


the 1990
J.J. THIESSEN
LECTURES

*Rereading Anabaptist
Beginnings*

by

WERNER O. PACKULL



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Canadian Mennonite Bible College
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The J.J. Thiessen Lectures

The J.J. Thiessen Lectures have become an important institution at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in Winnipeg. Named in honour of a founder of the College and long-time chairperson of the Board, the J.J. Thiessen Lectures seek to bring to the CMBC community some of his vision for the church.

Each fall an outstanding scholar or church leader is invited to CMBC to supplement the College's regular program. The lectures address issues which are important for the curriculum of the College and the life of the church.

The publication of these lectures, begun with the 1990 series, makes their content more accessible to the larger community.

- 1978 Marlin Miller, Professor of Theology at Goshen (Indiana) Biblical Seminary. *Mennonites and Contemporary Theology*.
- 1979 *Lectures cancelled.*
- 1980 J. Gerald Janzen, Professor of Old Testament at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana. *The Terrors of History and the Fear of the Lord*.
- 1981 Frank H. Epp, Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. *Mennonites with the Millennium on Their Mind*.
- 1982 Jürgen Moltmann, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. *Responsibility for the World and Christian Discipleship*.
- 1983 Cornelius J. Dyck, Professor of Anabaptist and Sixteenth Century Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Indiana. *Rethinking the Anabaptist Vision*.
- 1984 Kenneth Bailey, Professor of New Testament at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon. *Jesus Interprets His Own Cross: A Middle Eastern Cultural Approach*.

- 1985 Orlando Costas, Professor of Missiology at Andover Newton Theological School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. *The Crisis of Mission in the West and the Challenge of World Mission.*
- 1986 Susan Muto, Director of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. *Christian Spirituality and Everyday Living: A Practical Approach to Faith Formation.*
- 1987 Walter Klaassen, Research Professor of Religious Studies and History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. *The Emancipated Laity: Anabaptism in Its Time.*
- 1988 W. Sibley Towner, Professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. *The Bible and Our Human Nature.*
- 1989 Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. *Resident Aliens: The Church and Its Ministry.*
- 1990 Werner O. Packull, Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. *Rereading Anabaptist Beginnings* (first published lectures in this series).

Werner O. Packull, professor history at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, received his academic degrees from the University of Guelph (B.A. Honours), the University of Waterloo (M.A.) and Queen's University (PhD). Dr. Packull is a specialist in sixteenth-century radical reform movements. His publications include *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement* and *The Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer* (co-edited with James Stayer). He has also published numerous articles and reviews in scholarly journals.

Preface and Acknowledgements

When I was asked to give the 1990 J.J. Thiessen Lectures at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, I was told that these should consist of fresh research, be of interest to an audience of undergraduates and of publishable quality. I was flattered and foolish enough to accept. The assignment proved to be a daunting task in the midst of a busy schedule, already crammed with prior commitments, including preparations of a spring/summer course, Elderhostel, participation in two conferences and family health problems that occupied us part of the summer and fall. And so it was that the lectures received their final shape in midair between Toronto and Winnipeg. For purposes of publication I have made some further minimal editorial adjustments.

The general topic, rereading Anabaptist history, had come as a suggestion from my administrator, Rod Sawatsky, president of Conrad Grebel College. Other colleagues encouraged me in the same direction, and so I decided to use materials from a larger project under preparation on Hutterite beginnings. Materials from completed chapters on the origins in the Tyrol, the persecution that drove the Anabaptists from their homeland, the founding of new communities in Moravia and the difficulties that led to numerous schisms were chosen for this purpose. In the hope of making the lectures interesting I decided on more provocative titles, introductions and a frame of reference somewhat more relevant to the contemporary situation without sounding too moralizing—all, I might add, done with a somewhat guilty conscience by a historian trained to study the past “for its own sake.”

My approach has been a relatively simple one. Above all, I want to be truthful to the historical record as I have discovered it during many hours of reading the sources. The frame of reference and method—the historical critical method—within which I have read these sources has been provided by the standards of the academic

guild of which I consider myself a member, more particularly the community of scholars actively engaged in Anabaptist research. It is the tendency of that research to study the Anabaptists in the broader historical context which I hope is reflected in my own rereading of their beginnings.

Finally I need to thank a number of persons and organizations who have contributed to my larger project and indirectly to these lectures. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada provided a research grant and a time stipend for 1987-89. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, which is scheduled to publish my article on "The Beginnings of Anabaptism in Southern Tyrol" later this year, has graciously granted permission for the reuse and republication of some of the materials for these lectures. My colleagues and my students at Conrad Grebel College have been generously supportive of my work. Above all thanks is due to my life's companion, Karin, and our two children, Christine and Reinhold, who have provided the security and emotional support of family. Karin has done much more, having served as secretary for this project alongside her many other duties.

Werner O. Packull
Waterloo, Ontario
May 1, 1991

Lecture One

Origins — Religious or Social?

Introduction

The topic of this lecture, “Anabaptist Origins—Religious or Social?” could imply alternative historical explanations of Anabaptist beginnings, a religious or a social one. I do not mean to propose an either-or explanation. Human motivations are too complex to be reduced to single causal explanations.

Why then the title, Origins: Religious or Social, in question form? With this title I want to flag a shift in interest away from a preoccupation with Anabaptist ideals or vision to a rereading of Anabaptist beginnings in their larger, social setting. The older historiography, perhaps best represented by the “Bender school,” tended to approach the question of origins almost exclusively from a religious point of view. The relationship of religious ideals to the larger social context was formulated entirely within an idealist frame of reference. That is, religious concerns were examined for their social and economic impact, hardly ever the other way around. This idealist way of approaching the topic mirrored the assumptions then current in the larger field of Reformation studies. In an essay entitled, “Between Paradigms: Anabaptist Studies at the Crossroads,”¹ I sketched the broader shifts of perspectives in Reformation studies that have taken place since the 1970s. I also hinted at the implications these shifts have for a rereading of the Anabaptist

¹*The Conrad Grebel Review: A Journal of Christian Inquiry* VIII (Winter 1990): 1-22. This essay was presented as the Eby Lecture at Conrad Grebel College. I acknowledge the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a larger project in progress. The assistance made it possible to spend time in 1988 on research in Austria and Tyrol.

story. These J.J. Thiessen lectures are in a sense elaborations on points I tried to make in that essay. I will use the beginnings of the Anabaptists-Hutterites to illustrate how Anabaptism is being reread. But first some preliminary observations.

Some Historiographical Observations

Shifting from an Idealist to a Social Contextual Reading

Anabaptist studies, to the extent that they intersect and therefore interact with the broader Reformation field of studies, tend to share the dominant assumptions in that field. This was true of the older scholarship as it is of the present. Up into the 1970s Reformation studies were under the strong influence of neoorthodoxy and the so-called "Luther renaissance." Luther's Reformation breakthrough was primarily a religious-theological event, and Luther was the reformer against whose theology all other would-be reformers came to be measured. This Luther-centred view led to a theologizing of the Reformation. An implicit or explicit idealist philosophy of history came to inform the theologically determinist view of the Reformation. The idealist view fused easily with the conviction that God furthered his designs primarily through ideas or a doctrinal agenda rather than through worldly, material interests. Retreat from these convictions became tantamount to sacrilege or, worse, surrender to methodological atheism.

The scholars who were responsible for the "Anabaptist renaissance" shared the purely theological interpretation of the Reformation and its idealist assumptions about what moved history. However, they differed with their colleagues in the magisterial Reformation tradition, whose theological criteria put the Anabaptists at a disadvantage. In contrast to the major reformers, Anabaptists were seen to be primarily ethical rather than theological, practical rather than theoretical in orientation. The need to make Anabaptism the credible left or radical wing of the Reformation, therefore, led to a selective emphasis on its normative ideals and structuring principles.

Nevertheless, in spite of the perceived differences between magisterial and Anabaptist reformations much research was directed toward the identification of key theological principles that would

explain the parting of ways between the Anabaptists and the main reformers. Considerable effort concentrated on Anabaptist beginnings in Zurich. These beginnings tended to be explained with reference to Anabaptist biblicism, its restitutionism and its ethical discipleship. The Anabaptists, it was argued, took biblical authority to its consistent and logical conclusion. Using Scripture as the only guide in matters of faith and life, they reinstated the pristine practices of the New Testament church, including adult baptism. All church ceremonies were to conform to the apostolic model. Thus on the religious level the origins of Anabaptism could be deduced from its biblicism. This kind of biblical determinism assumed that wherever the sacred texts were read with sincerity and with commitment to follow their precepts the outcome would inevitably lead to a reinstatement of the pre-Constantinian believers' church. The possibility of a situational reading of the Scriptures could not be seriously entertained in this interpretive frame of reference. The Scriptures were an objective, self-authenticating witness.

There was, of course, one hitch in this whole way of explaining things. The Anabaptists were not the only ones appealing to the Scriptures in the sixteenth century; all reformers did. Why then the diversity of position on baptism or the Lord's Supper? Obviously it will not do to explain things by ascribing greater sincerity and honesty to the Anabaptists. Most scholars recognize that the various interpretations appealed to canons within the canon; that is, they emphasized different texts. Anabaptists, for instance, distinguished clearly between Old and New Testaments, and within the latter placed the emphasis on the teachings of Jesus rather than Paul. This explained their less dogmatic emphasis on discipleship or *Nachfolge*, on nonresistant love or *Wehrlosigkeit* as the Christian ethical imperative and on voluntarism and responsibility in the economy of salvation. But why different canons within the canon? One explanation suggested in these lectures is that the reading of the Scriptures took place in different contexts.

My main point here, however, is that a purely religious interpretation of Anabaptist beginnings provided the underpinnings for a recovery of the Anabaptist vision which proved so useful in the twentieth-century concern for Mennonite identity, an identity increasingly threatened by assimilation to either secularism or North

American fundamentalism. What was recovered by Harold Bender and others were the ideals which were believed to have inspired and sustained the Anabaptist movement. There were problems, however, when these ideals made normative were turned back on history in order to sort out true or good Anabaptists from bad ones. What did not fit normative traits was selectively weeded out or pushed to the periphery as aberration or *Randfiguren*. The historical Anabaptist movement was thus truncated, its diversity sacrificed. With time it became clear that such a selective reading of Anabaptism, while it served well the present, distorted the past. The study of the historical Anabaptists needed to continue without presupposed normative blinkers.

Such a study must seek an understanding of Anabaptism through a broader contextual reading which takes account of its position in the social-political fibre of sixteenth-century society. A rereading of Anabaptist beginnings must shift the focus from the study of purely religious ideas or ideals to the study of their context and social function in real life (*Sitz im Leben*).

Implications for Understanding Anabaptist Beginnings against the Background of *Gemeindereformation*

Recent contextual readings of Anabaptist origins have noted ideological parallels between Anabaptism and the reform efforts by commoners, described by Peter Blickle as *Gemeindereformation*.² Unlike the magisterial Reformation, premised on reform controlled from above by the political and intellectual elite, *Gemeindereformation* meant reform from below, under the control of representatives of the common people through their communities, *Gemeinden*, villages and towns. *Gemeindereformation* meant assertion of local autonomy. It emphasized corporate, congregational authority and aimed at communal rather than individual salvation. The *Gemeinde* claimed the right to appoint and dismiss its spiritual guides, the priest or preacher, and called for religious-social, real life reforms in light of the Gospel. The latter was interpreted as divine law to be made normative for all social relationships. *Gemeindereformation*,

²The next few paragraphs depend for their content on my article, "Between Paradigms: Anabaptist Studies at the Crossroads."

therefore, meant a challenge to the existing hierarchical order. It had to be carried out without or even against governmental authorization and was eventually defeated by the combined armies of the princes and city magistrates in the so-called Peasants' War of 1524-26. There remained only the options of magisterial reformation from above, persecution and exile for dissenters.

Anabaptism, it has been suggested, shared many features of *Gemeindereformation*, most notably the practical bent, the desire for local congregational autonomy, insistence that the community choose its own spiritual guides and that collective religious responsibilities rest with ordinary laymen. These basic commonalities, as well as the documented overlap in personnel between peasant uprising and Anabaptism, support the emerging consensus that the prehistory and early history of Anabaptism must be understood in the larger context of the commoners' movement for reform. Indeed, it has been argued that Anabaptism represented a continuation of the reform program from below although under altered conditions created by the defeat of the *Gemeindereformation*.³ Anabaptists, it can be argued, read the Bible with the eyes of the powerless. This situational reading of the Scriptures may help to explain why Anabaptists gravitated toward certain texts.

Redefining the Nature of the Original Anabaptist Protest

The findings above place Anabaptist origins in a different light. They call for a redefinition of descriptive concepts such as "magisterial" and "radical" Reformation. Previously, these concepts designated ecclesiological types; for example, the church versus the sect or mystical type. Now they describe different reform polities. Magisterial reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin pushed reforms from above with the aid of established political structures and authorities. The radicals, who were unable to find magistrates to sponsor them or were against any such sponsorship, pushed for reform from below, usually with the support of the commoners.

³This point is well documented in James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

When read in this context the initial Anabaptist protest takes on social-political overtones. Its anti-clerical aspects went beyond criticisms of religious abuses and represented a protest against the special social privileges of the clergy as an estate. To deny that priests wielded sacerdotal powers by virtue of ordination meant a denial of their privileged status in both church and society. Anabaptist iconoclasm directed against sacred objects and/or ritual, such as crucifixes, shrines, images, processions and the performance of mass, made a similar point. Indirectly, iconoclastic acts represented a dual social protest. It was directed against the privileges of the clergy as well as against the patronage of the rich in regards to images or altar decorations. Voices were heard, particularly in the radical camp, that such money would have been better spent on the poor. In the sixteenth-century context criticisms of existing religious practices were in effect criticisms of existing social injustices. For instance, by refusal, on religious grounds, to give the oath or take up arms in defense of the existing society, the Anabaptists in effect made a statement against the existing political-social structures.⁴ They deprived existing relationships of their religious sanctions and in so many words declared them unchristian and corrupt.

A rereading of Anabaptist beginnings in the broader context provides also new insights as to the dynamics that pushed Anabaptism into separation. Martin Haas, for example, documented the various way-stations that lead, in the case of Swiss Anabaptism, from a common front with a popular reform movement to separation.⁵ The situation itself had been fluid during the crucial years of Swiss Anabaptist beginnings. By 1527 the Anabaptists in most Swiss territories had been reduced to a faithful remnant, willing to give up the idea of transforming the whole society. Yet even in its sectarian mould, Anabaptism retained some of the radical features that betrayed its origins in the larger *Gemeindereformation*. Indeed,

⁴My graduate student, Edmund Pries, is presently working on a Ph.D. thesis reinvestigating oath refusal.

⁵Martin Haas, "Der Weg der Täufer in die Absonderung" in *Umstrittenes Täuferium (1525-1975): Neue Forschungen*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), 50-78.

whenever possible Anabaptists attempted to establish more equitable communities. Within these communities social distinctions were muted. True faith became a matter of obedient *Nachfolge*, neighbourly love, justice and mutual aid.⁶ In effect the Anabaptists attempted to realize parts of the *Gemeindereformation*. They sought to establish non-coercive, truly Christian, human relationships in the new communities. Even the discrepancy between ideal and reality, illustrated in my fourth lecture, does not alter this fact.

In the remainder of this lecture I want to illustrate the rereading of Anabaptist beginnings as outlined above, with specific reference to the Southern Tyrol.⁷

Contextualizing Beginnings in the Southern Tyrol

The Significance of the Tyrolese Anabaptists

Scholars seem agreed that Anabaptism in the Tyrol initially represented a popular grassroots movement. Gretl Köfler claimed that “one can speak in good conscience of a mass movement.”⁸ Wolfgang Lassmann described the Anabaptists in the Tyrol as “a regular people’s heresy” that enjoyed the active and passive support of a “large section of the population.”⁹ Edward Widmoser estimated that during one generation the number of persons

⁶Stayer argues that initially many of the Anabaptists, including the Swiss, went beyond mutual aid to embrace forms of community of goods. *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*.

⁷A more substantive article, entitled “The Beginning of Anabaptism in Southern Tyrol” is to appear later this year in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. I thank the managing editor, Robert V. Schmucker, for permission to republish aspects of it here. An even more comprehensive treatment in German, “Die Anfänge des Täuferturns in Tirol,” is scheduled to appear in *Alternatives Denken im Zeichen der Reformation*, ed. Günther Vogler (Weimar, 1991-92).

⁸Gretl Köfler, “Täuferturn in Tirol” in *Michael Gaismair und seine Zeit*, ed. Christoph von Hartungen and Günther Pallaver (Bozen-Innsbruck, 1983), 112-122, esp. 116.

⁹Wolfgang Lassmann, “Möglichkeiten einer Modellbildung zur Verlaufsstruktur des tirolischen Anabaptismus,” in *Anabaptistes et dissidents au XVI siecle*, ed. Jean-G. Rott and Simon Verheus. *Bibliotheca Dissidentum, scripta et studia*, no. 3 (Baden-Baden, 1987), 297 ff.

compromised by Anabaptism in the Tyrol reached twenty thousand,¹⁰ and Franz Kolb counted one hundred and twenty-five communities affected in one way or other.¹¹ The Tyrol was, therefore, a territory with a relatively large Anabaptist population, at least during the early stages of the movement.

Initial popularity of the movement seems indirectly confirmed by the clergy's complaints about sagging church attendance;¹² directly by the demonstrated sympathies of the populace. Even after ten years of vicious persecution, the Anabaptists enjoyed the confidence and protection of a large section of society. Many of the common people refused to cooperate with the authorities in apprehending the hunted heretics. In 1539 the officials of the prince bishop of Brixen gave this graphic description of the situation:

The common man is [favourably] inclined towards them, giving them support [*Unterhalt*], food and drink, permits them to come and go from his house. No one notifies the authorities [*Herrschaft*] and when the authorities learn of an [Anabaptist] meeting, they cannot expect the help or support of the subjects to raid the Anabaptists and imprison them. Even if they [commoners] go along, they give no hand [in apprehending them], but permit the Anabaptists to run to and fro beside them in the forests, claiming not to have seen any. They warn them of a possible raid.

If this is how those who are not in the sect act, how must those who belong to the sect act?¹³

Some territories had proven especially Anabaptist-friendly. In the North, an estimated eight hundred out of twelve hundred

¹⁰Eduard Widmoser, "Das Tiroler Täuferium," *Tiroler Heimat: Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Volkskunde* XI, part I (1951): 45-89, esp. 84-85; XVI, part II (1952): 103-128.

¹¹Franz Kolb, "Die Wiedertäufer im Wipptal," *Schlern: Monatsheft für Südtiroler Landeskunde* LXXIV (1951): 1-103, esp. 10.

¹²Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Vol. XIII: *Oesterreich*, part II (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1972) (hereafter *QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II), 382.

¹³Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Vol. XIV: *Oesterreich*, part III (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1983) (hereafter *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III), 420-21, October 17, 1539.

inhabitants of the city of Schwaz were at one point suspected of Anabaptist sympathies.¹⁴ In the South, the Etsch-[Adige], Eisack- and Puster Valleys proved particularly hospitable, with the mining areas of Sterzing and Klausen-Gufidaun in the vanguard. The district of St. Michelsburg in the Puster Valley seemed especially susceptible.¹⁵ Places like Lüsen, St. Georgen, Pflaurentz, Welsberg, Niedervintl and Tauffern contained high concentrations of Anabaptists or their sympathizers.¹⁶

These areas produced an extraordinary number of martyrs and capable leaders,¹⁷ not the least among them Jacob Hutter.¹⁸ Hutter would bequeath his name to a group of “communistic Anabaptists” who have survived against incredible odds to the present. He and his fellow “Pusterers” (from the Puster Valley) enjoyed the reputation of being among the toughest, most dedicated, disciplined and zealous of Anabaptists as evidenced in a letter by Peter Riedemann, the “second founder” of the Hutterites. Riedemann considered the “Pusterers” model members of the

¹⁴See Johann Loserth and Robert Friedmann, “Tirol,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

¹⁵Hartmann Ammann, “Die Wiedertäufer in Michelsburg im Pusterthale und deren Urgichten,” *Programme des K.K. Gymnasiums zu Brixen* XLVI, part I (1896): 1-52; XLVII, part II (1897): 1-124.

¹⁶Erika Prast considered St. Georgen and Pflaurentz as pro-Anabaptist. “Die Vier Pustertaler Herrschaften—St. Michelsburg, Schöneck, Uttenheim und Heunfels—Unter Brixner Pfandherrschaft 1500-1570” (Ph.D. dissertation, Leopold-Franzen University, Innsbruck, 1975), 191, 194.

¹⁷Of a total of 2,169 executions counted in Hutterite sources, 569 are listed as having taken place in Austrian territory, 349 of these in the Tyrol with 35 in the Puster Valley, 108 in the Adige Valley and 206 in the Inn Valley. Cf., Josef Beck, *Die Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer in Oesterreich-Ungarn, 1526-1785* (Vienna: In Commission bei Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1883), 277-280. But these figures seem conservative, since Hutterites tended to be selective in counting martyrs.

¹⁸Rudolf Palme lists Jörg Zaunried [Zaunring], Hans Amon [Tuchscherer], Hans Kräl, Niclas Geyerspühler, Jacob Portzner, Hans Mändel and Onofrius Griesinger. “Zur Täuferbewegung in Tirol,” *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* XLIII/XLIV (1986/87): 47-61, esp. 52. To this list could be added Ulrich Stadler, Sigmund Schützinger, Pilgram Marpeck, Jeronimus Käls and others.

Anabaptist communities in Moravia and hoped to convert the Hessian Anabaptists into "Pusterers," that is to say, into South Tyrolese.¹⁹

Recognizing the importance of the Tyrolese within the larger Anabaptist movement I now turn to a question central to the rereading of Anabaptist beginnings in the Tyrol: its relationship to the peasant uprising led by Michael Gaismair.

Anabaptist Relations to the Gaismair Rebellion

The Scholarly Debate

As noted above there is an emerging consensus that the Anabaptists "began within the radical currents of the early Reformation and the Peasants' War."²⁰ The older historiography, which insisted apologetically on a total separation between Peasants' War and Anabaptism, has become untenable.²¹ This is not only true for Central and Southern German territories but for the Swiss areas and for the Tyrol as well. Yet documentation of an actual link between the Gaismair Rebellion and Anabaptist origins has been difficult to obtain.²²

¹⁹Peter Riedemann wrote: ". . . vermeine wol Pusterer zu haben. . . ." *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder*, ed. A.J.F. Zieglschmid (Ithaca, New York: The Cayuga Press, 1946), 197. The English translators missed the point with "I imagine some from the Puster Valley might even return." *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, vol. I (Rifton, New York: Plough Publishing House, 1987), 184-5. Because of its greater accessibility and extensive footnotes, the English edition will be cited hereafter.

²⁰Adolf Laube, "Radicalism as a Research Problem in the History of Early Reformation" in *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives*, ed. Hans Hillerbrand (Kirksville, Missouri: The Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988), 9-33, esp. 22.

²¹Representing the old point of view were Harold S. Bender, "Die Zwickauer Propheten, Thomas Müntzer und die Täufer," *Theologische Zeitschrift* VIII (1952): 262-78; and "The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XXVII (January 1953): 3-16; also the articles by Robert Friedmann, "Hut, Hans," and "Müntzer, Thomas," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

²²James M. Stayer, "Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants' War," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXII (April 1988): 99-139, esp. 130, 137. Stayer names only six persons implicated in the Gaismair rebellion.

The suggestion of a connection is, of course, an old one.²³ More than a century ago, the conservative Austrian historian, Josef Jäkel, who considered Anabaptism a social disease, argued for a direct link to Gaismair,²⁴ whom he considered an evil and violent revolutionary. Through guilt by association with Gaismair, Jäkel intended to discredit Anabaptism. As evidence to strengthen his case he pointed to geographic overlap between the two movements. Areas of Anabaptist concentrations corresponded with areas that had previously supported Gaismair's uprising. The best evidence came in the official reaction as recorded in government documents. Government officials postulated a causal connection. According to Ferdinand I's mandate of August 20, 1527, "deceitful teachings and heretical sects" were spread by

some evil, capricious . . . persons, who did not get their fill from that immense and wretched blood-letting of the past years, but seek to revive new disobedience, insurrection and rebellion. . . .²⁵

The same mandate blamed the peasants' rebellion on false teachings of Christian freedom and on the subversive notion that "All things should be held in common and there should no longer be any authority [*Obrigkeit*]." The Anabaptists, like Gaismair, seemed to "disparage all authority and lordship." The government, therefore, charged Anabaptists not only with heresy but also with insurrection.²⁶

²³Last by Köfler, "Täufertum in Tirol," 112-128 and by Aldo Stella, "Il 'Sozialevangelismus' di Michael Gaismayr e le Origini dell'Aabattismo Hutterita" in *J. Valdesi e l'Europa*, Edition Claudiana, Torino (Torre Pellice, 1982), 245-263; also *Rivolte Contadine Trentino-Tirolesi e Genesi del Comunismo Evangelico Dei Fratelli Hutterite* (Padeva, 1982).

²⁴Josef Jäkel, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberösterreich und speziell in Freistadt," 47. *Bericht über das Museum Fancisco-Carolinum* (1889), 1-82.

²⁵Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Vol. XI: *Oesterreich*, part I (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1964) (hereafter *QGT*, XI: *Oesterreich*, I), 9.

²⁶A point made by Köfler about Leonard Schiemer's death. "Täufertum in Tirol," 114.

But was there any truth to these charges? In response to the conservative Catholic charge as represented by Jäkel, a liberal Austrian scholarship represented by Johann Loserth²⁷ and Edward Widmoser and brought to North America by Robert Friedmann, tended to emphasize the peaceful, purely religious intentions of the Anabaptists. In their struggle against centuries of prejudicial, official historiography, these liberals sought to underline the unjustified persecution of religious non-conformists. Engaged in a contemporary struggle for religious tolerance these scholars did not find it very useful to agree with conservatives who emphasized the subversive nature of all nonconformity in religious matters. It was this congenial liberal tradition that, through Friedmann, informed the North American Mennonite view of Anabaptism in the Tyrol (primarily through his many contributions to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*). The relationship between the Anabaptists and the armed rebels who, led by Gaismair, attempted to transform the whole society by force if need be, seemed not at all obvious to Friedmann and those influenced by him. Compared with Gaismair's aims the Anabaptists seemed primarily religiously motivated and peaceful. Their persecution, as that of later religious dissenters in Catholic Austria, seemed entirely unjustified.

A very different view was presented by Marxist scholars who were unencumbered by apologetic sensitivities on the peaceful nature of Anabaptism. Marxists readily agreed with conservatives as to the subversive nature of Anabaptism. The Czech historian, Josef Macek, saw in Anabaptism a continuation of Gaismair's assault on decaying feudal structures.²⁸ He wrote that "it is wrong and superficial to overemphasize the peaceful character of the Anabaptist movement, for by doing so one blurs its revolutionary

²⁷Johann Loserth, "Der Anabaptismus in Tirol von seinen Anfängen bis zum Tode Jacob Hutters, 1526-1536, aus hinterlassenen Papieren des Hofrates Dr. Josef R. V. Beck," *Archiv für Oesterreichische Geschichte* LXXVIII: (1892), 407-604.

²⁸Josef Macek, *Der Tiroler Bauernkrieg und Michael Gaismair* (Berlin, 1965), 468-473.

effect.”²⁹ Unfortunately Macek failed to make a convincing empirical case for his claims.

My colleague Walter Klaassen accepted Macek’s major thesis as “quite likely correct,” but his attempt to find empirical evidence for a Gaismair connection proved futile.³⁰ The names of 113 Gaismair supporters yielded only two future Anabaptists.³¹ James Stayer’s investigation along the same lines of personnel overlap fared little better. Stayer was able to raise the known number of Anabaptists who had participated in the Gaismair affair to a mere six.³² Yet, both Klaassen and Stayer, after working carefully with the sources, were inclined to believe that Gaismair’s peasant uprising created “the indispensable preconditions” for Tyrolean Anabaptism.

Another Look at the Gaismair Connection

The state of the scholarly debate warrants another look at the relationship between Anabaptism and Gaismair’s rebellion. In my research I pursued a different track than that followed by Klaassen and Stayer. First, I attempted to determine the precise time and place of beginnings in the southern Tyrol as well as the identification of the first converts. Neither had been thoroughly researched, although the Italian scholar, Aldo Stella, claimed that there were a number of baptizers in Gaismair’s entourage, presumably from the Swiss Grisons.³³ Secondly, I reopened the question of generic relationship between the original Anabaptists in the Tyrol and Gaismair’s rebellion by comparing their respective programs.

What were my findings? As for the beginnings of Anabaptism, I was able to establish that it was brought into the Southern Tyrol

²⁹Ibid., 471, n.217.

³⁰Walter Klaassen, *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden, 1978), 115.

³¹They were Friedrich Brandenburger and Hans Gasser. Ibid., 114-116.

³²Cf., n. 22. Stayer increased that number in his book to ten. *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 166.

³³Aldo Stella, “Hutterite Influences on Italian Nonconformist Conventicles and Subsequent Developments,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXIV (July 1990): 195 ff, esp. 197.

by the Swiss veteran, Jörg Blaurock, during the spring of 1527.³⁴ It was his first missionary journey down the Adige [Etsch] Valley, and followed on the heels of Gaismair's withdrawal in the fall of 1526. Blaurock was indeed a native of the Grisons, and contact with members of Gaismair's party is highly probable. Blaurock certainly never belonged to the *Stillen im Land*. From his Zurich ministry we know that among other things he interrupted sermons, denounced spiritual and secular authority and gained the most favourable hearing among Zurich's rebellious peasants in the district of Grüningen.³⁵ Indirect evidence from the Southern Tyrol suggests that his ministry here was of a similar nature. Blaurock was arrested during a second missionary journey to the Southern Tyrol in 1529. He died at the stake in Klausen on September 6 of that year. These findings about Blaurock's two journeys into the Tyrol clear up some of the confusion in previous literature and in Hutterite sources.

Secondly, and more importantly, I discovered that among Blaurock's first Anabaptist converts in the Southern Tyrol were two former confidants of Gaismair, Ulrich Kobl and Hans Gasser. Both were implicated in an alleged plot to assassinate one of Ferdinand's administrators. Evidence indicates that others of the original converts had also been Gaismair's sympathizers. Prior to their acceptance of Anabaptism, these converts had been members of radical sacramentist conventicles with a network of acquaintances reaching from Bozen to Klausen to Sterzing to the Puster and its side valleys. The existence of a network of acquaintances which predated Anabaptism helps to explain the rapid spread of the latter once it had been introduced into this circle by Blaurock in the spring of 1527. The prestige of converts like Kobl and Gasser may have aided the acceptance of Anabaptism and its rapid spread. It is tempting to infer, therefore, that the acquaintanceships of the

³⁴The greater details are spelled out in "Die Anfänge des Täuferturns im Tirol." Cf., n.7.

³⁵Mathias Hui, "Vom Bauernaufstand zur Täuferbewegung: Entwicklung in der ländlichen Reformation am Beispiel des zürcherischen Grüninger Amtes," *Mennonitsche Geschichtsblätter* XLVI (1989): 113-144.

pre-Anabaptist sacramentists went back to shared sympathies with the Gaismair project.³⁶

It seems certain that the sacramentists accepted much of Gaismair's program and continued to agitate for reforms, even after Gaismair had been forced into exile. They were not at all quietistic pacifists or withdrawn sectarians, but boisterous radicals. In Klausen, for example, some had attained notoriety as early as Lent 1526. On that occasion a number of future Anabaptists flaunted church regulations concerning the eating of meats and nailed a threatening letter against the local priest to the door of the parish church. With the help of local miners, they pledged to "defend and protect" the Gospel and its lay-propagator, a goat herdsman [*Ziegenhirt*] named Wölf. Given these attitudes in 1526, it is almost inconceivable that the persons involved were not also Gaismair's well-wishers. It was precisely in this circle that Blaurock's message found a favourable response. Within a year many of the sacramentists in Klausen had become Anabaptists. In 1529 Blaurock spent much of his time in Klausen and was executed there.

It should not be surprising then that Anabaptist teachings show continuity with both the sacramentist and Gaismair's program. Gaismair's religious orientation had been proto-Zwinglian or Swiss. He and his spiritual advisors considered mass "an abomination before God and utterly unchristian."³⁷ They wanted to deprive priests and the church of all claims to sacerdotal powers. The priest was to be replaced by the preacher, the mass by the sermon. The church was to be placed under local lay control, stripped of its material wealth and power; its monasteries dissolved; its hierarchy abolished; its servants made subject to common law. Local parishes had the right to choose and support their own pastors. Surplus funds from the local tithe were to be designated for the care of the sick and poor.

One of the most striking features of Gaismair's program was its iconoclasm. Article six of his *Landesordnung* cited Deuteronomy

³⁶I spelt out details and documented my findings in "Die Anfänge des Täuferturns in Tirol."

³⁷Klaassen, *Gaismair*, 33, 131.

7:5, 25 as a divine mandate for the destruction, the hacking down and the burning of idols. Images, shrines and crucifixes were to be removed; chalices and precious metals to be collected and minted into coins for the benefit of a stable territorial currency.³⁸

When viewed against Gaismair's proposed program, Anabaptism reveals striking continuities and a rather radical profile.

A Radical Profile

An obvious case of continuity with Gaismair's program concerns the iconoclastic attitudes exhibited by the Anabaptists and their sympathizers. Vintzentz Puchler had "broken a crucifix." Hans Grembsler had been guilty of kicking a statue he found "lying" by the road.³⁹ Balthasar Schneider and a certain Cristan were responsible for the destruction of a painting.⁴⁰ Hans Hueber advocated that the local church bell should be thrown from the tower.⁴¹ Valentin Schneider interrupted a procession with shouts that everything the priest said about the eucharist "stinks and is a lie." While in a churchyard, Jörg Parugkher uttered invectives against "murder dens in which no Christian order prevailed!"⁴²

The most spectacular demonstration of anti-clerical feelings and iconoclasm was provided by Jacob Gasser, in all probability a brother of the former peasant leader Hans Gasser. Upon his arrest, Jacob Gasser was questioned about a statue that had been "shot and hacked" to pieces!⁴³ There were good reasons for questioning Gasser about that incident. He had been responsible for an act of

³⁸The above comes from Gaismair's *Landesordnung*. Ibid., 131-36.

³⁹*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 136-137.

⁴⁰Cristan had been executed at Rodeneck. The painting is described as the "Bild bei dem Vichter." Ibid., 93.

⁴¹Hans Hueber held nothing of church ceremonies. He was an Anabaptist sympathizer who had fellowship with Anabaptists. Ibid., March 31, 1534, 237-8, 288, 314, 322.

⁴²Ibid., June 1534, 258, 259. Parugkher had hosted an Anabaptist meeting and given accommodation to Caspar Krätzler, one of Hutter's confidants.

⁴³Ibid., 31.

symbolic violence and sacrilege that touched the very heart of traditional worship.⁴⁴

On Saturday, January 27, 1532 rumours spread in St. Andreasberg, the jurisdiction of Rodeneck, that something extraordinary would happen in church next day. The rumours proved correct. On Sunday, Jacob Gasser interrupted the performance of mass. He tore the plate with the wafers from the priest's hand, threw the wafers to the ground, stamped on them, then took the chalice from the altar and threw it against the church door. According to a report sent to Innsbruck, only the two officiating priests and some of the women in the audience seemed shocked. Two men escorted Gasser outside where he disappeared into the crowd that gathered in front of the church. One local supporter, we are told, hailed Gasser's act as "a great miracle" and hoped that more would follow!⁴⁵

Gasser's action was, no doubt, an unusually bold demonstration of how far lay "enlightenment" or disrespect for the ceremonies of the established church and its clergy had advanced among some ordinary people. Gasser's attitude was by no means exceptional, although few among his fellow Anabaptists would have gone to his length. Most simply shunned the church.

Since the death of Blaurock in 1529, Anabaptists in this region were led by Jacob Hutter. Hutter himself had in all probability been a member of Gaismair's party, perhaps even one of his armed retainers.⁴⁶ He obviously condoned Gasser's radical action, since he baptized Mrs. Gasser shortly after the incident in Andreasberg while she and her husband were hiding from the authorities. Statements made by other converts of Hutter illustrate the attitudes fostered in Hutter's circle. Katharina Tagwericher, a seventeen-year-old, told her interrogators that "churches are damned temples of idols, whore-houses and murderers' dens in which priests [*Pfaffen*] murder souls." Hutter taught that the Anabaptists were

⁴⁴Was Jacob Gasser the brother of Hans Gasser? The government ordered that his *Urgichten* be obtained from Gufidaun, meaning that Jacob must have been previously imprisoned in Gufidaun. *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 14-15, 49-50.

⁴⁶See below p.27, n.67.

being persecuted “because emperor, king and lords fear that if one permitted the [true] Christian [teaching] to continue, then their [the lords’] glory would diminish more and more.” It should be noted that this had been the intention of the Gaismair project! By way of inference, then, Hutter and his young convert Katharina sought to continue the same project. Asked about the sacrament of the altar, Katharina replied: “It is a damned, no-good idol, invented by the priests for the sake of money.” She believed the same was true of pedobaptism.⁴⁷

Many similar statements could be cited from members of Hutter’s circle to demonstrate the same basic attitudes of utter alienation from and animosity toward traditional religious practices. In Hutter’s circle, churches were consistently referred to in derogatory terms as stone piles (*Stainhauffen*),⁴⁸ murderer’s dens (*Mördergrueben*), temples of idols (*Götzentempl*). “Only whores and pimps enter the stone piles.” Mass and the eucharist were considered “an abomination and a stench before God;” pedobaptism “a dirty wash” (*ain sudlwesch*). The priest attempted to “drive demons out of the pure child while he, himself, is full of demons.” In summary, everything associated with tradition and religious practices was one big racket, utterly corrupt and evil. The clergy knew nothing of the Gospel. They dealt in lies. They were selling the Lord through the sacramental systems in order to support their whores and their own unchristian lifestyle. True followers of Christ could not participate, attend or condone such ceremonies. “It was all against God and idolatry.” Last unction meant nothing. It was more important to die in the true faith than to be buried in consecrated soil. The corpse could just as well decompose on the mountainside. Contrary to its claim, the traditional church had no powers reaching into the next world and should have none in the present. Oral confession to priests was not only unnecessary but evil. No priestly sanctions were needed for marriage. The role of

⁴⁷Ibid., 288-89.

⁴⁸It should be noted that the same derogatory description of churches as mere stone piles was made by Waldenses in Austrian territory as early as 1398. Ernst Müller, *Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer* (Nieukoop: B. de Graaf, 1972, reprint of 1895 edition), 63.

the saints as intermediaries and with it the church calendar and holidays, as well as the rules and regulations concerning Lent, were all rejected as mere human inventions. In sum, "God the Almighty in heaven" alone was to be worshipped.⁴⁹

The statements above reveal that the break with church and tradition could not have been more radical. Anticlericalism and iconoclasm went hand in hand. Anabaptists refused to recognize any guides or spiritual authorities other than their own.⁵⁰ Given the intertwined nature of church and state in the Tyrol, it should be obvious that such views were not purely religious or spiritual in nature. They amounted to attacks on the entire existing social-political order. In order to grasp the full significance of this attack, it should be remembered that both secular and spiritual authority in parts of the Southern Tyrol was vested in one and the same person, the prince bishop of Brixen, whose control extended into Hutter's home territory, the Puster Valley. The Anabaptist protest was, therefore, by its very nature, both religious and social-political. The attack on the church was an attack on one of the pillars of the social-political structure. To shake off traditional religious authority meant to threaten the entire power constellation as had been the case with Gaismair's rebellion, however mild mannered its beginnings.

There are of course also some discontinuities with the Gaismair program. The Anabaptists relinquished the desire to transform the entire society and concentrated instead on the faithful remnant. The historic dynamics that transformed boisterous sacramentarians and former supporters of Gaismair into sectarians were similar to those observed in Anabaptist beginnings elsewhere.⁵¹

As much as possible, Tyrolese attempted to pattern their new communities on the norms of the Gospel. Distinctions between laity and clergy were abolished. Laymen, usually literate artisans,

⁴⁹Ibid., 20-21, 72, 92, 101-102, 126-127, 135-37, 151, 287-89.

⁵⁰Compare the statements of Valentin Fell [Föll], and Oswald Spiess, July 1532. Ibid., 72-73. Spiess related that before the meeting broke up, the Vorsteher told them "sie sollten untereinander gleich sein, auch keiner anderen geistlichen oder weltlichen Obrigkeit gehorchen, sondern nur den Vorstehern."

⁵¹Cf., n.4.

assumed leadership roles; even women read the Scriptures at gatherings.⁵² Such readings and discussions dwelt not only on criticisms of the established order but addressed also concerns with Christian behaviour, living in neighbourly love, justice, mutual aid and fraternal discipline. True, compared with Gaismair's aims, the scale had been reduced. A clear distinction between insiders and outsiders came to mark the threshold between earlier populist programs and the Anabaptist community. Persecution and suppression restricted interaction with the world. A newfound dignity governed that interaction. Hutter taught that while "one should give rent (*Zins*) to the authority and to the nobles, one should not give them reverence and not consider them higher than any other simple lay person."⁵³ King and emperor, like other outsiders, were considered Gentiles with no authority in the true congregation of God.

Anabaptism, which had begun "in, with and under" [Stayer] a radical reform movement that aimed at transforming the whole society, had become a separatist sect.⁵⁴ But even through this metamorphosis it retained a profile that betrayed its radical roots.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that a purely religious reading of Anabaptist beginnings distorts its radical profile and denies its radical roots. First, it is not a question of either-or, religious or social origins. In the sixteenth-century experience, the two were inextricably interwoven. Secondly, in a limited way the Anabaptists of the Southern Tyrol were heirs of Gaismair's rebellion. Continuity can be argued in terms of anti-clericalism and iconoclastic attitudes towards existing religious structures and perceived social wrongs. The Anabaptists rejected, if anything, in an even more radical way

⁵²The principle prevailed: "sie sollen gleich sein." *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 25, 73.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁴Meant here as a non-derogatory, sociological type in the Troeltschean sense.

the hierarchical, sacramental, sacerdotal power structure of the established church.⁵⁵

Finally, there were, of course, discontinuities with Gaismair's program as well. Anabaptists reorganized into voluntary, separated, self-regulated congregations. While this meant giving up any direct attempt at transforming the whole society, it would be wrong to underestimate the social, critical thrust represented even by this sectarian form of Anabaptism. The attempts to establish ideal apostolic communities of uncoerced equality and fraternity aroused considerable sympathy among the common people, but it invited also the wrath of the authorities. The latter is the topic of my next lecture.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 556-557. Although I here emphasize the radical-social profile of Anabaptism in order to illustrate continuity with the Gaismair project, I should also note other features. Anabaptists were recognized for their moral earnestness. One woman, under suspicion of Anabaptist sympathies, defended herself against the charges by claiming she and her husband drank and engaged in profanities, something Anabaptists did not do! While this statement comes from 1545, the noted tendencies were present or latent from the beginning. Anabaptists distinguished themselves by their upright, moral living. Many examples could be cited. Paul Rumer, who wore fancy clothes in order to impress a young lady, was asked by his potential mother-in-law, an Anabaptist, "whether he did not want to become morally upright and give up his pride." *Ibid.*, 157. Ruprecht Hueber was asked whether he did not want to repent of his sinful and unrighteousness living. *Ibid.*, 176.

Lecture Two

Persecution — Provocation or Innocent Suffering?

Introduction

The very title of this lecture may seem obscene to those familiar with the martyr stories in the Hutterite *Chronicle* or the Mennonite *Martyrs' Mirror*. Some of you, I am sure, are wondering whether this will be an academic exercise at obfuscation, to create doubt where previously there had been clear testimony. Against such suspicions I have no defence, except that I consider it the historian's duty to ask tough questions, even questions that may seem sacrilegious to some. The historian cannot ban questions of historical inquiry from a particular tradition that would be considered legitimate for another, for example, the persecution of the Doukhobors. Neither can the historian accept purely internal explanations, however obvious they may seem, without having put them to the test of vigorous historical investigation, an investigation that must aim at a broad contextual understanding of historical events. To this end I seriously propose a rereading of Anabaptist persecution, although I must confess from the outset that my sympathies are with the persecuted.

Some Preliminary Observations

The Possibility of Alternate Views?

Some years ago I attended an academic conference in which a leading scholar on the Swiss Reformation criticized the North American "free church" interpretation of Anabaptist beginnings. Speaking of Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Jörg Blaurock, Johann Brötli, Wilhelm Reublin and company, this scholar suggested that if these were our contemporaries they would be the kind of people who, if they moved into our neighbourhood, would bring down

property values! He meant this seriously and in a negative way. For this scholar, the Anabaptists were not at all innocent martyrs but cantankerous, if not dangerous, troublemakers who destroyed valuable artifacts, interrupted other people's worship services, disobeyed the law of the land and generally attempted to undermine properly constituted authority. They were not at all the *Stillen im Land*, but the disquieting disturbers of the social peace.

This view, which, by the way, was the view of Zwingli and Bullinger, suggests that the Anabaptists in part brought persecution on themselves. I must confess that at the time I was rather taken aback by the fact that anyone, especially a well established scholar, could in the twentieth century still hold to such a view. I need not tell you that such a view contrasts sharply with what most Mennonites or Hutterites think of their forebears. It may be granted, to be sure, that there were some hotheads, some unfortunate incidents in the early movement; for example, the Anabaptists in Münster, misled by their leaders, the crazed prophet Jan Mathiez and the actor-king Jan von Leiden, or some unfortunate incidents associated with Anabaptism in the St. Gall area. But these were peripheral manifestations that had nothing in common with normative, peaceful, nonresistant Anabaptism. True, Anabaptists suffered persecution for purely religious reasons, for reasons of conscience and because they took seriously the call to follow Jesus even unto death. This view of innocent suffering was an integral part of the Anabaptist legacy. It was the view of the martyr songs that made up the first songbooks and the view nurtured by the earliest histories in the tradition, *The Chronicle* and the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Indeed, when compared with other traditions, martyrology played a very important part in Anabaptist identity formation, so much so that some scholars have identified a "theology of martyrdom" as the very core of Anabaptist faith.⁵⁶ In Anabaptist self-perceptions, persecution came to be seen as the mark of the true church, as the vindication of the true faith. The early Anabaptists, caught up in the apocalyptic mood of their times, perceived

⁵⁶See Robert Friedmann's discussion of Ethelbert Stauffer's "Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom." "Martyrdom, Theology," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

themselves involved in a conflict of cosmic proportions between the prince of light and prince of darkness, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world. No doubt, there could be compromise.

My concern in this lecture, however, is less with Anabaptist self-perceptions than with an empirical rereading of the sources related to their persecution. The question I want to pose is a tough one: Have Mennonites all too readily and uncritically accepted the collective self-perceptions passed on in their tradition? Rushing in where angels fear to tread, I want to begin with a reminder that Anabaptism was not the only movement to produce martyrs. The argument that connects martyrdom with the true church has been and can be invoked for a variety of traditions. Sixteenth-century religious persecutions were by no means limited to the Anabaptists. Catholics suffered under Protestants, Protestants under Catholics. Anti-Trinitarians suffered almost everywhere. They, along with the Anabaptists, were condemned by the imperial mandate that revived the death penalty as outlined in the Justinian code of law of the year A.D. 519. The Anabaptist experience was, therefore, not unique. It differed quantitatively in that, with the exception of the Anti-Trinitarians, they suffered proportionally a larger percentage of martyrs than the other sixteenth-century religious parties. And with the exception of the Münster kingdom the Anabaptists were never in a position to persecute others. Against this background the Anabaptists can be justly considered the "martyr church" of the Reformation.

It is worth noting, however, that even on such rudimentary data as numbers of Anabaptist martyrs, a rereading of history calls for revisions. Past estimates now appear inflated. Ernst Payne, in the 1952-53 edition of the *New Cambridge Modern History*, estimated a number as high as 30,000. James Stayer, writing for the revised 1991 edition estimates that the total number in all probability did not exceed four to five thousand in all Europe during the entire sixteenth century.⁵⁷ Since the total number of persons involved in the movement has been scaled down as well, the relative percentage

⁵⁷I thank James M. Stayer for making his article for the *New Cambridge Modern History* available to me. See also Paul Schowalter, "Martyrs," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. Schowalter estimates the number as beyond 4000.

of martyrs remains high. However, to speak loosely of an "Anabaptist Holocaust," as I have heard it among some of my acquaintances, seems untenable.

But why persecution? Was it entirely unprovoked? It strikes me as curious that so far we lack an empirical study detailing the reasons for persecution. I am not proposing to do that now. Suffice it to state that a rereading of Anabaptist beginnings suggests that a good portion of first-generation Anabaptist leaders were compromised by association with the peasants' rebellion of 1524-26.⁵⁸ In my previous lecture I developed a radical profile in continuation with the Gaismair rebellion in the Tyrol. A similar case has been made for Zurich territory,⁵⁹ while the connection between Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer in South and Central Germany is well known.⁶⁰ As for the North, it is impossible to write the Münsterites off as totally unrelated to the larger Anabaptist movement. Münster played an important part in restarting and spreading the Melchiorite movement.⁶¹ Menno Simons and his followers came out of that movement. These perceived connections of various Anabaptist groups with political, social conflicts of the period seem at least to legitimate the question whether persecution was entirely unprovoked. A wholistic, historical approach could provide a better understanding of the reasons for persecution without accepting however—and this I want to make clear—their contemporary or twentieth century justification.

The Case of Balthasar Hubmaier and Jacob Hutter

In an age in which governing authorities assumed, for the most part, that a common religious belief system provided the bonding for a proper functioning of society and in which secular and

⁵⁸Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 61, 92, 166-7.

⁵⁹Hui, "Vom Bauernaufstand zur Täuferbewegung," 113-144.

⁶⁰Werner O. Packull, "Thomas Müntzer und das Hutsche Täuferum," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* XLVI (1989): 30-42. See also Stayer, "The Anti-Materialist Piety of Thomas Müntzer and Its Anabaptist Expression" in *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 107 ff.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 123 ff.

religious authorities claimed to cooperate for the "common good," Anabaptist iconoclasm, anticlericalism, refusal of the oath, rejection of arms and separation from the larger society seemed to threaten the very foundation of law and order. To argue that the Anabaptists were far ahead of their time on separation of state and church is an anachronism. Evidence suggests that, wrongly or rightly, the authorities felt threatened by the Anabaptists. This perception changed when the relative numerical weakness of the Anabaptists was recognized and/or their track record proved otherwise.

The examples of two Anabaptist leaders, Balthasar Hubmaier and Jacob Hutter, both celebrated in Anabaptist history as innocent martyrs for their faith, may serve to illustrate the historical context in which their persecution and execution took place. Balthasar Hubmaier, a doctor of theology, had been in conflict with authorities even prior to his involvement with the Reformation and Anabaptism. As a popular preacher in Regensburg he helped to unleash an anti-Semitic movement that led to the burning of the synagogue and the expulsion of Jews from that city. Hubmaier became the custodian of a shrine dedicated to Mary and a chapel built on the ashes of the former synagogue.⁶² With the coming of the Reformation, Hubmaier joined first the Lutherans, then the Zwinglians and finally the Anabaptists. As main reformer of the city of Waldshut, a Hapsburg possession on the Upper Rhine, Hubmaier, in 1524-25, sponsored the city's alliance with the rebellious peasants against the bishop of the diocese as well as against the city's secular overlord, Ferdinand I of Hapsburg. To this end, Hubmaier encouraged the enlistment of Swiss volunteers. The Swiss, it must be remembered, had traditionally been enemies of the Hapsburgs. At the same time, with the help of the local government, Hubmaier introduced in Waldshut a form of magisterial Anabaptism that included mass baptisms.⁶³ After the collapse of the rebellion Hubmaier fled first to Zurich, then to Nicolsburg in

⁶²On Hubmaier in Regensburg see chas. 10 and 11 of Heiko Obermann, *The Roots of Antisemitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. James Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁶³See Stayer on Hubmaier in Waldshut, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 63-72.

Moravia, another territory under Ferdinand's nominal lordship. Here he encouraged the lords of Liechtenstein to initiate the religious transformation of the city of Nicolsburg against the express orders and wishes of Ferdinand.⁶⁴

Considering the above record, it should not be surprising that Hubmaier was charged with both heresy and sedition by Ferdinand. Not even the powerful lords of Liechtenstein could save him from such charges. Hubmaier was burned at the stake on March 10, 1528 in Vienna.⁶⁵ His torturous career from populist priest to Anabaptist martyr illustrates the intertwined nature of religious and political protest. It is difficult, therefore, to ascribe his martyrdom to purely religious causes, although both Hubmaier and his clerical adversaries made that case for opposite reasons.

The case of Jacob Hutter is worthy of consideration because he figures prominently in the last lecture. Unfortunately the once existing court records of his trial are no longer extant. However, it is clear that the charges against him were not purely religious. He stood accused of rebellion against both spiritual and secular authority: he had broken currency regulations, moved money and persons out of the Tyrol, and insulted Ferdinand I as a "blood hound."⁶⁶ Not clear is whether his role in Michael Gaismair's rebellion was raised during the trial. Surviving evidence implies that the prosecution sought information dating back ten years, that is, to 1526, and it seems more than coincidence that Hutter left the Puster Valley in 1526 and did not resurface until 1528-29. As noted in my earlier lecture, Hutter had in all probability been an armed retainer in Gaismair's army.⁶⁷ In any case, unless the last records of his

⁶⁴See below pp.43-44.

⁶⁵The best biography on Hubmaier is still that of Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, ed. and trans. W.R. Estep (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1978).

⁶⁶A detailed biography of Hutter will appear with the publication of my larger manuscript.

⁶⁷See Stella, "Hutterite Influences on Nonconformist Conventicles, 195 ff. Stella notes that there were "a number of Baptizers" in Gaismair's camp who joined forces with the Swiss from Val Monastro in Grisons in 1528. Hutter, he suggests, may have been among them (197).

trial surface, we must rely almost entirely on internal evidence, that is, on the account provided by *The Chronicle*, about Hutter's martyrdom. According to that account, Hutter suffered incredible tortures and cruelties before being burned at the stake in Innsbruck. Among other things, he was placed into ice-cold water, beaten with rods, set on fire after alcohol had been poured into his wounds and paraded into the church as an object of public scorn. These facts of the case as told in *The Chronicle*⁶⁸ are, no doubt, true and nothing can excuse the cruelty of Hutter's tormentors whose behaviour was excessive even by sixteenth-century standards. But the point here is that even some of Hutter's former allies believed that he had acted provocatively toward the authorities while still in Moravia. According to Gabriel Ascherham, the leader of a rival Anabaptist community, Hutter did not perish for the sake of the Gospel, but on account of his "insults, scoldings and slanderings" against Ferdinand whom, in a letter to the governor of Moravia, Hutter denounced as a "bloodhound and murderer!" Hutter's insults and ragings, according to Ascherham, had created problems for all the Anabaptists and their protectors in Moravia. Without specifying details, Ascherham alleged that others "had to pay the price" while Hutter fled the country back to the Tyrol where he was apprehended and executed. As will be noted in our last lecture Ascherham was hardly an objective witness. His parting of ways with Hutter during the schism of 1533 left such bitter feelings that even the reports of Hutter's cruel death did not soften his view. He wrote: "People can say and sing what they like about Jacob Hutter, I knew him well and say he was an evil man. Even though he permitted himself to be boiled [simmered] and roasted, I cannot say anything favourable about him because he did not pass the test in this country."⁶⁹

If, then, a contemporary Anabaptist leader felt so negatively about Hutter and could claim that he had provoked some of the

⁶⁸*The Chronicle*, 145.

⁶⁹Stayer translated the surviving "Fragment of the Lost Chronicle of Gabriel Ascherham" in *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 168-71.

persecution, is it any wonder that Ferdinand, who was not blessed with any self-doubt, felt justified in his treatment of Hutter? It does not follow, of course, that Ferdinand's response was justified even in sixteenth-century terms. Other rulers, such as Philip of Hesse, exhibited more tolerant attitudes and refused to put any Anabaptists to death in their territories. Indeed, a case can be made that Ferdinand's response to the Anabaptists in the Tyrol violated the *Territorial Order* [*Landesordnung*]. Irrespective of any assumed Anabaptist provocation and on purely historical grounds, it is possible to argue that the official response transgressed the laws of the land. In other words, even from a sixteenth-century legal perspective, the measures, procedures and treatment were unjust. It is to these general measures and procedures that I now turn.

Official Responses

As noted earlier, the Tyrol produced a great number of Anabaptist martyrs, perhaps more than any other German-speaking territory. The three hundred or so known executions exceed at least tenfold the known numbers for neighbouring Switzerland.⁷⁰ The rigorous campaign of suppression in the Tyrol eventually led to the extinction of Anabaptism in that territory. The Tyrol was destined to become a stronghold of the Counter-reformation. Anabaptism was to be expunged from the memory of the populace and, until recently, from the history of the territory.

Perceptions at Ferdinand's Court

The dubious claim to fame of having "smothered the . . . Tyrolean Anabaptist movement in its own blood"⁷¹ must go to Ferdinand I (1503-1564). Ferdinand came into possession of the Austrian territories and the Tyrol in 1521. Barely twenty years of

⁷⁰Cf., n.17.

⁷¹I am borrowing this phrase from an unpublished essay by Wolfgang Lassmann, "Exkurs: Zur Täuferpolitik Ferdinand I" (unpublished paper, University of Vienna), 102ff; for an overview of Ferdinand's policy see also Karl Kuppelwieser, "Die Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal" (dissertation, Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, 1949), esp. "Der Kampf Gegen das Täuferum," 353ff.

age, he was unfamiliar with the language or customs of his subjects. Educated in the Spanish tradition he brought to his new role exaggerated notions of what constituted good government. In matters of religion he proved “an honest fanatic” without any virtues of self-doubt. As a Hapsburg he championed a united Christendom and considered it part of his God-given duty to eliminate “heresy” from his territories. To this end, Ferdinand issued no fewer than eleven mandates between August 20, 1527 and April 1534.⁷² These decrees refer to Anabaptism as a “seditious, pernicious, heretical, damned sect and heresy,⁷³” against which Ferdinand felt it necessary to respond with a bloody campaign of suppression.

Balthasar Hubmaier was one of the first victims of Ferdinand’s measures. In keeping with perceptions at the court, the charge of heresy and sedition against Hubmaier was extended to the Anabaptists collectively. After all, was not Hubmaier the leading Anabaptist theologian? Had he not supported rebellion in Waldshut, and did not the appearance of Anabaptism in the wake of the Gaismaier uprising provide proof that Anabaptists continued the rebellion in another form? Did they not desire to live without government and did they not work toward the overthrow of the existing one?⁷⁴ To Ferdinand and his advisors the answers to these questions seemed obvious, and measures were taken accordingly. Every means was mobilized to expedite the crushing of the “damned, pernicious” sect.

Measures Taken

Ferdinand’s measures against the Anabaptists included, among other things, the use of children as hostages in flushing out fugitive parents, surveillance of and raids on suspected hide-outs or meeting

⁷²Lassmann, “Exkursus: Zur Täuferpolitik Ferdinand I,” 104.

⁷³Mecenseffy, *QGT*, XI: *Oesterreich*, I, 4,9: “verfürisch, kätzerisch secten;” 100: “verdambten Ketzereyen;” similarly *QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 39.

⁷⁴See mandate of August 20, 1527, *QGT*, XI: *Oesterreich*, I, 3-12. It should be noted that Hans Schiemer, who died before Hubmaier, was also charged with insurrection.

places, the gutting of meeting places or places of shelter as stark reminders to would-be sympathizers.⁷⁵ The role of the church in all this was to function as an intelligence gathering agency. Priests were expected to keep lists of persons slack in church attendance and to report suspected Anabaptists and their sympathizers. Informers were hired and payments promised to those who betrayed or captured Anabaptists. Small fortunes of thirty, forty, yes, up to one hundred gulden—twice the amount a labourer could hope to save in a lifetime—were offered for information leading to the arrest of Anabaptist leaders. In May 1533, for instance, spies were hired to infiltrate the movement led by Jacob Hutter.⁷⁶ So secret was the mission that four undercover agents remained unaware of each other's identity. Among the agents was a mere sixteen year-old, who had been pressed into service with threats and promises while he was in prison. Among the tasks assigned to him was the betrayal of his own father who had gone into hiding.⁷⁷ It became a crime to show sympathies, to provide food and shelter or to have any commercial dealings with the heretics. Citizens who refused to cooperate with government policy were threatened with fines, imprisonment and torture.

Since the end justified the means, as far as Ferdinand and his advisors were concerned, informers were permitted to accept adult baptism in order to gain the confidence of the leaders who performed the baptisms. Some of the undercover operations produced results worthy of modern spy novels. Peter Lantz [Lanz], one of the government agents in the district of St. Michelsburg, played the game so well that the authorities came to distrust him. He provided quarters for the Anabaptist leader, Hans Amon, and even gained the release of Mrs. Amon from prison, all without knowledge of the local magistrate. When called to task, Lantz explained his apparent double dealings as part of an elaborate scheme to gain the confi-

⁷⁵*QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 331, 383-388. See also decree of Aug. 20, 1533. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 143ff.

⁷⁶The suggestion to use spies was made as early as December 1529 by the governor [*Hauptmann*] of Rattenberg, Philipp von Liechtenstein. *QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 320-321.

⁷⁷*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 118, 274.

dence of the Anabaptist leadership. His real motive, however, appears to have been personal greed. Anabaptist money was as welcome to him as that of the government and so he burnt the candle on both ends. The Anabaptists, not being stupid either, had taken advantage of Lanntz's love for material gain. They bought his hospitality and escaped arrest.⁷⁸

If arrested, the Anabaptists could expect to feel the full force of Ferdinand's wrath, mitigated only by the whims of his local representatives. Fortunately for the Anabaptists, some of the local magistrates tended to be less zealous than their sovereign.⁷⁹ Some were outright sympathetic to their cause, at least during the early stages. Normally the interrogations after arrest involved torture. Repeated torture left more than one steadfast victim broken in body. A gruesome example of the effects of such trial procedures comes from the later period. The Hutterite missionar, Hans Pürchner, was left unable to walk, stand, kneel, lift his arms or feed himself because of torture.⁸⁰ On the day of his execution he had to be tied to a log in order to remain upright for the sentence of beheading!

The sentences could range from fines, penances, floggings and condemnation to be galley slaves to the death penalty by drowning, beheading or burning. Floggings were generally reserved for minors or female prisoners considered pliable. In the case of women a macabre code of chivalry was upheld—they were to be beaten only in “appropriate places!” At least one local magistrate found the task of flogging women revolting and refused to carry out the sentence.⁸¹ Somewhat perverse seems also the official right-to-life

⁷⁸Kuppelwieser, “Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal,” 181; Lanntz rented extensive land [*Lehen*] from Balthasar Mairhofer, one of the Anabaptists wanted. Prast, “Die Vier Pustertaler Herrschaften,” 175ff.

⁷⁹The following seemed lenient or even sympathetic to the Anabaptists: Bartlme Angst, Richter of Rattenberg; Jacob Hupher, Stadt and Landrichter of Bozen and Gries; Hans and Adam Prew, Richter of Gufidaun; Simon Permantin, the Pfleger of Rodeneck.

⁸⁰Packull, “Trial and Martyrdom of Hans Pürchner,” 18-24.

⁸¹The “Züchtiger” of Meran refused to flog four women arrested on April 4, 1533. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 110, 113. He had been instructed by Ferdinand's court to beat them with rods in “appropriate places [*gepurlichen*”

policy extended to the unborn fetus. This policy meant that the death sentence against pregnant Anabaptist women was postponed until they had given birth.⁸² Recanters were subjected to humiliating, public penance. In some cases such penance included the wearing of special "garments of shame" [*Schandkleider*]. Anabaptist leaders who had baptized others could not save themselves even by recantation. The fortunate ones had the sentence commuted from burning to the less painful and more honourable death by beheading.⁸³ Ordinary Anabaptist members who were spared because of recantation but became *Relapsi* were normally executed without further trial.

When public executions, particularly during the early period, stirred the sympathies of spectators and directed ill will toward the authorities, the government changed customary procedures. The rights of the accused were severely curtailed. Jurors were coerced to meet behind closed doors [*Stillrecht*]. Their contact with the accused was kept to a minimum and the accused deprived of a proper hearing and defense. In order to stifle last-minute public declarations by the victim, possibly embarrassing to the authorities, time and place of execution were to be kept confidential. In other words, because the executions created negative publicity, they were moved out of the public eye and away from a "bad press!" Since reading specific charges against the accused proved counter-productive, this practice was discontinued. Instead, judges were encouraged to read general passages from government mandates about the evil nature of Anabaptism. If spectators and sympathizers did gather to witness the execution, they were kept far enough back

orten].” Two 16 or 17 year-old boys were beaten with rods in Brixen. Kuppelwieser, "Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal," 192.

⁸²As early as May 1525, Margaret Köblin was given this treatment. *QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 134-136; for others see 193, 214. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 110, 143. It should be noted that the Anabaptists in Münster gave the same treatment to traitors in their group.

⁸³On one occasion in 1532 the Anabaptists were to be burned collectively along with their meeting place. All this was to happen with little noise, lest it draw spectators who would take offence at the execution. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 86-87.

so as not to hear or understand the victims' last words.⁸⁴ In short, the government found it necessary to pervert legal process as outlined in its own *Territorial Order*. Ferdinand's campaign of suppression broke established customs and the law of the land. In the end only three options were left to the hunted heretics: a martyr's death; recantation, humiliating penance and fines; or flight abroad.

One of the nastier aspects of the policy of suppression was that it made the victims pay for their own prosecution and execution. The campaign to eradicate the Anabaptists proved expensive. In June 1535, for instance, the councilors of the bishop of Brixen complained to Ferdinand's court in Innsbruck that they had expended within a short period of time six hundred gulden in the jurisdiction of St. Michelsburg alone.⁸⁵ To cover such costs, the properties of the Anabaptists were confiscated and local stewards appointed to manage them.⁸⁶ The temptation for personal enrichment at the expense of the hunted heretics proved irresistible for some local administrators. Rumours soon spread that Anabaptists were being persecuted because local officials found this a lucrative way to enhance their own material interests. The government found it necessary to decree that all confiscated property, minus the court expenses, should be returned to the rightful heirs.⁸⁷

The rightful heirs, alas, were more often than not orphaned or, in cases of Anabaptists who had fled, abandoned children. Arrests or flights in Kitzbühl, for example, had left fifty children abandoned or orphaned.⁸⁸ If relatives or friends proved unable, afraid or unwilling to take in and feed the extra mouths, the abandoned minors were left to their own devices, begging in the streets. At

⁸⁴Kuppelwieser, "Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal," 176.

⁸⁵*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 272. Cf., Prast, "Vier Pustertaler Herrschaften," 198ff.

⁸⁶At times the property could be extensive. Balthasar Mairhofer of Niedervintl was rumoured to be worth 10,000 gulden. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 274.

⁸⁷Kuppelwieser, "Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal," 370.

⁸⁸*QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 257.

times children were placed in the care of poor-houses [*Spitalpflege*]; others became wardens of the stewards appointed to look after the property left behind by the parents. Some were farmed out to foster parents who received payments from the confiscated property.⁸⁹ Disputes between local administrators and the government in Innsbruck over costs and what to do with the Anabaptist properties left the children in limbo, without resource or protection and totally at the mercy of their wardens or foster parents.⁹⁰ Older children (ages ten to sixteen), who had imbibed the heresies of their parents, were at times interned on rations of bread and water and subjected to daily “discipline,” that is, floggings in the hope that such treatment would lead to changes in religious outlook.⁹¹ Since they were not yet baptized, they could be released upon progress in their religious rehabilitation.

Given the measures outlined above, it should not be surprising that the Anabaptists were eventually eradicated or driven from the Tyrol. What is surprising is how long they survived and that they survived at all.

Struggling to Survive

Anabaptist Countermeasures

First a further word on the fate of Anabaptist children. To their credit the Anabaptists made every attempt to retrieve the abandoned children, even though such missions were wrought with great personal danger to those who carried them out. For such missions, physically strong brethren were chosen to gather the children and lead them to the Anabaptist communities in Moravia. In spite of government vigilance and against great odds, many children were

⁸⁹An example were the seven children of Heinrich Goldschmied of Sterzing. A warden was appointed over the property, worth 400 gulden. Some citizens offered to look after the children if they were given payment in the form of Goldschmied's mobile property. The warden was instructed to see if these persons would not take the children without any payment! *Ibid.*, 72-88.

⁹⁰Widows were left with children, without means of support while Ferdinand and the local magistrates squabbled over the property of the husband. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 114-115.

⁹¹See government instructions of December 13, 1532. *Ibid.*, 84ff.

thus transported safely via an underground network to Moravia. The route usually led south via the Brenner Pass down the Wipp Valley to the Inn and by boat downstream. Before his arrest, one sturdy blacksmith carried fifteen children across the Brenner Pass.⁹² Brethren were waiting for them on the other side of the mountain range to facilitate transport down the Inn. It is beyond my comprehension that some twentieth-century Austrian scholars could still refer to these Anabaptist missions as “kidnapping!”⁹³ Surely such an interpretation reflects an uncritical extension of a totally one-sided governmental point of view into modern history. As for the adults, their survival depended on the goodwill of relatives, friends and the local population. Ferdinand’s vicious measures, however, created difficulties for sympathizers, and consequently drove the Anabaptists underground into a fugitive existence in inaccessible regions and to the fringes of Tyrolese society. In their struggle to survive, the Anabaptists developed defensive techniques and organizational habits that left their mark on the nature and organization of their community.

Against the official alliance of state and established religion, the Anabaptists in the Tyrol developed their own self-regulated and self-governed, highly disciplined, close-knit brotherhood. Members were encouraged not to divulge the names of their fellow believers or meeting places. As a precautionary measure, leaders kept their movements and destinations confidential. They travelled at night, hid in woods or pastures during the day. A network of most trusted members was set up to organize larger gatherings. Meetings initially held in hamlets, villages or towns, were shifted to outlying farmsteads, forests, caves and other less accessible terrain.⁹⁴ Rather astutely, the Anabaptists also learned to take advantage of

⁹²Confession of Rueprecht Hueber from Getzenberg. *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 183. Another, who had accompanied children to Moravia, was Hans Maurer, 195.

⁹³Kuppelwieser refers to the collection of 23 such children in 1533 as “regelrechte Kinderentführung!” “Wiedertäufer im Eisacktal,” 198.

⁹⁴*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 323.

so-called “wind-still zones,”⁹⁵ border areas between jurisdictional and administrative districts. They knew how to take advantage of local rivalries and the uncooperative attitude between district magistrates. A case in point was the rivalry between the prince bishop of Brixen and Ferdinand.

Given their limited resources, the Anabaptists proved capable organizers. They overcame formidable logistics in order to hold congregational meetings and later to facilitate the exodus of several hundred persons to Moravia. Some congregational gatherings could last several days. Attendance ranged from sixty to one hundred and fifty persons. Local leaders, designated as stewards in charge of a common fund, assumed responsibility for provisions. Able-bodied brethren were chosen as assistants to procure and transport the necessary supplies to the designated site.⁹⁶ Supplies for one occasion included fifty loaves of bread, half a bushel of nuts, two oxen, a cow and at least one jug of wine. The oxen and cow were herded to the site, the former slaughtered to feed those present and the cow presumably used to provide milk.⁹⁷ Such an experience of living together for several days foreshadowed the life in shared community of goods later practised in Moravia.

When persecution in the Tyrol made congregational life increasingly untenable, an underground railroad was set up to facilitate the exodus to Moravia. At strategic points local brethren were provided with funds to support the refugees.⁹⁸ The names of Anabaptist-friendly innkeepers and boatmen were noted and passed on. The Anabaptists traveled in smaller groups led by veteran guides. A variety of routes and mountain passes were used. Perhaps the most common and shortest route was across the Brenner Pass into the Inn Valley. Among the stopovers down the Inn were a number of Bavarian breweries.⁹⁹

⁹⁵I am using the term from a paper by Dr. Noflatzer to be published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

⁹⁶*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 71, 159.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 23, 71, 169, 198-9.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 171.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 163.

All in all, the system functioned with amazing efficiency. Between 1528 and 1533, in four years, an estimated four to six hundred must have fled the Southern Tyrol through this underground network. Unfortunately not all succeeded in their escape to Moravia.

Humanizing the Story

The story of Erhart Urscher, whose family was subjected to the trauma of flight, may serve to humanize the tragic dimensions of persecution. Urscher's involvement in the radical, religious cause, like that of other Anabaptists, appears to reach back to the peasant uprising. He and others had raided the granary of a well-to-do proprietor. The grain was subsequently restored to its owner. Urscher joined the Anabaptists.¹⁰⁰ At the time of their arrest in 1532-33, he and his wife were considered *Relapsi*. During a previous imprisonment the Urschers allegedly pledged [*Urgicht*] that they would henceforth shun Anabaptism.¹⁰¹ Yet in the spring of 1532, Urscher contributed the sizable sum of two hundred gulden to the Anabaptist treasury and, in the summer of that year, he sheltered two fugitives in his hayloft.¹⁰² When these guests were subsequently arrested, Urscher and his wife fled in panic, leaving their six children behind. The local magistrate placed the children with a warden while the hunt began for the parents. The oldest child, twelve year-old Valentin, was sent by the warden to shepherd livestock in the mountain pastures. At the trial of his parents a few months later Valentin recounted that he and his siblings had been mistreated and gone hungry at the warden's house.¹⁰³

The father, meanwhile, had found shelter for his pregnant wife at a remote inn. He then made plans to fetch his children, visiting his eldest in the mountain pastures and revealing the plan to him. One evening under cover of darkness, the father returned with three other men to pick up the children. The men carried the little ones,

¹⁰⁰See Urscher's confession. *Ibid.*, 90-93. The victim of this action was Wosstl Sallmann.

¹⁰¹They had been imprisoned earlier at Bozen. *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰²The fugitives were Valtein Felln and Oswald Spiess.

¹⁰³*QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 95-96, 104-105.

Valentin ran alongside them, thus making good their escape. The reunited family spent the next three months hiding in an isolated mountain hut. Attempts to find more suitable accommodations failed. Finally, tired of the fugitive existence and believing rumours of a general amnesty, Urscher returned home in order to solicit the intercession of his neighbours and friends with the authorities.¹⁰⁴ Recognized by the local priest he was promptly arrested. Although Urscher and his wife insisted that they had never objugated the true faith and were not ready to do so now, they were treated as *Relapsi*. Their fate was therefore a foregone conclusion. Urscher showed no regret and assured the judge that he would rather die “eight deaths” than deny his faith. As a concession to his friends and well-wishers, Urscher was sentenced to die by the sword rather than by fire. The surviving documents say nothing about the fate of his wife or children.¹⁰⁵

During the interrogations Urscher revealed his previous whereabouts and hiding places. It says something about the thoroughness of the government investigation that the innkeeper, who had provided temporary shelter and employ for Urscher, was also hauled into court. His examination revealed that several Anabaptist leaders, including Jacob Hutter and Hans Amon, had been his guests.¹⁰⁶ The innkeeper pleaded ignorance about the religious affiliations of his guests! He was fortunate enough to escape with a short prison term and a monetary fine.

Conclusion

These then were the conditions under which the Tyrolean Anabaptists sought to survive. Attempts at maintaining any kind of congregational life under such conditions had to be abandoned. By the 1540s, Anabaptist activity in the valleys of the Tyrol had declined, but martyr fires continued to flicker sporadically for

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 97-98, 104-105.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 135.

¹⁰⁶The inn was near the Härschner. Its owner was Ulrich Peckelhaube. Ibid., 98-100.

another twenty years. Eventually suppression triumphed. The victims were either dead, in exile or muted by fear.

While it is the historian's task to seek an understanding of the persecution in the broadest historical context, including the persecutor's point of view, it is not his duty to remain neutral or refrain from moral judgment. The fact remains that Ferdinand and his advisors broke the customs and laws of the Tyrol. Their response to a perceived Anabaptist threat went far beyond what was warranted even in the sixteenth-century context.

One further point needs to be made in this lecture. The Anabaptist experience in the Tyrol could cast doubt on the hallowed belief that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church." If Anabaptism represented the true church, then fire and blood drove the true church from the Tyrol. Ferdinand's measures proved terribly effective!

But the story of Tyrolean Anabaptism is incomplete without reference to the exiles who regrouped and built new communities in Moravia; communities whose "golden years" were just beginning as Anabaptism in the Tyrol was being snuffed out.

Somehow, strangely, the martyrs' seed found new soil from which to sprout and the martyrs of the Tyrol were not forgotten.

Lecture Three

Finding the Promised Land — Sixteenth-Century Moravia

Introduction

Throughout their history the Anabaptists and their descendants, Mennonites and Hutterites, have been in search of land where they might practise their faith in freedom and in community with like-minded brothers and sisters. This search began almost immediately as the result of persecution and has lasted into our day. For many sixteenth-century Anabaptists, Moravia seemed to be the promised land.¹⁰⁷ Beginning in 1527 many left their home territories for Moravia which promised a good measure of religious freedom, economic opportunity and safety. They came from Switzerland, the Rhineland, the Empire, Hesse, Swabia, Franconia, Bavaria, Upper and Lower Austria, the Tyrol and Silesia. In the North the search for a safe and hospitable place focused for a while on the city of Münster. The destruction of the “new Jerusalem” and its accompanying aberrations led Menno Simons and his followers to turn East and to begin a trek that would eventually bring Mennonites to Poland, Prussia and Russia.

¹⁰⁷Christoph Fischer, an early seventeenth-century Jesuit adversary of the Hutterites, wrote that missionaries enticed converts to emigrate with the slogan, “Come to us in Moravia, to the promised land that is ours, and that God has given us. There you and your children don’t have to suffer poverty and work hard as you do here. There you will certainly have food, clothing and shelter; your children will have training and schooling. You won’t have to worry about anything. You women when you’re old won’t have anything to do but spin to avoid boredom and sit still. You men, you won’t have to work hard anymore, only what you’re able to do and as much as you want to.” Cited by Stayer in *The German Peasant’s War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 148.

Older readings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite and Hutterite story tended to pay insufficient attention to the host societies that offered the religious refugees new opportunities, protection and a niche in its economic culture. It was tempting to treat the Anabaptists and their descendants as if they constituted autonomous communities or closed systems with little or no relationship to the host society. Such an approach seemed warranted by Anabaptist self-perceptions of separateness and their own unique emphasis on independent community. Much could be said for the internalist approach to Anabaptist history, particularly in light of the well-known defamations of the traditional historiography shaped by their sixteenth-century Catholic or Protestant opponents.¹⁰⁸ However, a rereading of Anabaptist history in the 1990s can afford greater attention to the ambivalent interdependence of Anabaptist communities and their host societies. The host societies must be part of the historical context in which we seek to understand the Anabaptist experience. A purely internalist point of view runs the risk of ignoring important factors that helped shape that experience, threatened or secured its survival.¹⁰⁹ The founding of the new Anabaptist communities in sixteenth-century Moravia must be understood against the background of the conditions that prevailed in that country.

Founding New Communities

Origins in the Nicosburg Schism

One of the startling facts about the Anabaptist presence in sixteenth-century Moravia was its diversity, evident from the beginning. Jarold Zeman, the best informed scholar on Moravian Anabaptism, documented no fewer than ten different Anabaptist groups. These did not include the "spiritualizing Anabaptists." He

¹⁰⁸An example of good internal history and what it can contribute is that of Leonard Gross, *The Golden Years of the Hutterites* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁹Fr. Hruby, *Die Wiedertäufer in Mähren* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1935), and Jarold Zeman, *The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia: A Study of Origin and Contacts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969) represent good attempts at utilizing external sources.

described the “basic trend within Moravian Anabaptism” as one of “splintering” and observed that most splintering occurred during the founding years.¹¹⁰ Of the many groups and communities ultimately only the Hutterites survived. They have understandably received most of the attention. Others, the Austerlitz Brethren, the Gabrielites, the Philipites, the Swiss groups, the followers of Pilgram Marpeck, not to mention the spiritualizers, have received considerably less attention.¹¹¹ Of these groups, the Austerlitz Brethren, the Gabrielites and the Philipites were the first to form settled communities holding all things in common. The Hutterites emerged belatedly and only as a result of several schisms. That story is left for the last lecture.

According to *The Chronicle* the Brethren at Austerlitz had a reputation of living “as one heart, mind and soul, each caring faithfully for the other.” So great was their reputation that other Anabaptists, who were “seeking a more perfect life,” flocked to Austerlitz.¹¹² The original group had come out of disagreements between Anabaptists in Nicolsburg. The tensions feeding this Nicolsburg schism can be traced back to quarrels in early 1527 between Balthasar Hubmaier, a doctor of theology, and Hans Hut, a self-taught jack-of-all-trades and former follower of Thomas Müntzer. At issue was not Hut’s pacifism versus Hubmaier’s defense of the sword, as Hutterite chroniclers would subsequently have it,¹¹³ but rather, as James Stayer put it, Hubmaier’s attempt

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 246-247, n.25.

¹¹¹The most recent treatment of Moravian Anabaptism is that by James Stayer under the provocative title, “Anabaptist Moravia, 1526-1622: Communitarian Christianity in One Country,” chapter 7 in his new book, *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 139ff.

¹¹²*The Chronicle*, 84-85.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 80-81. See James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972), 141 ff.; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1977), 99 ff; also “Hut, Hans,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

at instituting a "magisterial Anabaptism" in Nicolsburg.¹¹⁴ Hut's apocalyptic message seemed at cross-purposes with Hubmaier's intentions. The volatile influence of Hut's message, particularly popular among uprooted refugees flocking to Nicolsburg, threatened the social peace of the city and jeopardized Hubmaier's attempt at reforming the entire community with the cooperation of its local magistrates, the lords of Liechtenstein. It seems that Hut held a rather dim view of existing structures and expected a cataclysmic, divine intervention involving the Turks as God's rod of judgment. The effect of such a message, according to Hubmaier, was that it encouraged people to neglect their social responsibilities, their homes, property and even kin. Such persons who arrived in increasing numbers in Nicolsburg were creating welfare problems.

Although Hubmaier and Hut were both removed from centre stage in 1527,¹¹⁵ tension between the local reform party which was led by Hubmaier's successor, Hans [Johannes] Spittelmaier, and the refugees, led by one-eyed Jacob Widemann, polarized the situation.¹¹⁶ Concerned with the unity of the community, the local reform party continued the policy of magisterial reformation in cooperation with the lords of Liechtenstein. The "pilgrims, strangers and guests" formed a separate conventicle. Led by Widemann, the refugees introduced a self-administered welfare program, held separate house-meetings and refused to attend the local parish church.¹¹⁷ The leader of the local reform party, Hans Spittelmaier, felt it necessary to warn openly against the schismatics, deriding them as "little group makers and staff bearers" [*Heüffler und Stäbler*].¹¹⁸ The reference to them as staff bearers

¹¹⁴Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 140 ff.

¹¹⁵The lords of Liechtenstein appear to have surrendered Hubmaier in July, 1527. Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 191, n.64.

¹¹⁶*The Chronicle*, 80-81, from its Huttero-centric perspective, makes Hans Spittelmaier the one to "break away."

¹¹⁷Beck, *Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer*, 72. "Haben in den Häusern hin und wider versammlung gehalten, die Pilgram, Gäst und Fremdling aus andern Ländern aufgenommen, die Gemeinschaft angenommen."

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 72; *The Chronicle*, 80.

has usually been seen as evidence that they had come under the influence of the Schleithem Articles and assumed a non-resistance stance. This view seems supported by their refusal to pay taxes earmarked for war with the Turks, an issue that further polarized the two camps.¹¹⁹

Reestablishing at Austerlitz

After fruitless attempts to mediate the dispute between the two groups, the lords of Liechtenstein ordered the schismatics to leave Nicolsburg. In March 1528 a group of about two hundred, not numbering children, left the city and “because of their immediate need and distress” decided to pool all their resources in a common treasury. The same emergency situation seems to have facilitated the organization of a clear leadership structure. Two “servants of temporal affairs,” with an assistant each, were appointed. Widemann assumed or retained overall authority as “servant of the Word.”¹²⁰ Thus was born the first autonomous Anabaptist congregation practising community of goods in Moravia. The driving force behind this experiment appears to have been the emergency situation and the fraternal bonding between the refugees. The New Testament provided the apostolic model.¹²¹

Since disagreements on property, on taking oaths and on the payment of taxes surfaced later in this community, it would be

¹¹⁹Beck, *Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer*, 50-51. Stayer writes, “Criticism arose among the refugees based on the Schleithem Articles’ rule that Anabaptists should not employ arms under any circumstances whatever.” *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 141. But the reference to staffbearers in the context of Hut’s legacy could have a different meaning. It could simply mean refusal to resist the Turk who was seen as God’s punishment. It could also mean that they rejected the local magistrates’ policing power over them.

¹²⁰I am using the same designations used by the translators of *The Chronicle*: servant of the Word = *Vorsteher* or *Diener des Worts*; servant of temporal affairs = *Diener der Notdurft*; instead of manager for *Haushalter*, I prefer assistants in temporal affairs.

¹²¹It cannot be precluded that, if this group was influenced by the Schleithem Articles, it was also familiar with the oldest Anabaptist church order associated with the Articles. I dealt with the dating and origins of that order in my larger manuscript.

wrong to retroactively read back a fully developed and consistent position on either of these issues as the principal cause for the exodus from Nicolsburg. Motives were mixed; community of goods appears to have been the effect rather than the cause of division and exodus.

Thanks to the kind reception extended to them by the lords of Austerlitz, the newcomers were able to reestablish themselves quickly, moving from the land first designated for them into town. Special concessions included a six-year rent exemption, building supplies with permission to locate near the potter's market of the town, and encouragement to increase their numbers.¹²² The lords told the brethren that they were willing to settle a thousand of them! Mindful of friends and relatives left behind under persecution, the new settlers sponsored missions to spread the tidings of their good fortune at Austerlitz. Within a short time the number of brethren at Austerlitz had tripled to six hundred adults.¹²³ It became necessary to divide the community into three groups under respective leaders each. Jacob Widemann retained overall supervision.

News that at Austerlitz "God had gathered a people in his name" must have reached the Southern Tyrol by 1529. It was during that year, presumably after the martyrdom of Blaurock, that Jacob Hutter arrived in Austerlitz to investigate the "more perfect life." He was deeply impressed by what he saw and by what he heard from the community's leaders and reported enthusiastically upon returning to the Tyrol about . . .

the community of saints he had seen and experienced at Austerlitz. He told how, in the name of them all, [the Anabaptists in Southern Tyrol] had united with those at Austerlitz in peace and unity of soul and spirit and how they had sent him on his way home to Tyrol in peace.¹²⁴

From this time on, Austerlitz provided a place of refuge for hunted Tyrolese as well as an organizational model worth imitating.

¹²²The lords were the Kaunitz [Kounice] brothers, Jan, Vaclav, Peter and Oldrich. *The Chronicle*, 81-82, n.2.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p.82: ". . . their zeal and divine grace moved them to send brothers out to other countries, especially the Tyrol."

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 84-85.

Evidence suggests that Hutter began to organize the Anabaptists in the Tyrol as much as possible according to the teachings, practices and order he had witnessed in Austerlitz. A common treasury was introduced, servants of temporal affairs were appointed and a decision was made to dispatch the first group of refugees to Austerlitz. The leader of the group was Jörg Zaunring, described in government search warrants as of "medium height, wearing a light brown coat, brown trousers, a rough hat, no beard and having a high pitched voice [*ain klaine red*]." ¹²⁵ But despite government warrants Zaunring and his band managed to make their way to a fraternal reception in Austerlitz during the early summer of 1530.

Unfortunately the fraternal feelings lasted only a few months. In January 1531 a major schism rocked the community. The details of that story will be provided in the last lecture. A point to be reiterated here is that the Austerlitz Brethren and Hutterites were not the only Anabaptist communities in Moravia. From 1528-29 on, communities were rapidly growing under the leadership of Gabriel Ascherham and Philip Plener at Rossitz and at Auspitz. There were also settlements of Swiss. By 1533 an estimated four thousand Anabaptists had made the pilgrimage to the promised land.

In the rest of this lecture I want to turn to the conditions that made Moravia so attractive to the Anabaptist fugitives.

Conditions in Moravia

Political Factors

It is a curious but not well researched observation that the promised land for religious dissenters, more often than not, consisted of a frontier region on the periphery of European economic-political life. Here, for a variety of reasons, the dissenters found patrons (protectors) willing to tolerate them. In the case of Moravia, the protectors were feudal lordlings who offered toleration and protection in return for economic benefits. This trade-off was possible because of the political conditions in Moravia, a margravate which was part of the kingdom of Bohemia.

¹²⁵Mecenseffy, *QGT*, XIII: *Oesterreich*, II, 377.

The Hussite Legacy

Both Moravia and Bohemia had experienced the fifteenth-century turmoil that followed in the wake of John Huss. The Hussite wars left both a religious and a political legacy. The religious legacy made possible a pluralism unique in Europe; the political legacy meant a retarded development in the form of continued feudal decentralization. The crown and church, to the extent that they represented the larger universal or centralizing interests, emerged from the fifteenth-century conflict as losers, the magnates and nobility of Moravia as victors. By 1470 the more powerful feudal magnates "had taken control at the expense of the towns, peasants and king."¹²⁶ These magnates dominated regional defense and church patronage. Robert Friedmann described the political realities that prevailed in sixteenth-century Moravia as "thoroughly feudal."¹²⁷ Seen against the backdrop of dominant political trends elsewhere in early modern Europe, Moravia was an anomaly, perhaps even a feudal anachronism. Political developments in the rest of Europe, which accelerated during the sixteenth century, favoured the emergence of central administrative structures under territorial monarchs, princes or city councils. By way of contrast, in Moravia the interests of local magnates prevailed against all attempts to increase central authority. In this setting, Ferdinand's "Spanish" policies were bound to provoke stiff opposition.

Ferdinand I had inherited the crown of Bohemia and Hungary only on August 29, 1526. His attempts to enforce his will in matters of religion ran counter to almost one hundred years of tradition in Moravia and met with the determined resistance of its nobility. In their tug-of-war with Ferdinand, the lords of Moravia found unlikely allies in the Turks and in the religious non-conformists. The Hussite legacy prepared the lords to look upon religious dissenters as potentially useful in the defense of their own liberties.

¹²⁶John Klassen, *The Nobility and the Making of the Hussite Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 138.

¹²⁷Robert Friedmann, "Moravia," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*; also "Anabaptism in Moravia" in *Hutterite Studies: Essays by Robert Friedmann*, ed. H.S. Bender (Goshen: Mennonite Historical Society, 1961), 58 ff.

The Turkish threat, as will be noted below, restricted Ferdinand's ability to pressure the magnates into following his policies.¹²⁸ As a frontline monarch, Ferdinand considered it his first duty to defend Christendom against the expansionist Ottoman Turk (a classical case of the just-war theory). In order to defend against the Turks, he needed the financial and military assistance of Moravia's nobility. In order to assure their cooperation, he was forced to concede greater local autonomy. Such concessions, in turn, frustrated any attempt to enforce religious conformity. Ferdinand's control in Moravia remained limited to the four so-called "royal" cities: Olmütz [Olomouc], Brünn [Brno], Iglau [Jihlava] and Znaim [Znojmo].¹²⁹ Olmütz was also the seat of the diocese, but attempts by Ferdinand to use the bishop of Olmütz or ecclesiastic channels to strengthen his authority encountered the same obstacles. Other towns, such as Austerlitz [Slavkov], Auspitz [Hustopete], Rossitz [Rosice] and Schäckowitz [Sakvice], with Anabaptist communities, remained entirely subject to local lords.

Clearly, the political situation in Moravia was very different from that in the Tyrol. The political economy of Moravia was determined by the tug-of-war between Ferdinand and powerful local lords. Religious toleration for which Moravia became proverbial in the sixteenth century was directly tied to the fortunes and interests of its feudal lords. Indeed, these lords were inclined to expand their influence at the expense of both crown and church when the opportunity arose. The coming of the Reformation and the arrival of new "heretics" provided such opportunities.

The Martin Göschl Affair

The Martin Göschl affair serves to illustrate the above point. When the evangelical movement entered Moravia, Göschl, then the provost of the rich convent (Heavenly Rose) and the coadjutor of the bishop of Olmütz, joined the ranks of would-be reformers. In 1525 he married a former nun and in his position as provost

¹²⁸Cf., Peter F. Barton, *Die Geschichte der Evangelischen in Oesterreich und Südostmitteleuropa* (Vienna-Cologne-Graz, 1985), 60ff.

¹²⁹Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 197. Friedmann listed only three. "Moravia," 748.

prepared to dissolve the convent and secularize its property. Early in 1526 the property was transferred into the common trust of the Estates of Moravia, then presided over by Jan von Pernstein, the governor of Moravia. Another of the lords, Arkleb von Boskowitz [Boskovice], was appointed bailiff, ostensibly on behalf of the Estates. For his part in the transaction, Göschl received a hefty commission of 1000 gulden.¹³⁰ Subsequently defrocked by the church and threatened by Ferdinand, Göschl found protection in Nicolsburg at about the same time that Hubmaier arrived there. The politically astute Hubmaier seems to have gained a quick overview of the situation. He dedicated two of his publications to the supporters of Göschl, the lords Pernstein and Boskowitz.¹³¹ With this gesture Hubmaier presumably sought to gain the goodwill of these powerful patrons for his brand of Anabaptism. He thereby also associated Anabaptism with particular political interests in Moravia, a point lost on most historians.

The Göschl affair illustrates that members of the Moravian nobility welcomed the Reformation for reasons of political and material interests. The magnates were willing to support reform and to tolerate heretics because it brought economic and indirectly political advantages.

These realities help to explain how Moravia became the "promised land" for persecuted Anabaptists. The lords and the religious refugees, particularly from the Tyrol, had a common concern: Ferdinand I. By permitting Anabaptist settlement on their land, the magnates increased the subject population and their income. Southern Moravia had suffered considerable depopulation. Many homesteads and villages had been abandoned.¹³² These were readily available to settlers. Unencumbered by precedent, the

¹³⁰Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 182, n.24. Zeman does not make clear whether this was to be an annual salary or a one-time payment.

¹³¹Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, ed. Torsten Bergsten and Gunnar Westin (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 328, 434.

¹³²Jarold Zeman, "Historical Topography of Moravian Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XL (October 1966): 266-78, esp 274; and XLI (January 1967): 40-78, 116-160.

relationship with the “foreigners” could be redefined in new contractual arrangements. Agreements, made with Anabaptist leaders who acted on behalf of a whole group rather than with individual lease holders, simplified the procedure of administration and collection of rents.¹³³ It was presumably simpler to collect rents from Anabaptist communities than from individual, impoverished peasants who disappeared into the woods upon the arrival of the tax collector. Frugality, honesty, hard work and new skills were added reasons that made the newcomers economically desirable.

The Anabaptists, in turn, found religious freedom, protection and economic opportunities that bordered on privileges. Above all and most importantly, they were permitted to establish self-administered communities in accordance with their religious beliefs. These, then, were the mutual interests behind lordly patronage and Anabaptist resettlement on Moravian soil.

But political-economic interests were not the sole factors that made Moravia the promised land. The unique spirit of toleration, at least among the magnates, was equally significant.

The Religious Factors

Historians have been amazed by the religious heterogeneity of sixteenth-century Moravia.¹³⁴ Contemporaries catalogued no fewer than forty different “sects,” among them Utraquists and Bohemian Brethren (divided into a Major and Minor Party), Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Schwenckfeldians, anti-Trinitarians, Sabbatarians, Adamists, Josephites (who held that Joseph was Christ’s biological father), Spiritualists, a variety of Anabaptists and

¹³³Hruby notes that the Anabaptists were treated as “foreigners” well into the second half of the sixteenth century. To collect from a commune was presumably a simpler and surer task than from a host of independent tenants. Hruby makes the point that the lords always dealt with the leaders. This in itself could have aided the development of a clear authority principle in the communities. *Die Wiedertäufer in Mähren*, 71-72.

¹³⁴H. de Wind listed 20 sects in Austerlitz alone. “A Sixteenth-Century Description of Religious Sects in Austerlitz, Moravia,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XXIX (January 1955): 44-54.

even the odd agnostic.¹³⁵ It seemed to hostile observers as if all the heresies of past church history had come to life again and chosen sixteenth-century Moravia as their residence. Nothing like it existed in the rest of Europe nor would be seen again until the non-conformists of Europe created a new world in North America.

What explains this plethora of religious expressions in sixteenth-century Moravia? Political expediency is not the whole explanation. By sixteenth- and even twentieth-century standards the Moravian lords proved to be an unusually broad-minded and tolerant lot. As already noted, the Liechtensteins at Nicosburg permitted a disputation between two rival Anabaptists, Hans Hut and Balthasar Hubmaier. Later they attempted to mediate the schism between the two parties that had formed in Nicosburg. Ulrich of Kaunitz, the lord of Austerlitz, tolerated so many foreigners and sects in that town that it became proverbial as a new Babel! Johann of Lipa, Lord of Krumau [Cesky Krumlov], Eibenschitz [Ivanice] and Schäkowitz, in 1537 offered safety to the heretic Paracelsus. Heinrich of Lomnitz, lord of Jamnitz [Jemnice], ransomed Anabaptists from the dungeon of Passau. Johanka of Boskowitz [Boskovic], an abbess and "the mistress of Auspitz," permitted the founding of Philipite and Hutterite communities on her lands. Another member of her family, Dobes or Dobesch of Boskowitz, and his spouse Bohunda of Pernstein, sponsored the Gabrielite community at Rossitz.¹³⁶

Why this religious broadmindedness among these nobles? As Jarold Zeman noted most of these nobles themselves belonged to the religious dis-establishment. They were either neo-Utraquist, adherents of the Unity of Czech Brethren or pro-Reformed (Zwinglian) in their orientation. Some of them sponsored dialogue between the indigenous heirs of John Huss and the representatives of the new reform currents including the Anabaptists.¹³⁷

¹³⁵Waclaw Urban, *Der Antitrinitarismus in den Böhmischen Ländern und in der Slowakei im 16. Jahrhundert*. Bibliotheka Dissidentium scripta et studia, no.2 (Baden-Baden, 1986), 101 ff.

¹³⁶Points made by Friedmann, "Moravia," 747-50.

¹³⁷Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 248 ff.

The question arises: How appreciative were the Anabaptists of their protectors and their new surroundings? It is curious that in the Hutterite sources, the main body of Anabaptist literature of relevance here, the lords receive very little attention, although evidence from the later period suggests that they grew fond of their protectors.¹³⁸ As noted earlier, Hubmaier appreciated the potential protectors immediately. The dedications of his publications from the Nicolzburg period read like a who's who of Moravian magnates.¹³⁹ Gabriel Ascherham, the leader of the Anabaptist community at Rossitz, wrote positively about the role of magistrates who protected the good and punished evildoers.

Relations to the Outside World

The Turkish Threat

Anyone familiar with Anabaptist primary sources, specifically *The Chronicle*, will be disappointed by how little Hutterite sources reveal about everyday interactions with the host society. Only when outside events, such as the Thirty Years' War, drastically encroached on Hutterite existence do they receive some coverage and then, of course, from a Hutterocentric view with little appreciation of the larger dimensions of the conflict. In this part I want to draw attention to some of the larger factors that impinged on the early Moravian Anabaptist reality, namely the Turkish factor.

It is one of the ironies of history that the advance of the "infidels" and the reality of war brought Anabaptists in Moravia relief from the first major persecution unleashed against them by

¹³⁸Stayer writes, "During the 'golden period' despite their ritual denunciations of the wicked world, Hutterite society was tied to the surrounding aristocracy by ties of interest, and even, it seems, of some mutual affection." Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 154.

¹³⁹Hubmaier dedicated his work "On the Sword" to Arkleb of Boskovic who had been governor of Moravia from 1519 on. Hubmaier, *Schriften*, 433. Cf., Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 165, 221. About Sobek see *ibid.*, 63, 64; about Dubcansky, 69. The latter was the main mover for colloquia between Utraquists and evangelicals at Austerlitz in 1526, and in February 1528 between representatives of the Minor Party and Brethren on his estate of Habrovany near Austerlitz.

Ferdinand. This first persecution had taken the lives of at least twelve Anabaptists. Three had been burned at Brünn, five at Znaim and four at Olmütz.¹⁴⁰ It was hardly accidental that all of these executions took place in the “royal” cities. The lords of Moravia had refused, delayed or obstructed Ferdinand’s measures against the heretics on their lands. Then in the summer of 1529, the aggressive advance of the Turks forced Ferdinand to concentrate his attention and resources on this threat, in turn easing his pressures on the nobility in regards to compliance with his anti-Anabaptist policy. The Anabaptists in Moravia were thus the indirect beneficiaries of the Turkish threat.

A chronological review of Anabaptist fortunes in Moravia reveals a striking pattern directly related to the above observation. Turkish aggression and war invariably relaxed Ferdinand’s pressure on Moravia’s nobility and indirectly on the Anabaptists. Conversely, whenever the Turkish threat receded, Ferdinand renewed his demands for the persecution of the Anabaptists. Three distinct periods of persecution may be discerned within this pattern: 1527-1529; 1535-1537; and 1547-1551. “Good times” for the Anabaptists in Moravia began only in the 1550s and the “golden years” only after Ferdinand’s death in 1564.¹⁴¹

My point is that the vagaries and fluctuations of Anabaptist fortunes in the promised land can be understood only when one takes account of the larger context and of the political realities that prevailed in the host society. Whatever Anabaptist self-perceptions may have been in regard to their separateness from the world, it should be clear that the larger world in which they lived remained inseparately linked to them, ultimately determining their very survival. The Anabaptist communities were not islands unto themselves. Although apolitical in their outlook, their existence was not immune from the political forces at work in the host society. The fortunes of the early Anabaptists, whether they were conscious of it or not, were tied to those of their local patrons and fluctuated

¹⁴⁰Hruby, *Wiedertäufer in Mähren*, 198; Friedmann’s report of only one execution is false. “Moravia,” 748.

¹⁴¹Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 196-197, n.85; 300.

according to the political situation. The Turkish threat or lack thereof largely determined the political scene in Moravia.

With hindsight, it is possible to see that survival and prosperity of the Anabaptist communities in Moravia coincided with the "Indian summer" of political feudalism in that country. When the armies of Ferdinand II crushed the nobility at the battle of the White Mountain in 1620, the Anabaptist communities lost their protection. Without noble patronage they faced the choice of dismemberment and assimilation or exodus in search of another promised land.

Relations to the Indigenous Population

Finally I want to note that the promised land to which the sixteenth-century Anabaptists fled in order to build new communities was not an entirely empty land. Moravia did contain an indigenous population as well as foreigners. Ethnic Germans constituted a large proportion of the urban population. Any rereading of Anabaptist history should contain a history of relations to the neighbours, including, in the case of Moravia, the non-German indigenous neighbours.¹⁴² Unfortunately very little is known about Anabaptist interaction with the common people of Moravia, Czech or German. Initially, at least, there seemed to be goodwill extended toward the persecuted Anabaptists. When the first Brethren arrived in Austerlitz, they were welcomed not only by the lords but also by the towns people.¹⁴³ Only the attempts at religious dialogue with Czech Brethren have received some attention, but these were of a different, more official, nature than the day-to-day interaction that interest me here.

Obviously good relations with the powerful magnates were of a different order than good relations with indigenous commoners. It cannot be assumed that the interests of Moravia's elite coincided

¹⁴²In this instance, Anabaptist studies could learn from Russian Mennonite studies.

¹⁴³*The Chronicle*, 82. The townspeople may have been ethnic Germans, however, and the Brethren apparently were not too happy with the deserted farmsteads which had been assigned to them. They stayed three weeks, it seems, before asking permission to move into town.

with those of their indigenous subjects. The limited evidence available suggests that the good relations with the lords did not necessarily extend to the indigenous commoners who saw in the newcomers rivals for their daily bread. Both internal and external evidence record the existence of hostilities between the local population and the Anabaptist communities. At times the Anabaptists depended on the lords for their protection, not only against Ferdinand but also against angry commoners. *The Chronicle* relates that when Jacob Hutter and his people left Schäkowitz in 1535, they marched through a "crowd of ungodly, villainous robbers, who ground their teeth in rage, full of lust to rob and attack." Armed protection provided by the lords prevented the evil designs of the crowd, a circumstance recorded as "in accordance with God's will."¹⁴⁴ During the notorious raid on the Hutterite community of Steinabrunn in 1539, a "reckless" local "mob" aided Ferdinand's henchmen in rounding up Anabaptists. In this case, the local lord, who had to contend with Ferdinand's armed men, was powerless to help the Anabaptists. In another incident, riots erupted among the local population when the Hutterites procrastinated on an order to leave their settlement at Kostel. Hutterites also needed the protection of the local lord at Pulgram when they closed shop there.¹⁴⁵

Yet Hutterite sources provide insufficient explanations for these manifestations of hostility, apart from ascribing them to "godless villains and robbers." An external source, the testimony of Czech Brethren, although from a later period, proves far more lucid as to the possible causes of friction between the Anabaptist communities and the local population.¹⁴⁶ They were apparently not purely religious or ethnic in nature. Economic rivalries are listed as the main reasons. The effects of the Anabaptist communities on the local economy were perceived to be negative. The source suggests that indigenous artisans and peasants suffered while the Anabaptist-Hutterite communities prospered. It alleges that the production of

¹⁴⁴*The Chronicle*, 135.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 188, 190. See Amon's letter.

¹⁴⁶Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 266. The Brethren source seems to date from the 1570s.

ovens, knives, carriages and ornamental roofs were taken out of the hands of local artisans who found themselves unable to compete against the greater resourcefulness and collective resources of the Anabaptist-Hutterite communities. Bulk purchases of grain and other commodities by the communities also raised food prices for these local artisans. In some instances, leasing of large tracts of land and whole vineyards seems to have led to the expropriation and removal of small leaseholders from the land. Complaints were lodged that Anabaptist-Hutterites used the common forests to their advantage. Increased Anabaptist prosperity contrasted with adverse effects on their neighbours. Given these perceptions, manifestations of animosity toward the Anabaptist communities become more explicable. And it comes as no surprise that the missionary outreach to Slavic neighbours appears to have been nonexistent, nil or totally ineffectual.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

Time has come for a critical rereading of the Anabaptist search for the promised land. More specifically it is time that Anabaptist interdependence and interaction with the larger world is reexamined. This lecture represents a modest attempt in that direction. It argues that Anabaptists who flocked to Moravia became the beneficiaries of the conditions created by others during the Hussite Revolution. That revolution left the local nobility in a position to thwart Ferdinand's policy aimed at religious uniformity. For a season the magnates of Moravia turned this province into the promised land for Anabaptists and other persecuted dissenters. The motives of the lords were mixed. They identified opposition to religious uniformity with a defense of their own liberties. Some were genuinely tolerant, prepared to leave religious beliefs to the dictates of conscience. Hence they permitted an amazing flowering of diverse religious communities on their soil.

¹⁴⁷*The Chronicle*, 160. The exception appears to have been a mission to Slovakia in 1536. It was sponsored by a local noble who also donated land for a settlement, but the settlement lasted only four years.

Whether or not the Anabaptists had any interest in or concern for the larger political realities that prevailed in the promised land, their fragile fortunes depended on them. A rereading of the Anabaptist story must include these realities. The notion that the Anabaptists lived an isolated, apolitical existence, in total separation from the world, must be recognized as a myth. The Moravian communities, for good or ill, were part of the political-economic culture of that region. They shared with their Moravian patrons an antipathy to central authority, particularly as represented by Ferdinand I, and they impacted on the existing economic and political fibre of the host society. More research is needed to assess this impact and better understand the role of long-range effects, if any, on what was once considered to be the promised land.

Lecture Four **Congregation of God — Ideal and Reality**

Introduction

Almost everyone involved in the life of the church has at one time or other experienced frustration, doubt or disillusionment because of apparent discrepancies between professed faith and practice, between ideal and reality. While this is true in all traditions, I have the feeling that this tendency runs higher among those in the Anabaptist tradition. One explanation may very well be the perfectionist tendency, the high idealism of discipleship that informs the inner life of that tradition. A concomitant emphasis on individual moral-ethical imperatives and community tends to make individual failings the collective concern of the community which traditionally exercised its discipline by the ban and shunning. Luther's pastoral advice to the over-conscientious Melancthon, that he should "sin boldly so that grace may abound," must seem unthinkable, yes, blasphemous, in the Anabaptist tradition.

At times the perfectionist tendency took on perverted twists as in the case of Jan van Ophoorn, an elder of the Emden congregation during the second half of the sixteenth century. Ophoorn's zeal for discipline led him to ban "all other Flemish and Frisian congregations, as well as members of his own Emden congregation except his wife and himself."¹⁴⁸ Ophoorn's case was a particularly rigorous example of an attempt to make reality conform to ideal. It was, of course, an exception in Mennonite congregational life and

¹⁴⁸C.J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), 120.

a perversion of its ideals. My point is that the Mennonite experience, like that of other traditions, has its share of conflicts.

In a dissertation dealing with "Intra-Mennonite conflict" in North America from 1870 to 1985, Fred Kniss documented "over 200 conflict events at the congregational level or broader levels." He limited his study to the Swiss Mennonites in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio and Indiana and to conflicts over religious values and practice important enough to have been documented in "secondary and primary archival sources." He left out scandals involving money or sex. Kniss concluded that the "Mennonite experience . . . has abounded in internal disquiet and contention."¹⁴⁹ From my limited contacts, I would infer that few Mennonites would dispute this assessment of their recent history. However, they tend to exhibit a very different attitude toward first-generation Anabaptists. The popular perception appears to be that pristine perfection existed in that first generation. To say otherwise may be considered offensive. Since I have some contrary things to say in this lecture, I do want to state from the start that it is not my intention to offend but to be truthful to the historical record. Anabaptist quarrels and schisms are part of that record and belong to its history as does martyrdom. If we want to learn from history we cannot limit ourselves to selective aspects of it. A rereading of Anabaptist history, I would suggest, ought to include the church *with* spot and wrinkle.

Popular perceptions of Anabaptism in the Mennonite community continue to be shaped by the kind of scholarship that inspired the renaissance in Anabaptist studies two or three decades ago. It was a scholarship particularly adept at the identification of issues relevant for the contemporary Mennonite struggle with identity in the North American cultural setting. Apologetics with a concentration on ideal and vision in this scholarship served the Mennonite and free-church constituencies well, a case more difficult to make for the more academically oriented revisionists with whom I have

¹⁴⁹Fred Kniss, "Disquiet in the Land: The Emergence of Intramennonite Conflict, 1870-1985," Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1990. Citation from an edited version of chapter 8 of his dissertation which Kniss presented to a Forum at Conrad Grebel College, October 13, 1990.

generally identified. Our interests have been less apologetic and perhaps focused more on the search for historical understanding than on contemporary relevance. And while the resulting history may not be as inspiring or edifying, it may be truer to the past and to real life by revealing not only committed martyrs but also fallible mortals. Such a more inclusive rereading of Anabaptist history need not lead to disillusionment but to faith that God advances his kingdom by his grace despite our failings and weakness.

Growing Pains

The 1531 Schism

In my previous lecture I described the establishment of the Anabaptist congregation in Austerlitz. The founding members of this community had been schismatics from Nicolsburg. As noted, the congregation in Austerlitz, with its practice of sharing all things, became a beacon of hope and a model for persecuted Anabaptists everywhere, including those in Southern Tyrol. The rapid growth of the congregation, fed by an influx of refugees from diverse regional backgrounds, was accompanied by growing pains. These reached crisis proportions by January 1531 and led to a major schism.

The catalyst for this, the second major schism in Moravia within less than three years, was Wilhelm Reublin.¹⁵⁰ Reublin, a haunted and sick man, arrived in Austerlitz during the last months of 1530.¹⁵¹ His credentials were impressive. A founding member of Swiss Anabaptism, Reublin had been involved in its prehistory at

¹⁵⁰About Reublin, see James Stayer, "A Picaresque Journey through Early Anabaptism," 107-117 in *Profiles of Radical Reformers*, ed. H.-J. Goertz, trans. Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1982); also "Reublin and Brötli: The Revolutionary Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," in *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism*, ed. M. Lienhard (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 83-102.

¹⁵¹The fact that an exchange of messages had taken place between Reublin and Marpeck before the exodus suggests a space of at least two months or so. Reublin must have been in Moravia since the fall of 1530. Beck's dating of the exodus as at the beginning of 1530 in *Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer in Oesterreich-Ungarn*, 49, needs correction by a year.

Basel and Zurich. He had baptized Hubmaier at Waldshut and is believed to have been a main mover, along with Michael Sattler, of the Schleithem Articles. It was Reublin who brought Sattler to the area of Rottenburg where his wife and young son were imprisoned along with Sattler. The authorities considered Reublin, not Sattler, the "chief Anabaptist,"¹⁵² and while Sattler's trial wound to its bitter end, Reublin was busy building a congregation in nearby Esslingen. He subsequently helped spread accounts of Sattler's martyrdom and himself suffered imprisonment in Strasbourg.¹⁵³ Exiled in March 1529, the undaunted Reublin propagated Anabaptism in the Rhineland (between Bruchsal and Landau) before making his way to Moravia. He arrived in Austerlitz sometime in October or November, 1530, with a letter of introduction, it seems, from Pilgram Marpeck.¹⁵⁴

But in spite of his impressive credentials, Reublin was not permitted to teach or preach in Austerlitz and soon found other reasons to complain. In his letter to Pilgram Marpeck, dated January 26, 1531,¹⁵⁵ Reublin alleged that at Austerlitz ordinary members eat "peas and cabbage" while in separate dining rooms the leaders and their wives dined on "roasted meat, fish, poultry and good wine." One of the leaders literally cultivated an aristocratic lifestyle. Meanwhile little children were dying of malnutrition. Reublin counted twenty such casualties during his short stay! He was also appalled by the authoritarian style of the leadership. Marriages were imposed on unwilling sisters. Not surprisingly, he found deeper spiritual reasons for all these imperfections in the congregation of God.

¹⁵²C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1984), 77-79, 101.

¹⁵³Julius Lober claimed to have been baptized by him at Strasbourg in 1530 but that must have been earlier, or in the general area of Strasbourg. Lober was chosen an apostle at Bruchsal. Mecenseffy, *QGT*, XI: *Oesterreich*, I, 227, n.8.

¹⁵⁴For the full account see *The Chronicle*, 87-88.

¹⁵⁵English translation by J.C. Wenger, "Letter from Wilhelm Reublin to Pilgram Marpeck, 1531," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XXIII (April 1949): 67-75.

In order to correct the abuses Reublin began unauthorized Bible expositions. When the leadership attempted to muzzle him by means of the ban, a group of one hundred and fifty supporters left the community with him. Shaking the dust (or rather snow) from their feet, the schismatics moved to Auspitz. The exodus took place in the depth of winter (January 1531) without provisions and without reimbursement to the exiles for their contributions made previously by the exiles to the community. According to Reublin, the Gentiles showed greater pity than their erstwhile brethren.

Continuing Problems in Auspitz

Among those who left the Austerlitz Brethren with Reublin was Jörg Zauring and his band of Tyrolese. Together they established a new congregation in Auspitz, but this community too was soon torn by strife. Its first victim was Reublin unmasked as an Ananias. During an illness it came to light that, although the community was desperately short of cash, Reublin had kept a private sum of money as a kind of personal health insurance. He was expelled and Zauring assumed the leadership of the community.¹⁵⁶ But not all the problems left with Reublin. Soon the remaining leaders fell out with each other. In the quarrels that ensued it was rumoured that Zauring had kept his wife's adultery from the congregation. Instead of public discipline he had administered private correction which was considered a cover-up by some. Zauring was dismissed from his position. The resulting leadership crisis was resolved by drawing lots. One of the contestants was Jacob Hutter but the lot decided for Sigmund Schützing. At the same time, a union was formed with two neighbouring communities, the Philipites and Gabrielites. Gabriel Ascherham became the recognized overall bishop of the three communities.

But problems continued to plague the new community, now led by Schützing. After several lesser splinterings over a two-year period, a major schism involving Jacob Hutter rocked the "congregation of God" in 1533. This schism, the best documented in early Anabaptist history, involved not only internal squabbles but a breakup of the alliance with the two neighbouring communities, the

¹⁵⁶*The Chronicle*, 91.

Philipites and Gabrielites. Mutual incriminations, anathemas and excommunications led to such bitter feelings that members of the different communities, even though they worked on the same fields, refused to greet each other, sit or break bread with each other. A vicious campaign to slander each other and “steal each other’s sheep” festered for decades. The respective polemics included open letters of accusations, mocking songs and even rival written accounts of the events leading to the schism. Unfortunately, only the one-sided Hutterite account of this feud has survived. Today it constitutes the oldest part of *The Chronicle*.¹⁵⁷ It is to the specifics of this schism that I now turn.

The Schism of 1533

The Hutterite side of the 1533 schism was recorded by Caspar Braitmichel, the first and perhaps ablest of early Hutterite chroniclers. Braitmichel, along with Peter Riedemann, was a Silesian who shifted his loyalty to Hutter’s community. Although an eyewitness to some of the events, he was hardly an objective observer. He wrote not in order to preserve this story for posterity but because the Hutterite case needed to be made against rival attempts at the time to discredit Hutterite beginnings and its founder, for it seems that the label “Hutterite” originally designated derision rather than a badge of honour. Given this context, Braitmichel’s intentions were honourable enough. He desired to write “a short but truthful record . . . of the great distress and hostility provoked by Satan which the congregation, named after its shepherd Jakob Hutter, had to suffer.” More specifically, he aimed at refuting an account of the schism written by Hutter’s chief rival, Gabriel Ascherham. Unfortunately, from the historian’s perspective, this account is now lost. For his part, Braitmichel relied heavily on Hutter’s own account contained in his letters¹⁵⁸ written during and

¹⁵⁷*The Chronicle*, 99 ff.

¹⁵⁸Braitmichel included Hutter’s third letter to the Tyrol. It was written November 22, 1533. But Hutter had sent two other reports to the Tyrol as the events unfolded. They were presumably also used by Braitmichel who closed his account with the date of Hutter’s last letter. *The Chronicle*, 110-126. I used Caspar Braitmichel, “Von der Zerspaltung der Gemein,” Cod. Hab. 5, dated

shortly after the conflict. He encouraged his readers to “judge for themselves how God separated the devout from the hypocrites,”¹⁵⁹ but felt it necessary to warn that the reader

... should take care lest reading of rebellion and false spirits becomes a stumbling block for him. There must be stumbling blocks to reveal the chosen people who withstand the test, but woe to those who make stumbling blocks. As for you, innocent and honest reader, rejoice in the Lord your God.¹⁶⁰

While the historian may take such advice to heart, he or she cannot surrender the task of critically shifting the sources for predetermined partisanship. It is not his or her primary task to determine who was right or wrong and to take sides, but to seek an understanding of the issues of the conflict. A major issue was, no doubt, the power struggle for leadership.

The Power Struggle between Hutter and Schützing

Jacob Hutter had been no stranger to the troubles in the congregation which had relocated to Auspitz. In 1531 he had come from the Tyrol in order to investigate the exodus from Austerlitz. He sided with the Auspitz group and apparently participated in the expulsion of Reublin. As noted, Hutter appears to have been involved as well in resolving the leadership crisis that followed the Zaunring affair and saw the elevation of Sigmund Schützing.

After each visit to Moravia, Hutter returned to the Southern Tyrol. But his presence there was becoming increasingly more precarious because of the government's measures against him. In the spring of 1533 Hutter decided to make Auspitz his permanent base. By way of preparation Hans Amon was chosen to replace Hutter as servant of the Word in the Tyrol and Onophrius Griesinger appointed as Amon's assistant. A confidential letter by Amon

1571 and attributed to Caspar Artloff, reel #87 of the East Europe Anabaptist Collection, University of Waterloo Library.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 99.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 110.

to the servant of temporal affairs in Auspitz, Leonhard Schmerbacher,¹⁶¹ documents Hutter's intentions. He wrote:

Dearly beloved brother, I write to you in confidence as a warning for the sake of the dear brothers and sisters. When brother Jacob comes down and assumes the leadership of the people of God and serves them [with the Word], as I hope [he will], and the dear children of God develop a special trust toward him, [it is possible that] others become vexed or annoyed thereby. I therefore pray you, my dear brother, that in as much as God gives you grace and understanding, you will do your best to avoid that a root of bitterness be permitted to spring up among the servants of God, as, may it be lamented to God, did happen [before]. I hope to God, however, that it shall not happen [again].¹⁶²

Amon's premonition that bitterness might spring up because of Hutter's decision to move to Auspitz would prove correct.

Hutter arrived on Monday, August 11, 1533, bringing with him a "temporal gift, a sweet sacrifice, a small sum of money." Initially all seemed well. According to *The Chronicle*, the "whole congregation of God" received Hutter "like the Lord himself." Schützingler and his assistants invited him "to help them care for the people."¹⁶³ Hutter accepted and declared his intentions to correct the faults in the "house of God" and to discipline some of the "fickle, selfish people."¹⁶⁴ This somewhat rash declaration so soon upon arrival seems to have implied both a censure of and a challenge to Schützingler's leadership. Not surprisingly, therefore, Schützingler attempted to restrain him when Hutter took the

¹⁶¹The letter has been misplaced in Hutterite codices under the date 1536. That it originated in 1533 is clear from the reference to Hutter's intentions to come to Auspitz as well as the greetings sent on to Schützingler and Jörg Fasser. "Hans Amon, 1. Epistel gesendet aus der Grafschaft Tirol an Leonhard Schmerbacher in Auspitz" in *Die Hutterischen Episteln 1525 bis 1767*, vol. II (Elie, Manitoba: James Valley Book Centre, 1987), 220-222. I checked Cod. Hab. 17 [1657] of the Bratislava Stadtarchiv, Reel #81 and the Montana Codex [Braitmichel], Reel #22 of the East Europe Anabaptist Collection, University of Waterloo, for the proper text. The translation is mine.

¹⁶²*Hutterischen Epistlen*, II, 220.

¹⁶³*The Chronicle*, 99.

¹⁶⁴The English translation is not quite accurate here. Cf., *The Chronicle*, 99; Zieglschmid, *Aelteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder*, 105 ff.

initiative and began to rectify the faults in the congregation.¹⁶⁵ Within two weeks of Hutter's arrival, the two leaders were at loggerheads. Hutter offered or threatened to "move on and serve wherever the Lord would lead him, if he was not needed" but asked that his role first be discussed at a congregational meeting on August 24. When Schützingler refused, Hutter complained to Ascherham, the recognized overall bishop. Ascherham agreed with Hutter that his case should be heard by the congregation, but counselled that he should proceed "humbly." Informed of Ascherham's decision, Schützingler delayed the congregational meeting until he had a chance to present his side to Ascherham and Philip. He explained to these leaders that Hutter aimed at nothing less than sole control of his congregation. He acknowledged Hutter's superior gifts as a speaker and feared that Hutter's charismatic qualities would undermine his own leadership which had been decided by lot rather than popular acclamation.

As a result of Schützingler's representation, Hutter was cited to appear before the joint leadership of the three communities. In the heated discussion that ensued Hutter was accused of having advanced his own aspirations with the "sweet sacrifice" he had brought from the Tyrol, an accusation he rejected. Against Schützingler's appointment by lot Hutter pitched his sense of divine calling and insisted on the right of the congregation to decide his role. After considerable discussion, which included a suggestion of joint leadership, an idea rejected by Ascherham who feared that this would lead to confusion and division, it was agreed to bring the question of Hutter's future role before the congregation. But Philip and Ascherham were now decidedly on the side of Schützingler. On Sunday, September 7, Hutter was allowed to make his case. He spoke "with restraint," explaining why he had come and how, since his arrival, he had been hindered from doing the work to which God had called him. Schützingler spoke next, defending his divine mandate to sole leadership as revealed by lot. Ascherham strongly supported Schützingler and warned the congregation not to despise

¹⁶⁵Unfortunately we are not informed as to the nature of improvements undertaken by Hutter.

God's chosen, Schützingler. He illustrated graphically the consequences of turning against God's anointed with an appeal to the Old Testament story of Chora's rebellion. Ascherham suggested further that Hutter's "proud and arrogant" bearing made him a more suitable candidate for an itinerant rather than a residential leader. He opposed any division of authority, claiming that James had been the sole bishop in the church at Jerusalem. At that point Hutter interrupted and offered to prove, with the help of the New Testament, that Ascherham was wrong.

As a form of compromise some of the other leaders proposed that for "the sake of peace, love and unity" Schützingler be given precedence as leader. To this the whole congregation responded with "Yes, yes!" When asked by Ascherham whether he would abide by the congregational decision, Hutter replied that he needed to "first consider it before God, and take counsel with the elders and servants," that is, the junior leaders. On the following day he accepted the decision but not without protest. He claimed that he had been misunderstood, misrepresented and mistreated. Ascherham cut him off with, "We too speak German!"

The decision meant that Schützingler retained his position of authority as leading servant of the Word. Hutter's role, it seems, remained in limbo. He was still in the community two weeks later, when, according to *The Chronicle*, "the Lord struck Simon [Sigmund] Schützingler so severely that he lay seriously ill in bed." Since the congregation could not be left without spiritual guidance, the elders asked Hutter to assume the role of servant of the Word. Hutter wasted no time. On Sunday, September 28, in a special service of admonition, he assailed the lax discipline regarding community of goods which had been tolerated under Schützingler's regime. His criticisms apparently struck a responsive chord among the servants of temporal affairs, the leaders in charge of the common treasury who had all along favoured Hutter's candidacy. Hutter's admonition bore immediate fruit as members of the congregation came forward to surrender all their assets to the common treasury. During these proceedings, it came to light that the wife of Georg Fasser had, without knowledge of her husband, withheld some of her and her children's inheritance. The new Sapphira was called before a disciplinary committee—which

included her husband—and was placed under the ban, meaning that until her reinstatement she had to eat her meals separately from the rest of the community.

In the days that followed it occurred to Hutter, who, according to *The Chronicle*, was blessed with the divine “gift of discernment,” that Schützingers wife, too, might be a Sapphira.¹⁶⁶ He brought his suspicions before the elders who, upon his urging, supported an investigation. But first Hutter invited them to take inventory of his own bachelor quarters. This done, the search party proceeded to the unsuspecting Schützingers. Here they discovered an inordinate supply of linen, surplus shirts and the equivalent of “four Bernese pounds” in small coins.¹⁶⁷ This was shocking enough, but Hutter must have suspected more. “In the name and power of the Lord” he admonished a shaken Schützingers to come clean. Had he known of the money and was there more? The conscience-stricken Schützingers confessed and pulled another forty gulden from a secret place in the ceiling. Hutter and the search party seemed devastated by the evidence of such degradation. Schützingers had “taught full surrender and community [of goods] to others and yet did not hold to it himself.”¹⁶⁸

The magnitude of Schützingers crime and the resulting crisis was such that Hutter and the elders “could not postpone dealing with it.” On Sunday, October 5, the congregation was called together and briefed on Schützingers duplicity. In the presence of the whole congregation Hutter denounced the “faithlessness, greed and treachery of heart” of his former rival and admonished him to repent. A crushed Schützingers “promised to do so with all his might,” made a public confession and pleaded for forgiveness. But given his position and the nature of his crime, it was apparently deemed necessary to give the harshest sentence possible, that of excommunication. Schützingers was “given over to Satan.”

¹⁶⁶*The Chronicle*, 103.

¹⁶⁷One pound was the equivalent of 2400 Pfennig or 20 Groschen or Schilling. Barton, *Geschichte der Evangelischen*, 81.

¹⁶⁸*The Chronicle*, 104. Hutter must have known the Schützingers extremely well since they had travelled together several times from and to the Tyrol.

Hutter had been vindicated. Those who had supported Schützing were reminded how shabbily they had treated Hutter. The decision made one month earlier on September 7—confirming Schützing, who had been an Ananias all along, as leader of the community while Hutter was being censored publicly by Ascherham as unfit for such an office—had obviously not been a decision guided by the Holy Spirit. Not that Hutter then or now sought to force himself on anyone. Indeed, he was “no longer certain” that he could serve such a people. He therefore challenged the congregation “to pray earnestly and to call on God to raise up a faithful shepherd and servant for them.”

In response to such admonition the entire Sunday on October 5 and the following week, “eight days and nights,” were spent in loud weeping and groaning in prayer and search of discernment. By week’s end a consensus had emerged that Hutter should be accepted “as a gift from God to be their shepherd.” Sunday, October 12, saw the installation of Hutter as official servant of the Word. First, the former supporters of Schützing made a public confession of their “sin of ignorance.”¹⁶⁹ Then it was Ascherham’s turn. Notified of Schützing’s failings, he had arrived from Rossitz to a fait accompli and with little choice but to approve Hutter’s elevation.¹⁷⁰ According to *The Chronicle*, Ascherham tied Hutter and the congregation “together in great love.”¹⁷¹ The crisis seemed past. Hutter had emerged as the rightful leader of the community that would eventually bear his name.

The Parting of Ways: Hutter, the Gabrielites and Philipites

With Schützing removed, Hutter was free to rectify the abuses in the congregation. Among his priorities, it seems, was the removal of “unfaithful members” who stood in the way of the new

¹⁶⁹Later on, some convinced themselves that they had been coerced by Gabriel’s long speech and “threats” in their decision to prefer Schützing over Hutter. This becomes clear from the article of the grievances against Gabriel by Braitmichel. Codex Reel, #87, 370ff; cf., n.158.

¹⁷⁰This information comes from the account found in Codex Reel #87; cf., n.158.

¹⁷¹See account by Braitmichel, Codex Reel #87; cf., n.158.

unity to be forged with greater discipleship. Soon a number of expellees had reasons to complain to Ascherham and Philip about their treatment. Within two weeks of Hutter's assumption of leadership, Ascherham and Philip felt it necessary to intervene.

On Sunday, October 26, Hutter gathered his congregation two hours before daybreak to admonish further changes. He was about to address problems related to marriage when Ascherham, Philip and their assistants arrived unannounced. According to *The Chronicle*, "they had slipped in quietly before dawn, like wolves in sheep's clothing."¹⁷² After formal greetings, Ascherham raised a number of concerns. Why had Bernhard Glasser been excommunicated? Why had Hutter refused to take back David the Bohemian? And why did Hutter now claim that Schützing's leadership had been wrong all along and not of God? Obviously by retroactively rejecting Schützing's election, Hutter was casting doubt on Ascherham's and Philip's discernment, credibility and authority. After all, they had been party to Schützing's election by lot and had supported it against Hutter's candidacy for equal status.

During the debate that ensued old issues surfaced. Differences of opinion reached back to the Zauring affair. Ascherham and Philip accused Hutter of having extorted a confession of impure motives from David the Bohemian, who had leaked the story of Zauring's cover-up. They claimed that Zauring had been guilty of fornication and that his punishment had been too lenient. "The name of God had been horribly blasphemed" by what had been done and Zauring should have been "given over to Satan," that is, expelled. By way of contrast, Schützing's guilt had been of a lesser magnitude. His expulsion was too harsh. He had been subjected to humiliation and slander. In other words, when it came to questions of judgment, Hutter had been partial and unfair.

As tempers flared and "much was said for and against both sides," with each calling the other a liar, ordinary members were once more thrown into great anguish, not knowing what to believe. *The Chronicle* reports that "Many were heard to groan, and the faithful were shaken to the depths. No one knew . . . who was right

¹⁷²*The Chronicle*, 105.

or who was wrong, and which side was to blame. . . . The brotherhood was unable to arrive at any clarity or true judgment."¹⁷³ Philip, described in Hutterite sources as an "especially insolent man,"¹⁷⁴ accused Hutter of having manipulated his own promotion, of having excluded one scoundrel because of money (Schützinger) and having promoted another because of it (Fasser). Hutter, in turn, represented Schützinger's ouster and his own elevation to leadership as the will of God, arrived at through much prayer and searching of soul by the entire community. Accusations directed against him were, therefore, directed against the entire congregation, against the Holy Spirit and ultimately against God. Philip played into Hutter's hand when he accused the congregation collectively of idolizing Hutter. At that point some members shouted: "That is a lie." Although Philip subsequently apologized, the damage was done. *The Chronicle* recorded that "Philip told a lie in face of the whole brotherhood."¹⁷⁵

With the exchanges deteriorating into mutual recriminations, Philip, Ascherham and their assistants proposed the formation of a jury or arbitration committee. It was to consist of an equal number of elders from each community. "These brothers should judge the matter among themselves," that is, without the leaders. When the proposal was met with silence, Philip and Ascherham took their leave.¹⁷⁶

What followed next remains somewhat sketchy. It seems that under Hutter's guidance his congregation took the initiative and condemned Ascherham and Philip as liars. Ascherham complained later that he had been condemned in absentia, he had received no notice of the proceedings and was not given a chance to defend himself. He attributed Hutter's rash action to fear of another public

¹⁷³Ibid., 106.

¹⁷⁴Braitmichel's account, Codex Reel #87; cf., n.158.

¹⁷⁵See the margin in *The Chronicle*, 106.

¹⁷⁶The 1571 codex records that Philip Plener turned once more near the door and repeated: "I said that Jacob is your idol, and you worship him." Braitmichel account, Codex Reel #87, f.394.

confrontation with him and Philip, and to the fear that Ascherham and Philip would excommunicate him [Hutter].¹⁷⁷

In any event, on Monday, October 27, Hutter sent messengers to the other two communities to inform them that their leaders, Ascherham and Philip, had been found to be liars. Not surprisingly, the emissaries were given the cold shoulder. Neither Ascherham nor Philip accepted the letter carried by the delegates. Instead they sent a joint mission of their own to Hutter's congregation, proposing a general assembly of all three communities to deal with the issues without the leaders. Hutter accepted on condition that the final judgment should be in harmony with "the Word of God and true testimony." His congregation agreed.

It seemed as if a way had been found out of the impasse when an incident revealed that these expectations were unrealistic. As the messengers were taking their leave with "embraces and the kiss of peace," one of them, Hans of Strasbourg, asked whether it was true that Hutter and his group had already "excluded" Gabriel. When Hutter replied: "We do not regard him as a brother or as a servant of God," the messenger lost his temper and called Hutter a "liar and a false prophet."¹⁷⁸ Hutter turned the incident into proof that the delegates had come with dishonest intentions and malice of heart in the first place. Right then and there he called on his assembled congregation to "pronounce judgment" on the "slanderers, revilers and Judases." At least one supporter agreed that the delegates should be treated "the same as [Ascherham], Gabriel and Philip," that is, excluded from the true congregation of God. The majority, however, seemed less sure and were once again left "trembling and full of pain." And "a few irresponsible souls" even made "a commotion," blaming Hutter for derailing the negotiations.

¹⁷⁷This is implied by the sequence of events given by the Braitmichel account, Codex Reel #87.

¹⁷⁸The 1571 codex puts Hans of Strasbourg in brackets: (Wie wir achten Hans von Strasburg). It has been suggested that this Hans was Leopold Scharnschlager's son-in-law who, in 1531, married Ursula Scharnschlager. Also known as Hans Felix, the clockmaker, Hans was ill and unemployed at Austerlitz in 1536. From 1547-1554 he resided at Znaim. William Klassen, "Uhrmacher, Hans (Felix)," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

According to Hutter's own account, it took five days of deliberations and prayer to regain the proper consensus on how to proceed. Omens in the sky and the timely arrival of a supportive letter and reinforcements from the Tyrol came to Hutter's aid.

Since his arrival from the Tyrol in August, Hutter had remained in constant contact with the Anabaptists led by Amon in the Tyrol, briefing them about developments in Auspitz. This monopoly over communications with friends and relatives back home obviously strengthened Hutter's influence with the South Tyrolean faction in Auspitz.¹⁷⁹ It must have been literally a god-send for Hutter as well when on Friday, October 31, the very same day that reinforcements and news arrived from the Tyrol, he and several of his supporters observed a special omen in the sky. In his return mail to the Tyrol Hutter described it as follows:

On Friday, we saw three suns in the sky for a good long time, about an hour, as well as two rainbows. These had their arches turned toward each other, almost touching in the middle, and their ends pointed away from each other. This I, Jakob, saw with my own eyes, and many brothers and sisters saw it with me. After a while, the two suns and rainbows disappeared, and only the one sun remained. Even though the other two suns were not as bright as the one, they were clearly visible.

I feel this was no small miracle. It was a sign from God, and there was surely a reason why he allowed it to appear. This much I am able to tell you, but the Lord alone knows what he had in mind and wanted to show us by it.¹⁸⁰

The sign in the sky and the letter of support from home base, which Hutter read aloud to the congregation, no doubt helped produce the consensus Hutter had worked toward. Two days later, on Sunday, November 2, Hutter and his congregation severed all ties with the neighbouring communities, warning them against their

¹⁷⁹In his third letter which was included in *The Chronicle* by Braitmichel, he wrote: "I have written this to you twice before; this is the third time and it will surely not be the last time." *The Chronicle*, 111, 124.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 114. Earlier Kuntz Maurer had arrived with funds from the Tyrol. On October 6, 1533, Valentin Luckner, imprisoned in the South Tyrol, testified that Hans Amon had sent Conntz [Kuntz Maurer] with money to Moravia. Mecenseffy, *QGT*, XIV: *Oesterreich*, III, 165 ff.

false, lying shepherds—the suns that no longer shone.¹⁸¹ Since the warning went unheeded, it became necessary to excommunicate the rank and file of Gabrielites and Philipites along with their leaders. They could be considered brothers or sisters no longer. Hutter and his supporters would eventually lay sole claim to representing the “congregation of God” in Moravia. Reflecting on the series of events that led to the rupture Hutter put the blame squarely at the feet of those who had opposed him. He wrote:

It started as soon as I arrived. In fact, without any fear of God, they persecuted and slandered me and all of us more terribly than any unbeliever or cruel tyrant, any false prophet or false brother, has ever done. . . . They spread many horrible stories about me, saying that no greater rogue has ever come into the land. They all clamor for revenge and wish me evil, and their greatest longing is that God may put me to shame.¹⁸²

From his perspective it seemed only just and right that Ascherham and Philip, not to mention Schützinger who, prior to his arrival “had such a good reputation with most people that no one could oppose them,” had now been unmasked “as liars, slanderers, false shepherds and false prophets.”¹⁸³ As for his own role in the schism, Hutter pleaded a clean conscience.

I am not guilty of anything, great or small. God knows I did not come to break the peace and the unity but to increase them. This I began to do faithfully, as I can testify with many other honest witnesses. God has kept my heart pure and undefiled. In this whole matter there has never been any falsehood or deceit in my heart.

All the things for which they hate and revile me have come through the Lord’s great mercy. He alone is the cause, and I will let him alone answer for it.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹According to the oldest account available to me, the messengers were sent to Philip’s community on Sunday but they went to Gabriel’s community on Thursday.

¹⁸²*The Chronicle*, 117-118.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 118.

Needless to say, Hutter's personal reflections stood in sharp contrast with the opinions of those who opposed him, as a passage from Ascherham's larger account, that has survived, indicates. It is, therefore, worth citing in full.

I will write what I myself have seen, heard and learned from truthful witnesses, and can defend with my conscience [*und nichts über mein Gewissen anzeigen*].

First of all, this Jacob Hutter was a puffed up, ambitious person. For this reason he back stabbed and pushed out [*verstach or verstuff*] Sigmund Schützing and had himself chosen leader [*obrist*] in his place. But he was unable to disguise his ambition and intentions, for, before he was elected, he shot out with great anger against the people saying: "Am I not also an apostle and shepherd, must I be cast out from you in this fashion?" But the great fruit that followed in the wake of his assumption of office and his reform of the congregation was that he destroyed love and unity. He divided people previously united.

One may sing or say what one wants about this Jacob Hutter now. I say [judging by the fruit] that he was an evil person. Having recognized him for who he was, even if he [subsequently] permitted himself to be boiled and roasted, I know of nothing else to say about him, except that he did not prove such [saintliness while] in this land. Yes, he exercised vengeance over all those who took the side of or agreed in part with Schützing. And in his mischievous manner he intimidated the congregation with great threats, saying: "Do you see now, whom you praised? You held this rogue [Schützing] for pious, and humiliated me [holding me in lesser esteem]. You intended to keep Schützing in his office, but you gave a false judgment therein. Therefore do penance for your failings."

Such a person who seeks his own honor is called a real blusterer [*Poltergeist*]. That is not the spirit of Paul. It is a spirit of Balaam's children, children of a buffoon. But while Jacob carried his own praises to the heavens, boasting that he had Paul's spirit, a woman said to him: "You have the spirit of the devil."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵Ascherham: "Was sich verlossen hat unter den Brüdern, die aus aller deutschen Nation vertrieben waren um des Glaubens willen, die darum in derselben Zeit in das Mährerlandt kommen, zu Aufenthalt ihres Lebens von dem 1528. bis auf das 1541. Jahr." The passage was preserved by Christoph Andreas Fischer in *Der Hutterische Widertäufer Taubenkobel*. . . [Ingolstadt, 1607), 55-57.

The judgment attributed to a woman, which in sixteenth-century parlance was intended as a double insult—namely that even a child or woman could see through Hutter—drastically illustrates the hard feelings left on the other side. Mutual acrimony and incrimination between members of the opposing camps festered on for years.

Conclusion

But why tell this woeful tale of conflict, leadership rivalry and schisms in all its disasterous detail in a J.J. Thiessen lecture? Is this not at cross-purposes with lectures dedicated to “breadth of vision for the Church?” I think not. Breadth of vision, in my opinion, ought not be limited to the recovery of the sublime but must include the human, the church *with* “spot and wrinkle.” Conflicts, leadership crises and disagreements were a documented part of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist experience. They left not only bitter divisions and schisms but fortunately also, from at least this historian’s perspective, an apologetic literature that recorded these painful events. Any rereading of Anabaptist beginnings must include them as a vital part of first-generation community building; not primarily in order to retrospectively participate in the debate of which Anabaptist group was right or wrong, rather to balance popular idealizations of first-generation Anabaptists. Just as the tendency in the magisterial Reformation tradition to demonize the Anabaptists as heretics, rabble rousers and imbalanced fanatics (*Schwärmer*) had to be resisted by scholars like Harold Bender, Robert Friedmann and others, so scholarship in the present must resist the temptation toward hagiography.

It would be a misunderstanding of these lectures to perceive them as attempts at downgrading either the contributions of previous scholarship or the achievements of the first generation of Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were a remarkable lot by the standards of any generation. My rereading of their story, only a very small part of the entire story, has aimed at humanizing that story in the larger context. The Anabaptists were, after all, fallible humans, like the rest of us. The congregation of God, I would suggest, has never existed in perfection, not in the first century, not in the sixteenth and not in ours. To the extent that the church remains a human community, it is not immune to rivalries, personality clashes

or power struggles. And power, including religious power and authority, may be wielded in a variety of forms, from crude force to the subtlest psychological manipulation. There are, therefore, no simple lessons to be mechanically applied to contemporary problems. Perhaps focusing on empirical realities, as well as on the ideals of our faith, may help to prevent the kind of events that proved so traumatic for those involved in the sixteenth-century schisms.

Finally, if we want to learn from history, we must aim at an inclusive, wholistic understanding of past events. This is not a pleading for a history with ideals left out. A wholistic approach must include both ideal and reality, light and shadow. If these rereadings concentrate too much on reality and shadow, it was because the previous generation of scholars was, at times, too dazzled by the brilliance of the Anabaptist ideal and light.

