked differences. While expressed in distinct ways, *Gelassenheit* remains as an attitude of complete yieldedness to God for both of these writers.

Hans Denck was an important influence in nurturing *Gelassenheit* within Anabaptism. “It was most likely Denck who made this idea popular among the Anabaptists. They had good reasons to accept it: their own teaching of obedience and discipleship almost required this
attitude as the precondition of a reborn soul to walk the narrow path.”¹ Denck understood Gelassenheit as a relinquishing of self-will to become an instrument of God.²

Gelassenheit carried a different connotation for Peter Riedemann. His confession of faith is still followed by Hutterite Anabaptists, who “made the term Gelassenheit their own in a more earthly sense: the relinquishing of one’s worldly possessions, in other words ‘absolute personal poverty’ and subsequently the sharing of all earthly goods by the entire group. In fact, thus interpreted Gelassenheit becomes a central teaching of the Hutterite brethren.”³

Further, several representative Anabaptist emphases of discipleship, community and the willingness to suffer will be studied to show how Gelassenheit shaped the understanding of these emphases.

Use of Term

In his book, The Naked Anabaptist, Stuart Murray attempts to understand the bare essentials of Anabaptism. Murray identifies Gelassenheit as the spirituality of the “naked Anabaptist.”⁴ Walter Klaassen comments that “it described a very important part of their concept of the Christian life, especially their relationship with God.”⁵ The Mennonite Encyclopedia entry for Gelassenheit concludes “present-day Mennonitism has lost the idea of Gelassenheit nearly completely; yet with the recovery of the ideal of discipleship also


² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 449.

⁴ Stuart Murray, The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith (Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2010), 171.

Gelassenheit may be revived."⁶ Three questions arise out of these statements: what does the term Gelassenheit really mean, what made it a prevalent principle of Anabaptism and how does it affect the spirituality and theology of those within the Anabaptist tradition?⁷

The concept and practice of Gelassenheit has survived within the Amish community. Donald B. Kraybill notes that the solution to understanding this culture is embedded in Gelassenheit. Roughly translated, it means yielding to a higher authority. Kraybill comments that it is rarely used in speech but is “a master cultural disposition, deeply bred into the Amish soul, that governs perceptions, emotions, behavior, and architecture.”⁸ Perhaps that is why it seems so elusive; Gelassenheit is rarely used in speech but has become a part of the Amish everyday lifestyle.

Kraybill goes on to explain that the idea of yielding fully to the will of God was also familiar to the early Anabaptists. “They believed that Christ called them to abandon self-interest and follow his example of suffering, meekness, humility and service . . . yielding to God’s will was the test of true faithfulness.”⁹

David Augsburger defines Gelassenheit as “tenacious serenity.” He sees this as the heart of early Anabaptist spiritual devotion where the practice of self-surrender can be found

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⁷ Gelassenheit is difficult to place within a specific classification. Some authors such as Eckhart call it a virtue while others such as C. Arnold Snyder name it an attitude or concept. None of these really capture the essence, but since a more accurate classification seems elusive, this study will continue to use the descriptions as used by sources.

⁸ Donald B. Kraybill, The Riddle of Amish Culture, Revised edition (Baltimore, Maryland: 2001), 29.

⁹ Ibid.
together with stubborn commitment. Here the Anabaptists are shown developing their own concept of *Gelassenheit*, distinct from that of their medieval predecessors.

In medieval devotion, this word for self-surrender was invariably passive. It referred to the soul’s submission before God. But in the Radical reformation of Anabaptism it came to mean both passive yieldedness and active unyieldedness. This union of self-surrender and radical obedience, uniquely Anabaptist, echoes the identification of martyrs with Gethsemane: the resistance (“If it is possible, let this cup pass me by” [Matt. 26:39 NEB]) and surrender (“yet not as I will, but as thou wilt” [Matt 26:39 NEB]) with courageous consequence (“Enough! . . . Up, let us go forward!” [Mark14:41-42]).

Another term that has been connected with that of *Gelassenheit* is *kenosis*. Robert Detweiler notes that “the system of *Gelassenheit* as abandonment is what we continually struggle to work out, and it correlates with the operation of *kenosis*—a self-emptying, an outpouring of the self. It is a lying-down of life when one sees no other possibility.” Richard Beck connects *kenosis* and *Gelassenheit* in an interesting way. He discusses *kenosis* as an assault upon the ego which expresses themes of service, submission, obedience, humility, and modesty. The concept of *kenosis* is based upon Philippians 2:7 where Jesus “emptied himself”.

For Beck the practice of *kenosis* is captured in the word *Gelassenheit* with its emphasis on submission or yielding.

A concept that allowed the lay person to have a spiritual Christian walk appealed to the early Anabaptist. No longer was it necessary to be within the clergy or monastery to gain access

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11 Ibid.


to God, but one could come to him on their own with a submissive heart. This would have seemed attractive to those with a desire to live for God and who saw corruption within the church leadership of the time.

Malcolm Yarnell notes that words like “commitment,” “pledge,” “determination,” “submission,” “obedience,” “fulfillment” appear again and again “in the great literature of the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century movement of the sixteenth century. Two German nouns capture the essence of the Anabaptist genius: Gelassenheit and Nachfolge. Gelassenheit was the more common word in the sixteenth century, while Nachfolge is the more common word today.”14 However, Yarnell goes on to say that it is difficult to provide an exact translation. His suggestion is similar to most of those who attempt to translate Gelassenheit as yieldedness or surrender, indicating the submissive attitude of a Christian disciple.15

Gelassenheit is not easily translated into a single specific English word that allows us to gain the true picture of what the early writers meant when they used it. A study of their writings and a look into the context of their teaching will present a clearer picture of why the early Anabaptists considered this an important dimension of their expression of Christian faith.

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15 Ibid.
Chapter 1

Medieval Beginnings

This chapter will examine the writings of Meister Eckhart as a primary source for understanding medieval notions of Gelassenheit. It is through Eckhart that later writers based and developed their own understanding.\(^{16}\) One such example is Andreas Carlstadt who, as a radical reformer, was closer to the tenets of Anabaptism than most other traditions. Therefore Carlstadt’s writings will also be studied.

As early as the fourth century, Christians headed to the desert, believing that by forsaking their materialistic lives they could devote themselves completely to God through meditation and asceticism.\(^{17}\) Cornelius Dyck describes this wilderness experience as being repeated in Anabaptism.\(^{18}\) He notes a struggle for inner peace in the midst of indescribable suffering and that an old medieval mystical term, Gelassenheit “was given new meaning in the peace accompanying their martyrdom, in their willingness to bear the cross as had Jesus, and in the love they proclaimed to friend and foe.”\(^{19}\)

In an essay tracing Anabaptism to its medieval roots, Peter Nissen describes the stages in the development of Anabaptist discipleship and shows that one stage comes from German mysticism. He notes:

\(^{16}\) Later writers such as Henry Suso, John Tauler, and the author of the Theologia Deutsch are examples of those who considered Eckhart in their writings about Gelassenheit. This is noted by various contemporary authors including Werner Packull in Mysticism and the Early South German-Austria Anabaptist Movement and Walter Klaassen in “Gelassenheit and Creation,” Conrad Grebel Review.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 16.
the German mystic writers of the 14th and 15th centuries – master Eckhart, Heinrich Seuse, Johannes Tauler and the anonymous author of the *Theologia Deutsch* – translated the monastic ideal of self-surrender, *patientia or resignatio*, into an ideal that was accessible also to lay persons not living in a monastery. It was the ideal of *Gelassenheit*; the surrender of one self, or self-denial, as a gift of one’s person to God and to his fellow. This ideal became of great importance in Anabaptist and Mennonite Spirituality.20

Medieval teachings shaped Anabaptist practice of spirituality and the attitude of *Gelassenheit* is one such example. The word *Gelassenheit* appears to have originated in the writings and sermons of Meister Eckhart.21

**Meister Eckhart**

Eckhart was born in 1260 and joined the Dominican order to become a preacher. It would appear that he did very well within this order and became superior of a religious house.22

The teaching of Eckhart helped to set the stage for the reformation to come, as noted by Kiwiet:

In addition to the doctrine of the scholastics he called for a Christian life, a life of contemplation, and a life of Christian service. Eckhart was not just a mystic spending his life in contemplation, but he also was a very popular preacher in the Dominican order, which had set as its aim the bringing of the Gospel to the laymen. Several of Eckhart’s ideals were realized in the Reformation, when religion became a matter of the individual and when even the Bible was put into the hands of the laymen.23

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21 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 99. Caputo discussion of Heidegger’s use of *Gelassenheit* is an example of those who believe that the term came from Eckhart. He comments that Heidegger borrowed the word from Eckhart. No other theories were discovered in the research of this study, but it may be worth further study.


Most of Eckhart’s use of Gelassenheit can be found in his German works. One example asserts, “Let us go on learning to abandon ourselves until we hold on to nothing that is our own. All our tempests and strife come only from self-will, whether we see this or whether we do not. We should put ourselves and all that we are in a pure cessation of will and desire, into God’s good and dearest will, with everything that we might will and desire in all things.” Self-surrender of one’s will and a complete yieldedness to God’s are common themes in Eckhart’s writings.

This theme of submission can also be found in his Latin works. For example in his commentary on John’s Gospel, Eckhart writes

“He came to his own, and his own received him not.” The moral meaning is that God comes to the minds of men who dedicate themselves totally to him and who make themselves so much his that they no longer live for themselves but for him. This is what is meant by “His own received him not,” where “his own” are those who live for themselves, seeking what is theirs and not what is God’s.

For Eckhart, God is creator and has all rights to his creation. An example of this idea of creation and creator can be found in Eckhart’s commentary on the Book of Wisdom. He writes “it is evident that everything created is nothing of itself. ‘He created them that they might be,’ and prior to existence there is nothing.” Another example can be found in Sermon 12 where

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25 Ibid., 162.

he writes “everything created is nothing.” The significance of humans rests in who they are as created beings in that they belong to their creator; nothing rests in their own significance.

Charlotte Radler comments on Eckhart’s concept of creation, noting that “since creation does not possess its own ontological foundation and is nothing in itself, it has being only through its relationship with ultimate reality, which is richness in itself. Creation has being because of its relationship with God, since God is toward and in creation.”

*Gelassenheit* is a significant aspect in the relationship between creation and creator.

Eckhart continues in sermon 12 with the explanation that:

A person who is so established in the will of God wants nothing else but what is God and what is God’s will. If he were sick, he would not want to be healthy. All pain is a joy to him, all multiplicity is simplicity and unity, if he is really steadfast in the will of God. Even if the pain of hell were connected to it, it would be joy and happiness for him. He is free and has left himself, and he must be free of everything that he is to receive.

A person who thus remains in God’s love should be dead to himself and to all created things, so that he gives as little attention to himself as he does to something a thousand miles away.

One is to become detached from anything created including self-will and yield all to the will of the creator.

It is this term of detachment that is significant for Eckhart. A collection of Eckhart’s sermons edited by Bernard McGinn includes a glossary of some of Eckhart’s terms. Included with *Gelassenheit* and *gelassen* are the words *abegescheiden* and *Abegescheidenheit*, which are

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defined as “detach, detachment, letting go—freedom from ties to creatures and all mundane concerns.”

Eckhart uses the term Abegescheidenheit frequently, to the extent that his spirituality is characterized by it. Robert Forman believes that commentators overemphasize Gelassenheit. He gives the criticism that:

Schurmann and Caputo, both Heideggerian scholars, overemphasize to the point of absurdity Eckhart’s term gelassenheit. Though Eckhart used it but once, in DW 5:283:8, each devotes an entire chapter to its explication! Eckhart uses more commonly the terms läzen and its derivative, gelâzen, both verbs, though he occasionally use their adjectival forms. Lâzen and gelâzen denote this transformation process. They do not, as these commentators imply, depict a state or an end towards which one progresses. They are right to focus on the state of detachment, abgescheidenheit, as something Eckhart advocates. They simply focused on the term which leads towards it, rather than the term which describes the new state. This distinction is important inasmuch as the transition process, though it has much in common with the goal, is distinguished from the goal in significant ways. Lâzen and gelâzen denote the process, abgescheidenheit the goal.

While Eckhart may not have focused on the state of Gelassenheit, Forman does indicate an interest in the terms of lassen and gelassen. He indicates that Eckhart taught a “letting-go” of being attached to things. While Forman does explain Eckhart’s use of the term as a process of surrendering, “one surrenders both the emotional attachments to things, people, and work, and surrenders the sense of oneself vis-à-vis attachments,” he also admits that as a “description of the goal, Eckhart uses the derivative term gelâzenheit.” Forman sees Gelassenheit as being translated as “self-abandonment” or “surrender,” “since in abandoning

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30 Ibid., 399.
32 Ibid., 77.
the self one surrenders all attachments.”  

There is a close connection in Eckhart’s writing between Gelassenheit and Abegescheidenheit.

Reiner Schürmann also asserts that the two terms are connected. He sees Gelassenheit as a key term in the definition of Eckhart’s detachment. For Schürmann it designates the attitude of a human who no longer regards objects and events according to their usefulness, but who accepts them in their autonomy. This attitude makes him renounce influences, and it produces equanimity. We can translate this word by ‘infinite resignation’ and by ‘serenity.’ These two translations imply breaking the habit of possessing things and also oneself.

Schürmann understands the importance of detachment in Eckhart’s spirituality but makes Gelassenheit more a part of it than Forman does.

Another indication that Gelassenheit and Abegescheidenheit have the same meaning is noted by Walter Klaassen. He believes that the use of the concept of Gelassenheit came into use with Eckhart but that Eckhart used the word Abegescheidenheit. To Klaassen, these words are interchangeable. He also indicates that Gelassenheit is best translated as detachment.

McGinn also indicates that detachment is a distinctive theme of Eckhart’s. A treatise entitled On Detachment clearly shows that Eckhart thought highly of being detached and claimed it as the highest virtue. The importance of this treatise is noted by McGinn as he

33 Ibid., 80.

34 Reiner Schürmann, Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), 16.


36 Ibid.

37 Colledge and McGinn, Essential Sermons, 68.

states “although it was not a part of the trial documents and doubts have been expressed about its authenticity by previous scholars, its profundity of tone and true Eckhartian style have convinced Quint and most modern investigators that it is one of the finest products of the Meister’s pen.”39 An investigation of this treatise may well give insight into the theology and spirituality of Eckhart and gain an understanding of his usage of Gelassenheit.

Eckhart indicates that he sought to discover the highest virtue, something “with which man can most completely and closely conform himself to God”.40 The conclusion of this research was that he found “no other virtue better than a pure detachment from all things; because all other virtues have some regard for created things, but detachment is free from all created things.”41 Eckhart goes on to compare detachment with other virtues such as love, humility and mercifulness. In the example of how detachment is valued above love, Eckhart notes that love compels me to love God, however detachment compels God to love me. He explains “that is because God is able to conform himself, far better and with more suppleness, and to unite himself with me than I could unite myself with God.”42 The second reason he gives is that while love compels me to suffer all for God’s love, detachment is receptive to nothing except God. This is also explained in that with love there is some regard for that which one is willing to suffer for, while detachment is “wholly free of all created things.”43

39 Colledge and McGinn, Essential Sermons, 68.


41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 286.

43 Ibid.
In the concluding paragraphs of this treatise, one definitely sees the interchangeability between *Abegescheidenheit* and *Gelassenheit*. Eckhart comments that only a heart with pure detachment can be poor in spirit, having abandoned all things for God. He continues “now a heart that has pure detachment is free of all created things, and so it is wholly submitted to God, and so it achieves the highest uniformity with God, and is more susceptible to the divine inflowing.”\(^4^4\) The concepts of abandonment and submission are terms associated with *Gelassenheit*. These words of Eckhart show the value he placed upon it.

Words like “nothingness” and “free from all created things” often appear in Eckhart’s works and are key to his understanding of detachment. Another familiar concept of Eckhart’s found in this treatise is the relation of the inner person as opposed to the outer person. It is the inner person who can become totally detached apart from God with the ability to ignore the outer (physical) person.\(^4^5\) McGinn also notes this as he writes “the detachment to which Eckhart invites us is principally an internal one.”\(^4^6\) Eckhart warns that there are those who try to please God through their own penances and rituals which seem important to people.\(^4^7\) He comments that “so long as a man has this as his will, that he wants to fulfill God’s dearest will, he has not the poverty about which we want to talk.” This person must be “free of his own created will as he was when he did not exist.”\(^4^8\) Lifestyle does not seem important to Eckhart, particularly if it does not involve a complete surrender to God’s will which includes giving up

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\(^4^4\) Ibid., 293.

\(^4^5\) Ibid., 290-91.


\(^4^8\) Ibid., 200.
any possible sense of living out one’s own will, even if it is with the idea of doing it for God. It appears to be the inner attitude that counts. Forman touches on this in his comment that self-abandonment does not mean that one somehow gives up being in one’s body, or stops being able to live in the world as a distinct being, for of course one must continue to take into account one’s social situation, personal qualities, capacities, etc. Eckhart does not advocate stupidity! No, what he advocates is a ceasing to cherish self-aggrandizement over the aggrandizement of others, a ceasing to regard oneself and one’s own gain as most important.49

For Eckhart this idea of self-abandonment does not mean a contemplative withdrawal from the material world.50 The monastic concept of withdrawing from the world in complete contemplation of surrendering to God is not considered here. Eckhart wrote in the vernacular, teaching the lay people how to become closer to God. This is something that Richard Kieckhefer also notes as he writes:

As a mendicant rather than an enclosed monk, Eckhart was dedicated to a life of active service in preaching, teaching, and administration. Instead of glorifying the spirituality of the strictly contemplative orders, he enjoined his reader to discover God in all times and places, in all persons and things (DW 5. 289-90). If an individual happened to receive ecstatic favors, they presumably came from God. But Eckhart was less concerned with the extraordinary moments in a person's life than with the substance of that life.51

An article by Winfried Corduan discusses Eckhart’s spirituality as being completely God-centred. He concludes his treatise by noting that:

Eckhart shows us a theology and spirituality that is completely willing to let God be in charge. Being is God’s being. The only alternative is nothing. Surrender to God means to let God do all, both to become a believer and to be transformed by God. God implants

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49 Forman, Mystic as Theologian, 78.

50 Ibid., 77.

his own nature in the believer through his doing alone. We cannot search out these truths or experience them. We need only accept them.\footnote{Winfried Corduan, “A Hair’s Breadth from Pantheism: Meister Eckhart’s God-Centered Spirituality,” \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 37 (June 1994), 274.}

Eckhart displayed an attitude of worship to God in his life as he developed the virtue of \textit{Gelassenheit} in his spirituality.

Eckhart was tried for heresy in 1326 and died before the trial was complete.\footnote{The exact date of his death is not definite. Tobin indicates it was sometime between February 1327 and April 1328. (11-12) and McGinn indicates that new information show it to be in January 1328 (194, n. 4).} The main issue of the condemnation was that some of Eckhart’s writings were pantheistic even though the church did not consider Eckhart himself to be pantheist.\footnote{Arthur McMahon, "Meister Johann Eckhart." \textit{The Catholic Encyclopedia}. Vol. 5. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), 14 Apr. 2012 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05274a.htm>.} In 1329, Pope John XXII issued a bull condemning a number of his propositions. “Eckhart is said to be someone who ‘wished to know more than he should,’ who was ‘led astray by the Father of lies,’ and who sowed ‘thorns and obstacles contrary to the very clear truth of faith in the field of the Church’.\footnote{Bernard McGinn, "Evil-Sounding, Rash, and Suspect of Heresy: Tensions between Mysticism and Magisterium in the History of the Church," \textit{The Catholic Historical Review}, 90 (April 2004), 193-194.}

Eckhart’s responded to the accusations that he could not be a heretic because “he never willingly taught anything that church authorities considered erroneous.”\footnote{Tobin, \textit{Thought and Language}, 10.} Tobin asserts that “there is little reason to doubt his loyalty to the church as there is to doubt his conviction that he was misunderstood.”\footnote{Ibid. 12-13.} The Catholic Encyclopedia acknowledges that “the very nature of Eckhart’s subjects and the untechnicality of his language were calculated to cause him to be
misunderstood, not only by the ordinary hearers of his sermons, but also by the Schoolmen who listened to him or read his treatises.58 Even if just some of Eckhart’s writings contained the possibility of heresy, these propositions remained condemned as heretical in case others would read them and from them develop their own dangerous doctrine.59

A discussion on Eckhart’s condemnation is given by Wilfried Corduan who speculates that

It is difficult now to understand why Eckhart’s accusers would not accept his explanation, which had solid precedent in theology, philosophy and devotional writings. The records are incomplete, and there were many currents and tensions in the air, but a plausible explanation is that Eckhart’s sometimes unguarded formulations were seen as undergirding the spiritual movements—for example, the Brethren of the Free Spirit—that promised a relationship with God apart from Church or tradition on a purely personal level. Eckhart’s creation metaphysics stresses an immediacy to God that had to be seen as making any this-worldly mediation dispensable. It would have emphasized the notion that God could be found right where we live, not just through a special sacred dimension.60

Perhaps the idea that the established Church was not needed to develop a relationship with God was something that threatened its tradition. This thought is also presented by Bernard McGinn who gives his opinion of why mystics like Eckhart were considered heretical. He asserts that “such tensions are not merely accidental, the result of the bad will of heretics or the mistakes and incomprehension of authority figures, but that they also are partly the result of inherent issues, pressure points if you will, in the relation of mysticism and magisterium in the

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58 McMahon, “Meister Johann Eckhart.”

59 Ibid.

60 Corduan, “Hair’s Breadth from Pantheism,” 267-268.
history of Christianity.”61 Corduan also indicates the attraction lay people would have in Eckhart’s thought that they could find God on a personal basis without a mediator.

The phrase, “for whatever is in God is God” is said to be one of the integral statements that caused offense.62 Corduan makes the case that this sentence only errs when taken out of context. If one interprets it to mean “since all creatures are in God, they are God,” this would be considered pantheism and Eckhart would admit that such a statement is erroneous.63

Condemnation did not stop his followers from continuing with the teachings and ideas of his writings. John Tauler and Henry Suso were two of his followers who “lived and suffered through these tragic events, and who, in their different ways, testified that they still revered his memory and dissented from the judgment of the Holy See.”64

Later Medieval Writings

Another example of someone who continued with the influence of Eckhart is the unknown writer of the Theologia Deutsch. This writer and Tauler also influenced the early Anabaptist writers. Both contained similar concepts of Gelassenheit in their writings. The main difference that Tauler and the Theologia Deutsch added to their spirituality was an emphasis on the imitation of Christ.65 As Kenneth Davis brings to view South German Anabaptist similarities to the Theologia Deutsch, he notes that one such concept is the idea of Gelassenheit, which


62 McGinn, Teacher and Preacher, 246.

63 Corduan, “Hair Breadth from Pantheism,” 266.

64 Colledge and McGinn, Essential Sermons, 15.

emphasizes resignation more strongly than repentance. Packull concurs with the thought that these followers of Eckhart continued in his teaching with the added emphasis on discipleship. He adds “with the attention shifted to human volition, obedience to the divine will was pushed into the foreground. And although the tendency to internalize the life of Christ and the concept of the logos is by no means lost, the historical (incarnate) Christ assumed greater significance as the exemplar of obedience.” While Eckhart’s theology of Christ as logos has not been discussed, there is the added emphasis of imitation placed in later writings while continuing the basic understanding of Eckhartian Gelassenheit.

**Andreas Bodenstein Von Karlstadt**

The *Theologia Deutsch* also influenced Andreas Carlstadt who wrote several tracts on Gelassenheit himself. Klaassen notes that Carlstadt was perhaps a more immediate transmitter of the teaching of Gelassenheit to the Anabaptists.

Carlstadt was born in 1486 in Franconia and taught at the University of Wittenberg. He was archbishop before his break with the church. His marriage in 1522 demonstrated his stance on the side of evangelical reform as it openly broke his vow of celibacy. Ron Sider indicates that Carlstadt’s name was on a letter of excommunication together with Luther’s in 1520.

66 Ibid., 227.


68 Ibid.

69 Klaassen, “Gelassenheit and Creation,” 27.

Shortly after, Carlstadt wrote *Tract on the Supreme Virtue of Gelassenheit*. Within this tract Carlstadt criticized the pope as forcing him away from the Bible, against God, right and honor.\(^72\) He believed that the Bible is clear enough that not only a scholar can understand it, but the layperson can as well.\(^73\) It is from his study of the Bible that he developed his own understanding of *Gelassenheit*.

Carlstadt writes “I know that there is no greater virtue on earth and in heaven than detachment, when a person leaves behind all possessions, honor, friends, body, and soul.”\(^74\) Words like “detachment” and “greater virtue” are reminiscent of Eckhart. The concept of detaching oneself from creation is also found in this tract. Carlstadt comments that “I know that I must be yielded [*Gelassen*], and that I must let go [*Gelassen*] of all creatures.\(^75\)

A theme of suffering is prevalent within this tract. Carlstadt discusses following the example of Christ in denying oneself and taking up the cross.\(^76\) Even in suffering one must not use it to seek honor or self-interest but must be totally yielded. He emphasizes, “Is it not a painful matter that I cannot accept any suffering as if it were my own doing? If I desire to suffer something or carry a cross for God’s sake, I must first deny and forsake myself. I must totally


\(^{73}\) Ibid.


\(^{75}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 37.
submerge my own will in God’s will and drown self-will in all things. Hence, I must will as God wills.”

In 1523 Carlstadt wrote another tract on *Gelassenheit* that contains many of these same thoughts with more detail. The opening commentary by E. J. Furcha gives an overview of this treatise, noting that:

Carlstadt here provides a detailed analysis of the kind of disposition a genuine Christian ought to develop. The ethical implications of taking seriously total surrender to God’s will are developed by him through an interesting use of relevant Scripture passages. While he reads these under the influence of late medieval mysticism, he does not shy away from developing his own specific understanding by which he, in turn, seems to have influenced Anabaptists and other radical Reformers. Notable is his own detachment from former academic honors and accomplishments while intentionally living as a “new layperson”.

Within this tract, Carlstadt elaborates on the meaning of detachment. The analogy of marriage is used where a man leaves father and mother on account of his wife and clings to her.

Carlstadt explains that one should “note at once how the love of a wife surpasses and cuts out the love of father and mother. Likewise the love of God ought to supersede all love and delight (which we have toward creatures). Nowhere other than in God ought a person be content. Yes, we must leave all creatures if we want to have God as our protector and indweller or Lord.”

The concept of Christ as bridegroom is drawn out in Carlstadt’s writing. Humans enter into a marriage type relationship where one is united with God. The detachment from “father, mother, house, and possessions for the sake of God’s will” is the desired effect of *Gelassenheit*,

77 Ibid., 38.

78 Furcha, *Essential Carlstadt*, 133-134.

a notion that Carlstadt repeats within his writings. A disciple of Christ needs to forsake all material goods.

Another analogy that Carlstadt uses to describe *Gelassenheit* is that of the relationship of an apprentice to the master. “If he shows pleasure in and love of the skill of his master, no one will doubt that the young chap is an easy learner. Furthermore, the apprentice must be free of all hatred and envy of the master and his craft.” The apprentice becomes the disciple of the master trusting in him to give all he needs. Carlstadt continues “therefore, let us work heartily, but without a care and we will, in this case, become God’s apprentices.” As a result, “yieldedness is the beginning of the Christian life and must maintain all divine virtue. Wherever it is not vigilant, the apprentice drops out of the school of Christ.” *Gelassenheit* becomes necessary to develop a relationship with God.

Carlstadt then goes on to describe a circumcised heart which is “a cutting away from the heart of all creatures.” For Carlstadt a circumcised heart and a *Gelassenheit* attitude mean the same thing. He explains that “it follows that a circumcised and loving heart has abandoned all creatures and in love clings to nothing other than God.” This can be further understood in Sider’s study of Carlstadt. He writes “as the human heart experiences *Gelassenheit*, God

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80 Ibid., 136. Another example can be found on page 163.
81 Ibid., 142.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 143.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 145
86 Ibid., 146-147.
bestows his gifts of love, righteousness and obedience. The human will undergoes a genuine transformation."87 The person yielded to God becomes detached from the things of creation like self, others or material goods.

Carlstadt realizes that Gelassenheit is an ongoing process. He concludes his treatise with the words: “Such self-denial cannot be tepid or distant, but must be sincere and red-hot. It must not last for a day, but forever. In addition, we must daily watch for unyieldedness and agreeableness and wait . . . We must daily bear the cross of wrath, hatred, and envy against our soul and never lay it down if we are to follow Christ and intend to become apprentices of God and Christ.”88

Klaassen sums up Carlstadt’s understanding of Gelassenheit as “renouncing all things and clinging to God only, about dying to selfwill and becoming one with God and his will.”89 Carlstadt believes that all pleasure is sin90 and Klaassen explains this as identifying selfishness or selfwill as the essence of sin.91 Snyder understands Carlstadt’s concept of sin as “being essentially volitional, namely as willing other than what God wills. Since sin is of this nature, the conquering of sin must take place by means of Gelassenheit, or “yieldedness” of one’s will and

87 Sider, Andreas Bodenstein Von Karlstadt, 223.

88 Ibid., 167.

89 Klaassen, “Gelassenheit and Creation,” 27.

90 Carlstadt, “The Meaning of the term Gelassen,” 139.

91 Klaassen, “Gelassenheit and Creation,” 27.
desires to do God’s will.”\textsuperscript{92} Unyieldedness is the essence of sin and keeps a person away from a relationship with God.

Sider notes Karlstadt’s acceptance of mystical teaching to his theology including “the notion of Gelassenheit and the constant emphasis on the importance of the renunciation of self and creatures as the preparation for grace.”\textsuperscript{93}

**Summary**

Eckhart can be said to be someone who put a name to the monastic ideals of resignation and self-surrender. Thus the concept of Gelassenheit was identified and developed as a sought out characteristic of spirituality. For Eckhart, God was understood as creator and all else his creation. Therefore the goal was to be able to detach oneself from all created things and yield only to God. He believed that by surrendering to everything including self-will, one would become indwelt by the creator. This was the goal of Gelassenheit, to unite oneself with God. This is what the Catholic Church interpreted as pantheism. They may have been correct; however his ideas continued to be used by later writers who dismissed any pantheistic ideas and focused on his concepts of detachment and self-surrender to the will of God. The example is given of Karlstadt who focused on the idea that self-surrender meant taking up the cross in the imitation of Christ.

This mystical medieval concept of Gelassenheit was something that appealed to early Anabaptist leaders as they considered what it meant to their own spirituality.

\textsuperscript{92} C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 26.

\textsuperscript{93} Sider, *Andreas Bodenstein Von Karlstadt*, 301.
Chapter 2

Hans Denck

Denck as Anabaptist Leader

This study of Hans Denck explores his writings demonstrating that Gelassenheit is fulfilled by following the example of Christ including the resignation of one’s own will and yielding to the will of God.

Denck played an important role in developing Anabaptist spirituality in the South German movement together with other such leaders as Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Hut, and Thomas Müntzer. Denck’s role as an Anabaptist leader is often summarized with reference to the motto “No one may truly know Christ except one who follows Him in life.” An examination of his writings displays the importance of following Christ’s example and a Gelassenheit spirit is the attitude needed in living this out. It is for this reason that this study focuses on Denck as one example of developing Gelassenheit within Anabaptism.

Medieval views of Gelassenheit were understood as an attitude of worship. The devoting of oneself to the will of God deeply influenced how Hans Denck understood Gelassenheit. His notion of Gelassenheit indicates an attitude of worship but his is a lifestyle-worship—to live the Christian life is to follow the example of Christ.

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94 Werner O. Packull, Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525-1531 (Scottsdale, PA, 1977), 61. Packull considers Denck one of early South German Anabaptism’s noblest representatives.


96 The idea of worship as a lifestyle comes from Linda Dillow’s book Satisfy My Thirsty Soul (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress), 27.
Even those opposed to Denck saw him as an influential Anabaptist leader. A number of historians have compiled lists with names of how various religious reformers depicted Denck. One such example is Jan Kiwiet’s list which includes Martin Bucer who called Denck the “pope of the Anabaptists”; Wolfgang Capito who called him “the duke of this blasphemy” and Urbanus Rhegius wrote that he was “the abbot of the Anabaptists”. Such comments show that even his opponents saw Denck’s influence within the Anabaptist movement and for them this was a threat. Denck was banished a number of times from the places he lived.

Denck was influential in developing the attitude of Gelassenheit in early Anabaptist spirituality. Gustave Guillaume Roehrich, who completed his thesis on Hans Denck in 1853 for the Strasbourg Faculty, writes:

only he whose spirit is intimately united with God; who no longer allows himself to be influenced by worldly affections; who remains calm and tranquil under the cruelest circumstances of life; who is resigned, as Jesus was at Gethsemane; in short, only he who has attained the highest degree of mysticism can understand these words. It is from this mysticism that the multiple sense of the word “Gelassenheit” derives. Denk borrowed this word from his medieval mentors and used it often.

A key word in this description is that of someone who is resigned. For Denck, Gelassenheit meant resignation. It was a resignation from the rights of his life and the full devotion to the will of God. With this attitude a yielded Christian can find comfort and acceptance of the hardships of life knowing God can make good out of all the difficulties.

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Hans Denck is believed to have been born around 1500 and died in 1527 as a result of the plague. Most of Denck’s short career was spent as a teacher. His knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew gave him opportunity to find employment wherever he went. Denck was known to have been influenced by the mystic Meister Eckhart and the *Theologia Deutsch.*\(^{100}\) Cornelius Dyck describes him as “a brilliant theologian and author with whom few could debate, he was nevertheless gentle, humble, and pious, a man of deep integrity and faith.”\(^{101}\) A similar conclusion is reached by Clarence Bauman who says that “Denck was above all a thinker and a teacher endowed with the spiritual resourcefulness to dig his own well and the mental capacity to articulate his own integration of beliefs and values.”\(^{102}\) It does not seem unrealistic that he would have a great influence on those around him to accept his ideas and view of how to live the Christian life.

One advantage Denck may have had was to live in places known to be centres of theological inquiry. Nuremberg, Augsburg and Strasbourg were places of reformation where followers of Luther and Zwingli debated with one another. Despite such openness to religious debate, Denck found himself being banished from place to place as authorities discovered his Anabaptist beliefs. Humanists who questioned the teachings of Luther must have affected Denck as indicated by Kiwiet who discovered that the first protest against the Lutherans came through the writings of the Humanist Hans Sachs around the time that Denck entered Nuremberg. Sachs “asserted that no Christianity could be possible without an imitation of Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*); that no real Reformation could be achieved by merely changing


external forms, but first of all by a complete yielding (Gelassenheit) to the will of God.”103 Hans Greiffenberger was another Humanist who wrote similar ideas to Sachs. The same themes can be found in Denck’s writings. As a result Kiwiet concludes that it is clear that the Humanists of Nuremberg exerted a decisive influence on Denck.104

Within such a wide range of religious debate, as a thinker, Denck processed these views to develop his own belief and value system. Bauman notes that “he developed his spiritual insights on the strength of his own intuitive awareness that every one who loves God has unmediated direct access to God’s own mind and will providing that one unconditionally commit one’s whole life to the living embodiment of the Divine Presence.”105 As a teacher, Denck was able to influence others through his writings about the importance of committing one’s life to the will of God. It is in this view that his concept of living with the attitude of Gelassenheit is demonstrated.

While in Basel, Denck attended lectures given by Oecolampadius, a leader within the reformation. Oecolampadius must have seen potential in Denck and recommended him for a position as the rector of St. Sebald School in Nuremberg in 1523. Denck’s religious leanings were suspect when he forbade his students to be involved in the ministration of the mass.106 Protest against Lutheranism was rising and during a city council trial proceeding, Denck’s name came up in a list of those who had associations with the protest.107 He was asked to give a


104 Ibid.

105 Bauman, Legacy of Hans Denck, 1.

106 Ibid., 8.
confession of his views and it is this confession that is known as the first of his writings. The result was his banishment from Nuremberg. Denck left the city without protest.

**Writings of Hans Denck**

A glimpse of his *Gelassenheit* attitude can be found in this first confession, wherein he argues that faith cannot come from an internal understanding, whether through the faith of parents or by the teaching of books, but it must come from something that resists the inborn nature.

For Denck, faith comes from something within his heart that God has put there, which allows him to understand Scripture and thus be able to accept its teaching. Within this confession he notes that “all believers were once unbelievers. Consequently, in becoming believers, they thus first had to die in order that they might thereafter no longer live [for] themselves, as unbelievers do, but [for] God through Christ that their walk might indeed no longer be on earth but in heaven as Paul says.” The attitude is to be one of yieldedness. Within this confession one sees a relinquishing of the desire to live for oneself and instead be content to live for God.

The Nuremberg preachers responded to this Confession by advising the council that Denck erred in his tenets and unless dealt with would need to be removed so as not to spread his views. As a result Denck was banished from the community.

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107 Ibid., 9.


109 Ibid., 61.

110 Ibid., 57. An example of this idea of relinquishing himself for the contentment of living for God is seen in the words “How well I see that my unbelief cannot stand before him. Therefore I say: Very well then, in God’s almighty name, whom I fear from the depth of my heat, Lord, I believe, help my [un]belief!”
Denck ended up in Augsburg in 1526 where he was able to gain employment as a tutor of Latin and Greek. It was here that Denck became a leader of the Anabaptist group.\(^{112}\) Discussion and debate led to a deepening of the beliefs he was already establishing. In Augsburg, Denck’s influence grew beyond expectation. Roehrich sees this achievement as a result of enthusiasm, zeal and outstanding qualities. There was also division among the reformers and a convincing leader could sway others to follow.\(^{113}\) Denck had the ability to be that kind of leader.

Although Denck did not openly promote his theology, his disagreement with the teachings of Reformers brought him into the debate. Denck wrote *Whether God is the Cause of Evil* in Augsburg in 1526, a treatise which contains his criticism of Lutheranism. A number of radical reformers, including Denck, did not see Lutherans and other reformers as going far enough in their stance against the Catholic Church. It seems obvious that eventually he would be found to be part of the Anabaptist movement. The City Council requested him to explain his beliefs and with the expectation that his views would not be favourably accepted, Denck left Augsburg and headed to Strasbourg in late October of 1526.\(^{114}\)

Strasbourg was known for tolerance. Unfortunately some of the leaders felt that he would undermine the Reformation and therefore Denck was evicted from Strasbourg before

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\(^{112}\) Denck is believed to have been baptized by Hubmaier and baptized Hut although historians have not been able to establish the certainty of this. It is known that he came in contact with both of these Anabaptist leaders.


the end of 1526. Denck wandered to various places before arriving in Worms in February of 1527. It was here that he wrote Concerning True Love and Order of God. His last place of residence was in Basel where he wrote what is known as a recantation for Oecolampadius shortly before he died of the plague in November 1527. Bauman believes that readers of Denck’s “Protestation and Confession” would see it as an articulation of his thinking rather than the recantation as accepted by Oecolampadius.116

Main Gelassenheit Treatise

The work Whether God is the Cause of Evil, which contains the most actual uses of the term Gelassenheit of all his writings, shows the contrast from Lutheranism which stressed justification through faith in the work of Christ. Anabaptism believed in free will and the responsibility of those who make a decision for Christ to live in imitation of Christ as part of their salvation process. Denck criticizes in particular the idea of predestination and shows the importance of free will. It is because of this free will that evil exists. God is not the cause of it. The entire work is set up in a question and response format so that Denck can address the issues that he disagrees with in the reformers theology. Besides predestination, Williams observes that one of the themes within this treatise is the “diverse manifestations of selffulness and its desirable opposite, Gelassenheit.”118

115 Ibid., 14.
116 Ibid. 19.
118 Ibid., 87.
The desire for a *Gelassenheit* attitude can be seen right from the first paragraph of Denck’s work: “I, John Denck, freely confess before all God-fearing persons that I open my mouth against my own will and reluctantly speak before the world of God who nevertheless compels me so that I cannot be silent. And in his name alone do I willingly and joyfully speak however difficult it may be for me.”¹¹⁹ Denck was hesitant to speak against the church authorities of the time. Some of his close colleagues such as Oecolampadius knew he had other ideas, but did not realize he was teaching something entirely different from the Lutheran church at first.¹²⁰ Denck indicates here that his desire to yield to God’s will overcame his own will. It was his way of worshipping the God he had chosen to serve.

Within this treatise, Denck discusses whether sin is of God. Bauman sums up this thought of Denck’s as

Sin is not of God but rather our opposition to God. That God allowed sin is infinitely better than if he had prevented it, for then human nature and destiny would be predetermined, and mankind, not knowing of sin, would presume to be equal to God and deprive him of his sovereignty and glory. In view of God’s omnipotence, sin, understood as opposition to God, however great it may be, in effect amounts to nothing even though God uses it as punishment: just as the schoolmaster punishes his pupils for doing nothing and just as we who commit ourselves to God in complete *Gelassenheit* become nothing apart from being in God and God in us.¹²¹

Historians tend to translate Denck’s use of *Gelassenheit* as resignation. In Denck’s writing the word comes up as something that can be measured. There is a degree in which one

¹¹⁹ Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 88.


can resign oneself to the will of God.\textsuperscript{122} One needs to do something good and the more one does, the less punishment is needed. Those who sin realize the punishment is deserved much as a parent or a teacher disciplines a child to correct the poor behaviour. It is at that point, as one resigns themselves to the punishment, that one recognizes how God can use it for good.\textsuperscript{123} They realize that the purpose of punishment is to keep one from committing the same sin. God is displeased by sin, and so the person who has the attitude of \textit{Gelassenheit} no longer desires to sin.\textsuperscript{124}

The next use of \textit{Gelassenheit} within the text discusses sin as being something that does not please God and that he forbids. Therefore no one who has an attitude of \textit{Gelassenheit} can say that God would induce someone to sin.\textsuperscript{125} This is a response to those who claim that they can do nothing other than what God works in them. It is here that he puts in a key point for his entire argument within this treatise:

The mouth speaks of its resignation while the heart makes use of all its own liberty. Such a person steals from God the will which he has created good and free and makes it thus his own against God’s will. Yea, the mouth and the heart steal from God his highest and greatest honor they can conceive and say: God has made a temple in which he does not wish to dwell. If, however, they say he does dwell therein, how inconsistent they are, for they accuse God of that for which he has eternal abhorrence.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{Gelassenheit} for Denck comes from the free will of a person to choose for oneself whether to yield to the will of God and not sin in disobedience to God.

\textsuperscript{122} Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 91.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 92-93.
Denck goes on to note that others may then claim that if there is no failure on God’s part and it is only through me that sin exists, then it depends on me as to whether I am saved and so salvation is from myself. He responds that Salvation is not of us, but in us. God is in all creatures as they have come from him. He writes, “For if God is in me, then in fact everything is in me that belongs to God—omnipotence, righteousness, and mercy.” 127

So what does one lack for salvation? Denck explains that it is not enough for God to be in a person, that person must also be in God. He writes, “What purpose does it serve that you have God and yet do not honor him as God? What does it help that he created you in the beginning through his Word and has made you his child when you do not conduct yourself as a child? Can he not disinherit you although he has promised you equally along with other children the inheritance?” 128

The reason to develop an attitude of Gelassenheit really is for salvation. Denck notes that the hindrance to accepting salvation is because human will and God’s will are not the same. The opposite of Gelassenheit is when self is sought rather than God for his own sake. A discontent is demonstrated where one is forever seeking to hide in order to escape the hand of God. 129 The problem lies in the knowledge that by seeking salvation, one finds oneself in damnation which is definitely not appealing to the sinful nature that all have. Yet allowing self-will to be broken and yielding oneself completely to God is a key to salvation. He explains “if man held himself still, that would be the time and place for the Spirit of the Lamb to give

127 Ibid., 94.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
testimony and say that this is the only way to salvation, namely, to lose oneself. For, since God and all his action is the best, it must necessarily follow that his breaking of the will (brechen), which is surely contrary to our nature, is infinitely better than to do all things in heaven, on, and under the earth.”¹³⁰ The idea of “losing oneself” fits in well with the attitude of Gelassenheit. To yield to the will of God means giving up on one’s own will, giving one the path to salvation.

Denck continues his argument on free will by addressing the question of why God would not make humans as he would want. His response is that God gives freedom of choice. The reason given is “that God does not wish to compel, so that his mercy might be recognized and not despised.”¹³¹ Otherwise he need not have put a soul into humans when he created them; he could have had his satisfaction by creating them blessed. He goes on to say “Thus Christ also says (when some withdrew from him) to his disciples: Do you also wish to go away?—as though he wished to say, you should be unconstrained.”¹³² We are never forced to do God’s will.

Gelassenheit is always a voluntary attitude even though Denck shows it to be essential to salvation which he is careful to say is only through Jesus Christ.

It is here that the word Gelassenheit comes up in his writing once more. Denck writes that “Scripture speaks of a resignation (Gelassenheit), which is the means of coming to God, that is, Christ himself, not to be regarded physically, but rather spiritually, as he himself also proclaimed before he came in the flesh.”¹³³ Bauman indicates that these words show that “the

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¹³⁰ Ibid., 95.
¹³¹ Ibid., 93.
¹³² Ibid.
¹³³ Ibid.
commandment of God is not too high or too far off. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it. . . . perverted Christians now deny Christ’s preaching in their hearts, that inner Word which works death and resurrection.”\(^{134}\)

For Denck, the importance of baptism and communion lies in the spiritual act of it and not the physical. The physical acts cannot save anyone.\(^{135}\) God transforms the person who freely chooses him and desires to follow in the example of Christ. It is this understanding of the means to God that many misunderstand. Those who claim to be wise in the scriptures but not educated in the Kingdom of Heaven speak about a “stark blindness” where there is no distinction between the godly and the godless. These people believe that even the godless stand resigned in God and not they but rather God who sinned in them. There is nothing that people can do on their own; all is determined by what God has chosen to do in their life.\(^{136}\) The concept of predestination is attacked as being a message from the devil. Denck’s belief is that all are given that choice not just a few elect.\(^{137}\) The way to salvation is that “one should deny neither the Word in the heart nor any external testimony but hear and discern all through the Spirit, leave all that pertains to self, commit oneself to God in freedom, and live just as Christ lived.”\(^{138}\) Salvation is a choice one makes through the means of Christ to follow the example he left.

\(^{134}\) Bauman, Legacy of Hans Denck, 73.


\(^{136}\) Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 97.

\(^{137}\) Bauman, Legacy of Hans Denck, 74.

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 73.
From here we begin to see Denck’s understanding of the inner Word and its importance even above that of Scripture. One should not deny the word that God gives to the heart but listen carefully. External testimony is important and should be considered as a way that God speaks to someone. One can become certain of God’s will by persevering in the gaining of understanding. According to Denck, God’s will is “to leave off all of selffulness (aigenschaft) and to yield oneself to the freedom which is God. For man imitates God, takes on the traits of the divine generation, as one who is the son of God and coheir with Christ. Therefore such a one also lives, according to his measure, just as Christ lived. Yea, he himself does not live alone but Christ in him.” One begins to see a pattern that the attitude Gelassenheit must include a way of life, living just as Christ lived. Kiwiet makes the comment that “in spite of his high respect for the Scriptures Denck evaluated the conscious and obedient encounter with God much higher. Faith is not a matter of reading the Bible, but of meeting God.”

A reason that a Gelassenheit attitude should be directed to God can be seen in the words “God alone is to be loved because he alone is good.” For Denck, no one else deserves the self-surrender that Gelassenheit dictates. And so he goes on to say “if one is to love him, one must hate and lose all [else] which hinders this, namely, oneself and all that is creaturely.”

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139 Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 99.


141 Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 98.

142 Ibid.
Love comes up often as a theme in Denck’s writing and in this treatise he discusses the perfect love that Christ has and insists that Christ’s sacrifice was so that all could be saved. It does not make sense to Denck that some would be excluded from the possibility of salvation. That would make love delusive and a respecter of persons. ¹⁴³ This love shows that Christ is also the perfect example of Gelassenheit. Denck writes “indeed, Christ was so extremely resigned (gelassen) that, although he loves all men without measure, if it had pleased the Father, he would also have willed to suffer even in vain.” ¹⁴⁴

A dissertation by Willis Milton Stoesz discusses Christ as the mediator (mittel) between God and man. He also agrees that Denck sees Christ as offering himself up which is given to us as an example. He writes “Christ was obedient to God all his life long to his death; this is the key point to the whole understanding of Christ which the mittel seeks to make plain to the individual. Obedience has to do with specific ethical norms as binding upon men, but it is most characteristically defined by self-sacrifice considered apart from any special life-context.”¹⁴⁵ Perhaps Stoesz is correct in concluding that “it may be said that Christ would not have been the Savior if he had not lived a life of complete self-sacrifice.”¹⁴⁶ He is correct that salvation does have to do with self-sacrifice and it is through Christ’s self-sacrifice that one can be saved.

In order to remain within the faith, yielding to God is a continuing action. Denck responds to the question of the doctrine of foreknowledge that it is only needed as a comfort

¹⁴³ Ibid., 102.
¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
for the elect since help and salvation is sure because it lies in the hand of God. However Denck replies that one has a responsibility in that God can reject the person who does not remain in the faith. Yet there is also reward as he notes “whoever has yielded himself to the chastisement of the Father [and who] has in a measure tasted the sweetness of the bitter cross, to him the Father has revealed himself through his Spirit in defiance before that person’s enemies.” Once again Denck shows the importance of *Gelassenheit* if one is to remain in the faith.

There is cost to this attitude of *Gelassenheit*. Denck discusses the importance of renouncing the world. There may be a need to make use of the world but this should be with the attitude of being a stranger on earth, prepared for the possibility of controversy and adept in adversity. “Whoever lives in security and happiness in the world should take care lest he be overtaken with her, and the ignominy of his fornication become publicly exposed and rebuked. For the Lord cometh. He will come at night, when none will take note of him, like a thief, to take off what he commended to us as shepherds, to serve him therewith and which like thieves we have appropriated for ourselves in order to rule.”

It is within this treatise that we find of Denck’s well known phrase: “this Means is Christ, whom none may truly know unless he follow after him with his life.” God cannot be known except through Christ and the one who has faith must demonstrate it by the way one lives.

147 Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil”, 105.

148 Ibid. 106.

149 Ibid., 113.
Within this main emphasis of Denck’s we can once again see the concept of *Gelassenheit*. Life is not one’s own but committed and yielded to the example that Christ has left for us to follow.

Stoesz discusses Denck’s use of *Gelassenheit* as a submissiveness of will before God. This means that one must regard all objects and also oneself without any sense of possessiveness. “The individual must cease thinking he is at his own disposal; rather he is to stand passive (*gelassen*) before God, disposed in a submissive stance before God. For this is what Christ did.” Christ’s submissive stance meant his willingness to die to fulfill God’s will even if no result occurred. The example of Christ is to die to self-will.

Denck concludes *Whether God is the Cause of Evil* with the encouragement that the one who takes these words to heart will not be abandoned by God even though that person is overwhelmed with scorn and shame because of sin or even persecution by all other creatures.

**Other Writings of Denck**

Although his other writings seldom contain the actual use of *Gelassenheit*, they do contain the concept. His next treatise *Concerning the Law of God* also written in 1526. Bauman sums up Denck’s purpose for the treatise as a concern that

Christ, whom the whole world professes in word but denies in deed, proclaims that he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. This truth is distorted to imply that we need not fulfill the Law since Christ did so quite sufficiently in our place. Were this the case, then it would not really matter how one lives after conversion, as, Denck observes, it indeed does not appear to matter. Christ’s fulfillment of the Law, however, does not exempt us from it, but rather gives us an example to follow, for what applies to the head hold true also for the body.  


151 Ibid. Stoesz is not indicating that one remains passive without the ethical dimension, but rather one becomes removed from the desire to pursue one’s own will.

This writing concludes with thoughts similar to those found in as Whether God is the Cause of Evil evident in the following words: “Blessed is the one who says it truthfully, that is, who from the heart gladly suffers all curse of the Law so that God’s will alone be done, that he alone reign, his Name alone be sanctified, and our will be broken, the power of sin destroyed, and all false praise be brought to share forever and eternally, Amen.”

In a foreword to the translation of Concerning True Love, Furcha notes that “it may well have been a positive effort on Denck’s part to express the motivating force in his own life—not so much in terms of theological debate and acrimonious accusations, but rather in the unified totality of a committed ‘lover’, responsive to the power of genuine love personified in Jesus Christ.”

The concept of self-surrender and yieldedness appears in this treatise just as in his previous writings. Love’s only desire is seen to benefit and do good to others and not consider itself. A love that does not sacrifice or deny itself for the beloved is a love that is selfish. For Denck, this Love is God, “who must love himself in accord with his goodness which he receives from himself and which he replenishes within himself, [the God] who does not regard himself for the sake of those who need him so that, for their sake, he would (insofar as that is possible) gladly be nothing.”


154 Furcha, Selected Writings, 100.


156 Ibid., 185.
Denck continues with the comment that “the more Love is loved, the nearer is salvation.”\textsuperscript{157} Because God loves people so much, he is willing to give of himself for them. In the same way, people should be willing to give God their love by giving themselves to him. That is the way to salvation and that way is through Jesus Christ, the one who displays perfect \textit{Gelassenheit}. Later Denck also notes that those who become the children of God through their faith have an advantage that they have no other contract or prescribed law from him than to love him.\textsuperscript{158}

As Denck discusses how love does not add to the law but fulfills it, we once again see an example of a \textit{Gelassenheit} attitude. He writes: “Love consists in recognizing and loving God and learning to surrender and to yield for his sake all precious things that are humanly attractive to mankind. And again, [this means] to accept and bear in the love of God all things that are contrary to one’s materiality.”\textsuperscript{159}

Denck discusses the purpose of customs within a gospel of love. For him baptism is a testimony of confession and the breaking of bread is a remembrance of what they were called to. God is to be served in holiness and righteousness throughout their whole lives. Again the attitude of self-surrender is displayed. Denck writes: “holiness means that one has once for all separated oneself from the evil world and all the filth of the flesh to serve God the Lord alone—

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 191.
\end{quote}
all of which is meant and witnessed to by water baptism as one acknowledges the old life as waste and desires henceforth to walk in new life.”\textsuperscript{160}

Within this treatise is an understanding of how one can live the \textit{Gelassenheit} life. There should be no intent or desire to do any harm to anyone. One serves by working toward the betterment of everyone as much as one is able.\textsuperscript{161}

In the conclusion of this work, Denck indicates that all he writes comes from the perfect Love of Christ. Despite all the trials one goes through, one reason to stay true and live the \textit{Gelassenheit} life is “the consolation of all children of God that their Father is stronger and mightier than the whole world, including its prince the devil. Indeed, God is so faithful that he will not allow harm come to all those who trust in him.”\textsuperscript{162}

There is one other writing that contains the word \textit{Gelassenheit} and that is found in Denck’s \textit{Propositions} written in 1528. It is interesting to note that this work was placed in the appendix of later editions of \textit{Theologia Deutsch}, a work that greatly influenced Denck’s theology and spirituality. It is within this work that Denck discusses faithfulness to God as a life-long pursuit. Bauman explains this in his foreword to \textit{Some Propositions}. He writes: “From the relation of God to himself and his creation in infinite mercy and boundless goodness, he postulates, somewhat theosophically, that ‘the return from all duplicity to oneness must be

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 193.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 201.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
pursued throughout all life.’ And, from the relation of Jesus to God in utter Gelassenheit and perfect submission, he concludes that no one comes to the Father except through the son.”

Denck discusses unity within this treatise. A further understanding of free will is gained. The oneness mentioned is the unity that one gains with God through yielding to him. Denck explains

this Oneness, in keeping with its unique nature, must so completely transfigure itself so as to recover its essential freedom, which it actually never lost. Therefore, he (Jesus Christ of Nazareth) taught, practiced, possessed, and utilized the highest of free will. This was not his own will (according to his clear witness) but that of the ONE from whom he received it so that it could be known through him.”

It would make sense that Denck felt strongly that God gave free will to choose him, but true free will is in accepting the salvation God in his mercy has offered. That salvation includes a giving up of oneself to follow the example of Christ. And so the use of Gelassenheit within this treatise is found in further emphasizing what Denck has been explaining all along:

It may and must be realized only through losing all that which is contrary to the ONE, and not otherwise. This is resignation in resignation, complete submission, a perfect sacrifice that is willing. In summary: That is Christ, true Son of God, the first-born among the brethren, to whom belongs all that is in the Father’s power and who is the sole genuinely true Means through whom one may, shall, and must come to the ONE, that is, to the Father, appointed thereto by the Father.

Summary

Denck’s writings are consistent in his understanding of Christ as the way of salvation. However, it appears that this salvation is more of a result of Christ’s perfect submission. Denck

163 Ibid., 260.


165 Ibid., 267.
concentrates on the life of Jesus and the example he portrayed for us. Salvation can be achieved by choosing a self-sacrificing attitude toward the will of God. While it is only through Jesus Christ that one can be saved, this attitude is demonstrated by following the example of Christ. There is an ethical element to Denck’s Gelassenheit. Action must be accompanied by belief. For Denck, Gelassenheit is more of an individualistic concept. It is the individual’s relationship with God that matters most. One strives to live in obedience to God and serves him by helping others.

For Denck, Gelassenheit is the response of an individual to the gift of salvation that God offers through Jesus Christ. It is an attitude of worship portrayed in the lifestyle of the Christian.
Chapter 3

Peter Riedemann

*Gelassenheit* played a major role in the Hutterite tradition, as one who is self-surrendered and yielded to God must also be yielded to the church community. For the Hutterite, this means communal living where all things are owned together as a group. Hutterites use a confession of faith written by Peter Riedemann who also taught this attitude of *Gelassenheit*.

This chapter will examine Riedemann’s understanding of *Gelassenheit* as a theology of community. With his emphasis on communal living, Riedemann’s *Gelassenheit* has a different nuance than that of Denck. While Denck’s spirituality was more of a relationship between the believer and God, Riedemann’s spirituality leaned more toward a relationship within community although God was still the center of that relationship. The contrasts between the two writers can help understand the place of *Gelassenheit* despite the differences in spirituality and theology.

Robert Friedmann asserts the importance of Riedemann’s work, commenting that:

One must remember that Riedemann is representative of first-generation Anabaptists who dared to seek new forms of Christian existence. But unlike most of his fellow-believers, it was granted to him to continue his work into the new situations of second generation Anabaptism after the first spiritual enthusiasm had faded away and early leaders had died, most of them by execution.166

Leaders such as Denck and Sattler only had a few years to teach their Anabaptist theology since their lives were cut short due to disease or persecution. In contrast, Riedemann served as leader for approximately 25 years. His theology displays a different emphasis when comparing

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his first confession of faith to the second confession written approximately 12 to 15 years later.

A study of Riedemann’s writings shows a development of his concept of Gelassenheit.

Riedemann was born in 1506 in Hirschberg, Silesia (modern Poland). Little is known about his early life except that he became a cobbler by trade. His story begins in prison at Gmunden for being an Anabaptist.167 Wolfgang Brandhuber was a leader in the Linz-Gmunden area when Riedemann arrived in 1529 leading to the belief that Brandhuber influenced Riedemann’s beliefs.168 Christian Hege describes Brandhuber “like all the Anabaptist leaders of that time he placed the greatest stress on a Scriptural faith, which is expressed in a spiritual life rejecting worldly grandeur, in patient endurance of suffering, and in mutual aid. His views on organization for the care of the poor and distribution of gifts of charity are worthy of note.”169

In his introduction to Riedemann’s Confession of Faith, John Friesen also notes these tenets of Brandhuber and adds that he also taught that material possessions should be held in common but not to the extent that the Hutterites adopted in their communal living.170 These concepts of Brandhuber’s are similar to those found in Riedemann’s Confession.171


168 Ibid., 25. Friesen draws his conclusions from the writings of other scholars such as Christian Hege, Daniel Liechty, Josef Beck and James Stayer which compares Brandhuber’s theology to that of Hans Hut. From this discussion, Friesen sees Riedemann as following Brandhuber’s theology more so than Hut’s.


170 Friesen, Peter Riedemann, 26.

171 Ibid.
Friedmann also agrees with the speculation that Brandhuber was an influence on Riedemann’s Anabaptist beliefs.\textsuperscript{172} Exactly where and when Riedemann became an Anabaptist is unclear. Both Brandhuber and Riedemann were apprehended in Linz showing he was already involved in Anabaptism. While Brandhuber was martyred, Riedemann was put into prison in Gmunden. Riedemann had the freedom to write while in prison where he wrote the first of his two Confessions of faith.

\textbf{First Confession of Faith – Imprisoned in Gmunden}

This first book, like the second, is a confession of faith or \textit{Rechenschaft}. Both have similar styles, but it is interesting to notice the different emphasis placed upon each one. Friedmann sees enough of a difference that he divides Riedemann’s life into two phases. This first period he names Riedemann I.\textsuperscript{173} While called a confession of faith, Friedmann sees it more as a meditation, giving the assessment that “The dominant mood of this work is the affirmation of brotherly love (\textit{agape}) which seems to permeate Riedemann's new Anabaptist vision. At least the first half of the tract is solely a great song of praise of such love, regardless of what life might be otherwise. The Gospel and First Epistle of John provided him with all of his proof texts.”\textsuperscript{174}

While there may be differences in the confessions, it is not so much two phases as a difference in emphasis and growth in Riedemann’s maturity as a spiritual leader. Friesen is right

\textsuperscript{172} Friedmann, “Early Anabaptist Leader”, 7.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
in noting that the main issues that Riedemann presents in each confession are similar. The first confession contains an emphasis on God’s love, something not seen in his later confession, but in both there is a detailed discussion of the Apostles Creed.

The first confession contains three parts. Friesen divides these into a discussion of God’s love, a confession of faith using the Apostles Creed as an outline, and a brief outline of seven pillars of the House of God.

The attitude of Gelassenheit can be seen within this confession. Within the first few chapters, Riedemann meditates on how much God loves his creation and how Christ was willing to suffer and die that others would be saved. Therefore it only seems right that humans should demonstrate love toward God in return. This love should include a surrendering of everything to God. He writes that “everyone who loves God with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength would rather be dead to the world, and would rather die than continue for even a short time thinking a useless or vain thought.”

Love towards God is also shown to include love towards others. A new aspect of yieldedness to the will of God is added to the attitude of Gelassenheit: serving others just as Christ did in his example. Riedemann writes:

But brotherly love implies that we lay our lives down for each other, just as Christ did for all of us, and gave us an example to follow in his footsteps. So I should not live for myself alone, but live to serve my brothers -not seek my prosperity and betterment, but

175 Friesen, Peter Riedemann, 27.

176 Ibid., 26.

theirs, my whole life long; also, I should take care not to let my brother be grieved or weakened by my work or words.\textsuperscript{178}

Although Riedemann was not involved in the communal way of life at this point, he gave thought to the idea of having all things in common.

The concept of communal living can be further seen in the symbolism he uses for the bread within the Lord’s Supper. He reflects on how the grains can no longer be distinguished one from another within the loaf as it is ground and baked. This analogy is used to describe those within the church. Riedemann writes, “When we are ground by the millstone of divine power, believe his word and submit to the cross of Christ, we are brought together, bound with the band of love to one body of which Christ is the head.”\textsuperscript{179} The attitude of \textit{Gelassenheit} is shown in this allegory that “those who truly surrender to the Lord become of one mind, heart, and soul just as the grains of corn unite in the bread; and as Christ, the head, is one with the Father, the members are of one mind with the head as the head also was.”\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Gelassenheit} is found in an attitude of community where all within the body unite to serve God together. To yield to the head includes yielding to the body.

\textbf{Imprisoned in Nuremberg}

After three years in the Gmunden prison, Riedemann was able to leave in 1532. He went to Moravia and immediately joined a communal group that was under the leadership of Jakob Hutter. Hutter was the most influential Anabaptist leader in shaping the Moravian group in

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
existence when Riedemann joined. 181 This group became Riedemann’s home community for the rest of his life. 182 Friedmann notes that “from 1532 until his death in 1556, he was a thoroughly convinced and dedicated ‘Hutterite’ Anabaptist, espousing also their particular tenet of community of goods. Now, developing under the strong leadership of Jacob Hutter (1533-35), a new Riedemann emerged, whom we may fittingly call Riedemann II.” 183

Riedemann found himself developing under the leadership of Hutter. But his beliefs did not entirely change; he already shared the Hutterite understanding of community living. His connection with the beliefs of the group allowed him to quickly become a leader. 184 Within a year, Riedemann was sent as a missionary to Franconia to encourage others to join the Hutterite movement. There he was captured and imprisoned in Nuremberg for more than four years. 185

Once again it appears that he was able to write letters and most likely had some contact with local Anabaptists. Franconia had Anabaptist influences from other leaders including Hans Hut and Hans Denck. 186 It is quite possible that Riedemann was aware of these movements. How much he was influenced by them and what he wrote is unknown.

181 Friesen, Peter Riedemann, 33.
182 Ibid., 34.
184 Ibid., 9.
185 Friesen, Peter Riedemann, 34.
186 Ibid., 35.
Although he had the ability and opportunity, Riedemann did not write much during the time frame of this second imprisonment, which seems curious.\textsuperscript{187} When comparing the list of letters that Friedmann has discovered, it appears that few were written during this time period.\textsuperscript{188} The only connection that Packull notes is a communication between the communities of the Gabrielites and Philipites who separated themselves from the Hutterite community due to conflict. Gabriel Ascherham and Philip Plener each led a communal group alongside Jakob Hutter’s group. A disagreement arose between them and Hutter. As a result a schism divided the community into three separate groups. Riedemann was working to resolve the conflict between these groups in the hope of reuniting them into the Hutterite group. It is known that he personally communicated with both the Philipites and the Gabrielites.\textsuperscript{189}

Friedmann’s study of a tract written by a Philipite leader named Hans Haffner shows some of the similarities between this group and Riedemann’s group, particularly in the concept of \textit{Gelassenheit}. The title is translated into English as “concerning a true soldier of Christ.” Friedmann describes the contents of this book as a metaphor of the title with reference to Ephesians 6:10 and following. He writes:

The four weapons are nothing else than faith, love, hope, and in the fourth place and in particular, resignation (\textit{Gelassenheit}). . . . "A genuine soldier of Christ must have true resignation, and must mortify his own life" (Luke 9:23 and 57). In this expression the

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\textsuperscript{188} Robert Friedmann and Bruno Fast, “An index of Riedemann’s Epistles”, Mennonite Quarterly Review, 65 (July 1991), 340-351. According to the listings within this article, none of the letters found were dated between 1533 and 1537 which were the dates Riedemann would have been in prison.
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\textsuperscript{189} Friesen, \textit{Peter Riedemann}, 36-37.
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basic conception of the booklet is expressed, for almost the entire content concentrates itself about this thought of true "resignation."\textsuperscript{190}

If this is typical of Philipite understanding, the attitude of \textit{Gelassenheit} can be seen as the underlying aspect of their faith. Friedmann comments further:

We note also that this "resignation", which seems to have been the primary experience of the Anabaptist Brotherhoods, further explains and clarifies the three other fundamental pillars of all faith. Resignation is "the true discipline and test" (of faith), namely "that we must let ourselves be despised, persecuted and killed." Even love is viewed from this point of view as in the last analysis only a sort of resignation, and there is no question but that all the Anabaptist circles take this position which emphasizes so strongly the ascetic attitude.\textsuperscript{191}

Similarities between this writing and that of Riedemann’s are also noted. Friedmann picks up Riedemann’s analogy of the grain in the bread as the fellowship of believers.\textsuperscript{192} He shows that this is the same message that Haffner also teaches. Love is all important and resignation (\textit{Gelassenheit}) demonstrates that love.\textsuperscript{193} With this example, the prevalent role that \textit{Gelassenheit} has within certain Anabaptist groups such as Hutterites and Philipites emerges as the driving force behind the other pillars of faith, love, and hope, all important to the development of Anabaptist emphases.

Despite the schism, Riedemann continued to keep in contact with the Gabrielites and Philipites. Packull notes that the Gabrielites had hoped for Riedemann to join them and were disappointed that he decided to join the Hutterite group. He adds that the \textit{Hutterite Chronicle}


\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
records that they lacked Riedemann’s ‘desire for peace and unity.’\textsuperscript{194} While some from these two groups were convinced to eventually join the Hutterites, the majority were scattered, leaving the Hutterite group as the only Anabaptist community practising a community of goods.\textsuperscript{195}

**Second Confession of Faith — Imprisoned in Hesse**

After his release from the Nuremberg prison, Riedemann worked as a missionary visiting Anabaptist groups in various places such as Hesse where he was sent after the Anabaptists there requested help.\textsuperscript{196} While there, he was once again captured and imprisoned. Friesen observes that one of Riedemann’s greatest accomplishments while in the prison was the writing of the *Confession of Faith*, Riedemann’s second book. The purpose for writing was to give Philip, the ruler of Hesse, an understanding of the beliefs of the communal Anabaptists of whom Riedemann represented.\textsuperscript{197} A copy of this document made its way to the Hutterite group where it quickly became the confession of faith for the community.\textsuperscript{198} Within this confession, Friesen sees in Riedemann’s theology a central motif of communalism, “the concept and practice of community of goods.”\textsuperscript{199}

Friedmann’s observation of two Riedemanns basically shows the difference between the two confessions he wrote. As noted earlier, the first focused on the concept of love. It

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{194} Packull, *Shaper of Hutterite Tradition*, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Friesen, *Peter Riedemann*, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 42.
\item \textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 45.
\end{itemize}
would appear that the main reason for the difference is the purpose for writing. Friedmann makes the comment that “another difference between the two Riedemanns is that the second one was written primarily for the Landgrave of Hesse and thus pursued a special aim not present in the work of the first Riedemann.” Friedmann admits that “both are rooted in the same existential decision to pursue Nachfolge and to the practice of self-surrender.” Friedmann asserts “Riedemann was and remained a genuine, even typical Anabaptist, a spiritually ‘reborn’ man who unhesitatingly renounced the ways of the world in order to embrace the ‘narrow path’ of discipleship. He knew well that suffering and torment would not be lacking on this path; that, in fact, it was to be anticipated. But he was unwavering in his loyalty to the new venture.” Gelassenheit remains a theme within Riedemann’s spirituality.

Upon Riedemann’s arrival in Moravia he “became thoroughly committed to the Hutterite form of Anabaptism and its brotherhood-church” and as a result “accepts fully the more concrete principle of community of goods, which is a practical expression of both brotherly love and Christian resignation (Gelassenheit).” The concept of love remains, even if the Confession of Faith shows the more practical outline of his beliefs.

The second Confession of Faith also uses the Apostles Creed to outline the beliefs. It begins with an understanding of God as father because of the grace he gives. As his obedient children “that means letting God take charge of our whole life, controlling all our members,

200 Friedmann, “Early Anabaptist Leader”, 38.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid., 38.
203 Ibid., 43.
including heart, lips, eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Then not we but he, the Lord, will accomplish everything in us.”

Confessing Christ as Lord means allowing Christ’s work to be done in that person. Riedemann writes that “the person in whom Christ is to become victorious must wholeheartedly surrender himself to Christ.” Without this surrender, “such a person remains in sin forever.” An attitude of Gelassenheit is needed in salvation.

Another area that Gelassenheit must be portrayed is within baptism. Riedemann describes the baptismal ritual as including an acknowledgement that the candidates must reject the world, sin and the devil and yield themselves to God “with all their heart, soul, and body, henceforth to live no more for self but for God and his church, and to allow God alone to rule over and to use their entire body.”

As noted earlier, the community of goods is an important theme within this Confession. Community of goods applies to both spiritual and material gifts. These gifts are meant to be shared. One should not have abundance while others are wanting. As Riedemann discusses creation, he writes that by collecting created things, people tend to forget the Creator.

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204 Peter Riedemann, Confession of Our Religion, Teaching, and Faith by the Brothers Who are Known as the Hutterites, John J. Friesen, trans. (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1999), 62.

205 Ibid., 67.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid., 111.

208 Ibid., 119.

209 Ibid.
Created things belong to God and are not to be anyone’s private possession.\textsuperscript{210} This portrays a resignation or abandonment from the desire to personally own anything; all is to belong to God. Riedemann goes on to say that “whoever is to be renewed into the likeness of God must abandon what leads away from God, that is, grasping and collecting material possessions.”\textsuperscript{211} The benefit of being free from created things is that one’s treasure becomes the true and divine, and nothing is regarded as one’s own but all do share together as it belongs to all God’s children.\textsuperscript{212}

Not only is Gelassenheit demonstrated in yielding to God, but also to the church. Riedemann goes on to explain that “there is no church of Christ except the gathering of those whom the Holy Spirit brings together, directs, and teaches. Those who surrender themselves to be ruled by the spirit yield themselves to the church of Christ, in which the Holy Spirit works.”\textsuperscript{213}

Friedmann further explains Gelassenheit within the communal lifestyle. He notes three motives for the doctrine of communal life with the Anabaptist concept of the church. One is to show brotherly love in action, another is obedience to the divine commands and the third is Gelassenheit which he describes as “yieldedness or resignation to the will of God and renunciation of any form of selfishness.”\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 120.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 120-121.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 122.

These motives can also be seen in the writings of Franz Heimann, a scholar from Vienna who wrote his dissertation on the Hutterite community in 1927. Heimann discovers that Hutterite writings emphasize the reason for communal living. He writes:

They all emphasize that it is the commandment of love, the highest principle of the Gospel, which requires such complete self-surrender and such entering into a perfect communion of goods. It means a voluntary relinquishing of anything personal, and a tie by which the members testify to their love for each other. It means the community in the "house of God" where there is no mine nor thine, where equal love rules, and where everyone shares the same concerns and participates in the same goods.215

Once again an attitude of Gelassenheit is shown to be the underlying factor in living together in brotherly love. While this communal life was to make sure that no one was in need, Heimann also notes that this communal way of life was not about economic or social motives.216 It was about living out the command of God. John Hostetler writes in his book Hutterite Society that “under the theology of Gelassenheit—a term indicating peaceful submission to God and to the believing group together with the forsaking of private property—they practiced the communism of love, in production as well as consumption, looking to the future for the ultimate vindication of their faith.”217

Friesen observes that according to Reidemann’s Confession, communal living is the example given by the Trinity. “The three persons share all characteristics and are seen as equal in all respects. He argues that if the church is really a holy community, it should exhibit the


216 Ibid.

same characteristics: all members should share all things with each other and each be equal with the others.”

This was an argument that the Hutterites had against the Swiss Brethren. Hans Amon, the leader after Hutter died, accused the Swiss Brethren of appealing to God’s grace just so that they could justify keeping their private property, “instead of yielding in Gelassenheit to living in a disciplined community that held all things in common.” Communal living becomes a part of the Hutterite theology and Gelassenheit is the attitude they develop to live out the commands of God.

Yieldedness is further discussed in the section on “How the House of the Lord is Built up in Christ.” Human effort on its own cannot accomplish God’s work without his action.

Riedemann writes

If God is to do anything good in a person, that person must surrender himself to God. . . . Just as a person cannot do anything good of himself, so God does not want to do anything in him, unless he gives himself with all his heart to be God’s instrument. Then that person’s surrendered will interweaves itself with the divine will in such a way that the divine will and the human will become one. From now on, God desires, chooses, and works everything in that person. The person allows himself to become God’s instrument and thus may say with the beloved apostle Paul, “Now I live no more, but Christ lives in me,” This is the way God works in people.”

As a result of this surrender, a person is enabled to partake of Christ’s nature and character. That person is able to obey and live a life as God commands.

Gelassenheit exists when the

218 Friesen, Peter Riedemann, 49.

219 Packull, Shaper of Hutterite Tradition, 91-92. This reference pertains to letters written between Hans Amon as leader of the Hutterites and most likely Jörg Scherer, a leader of the Swiss Brethren.

220 Riedemann, Confession of Faith, 178-179.

221 Ibid., 179
human will becomes that of the divine will. Only a person who has a yielded spirit is able to be a tool within the community of God. However, human will alone cannot make a person constructive. The transforming power of God is needed and God will not transform a person who is not willing to yield to him. It shows how God only wants to use people who are surrendered to him willingly.

**Riedemann’s Letters**

Besides the Confession of Faith and hymns, Friedmann discovered 34 letters that were written by Riedemann. There are dominant themes that occur throughout these letters that Friedmann indicates as revealing “the tenor of Riedemann's mind and dictate all his messages.” One of these dominant themes is Gelassenheit. Friedmann observes a “first recognizable theme is Riedemann's oft-repeated call to long-suffering; or, as he calls it, *Langmut*, patience, *Gelassenheit*, a free yielding to God's call wherever it may lead. This theme expresses the attitude of a true disciple, which too often leads him into suffering and even into martyrdom.”

**Leader of the Hutterite Community**

With the death of Hans Amon, Riedemann returned to the community in Moravia. In 1542, Leonhard Lanzenstiel, the new chosen leader of the Hutterites, felt that Riedemann should share the leadership position with him. Riedemann accepted this position and

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222 Ibid., 17.

223 Ibid., 18.

224 Ibid.

225 Friesen, *Peter Riedemann*, 42.
remained as leader until his death in 1556.226 The years from 1542 until 1547 were mostly peaceful for the community and they were able to prosper. After 1547 persecution came causing great hardships for the Hutterites. They lost their homes and found themselves on the run. Yet despite the harshness, the community was able to survive. Friedmann speculates that

Most likely their perseverance was due to the strong leadership of Riedemann and Lanzenstiel, now undergirded by the studying of the *Rechenschaft*. These were certainly heroic times when the future of the Hutterite brotherhood was in doubt. That it survived this ordeal, ready to stick it out in togetherness, is a remarkably forceful tribute to this unique way of brotherhood.227

Riedemann saw the Hutterite community through the turbulent times and died in 1556 in relative peace within the community in Protzka.228

**Legacy of Riedemann**

The influence of Riedemann and in particular his *Confession of Faith* carried on through the next generations of the Hutterite group. Other contemporaries of Riedemann who taught the importance of communal living that include an attitude of *Gelassenheit* include Ulrich Stadler and Peter Walpot.

Stadler became of leader within one of the Hutterite communities during the first generation. Friedmann calls him the greatest theological thinker of the Moravian groups next to Riedemann.229 He emphasized the importance of communal living with a *Gelassenheit* attitude. This can be seen in his writing from 1537 entitled *Ordering Life in Community* with the words:

226 Ibid.


228 Friesen, *Peter Riedemann*, 44.
In order to hold in common all the gifts and goods which God gives and dispenses to his own, there must be free, unhampered [ledige], patient [gelassene] and full hearts in Christ, yes hearts that truly believe and trust and in Christ are utterly devoted. Whoever is thus free, unhampered, and resigned in the Lord from everything, [ready] to give over all their goods and chattels, yes, to lay it up for distribution among the children of God—it is God’s grace in Christ which prepares people for it.\textsuperscript{230}

Within this document Stadler addresses arguments he sees coming from those who do not believe that it is necessary to have community of goods. One of these arguments is that it is not commanded in Scripture. To this he replies:

We learn in Christ to lose ourselves in the service of the saints, to be and become poor and to suffer want if only another may be served, and further, to put aside all goods and belongings, to throw them away in order that they may be distributed to the needy and the poor. That is the highest degree of divine abandon and voluntary surrender to the Lord and to this people through the Spirit of grace.\textsuperscript{231}

To Stadler sharing all things in common showed the \textit{Gelassenheit} spirit of their faith in God.

After Riedemann’s death in 1556, Peter Walpot became the leader and later bishop of the community. When a Polish group requested to reprint Riedemann’s Confession with changes, Walpot refused. Packull makes the comment that “clearly, then, Riedemann’s Confession had been elevated by Walpot and his generation to constitute Hutterite orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{232} He goes on to say that Walpot’s use of the \textit{Confession of Faith} in discussion with the Polish Brethren imply “an almost official Hutterite confessional status for this work.”\textsuperscript{233}


\textsuperscript{230} Dyck, \textit{Spiritual Life in Anabaptism}, 142.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 146-147.

\textsuperscript{232} Packull, \textit{Shaper of the Hutterite Tradition}, 119. This Polish group did not believe in the Trinity which was an important basis to the Hutterite faith. Thus the Hutterites would not allow them to change what was part of their doctrine.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 120.
Walpot took what was taught in the *Confession of Faith* and turned it into a lifestyle. Packull notes that there was orderliness to the community where everyone had their assigned place and task.²³⁴ The attitude of *Gelassenheit* was embedded into the ordered lifestyle. Daniel Liechty, a scholar specializing in the study of sixteenth century religious radicals, notes that “it is in the second generation that the true essence of Hutterian communal spirituality appears in written form.”²³⁵ The writings of Walpot are an example of this second generation. The Hutterian Great Article book of 1577 is considered to be the writing of Walpot. One of these articles is entitled “True Yieldedness and the Christian Community of Goods.” Liechty sums up this document as “Walpot’s spiritual vision of yielding the individual will to that of the community and his defense of the Hutterian communal ethic against its detractors.”²³⁶ For Walpot *Gelassenheit* was the communal spirituality needed within the Christian church.

Walpot carefully goes through scripture examining many of the passages that speak of the danger of wealth. He encourages people to give up what they have and share with those in the community. One such example is the commentary on Luke 21:1-4. It describes the widow who put into the offering all she had while the rich just gave of their excess. Walpot responds “therefore, the Lord demands that we come with all our possessions and all our heart to Christian community, whether that is with much wealth or with little. How can Christ be more clear in showing, teaching and commanding true yieldedness and community?”²³⁷

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²³⁴ Ibid., 118.


²³⁶ Ibid., 138.

²³⁷ Ibid., 158.
This concept of *Gelassenheit* as an attitude of community that began with Riedemann and the early Hutterite leaders continued on with the next generation and is still found today in the Hutterite communities.
Chapter 4

Anabaptist Emphases

Early Anabaptism “did not consist of a single coherent organizing, but a loose grouping of movements.”238 Three major streams have been identified as the Swiss Brethren, the South German/Austrian and the Dutch.239 With three separate movements of Anabaptism, the emphases have different nuances as well. “The differences among the three streams of Anabaptism are as important as the similarities, for these differences resulted in marked dissimilarities in emphases, in style of communications, in modes of leadership and in other areas of general spirituality.”240

To discover the place of Gelassenheit within Anabaptist spirituality, some basic features of Anabaptism need to be defined. The “Anabaptist Vision” as defined by Harold Bender consists of three primary emphases. He lists them as: “first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and non-resistance.”241 There is evidence that early Anabaptism was much wider in scope than Bender’s “Vision” as it grew out of the various movements already noted.242 Another list of emphases is offered by Daniel Liechty including the immediacy of


239 Liechty, Early Anabaptist Spirituality, 1. Snyder also uses these three movements to describe Anabaptism in Anabaptist History and Theology.

240 Ibid.

human relationship with God, a life of discipleship, and the corporate nature of the Christian life. Cornelius Dyck lists communal life, a concept of peace noted together with a willingness to suffer, and discipleship as prominent themes within Anabaptism. C. Arnold Snyder divides the emphases of Anabaptism as relating to political reality, socio-economic reality and religious reform. Within these categories he discusses the themes of non-resistance, community and discipleship.

An examination of the emphases of discipleship, community and the willingness to suffer brings to view a picture of a holistic spirituality. Each one is interconnected in Anabaptist spirituality and Gelassenheit brings them together into the lifestyle of the Anabaptist Christian.

**Discipleship**

Snyder offers an Anabaptist definition of Christians as

disciples who have committed themselves to following Christ on that path, yielding to God’s will in all things as Jesus did, not claiming possessions for themselves, speaking the truth in all circumstances, humbly giving way in the face of evil power, living non-coercively, willing to suffer rather than inflict suffering on others. The visible shape of Anabaptist spirituality is discipleship, the ‘following after Christ’ (*Nachfolge Christi*) in life.

The concept of an inner yielding is demonstrated by lifestyle. Anabaptist spirituality is an attitude of Gelassenheit demonstrated by *Nachfolge*. Malcolm Yarnell describes the difference

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242 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 398-404. Snyder examines the various views of Anabaptist historicity showing how Bender’s view attempted to show Anabaptism as more than a heretical movement. However it limits the scope of Anabaptism and so a broader view that Snyder presents as beyond polygenesis appears more realistic.


244 Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 14-16.

245 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 7.

between Anabaptist soteriology and that of the reformers. He writes “The Anabaptists believed biblical salvation starts in justification but continues in sanctification and ends in glorification. The entire process of salvation can be described as Nachfolge, discipleship, in which a disciple unswervingly displays the attitude of Gelassenheit, or yieldedness, to Christ.” Salvation was demonstrated by yielding in faith and acting in obedience.

Denck taught that faith and obedience need to go together. The one who knows God’s commands but does not live it breaks the relationship with Christ.

One who teaches a command of the Lord and then invalidates it is a terrible offense; that is, he himself does not keep it and allows others to disobey it . . . Let the one who teaches in the Lord’s Name not forget that he should also be a disciple of Christ; but he who is a disciple of Christ should not do anything without permission nor should he discard the Master’s commandments.

There is little reason to have faith if one disregards God’s commandments. Riedemann concurs that faith and obedience need to be united, warning against those who acknowledge faith only. “Faith is not an empty illusion, as it would seem from those who only speak of faith and know nothing more about it. They think that Christianity consists of words only. Therefore, they look upon all who confess Christ with their lips as Christians no matter how they live.” Faith is much more than one’s belief; it is a power of God. It can renew people and make them resemble God in his nature, “living in God’s righteousness, ardent in God’s love, and observing his commandments.” Faith is synonymous with Gelassenheit as it allows God to take control

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249 Riedemann, “Confession of Faith,” 84.
250 Ibid.
so that the disciple will live in obedience. No longer does self-will exist but it is remade into the will of God.

The Hutterite group took the commitment to community a step further by indicating that a true disciple is one who gives up everything for the good of the church. Riedemann explains:

When the true and the divine become one’s treasure, the heart turns toward that treasure, emptying itself from everything else and regarding nothing any longer as its own but as belonging to all God’s children. Therefore, we say that as all believers share spiritual gifts, still more should they express this in material things and not covet or claim them for themselves, for they are not their own. They will honor God, show that they partake in the fellowship of Christ, and be renewed into God’s likeness.251

The Gelassenheit faith of the Hutterite believer resulted in a complete surrender of everything to the community as they literally followed Jesus’ words such as “none of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions.”252

Discipleship and Anabaptism were almost synonymous in the sixteenth century.253 Early Anabaptist discipleship “included sharing material goods as well as the gospel with others, peacemaking, suffering love, and in everything keeping faith and works together, combining true faith (ortho-doxy) with true Christian living (ortho-praxis).”254

Bender notes that the main focus for the Anabaptist faith was an emphasis upon following Christ in life. “To them it was unthinkable for one truly to be a Christian without

251 Ibid., 121.
252 Ibid., 120. The Bible verse used in this example is Luke 14:33.
253 Dyck, Spiritual Life in Anabaptism, 16. Dyck clarifies that this is true for early Anabaptism only, he does not see the descendants as having a monopoly on discipleship today.
254 Ibid.
creating a new life on divine principles for both himself and for all men who commit themselves to the Christian way.”

For the Anabaptists, both Gelassenheit and Nachfolge were part of their spirituality. Salvation was gained through Jesus Christ by yielding to God’s will. However this faith was only considered true by the demonstration of living out the example of Christ. Anabaptists criticized the Protestant reformers for developing external reforms only. Liechty comments that according to Anabaptists other Protestants “brought no internal, spiritual renewal of the people and did not lead to any noticeable moral improvement in the behaviour of the people. . . . in the Anabaptist view, no spiritual experience of God or Christ could take place without it resulting in a marked betterment of life.”

While there may have been nuanced differences among Anabaptists, they agreed that salvation through Christ would result in a transformed life of the believer. For example, Denck saw Christ as the perfect example of having a Gelassenheit attitude which the Christian is to follow. Just as Christ was obedient and surrendered to God’s will, so the Christian is to live out that example of obedience.

Kiwiet writes that “Consistent with his Christology Denck defines faith as ‘obedience to God and trust in His promises,’ and sin as disobedience and unbelief.” This is further defined by Bauman who acknowledged that “Denck claimed Christ as the express example to be followed. In fact, Denck established his epistemology of obedience on the claim that no one can

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256 Liechty, Early Anabaptist Spirituality, 10.


truly know Christ unless one follows him in life. Christ is the divine image to whom we conform as God’s love transforms us into his likeness.”

Weaver describes the purpose and expectation of what it means to follow after Christ. For him the character of the church is “the commitment (or profession of faith) to Jesus’ life and teaching as the authoritative source of truth. The will of God is revealed in the particular humanity of Jesus, which forms the baseline against which Christians evaluate their own activity.” The commitment to follow the example of Christ becomes the purpose for discipleship and is the development of an attitude of Gelassenheit. To follow Christ “involves a new way of life, which expresses itself in redeemed attitudes and relationships among people both within and without the church. This communal or social orientation does not deny individuality or the personal nature of one’s faith, but it does mean that the individual’s faith attains its fullness in terms of the believing community.”

The attitude of yielding oneself to the will of God is always a personal decision. The decision that the individual makes is to yield to the community of believers in obedience to the example of Christ. David Augsburger comments that “the goal of Gelassenheit is fulfillment in community, not self-actualization in isolation.” He goes on to describe a commitment to “seek consensus through sacrifice, service, respect for others, and obedience to the collective will of the group.”

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259 Bauman, Legacy of Hans Denck, 30.
260 Weaver, Becoming Anabaptist, 174.
261 Ibid.
262 Augsburger, Dissident Discipleship, 93.
Church as Community

The aim of the Anabaptists was to portray in their lifestyle the genuine love they saw through the example of Christ. The Anabaptists developed confessions of faith that included rules on how to live. An example of this can be seen in Riedemann’s confession. Included in the articles are topics such as marriage, adultery, warfare, taxes, making clothes, shaking hands and embracing, buying and selling, and drinking toasts. Such a dictating of a community member’s life definitely sounds legalistic. The purpose was to display the love they had for God. The community needed guidance in how to live their life of faith and obedience which led to rules to direct those within the group. It also kept out those who refused to obey, thus keeping the church pure. Riedemann’s understanding was that

According to our Master’s instructions and the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, the right way is first to call everyone to repentance through the Lord’s Word. All who respond—who give themselves up to God completely and allow the Holy Spirit to work in them and lead them into a new life—all these we will joyfully accept into the church of God’s children as those who have received Christ. But, as Christ and the apostles did, we allow those who continue in their sins to be banished and go their own ways.263

Gelassenheit was meant to be a surrender to God above all else. Legalism resulted when yieldedness was to the community rather than to Christ.

Within Riedemann’s Hutterite community, the following of Christ included the concept of a communal sharing of all property. Snyder confirms this in his understanding that for the Hutterites the basic issue had to do with Gelassenheit. He writes “one’s readiness to abandon

private possessions was a test of one’s obedience to Scripture and true yieldedness to God and to the Body of Christ.”

While other Anabaptists such as the Swiss Brethren and Menno Simons also taught the importance of yielding one’s property to share with others, they did not see giving up of all private property as a prerequisite for following after Christ. Snyder reflects on a connection between economics and spirituality:

Some of the most moving passages describing Gelassenheit to be found in all of Anabaptist literature emerge from the communal South German tradition, and make most explicit the necessary connection between inner yieldedness to the Spirit and yieldedness in economic matter. While not all agreed that legislated community of goods was a necessary sign of Gelassenheit, the early Anabaptists did agree that economic questions were, in the end, spiritual questions.

Every aspect of community living was important to Anabaptists in their understanding of complete yieldedness to God. Whether they held all things in common or simply shared of their possessions, Anabaptists placed a significant importance upon the commitment to their community. Yarnell observes that they demonstrated “a highly integrated theology” that applied a doctrine of community in the same way that a doctrine of personal discipleship combining doctrine and practice. This shows the interconnection between Anabaptist emphases. Not only did they believe in the importance of community and discipleship, one did not exist without the other. Community became the way for the Anabaptists to portray faith through discipleship and lifestyle.

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264 Snyder, Following in the Footsteps of Christ, 144.
265 Ibid., 145.
266 Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology, 390.
267 Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 15.
The commitment to include discipline within their faith became legalistic at times. Wayne Allen surmises that Anabaptism contained a harsh and rigid legalism that Denck aimed to avoid. Allen notes that for Denck “the foundation upon which all belief and practice rested was faith in Christ; without that faith all else was meaningless.” It is true that this can be found in Denck’s writing. One example is a comparison of law and love, where Denck writes:

Customs are of no avail by themselves to one who does not participate in this Love, but whoever understands and has this Love shall practice and observe them as Jesus did. Therefore, it is not necessary when preaching the Gospel of Love to heathen that one teach them the customs of servitude. For, if they accept the [true] Love, they will also know how to conduct themselves where it might be necessary with respect to such customs.

However this is not only found in Denck’s writing. The holistic spirituality that the early Anabaptists held to meant a strong commitment to community that included a specific lifestyle. That lifestyle meant little if the attitude of Gelassenheit was not there. Another example from Riedemann notes that “Brotherly love should come wholeheartedly from pure hearts and not be tainted but remain pure. God the Lord knows what is in man; he searches the heart and mind. Thus neither outward show nor hypocrisy means anything to him, no matter how fine they seem, for God is not deceived. He wants a sincere, renewed heart.” Riedemann’s words are similar to Denck’s in the concept that works and rituals mean nothing if the heart is not yielded to God. The commitment made within the heart is demonstrated by the commitment to the life of the community; one does not exist without the other in Anabaptist spirituality.

This is further emphasized by Liechty who remarks that:

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270 Riedemann, Love is Like Fire, 20-21.
The experience of community was so strong among Anabaptists that they were persuaded that it was only in community that one could be a Christian. For it was within the community that the process of discipleship, of disciplining life, took place. This disciplining could at times lapse into legalism. But at its best, it was a manifestation of genuine love among the gathered assembly, a recognition of the mutual needs and the interdependency of human beings.271

Friedmann supplies further insight to Riedemann’s community observing that “it was, of course, at all times a ‘close fellowship’ which alone could ascertain the quality of a ‘lantern of righteousness,’ implying discipline and full commitment. At the same time, however, it also offered a joyful promise of an existence of profound meaning even in suffering, in sharp contrast to the ways of the ‘world’ with its too often inane attractions.”272 The Confession of Faith produced unity among the group that each one committed to its tenets. The communal lifestyle offered security as each person’s needs would be met.

Snyder discusses the tension between individuality and community. He writes that an openness to the Spirit, the acceptance of water baptism, the steadfastness unto death called for by state persecution were steps that could be taken only by individuals who had freely chosen (and who continued to choose) the ‘narrow way’ by means of God’s grace.273 The attitude of Gelassenheit is a process that all individuals had to make on their own; no one, such as priest, parent or spouse could do it for them. Yielding was a matter between the believer and God.274

271 Liechty, Early Anabaptist Spirituality, 13.

272 Friedman, “Early Anabaptist Leader,” 36.

273 C. Arnold Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology, 229.

274 Ibid.
There was a tension however, as the individual’s commitment meant “a binding of oneself to others: the Body of Christ on earth.” The individual with a *Gelassenheit* spirit purposefully chooses to be bound to the life of the community.

In Anabaptist spirituality, baptism and the Lord’s Supper were not just an individual’s experience. Both expressed the concept of the church as a community of believers. Baptism indicated an acceptance into the community and participation in communion indicated unity. Both ordinances were outward signs that an inner commitment to God and his church had been made.

In his treatise *Concerning True Love*, Denck discusses the newly established custom of baptism and the breaking of bread within the doctrine of love. He explains that these customs are for testimony and remembrance. It is to show that the Christians are serving God in holiness and righteousness throughout their lives. He continues to say that “holiness means that one has once for all separated oneself from the evil world and all the filth of the flesh to serve God the Lord alone—all of which is meant and witnessed to by water baptism as one acknowledges the old life as waste and desires henceforth to walk in new life.” For Denck there was no purpose for baptism if an inner surrender to God had not been made.

Riedemann asserts that baptism should only occur for the one who is “first born of Christ through the Word and faith.” Although Riedemann agrees the inner decision must first be made, the outward ritual of baptism is more important to him than to Denck. Riedemann

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275 Ibid.
277 Riedemann, *Confession of Faith*, 110.
writes in his *Confession of Faith* that “since in baptism a person’s sins are left behind and forgiven, and the church has the key, baptism should take place before the church. However, if it is not possible to reach the church, the baptizer may do it alone.”\(^{278}\)

Earlier it was noted the *Confession of Faith* contains instructions for baptizing. The candidates are asked if their desire is to yield to God with all their heart, soul and body, and to live no more for self but for God and his church.\(^{279}\) Riedemann then notes that the baptizer questions again their decision, making sure that they are certain that Christ is the only way to life. If they so confess, they are asked if it is their wish to bind themselves to God and be baptized.\(^{280}\)

For Riedemann and the Hutterites, both the attitude and the symbol are needed for salvation. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore both *Gelassenheit* and water baptism are needed for a person to be a part of the church. Snyder describes the general characteristic of Anabaptist spirituality as “the integration of inner, spiritual reality with outward witness.”\(^{281}\) He goes on to say “just as the inner reality was to be governed by the Spirit of Christ, so the outward witness was expected to reflect and mirror the life of Christ by a visible obedience to his explicit commands and a life in conformity to the witness of his life and that of the apostles.”\(^{282}\) Water baptism is the first visible way that one can show the inner spirituality of

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\(^{278}\) Ibid., 111.

\(^{279}\) Ibid.

\(^{280}\) Ibid.

\(^{281}\) Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 72.

\(^{282}\) Ibid.
the Anabaptist.\textsuperscript{283} It signified that the believer had already developed an attitude of inner *Gelassenheit* to Christ and was also now yielding to the Body of Christ,\textsuperscript{284} that “baptism meant moving from ‘the world’ to the Body of Christ, the church.”\textsuperscript{285} Riedemann observes that true baptism is the acceptance into the church of Christ.\textsuperscript{286} It would stand to reason that the ritual of water baptism is what officially welcomes the person into the church.

The Anabaptists had a hard time reconciling their theology of baptism with the established church’s understanding of infant baptism. Denck’s understanding shows that external baptism is not necessary for salvation; it is the inner baptism of the spirit that counts. Bauman writes that Denck understands baptism “not as a merely external or ‘sacramental’ act but essentially as a spiritual covenant of one’s inner openness and readiness for the work of Christ’s spirit.”\textsuperscript{287} Snyder describes this further in that “although the outer ‘ceremonies’ and ‘ordinances’ commanded in Scripture need to be practised as commanded where possible, the power of the ‘outward signs’ is conditional on the more fundamental spiritual realities to which the signs point and to which they give witness.”\textsuperscript{288}

Robert Friedmann observes that many of the early Anabaptists, particularly in the South German movement, believed that there was a difference between the outward sign of water baptism and the essence of the believer. He writes, “The sign is external, the pouring of water 

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Riedemann, “Confession of Faith,” 102.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Bauman, *Legacy of Hans Denck*, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 73.
\end{itemize}
over the recipient, symbolizing the man’s own decision and sealing his determination for the new life and the narrow path. The essence, however, lies deeper and concerns the inner surrender of one’s self-will to the obedience to God, a spiritual transformation and regeneration which demands an outer sign.”289 This essence contains the attitude of Gelassenheit. It is the commitment of the person to the will of God resulting in a transformation only possible with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is meaningless without the inner transformation.

Snyder gives further insight into this by connecting the essence with the baptism of the Spirit which is described as “that powerful rebirth and redirection of the sinner in the heart, by the power of God.”290 An early Anabaptist writer, Leonhard Schiemer portrays the baptism of the Spirit as

to which one submits in obedience as Christ was obedient to his Father, even unto death on the cross, Phil 1[:29-30], and in Matt. 3[:11] John teaches that he will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Christ had this baptism for John saw the Spirit descending upon him as a dove, Luke [3:22]. In this baptism one surrenders to God with life and limb, but flesh and blood cannot surrender in that way without the Holy Spirit is this complete surrender to God.291

289 Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 138. Friedmann sees this trait as separating Anabaptists from the radical spiritualists. “For the latter knew no ‘sign,’ no real brotherhood, no challenge of tradition, and accordingly their impact upon the world was not felt as a provocation force causing a reaction by government and the world at large.” It is the emphasis on both the inner transformation and the outer obedience that makes the Anabaptists unique and their definition of Gelassenheit unique.

290 Snyder, Following in the Footsteps of Christ, 71.

Schiemer describes three baptisms: Spirit, water and blood which “belong together and are one, for one without the other violates God’s order.” While water baptism cannot grant salvation, it is an important aspect of demonstrating the inner baptism of the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit requires water baptism as a display of faithfulness to the example of Christ who also allowed himself to be baptized by water.

*Gelassenheit* and acceptance into the church are closely connected. The attitude of *Gelassenheit* does not remain private or individualistic. Snyder writes “a profoundly personal yielding to God was simply the prelude to an equally profound yielding of the individual to the collective members of the Body of Christ on earth.” Not only can this be seen in the writings of Denck and Riedemann, but other sources such as the writings of early Anabaptist leaders Balthasar Hubmaier and Leonhard Schiemer, and the Schleitheim Articles also portray how the individual yields to the community of believers.

The connection of a *Gelassenheit* attitude to baptism is one reason the Anabaptists rejected infant baptism since in their view the infant is not able to make the decision of self-surrender and yieldedness and so the baptism has no meaning. It is not the act of baptism that saves but the inner decision to yield to Christ. An example of this can be found in Riedemann’s *Confession*. For him scripture does not teach anywhere that infants were baptized. It teaches that those who believe may be baptized and to him that would also imply that those who do not believe should not be baptized. Another reason that Riedemann gives to reject the

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292 Ibid. The baptism of blood will be explored later in this study.

293 Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 78.

baptism of infants is that “the covenant of grace is a covenant of the knowledge and recognition of God. Children, however, know neither good nor evil, and that is reason enough for us to reject infant baptism, even if we had no other reasons.”

Snyder makes a comparison of Anabaptist understanding of baptism to the Catholic spiritual tradition. Those who rejected infant baptism before and during the sixteenth century were considered heretical. Yet he does make a parallel to the monastic tradition. He observes that “Anabaptist baptism, like the monastic vow, witnessed to a profound intention, and was to be undertaken only by those who were prepared to commit themselves to a life of self-denial, a life devoted entirely to following in Christ’s footsteps in the community of faith.” Like the vow of a monastic, Gelassenheit was a powerful mindset that led one to baptism as a sign of that commitment.

The Anabaptist understanding of communion differed from the traditional view of the established church and also contained the attitude of Gelassenheit. The Anabaptists saw it as a symbol of remembrance of Christ’s death. Anabaptist theology contained another aspect to communion as well, that of the community coming together as one body. Riedemann’s allegory of the grains ground together within the bread is an example of how many people come together with their individuality and develop into one united body. He does the same with

295 Ibid., 103.

296 Snyder, Following in the Footsteps of Christ, 81-82

297 Ibid., 83.

the wine, indicating that many grapes have been made into one drink.\textsuperscript{299} The sharing of this meal is meant as a sign of the fellowship of Christ’s body. Riedemann explains that “all the members, in taking part, declare themselves with all the others to be of one mind, one heart, and one spirit with Christ. That is why Paul says, ‘Examine yourself before eating this bread and drinking from this cup, for all who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink judgment upon themselves.’” This is another example of a personal yielding of communion with Christ done collectively with the body of believers.

The understanding of the Catholic view was that the bread and wine actually turned into the body and blood of Christ. The Anabaptists rejected this belief saying it was not possible as Christ had ascended into heaven.\textsuperscript{300} Riedemann makes the point that when Christ held the Last Supper with the disciples, he had not yet been transfigured; he was still in human form.\textsuperscript{301} Another reason given is a quote of Jesus’ words “You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” Riedemann comments “from this it is clear enough that the person Jesus Christ is not in more than one place.”\textsuperscript{302} For the Anabaptists, Jesus’ words ‘this is my body’ means ‘this represents my body.’\textsuperscript{303} It is a remembrance where “the faithful remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross with each celebration of the Supper.”\textsuperscript{304}

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\textsuperscript{299} Ib. ib., 117.
\textsuperscript{300} Snyder, \textit{Following in the Footsteps of Christ}, 91.
\textsuperscript{301} Riedemann, “Confession of Faith,” 114.
\textsuperscript{302} Ib. ib., 115.
\textsuperscript{303} Snyder, \textit{Following in the Footsteps of Christ}, 91.
\textsuperscript{304} Ib. ib.
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Baptism marked an indication of a *Gelassenheit* spirit that welcomed the believer into the church. The Lord’s Supper was a continuing act reaffirming that decision. “When one took the elements, it was a public pledge and testimony of a clear conscience, of a present, genuine yielding to God and rebirth in the Spirit – and woe to liars, hypocrites and deceivers.”305 Snyder observes that “the central themes of an Anabaptist spirituality– yieldedness to God, faith, humility, spiritual rebirth, baptism, new life and conformity with Christ unto death if necessary – are thus concentrated, recalled, examined and enacted in this celebration.”306 The holistic spirituality of the Anabaptist is shown in the celebration of remembering what Christ had done together with the ongoing public commitment that one had yielded to God and was joined together with the community of believers.

**Willingness to Suffer**

The example of a *Gelassenheit* filled life can readily be seen in the Anabaptist concept of suffering because of faith. The Anabaptists so yielded and surrendered their will to God that they were willing to die for him just as Christ their example did. The Anabaptists included the idea of *Gelassenheit* in their practice of defenselessness.307 *Gelassenheit* in this context was the “attitude which Jesus asked of his disciples when he sent them out on a mission or which he taught in the Sermon on the Mount or in the apocalyptic chapters of the Gospel as a

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305 Ibid., 99.
306 Ibid., 102.
307 Although the scope of this study does not allow the examination of all Anabaptist leaders, the example of Pilgram Marpeck’s theology include baptism and communion along with loving one another including enemies. The Anabaptist movement was “a movement of self-denial, of *Gelassenheit*; it is the refusal to dominate, and is the very foundation of nonviolence in Marpeck’s theology. For further study see Neal Blough, “The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology”, *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, H. Wayne Pipkin, ed. (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 137-138.
requirement for all those who are persecuted for his name.”308 Just as Christ was willing to die, the Anabaptists in response to the example set by him, yielded their lives to God to the point where they would die for their beliefs.

Not only did Riedemann discourage the Hutterites from using swords; they were not to make weapons of any kind. The reason is that “since Christians should not practice vengeance, neither should they make the weapons by which others carry out vengeance and destruction.”309 Vengeance should be left up to God and not practiced by Christians.310

In her study of Old Order Mennonite and Amish, Sandra Cronk describes the example of Christ, explaining that “although Christ was all-powerful, he never used his power to manipulate or coerce others to achieve his will. He would not even allow Peter to use his sword to prevent his capture when Judas betrayed him. He yielded himself so completely to God's will that he allowed himself to suffer and die on the cross.”311 She observes that Anabaptists saw the image of Christ as that of “the suffering servant whose power to save came through his yielding and submission.”312 Examining Christ’s power further, Cronk continues: “this understanding of power is paradoxical. On one hand, the use of love instead of coercion means the rejection of the usual forms of power. On the other hand, Christ's love had a power to bring about radical change. Although his love was characterized by yielding and submission, it was


309 Riedemann, “Confession of Faith,” 137.

310 Ibid., 135.


312 Ibid.
It is this image that the Anabaptists held. They stood up for their beliefs even to the point of death, but refused to use the sword.

Denck repeatedly acknowledges Christ as the perfect example of Gelassenheit. He also emphasizes the need to follow the example of Christ. His exhortation is that one needs to remain in God. This may be accomplished “only through losing all that which is contrary to the ONE, and not otherwise. That is resignation in resignation, complete submission, a perfect sacrifice that is willing.”

By being the perfect sacrifice, Christ is the means through which one can come to God. His example shows that this sacrifice was of his free will. Those who lack the comprehension of God’s word are considered at fault since they don’t consider how they are in opposition to God and could be helped if they so desired.

Besides Denck, Anabaptists in general taught a doctrine of free will. The person is able to choose whether to follow Christ’s example and live accordingly. Denck writes that “he gives man absolute free choice, as he gave in the beginning, in such a way that man might grasp either the good or the bad as Scripture testifies.”

Liechty describes the Anabaptist optimism that those who willed to respond could respond. “Their experiences taught them that God’s power and Spirit were granted to those who desired them, and that this Spirit led the person into a real and genuine change.

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313 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
316 Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology, 160.
317 Denck, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil,” 97.
conformed to the image of God in Christ.”318 Anabaptists knew that many would not respond and the unresponsive would take it as a judgment of their refusal. “Therefore, the optimistic anthropology of the Anabaptists was offset by their realization that discipleship would all but inevitably include suffering and even martyrdom.”319 They believed that their commitment to God was made through their own decision and if that commitment meant suffering, they were willing to do so. Without free will there was no freedom to willingly suffer for their commitment.

Bender connects non-resistance with the willingness to suffer. He comments on the Swiss Brethren belief that “the Lord has commanded simply to preach the Gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true church of Christ has the characteristic that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict persecution upon anyone.”320

Stuart Murray of the Anabaptist Network includes suffering as one of the tenets of the Anabaptist tradition. “Anabaptists were not surprised by persecution. They regarded suffering for obedience to Christ as unavoidable and biblical: suffering persecution was a mark of the true church, as Jesus had taught.”321

The Anabaptists understood three types of baptism: Spirit, water and blood. Leonhard Schiemer, an early Anabaptist leader who had connections with Hubmaier, Hut, Hutterites and

318 Liechty, Early Anabaptist Spirituality, 11.
319 Ibid.
others, connects all three baptisms, teaching that they cannot be separated.\textsuperscript{322} Being buried with Christ is the same as being baptized with him. He then notes “this is the reason for baptism, namely a willingness to die with Christ.”\textsuperscript{323} The baptism of blood is meant to depict an image of martyrdom. A more refined definition of the baptism of blood is given by Snyder as he interprets the writing of Balthasar Hubmaier. “The ‘baptism of blood’ is a daily practice in the discipline of obedience.”\textsuperscript{324} Snyder goes on to say that “if a believer were called to witness to the truth by accepting death—as was Hubmaier himself—the way to the greatest test of faith and obedience would have been prepared by daily practice in the ‘third baptism,’ the daily ‘mortification of the flesh until death’.”\textsuperscript{325}

The baptism of blood shows the test of personal \textit{Gelassenheit}. Snyder writes that “the readiness to yield one’s life for Christ’s sake was as convincing a piece of evidence as one could present, that one’s own will had been set aside.”\textsuperscript{326} He goes on to show how this \textit{Gelassenheit} attitude was demonstrated by those who were martyred explaining that:

Anabaptist spirituality had been characterised by a search for true \textit{Gelassenheit} from the very start of the spiritual path, as if in preparation for the final challenge. The numerous prison letters of Anabaptist men and women who were soon to be martyred reflect their struggles to trust entirely in God in their final moments on earth. The references to ‘yielding to God’s will’ in surviving testimonies are so numerous that choosing just one example or two is almost arbitrary.\textsuperscript{327}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Schiemer1986} Schiemer, “The Apostles Creed: An Interpretation,” 34.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Snyder1986} Snyder, \textit{Anabaptist History and Theology}, 93.
\bibitem{Ibid1986} Ibid., 94. The mortification of the flesh is a giving up of the desire to live and reign according to its own lusts. “Here the Spirit of Christ prevails and gains the victory. ... Day and night he practices all those things which concern the praise of God and brotherly love.” (93)
\bibitem{Snyder1986a} Snyder, \textit{Following in the Footsteps of Christ}, 164.
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The Anabaptists were convinced that their faith was one of trust and their trust in God allowed them to self-surrender their lives so completely that they accepted martyrdom. Yet it did not mean that they never struggled in their faith. Cronk also writes of this struggle to gain true Gelassenheit. Yet she notes that many were willing to accept martyrdom. She writes:

Gelassenheit in the Anabaptist view has two closely related meanings. First, it means that the Christian must yield to God's will. Each person must give up self-will and self-centered desires to follow God. The death of self-will may involve both internal and external suffering. Internally there is a struggle to die to selfish desires. Externally, obedience to God's will may bring persecution. Thousands of early Anabaptists were burned at the stake or drowned. Indeed martyrdom became a sign of a yielded life. Both internal and external yielding were ways of following Christ's path to the cross.328

Martyrdom was the ultimate price that the Anabaptists paid for the holistic spirituality. Their desire to yield to God in all things included both their life and death.

A summary of these emphases within Anabaptism and the role Gelassenheit played within them is found in the words of Yarnell who writes:

For the Anabaptists, true Christianity involved the essence of Nachfolge and an attitude of Gelassenheit. This played itself out in an ecclesiology preserving the regenerate church through believers’ baptism, church discipline, and a memorial communion. It also manifested itself in the desire to be a visible witness to a hostile world of the saving grace available through faith in Christ. Sadly but gloriously, many Anabaptists were driven to pay the ultimate price for their Christ faith: martyrdom.329

The Anabaptist could not picture a church that did not include surrender, discipleship and community. They demonstrated their yieldedness to God through the celebrations of baptism and communion and sought to be a witness to those around them. The comment that “theology and experience

327 Ibid., 164.


329 Yarnell, Formation of Christian Doctrine, 16.
undoubtedly intertwined\textsuperscript{330} is a concise description of Anabaptist spirituality. Every aspect of their life was demonstrated as worship to God as they yielded their lifestyle to him in an attitude of Gelassenheit.

\textsuperscript{330} Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, xxii.
Conclusion

A concise summary of *Gelassenheit* can be seen in the words of Snyder:

Although the word “Gelassenheit” is not found in all Anabaptist testimonies, the reality indicated by that term is visible in the Anabaptist movement as a whole. The concept itself was central to Anabaptist theology and spirituality. Believers were called to yield inwardly to the Spirit of God, outwardly to the community and to outward discipline, and finally, in the face of a hostile world, believers could be called upon to give way before God’s greater purpose by accepting a martyr’s death. The necessary unity between the “inner life” of believers—believing, yielded to, and regenerated by the spirit of God—and their “outer lives” of discipleship and community life (visible baptism, celebration of the Supper, community discipline, martyrdom), is seen here again. The principle of yieldedness has roots in late medieval mysticism and piety, and was central to the radical reformers who diverged from Luther.\(^{331}\)

This study set out to demonstrate that Hans Denck and Peter Riedemann took the concept of medieval *Gelassenheit* and developed it as the underlying principle of their spirituality and theology. Their expression of Gelassenheit included an ethical dimension. Self-surrender and obedience to God came together as one expression of faith.

The term *Gelassenheit* carries with it various nuances of meaning. It generally appears as a virtue, concept or attitude that involves the resignation, self-surrender or yieldedness to the will of God. Its importance is as the basis for Anabaptist spirituality.

The study of *Gelassenheit* shows a developing progression. It starts as a concept of yieldedness to God and develops into a particular lifestyle. This concept really began in the early church and can be seen in the life of monastics. Eckhart develops this concept into the term of *Gelassenheit* which is also found in the Anabaptist writings of Denck, Riedemann and others. The Anabaptists included within *Gelassenheit* the outward yielding to community and discipleship.

\(^{331}\) C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 89.
In Eckhart’s view, *Gelassenheit* is the detachment from material things to the will of God; it is the highest virtue that one can attain. Carlstadt also considers it a virtue where one is willing to give up everything to cling to God. Taking up the cross in imitation and obedience to Christ became a major theme. For Carlstadt analogies relating marriage and apprenticeship to *Gelassenheit* show the relationship with God in giving him complete loyalty and commitment. Denck identifies resignation with *Gelassenheit*. Christ is the perfect example of true *Gelassenheit*. A person resigns to the will of God and lives a life following Christ’s example. For Riedemann, *Gelassenheit* is a yieldedness to God that involves a commitment to the community of believers.

While the idea of *Gelassenheit* can be found throughout history, the root of the word is found in the 13th century writings of Meister Eckhart. Eckhart acknowledged God as creator and everything else as created. As such he determined that one should become detached from creation and yielded to God. This became the highest virtue that one could attain. A heart with pure detachment becomes free of all created things and wholly submits to God. Despite living within the rule of the Dominican order, Eckhart encouraged the laypeople to develop the same devotion to God.

Within Eckhart’s writing is the description of what *Gelassenheit* means as a virtue or concept. There is no detail as to any expected lifestyle. One is to detach oneself from anything that is not God, and so the focus remains the relationship between an individual and God.

Johann Tauler and the author of the *Theologia Deutsch* expanded the understanding of Eckhart’s Gelassenheit to include an emphasis on an imitation of Christ.
As a radical reformer, Andreas Carlstadt saw the value of *Gelassenheit* and developed his own understanding of detachment that diverged from the reforms of Luther. Carlstadt included a dimension of volition. One had the free will to choose to yield to God or, in unyieldedness, live a life of sin. A transformation takes place in a person’s life that allows for a detachment and forsaking of all things including possessions and family. Carlstadt emphasizes that nothing should be done in promoting one’s own will, including that of a willingness to suffer for God. Selfwill is completely denied and all is done for God’s will.

Denck’s writings follow closely the thought of Carlstadt.\(^{332}\) His emphasis is on the imitation of Christ. Christ was the perfect example of *Gelassenheit* as he willingly sacrificed himself in yieldedness to the Father. Another theme is that of love. Like Carlstadt he describes the concept of a committed lover as an analogy of the genuine love of Christ. A love that is not willing to sacrifice is considered a selfish love.

In Denck’s writing *Gelassenheit* is an important aspect of obtaining salvation through Christ. It is the response of an individual to the gift of salvation God offers. One yields to a life of following in Christ’s example. Lifestyle becomes more important as there is an outward demonstration of the yielded spirit. Denck discusses baptism as a sign that one has surrendered to God. *Gelassenheit* in the practices of the church is more characteristic of Anabaptism than other traditions. Relationship between a person and God is also important. Denck indicates that a person needs to willingly come to God, but it is God who works a transformation in that person’s life.

\(^{332}\) Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 10. Pater makes a case that Karlstadt’s theology closely resembles Anabaptist theology that would make for a basis for further study as to the actual influence Karlstadt had on Denck and other Anabaptists.
Similar concepts of Gelassenheit can be found in Riedemann’s teaching. He discusses the love God has for his creation and teaches that in return humans should demonstrate that love by yielding to God. Riedemann also sees the importance of Gelassenheit within salvation. Without surrendering to Christ, a person remains in sin. He believes that God transforms a person to be a tool in the community but that person has to be willingly yielded to him.

Riedemann develops these ideas further and adds communal living as an important part of Gelassenheit. His confession of faith illustrates specific guidelines for what it means to live the yielded life. It is in Riedemann’s writings that community is developed to a complete concept of communal living. Not only does the believer surrender to the will of God, but surrenders all possessions to the community. Riedemann asserted that ownership of things makes one forget the creator who is the true owner. There is also the tendency to forget those in need. Yielding to God also involves a commitment to community. This commitment to community becomes even stronger in those who followed after Riedemann. Peter Walpot developed orderliness to the community where Gelassenheit became embedded within that ordered lifestyle.

Gelassenheit was central to Anabaptist spirituality. It was the basis for the various emphases that the Anabaptists placed upon their faith. Discipleship demonstrated the obedience of a yielded spirit by following in the example of Christ. Denck made the following of Christ imperative to his theology and spirituality.

The commitment to community was also a demonstration of a Gelassenheit spirit. Baptism became a way of demonstrating an inner transformation by the Holy Spirit and being accepted into the community. The Lord’s Supper was a symbol not only of remembrance to the
blood and body of Christ, but also demonstrated unity as they shared the bread and wine together.

Within an attitude of willingness to suffer, *Gelassenheit* is demonstrated strongly through the Anabaptists’ willingness to yield so completely to God that they were willing to give their lives for him as well. Many accepted martyrdom rather than give up the commitment they made to God.

*Gelassenheit* demanded that a person be baptized only upon their commitment to God and the church. The committed person willing surrendered to a disciplined life within community. *Gelassenheit* also strengthened the person to accept death rather than recant. These are a few examples of the role *Gelassenheit* plays within early Anabaptist spirituality.

The majority of Anabaptists considered all of these emphases an important part of their spirituality. Each one demonstrated the commitment they made to God. As a result it became a holistic spirituality where the inward yielding to God and the outward commitment to community and discipleship became one. Despite these similarities, the differences cannot be overlooked. In the examples of Denck and Riedemann, both add the ethical aspect to *Gelassenheit*. Yet both have their own unique characteristics as well. For Denck more emphasis is placed on relationship between a person and God. For Riedemann this includes a commitment to community and a communal ownership of all property.

Denck and Riedemann may have developed their theology with different emphases but both see the importance of discipleship, community and a willingness to suffer as they yield to the will of God. *Gelassenheit* was not only a spiritual concept but contained an ethical
dimension as well. For both of them, as well as other Anabaptists, Gelassenheit was the underlying principle used to develop their spirituality and lifestyle.
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