Peace in the End Times:

Apocalyptic Expectation and Sixteenth Century Anabaptist Peace Theology

by

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Abstract

This study challenges the prevailing assumption in Anabaptist historical theology that sixteenth century Anabaptist apocalyptic expectation was necessarily violent. Historical theologians of sixteenth century Anabaptism have tended to distance the origins of Anabaptism from apocalypticism, given its close association with radicalism and violence, to keep the tradition and its peace witness free from the stains of Münster, Hans Hut, Thomas Müntzer and other violent extremists closely associated with Anabaptist apocalypticism. While this desire is somewhat understandable, it has led Anabaptist historiography to largely avoid exploring apocalypticism beyond its violent expressions in the Anabaptist tradition. This study explores the connections between apocalyptic thought and nonresistance in sixteenth century Anabaptism, arguing that apocalyptic thinking in Anabaptism also has the possibility of leading to a nonresistant position, pointing to Clemens Adler and Menno Simons as examples of this phenomenon.

This study pays special attention to both Anabaptists' theological writings and biographical details to describe the nature of their visions of the End Times and how they developed, reflecting the fact that apocalypticism is understood intellectually, but is lived out physically. The point of this argument is not to suggest that Anabaptist approaches to apocalypticism were always peaceful or rooted in nonresistance, but rather to broaden the understanding that Anabaptist apocalyptic thinking is not always violent. It is to broaden the apocalyptic lens for the study of sixteenth century Anabaptism. This study does this by first outlining the biographical details of Clemens Adler, paying close attention to the context that his apocalyptic thought emerges from, as biographies can work to locate and contextualize the apocalyptic theologies of these sixteenth century Anabaptists. Then this study is be able to

examine more thoroughly his theological writings, paying special attention to how his apocalyptic beliefs led him to develop his position of nonresistance. This same method is then used to explore the life and writings of Menno Simons, investigating how his apocalyptic thought led him to develop his nonresistance.

This study suggests a reconsideration of apocalypticism in the study of sixteenth century Anabaptism, to understand it as more than a synonym for violence, but as a worldview that was formative in early Anabaptist ethics. On this basis, apocalypticism can be used as an historiographical lens to analyze the origins of sixteenth century Anabaptism.

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With all this support, both named and unnamed, I am reminded of the "great cloud of witnesses" from Hebrews 12. They have allowed me to lay aside every weight, letting me run with perseverance the race set before me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Contemporary conceptions of apocalypticism often conjure images of dramatic scenes of the violent destruction of the world, perhaps by war, zombies, or a meteor rocketing toward the earth. These are very common settings for popular teen novels or Hollywood blockbuster films, but the phenomenon of apocalypticism, particularly within the Christian imagination, has its roots in the biblical books of Daniel, Ezekiel, II Esdras, and Revelation.[1] These books offer an account of the End Time events that will precede the passing away of historical time along with the "old Earth" and "old Heaven," ushering in God's good future with a new Earth and a new Heaven. These apocalyptic books are full of imagery, events, and signs whose meanings have been interpreted in numerous ways throughout Christian history, allowing for many Christians to find in these books a justification for, among other things, the use of violence, identifying others as God's enemies, and taking God's judgement into their own hands. These interpreters have used these books and their symbolic imagery, identifying in their contemporary experience the fulfillment of these signs, pointing to the coming of the End Times.

Regarding this phenomenon, Walter Klaassen, in his book *Living at the End of the Ages*, argues that throughout the course of Christian history, every generation has had those who believed that they were living in the End Times. He states that what these interpreters claimed about the coming end "has been claimed by equally dedicated, equally qualified, and equally inspired interpreters of prophecy in every generation of Christians since the time of Jesus."[2] And

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1. While many cultures and religions around the world for the majority of recorded human history have had visions, prophecies, or expectations of the end of the world in some shape or form, the primary focus of this study will be within the scope of Christian apocalypticism, particularly sixteenth century Anabaptism.

2. Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Lanham, NY.: University Press of America, 1992), x.

our present age is no exception to this. Writing during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which social, political, and economic strains in the world have been heightened, not to mention the continuing ecological degradation the world is facing during our climate crisis, it is not hard to identify the apocalyptic tensions that exist in 2021. In the sixteenth century context, from which the first Anabaptists emerge, people were living at a time when apocalyptic tensions were similarly heightened: the practice and teachings of the Church were being challenged during the Reformation, plague and disease were spreading, the Habsburg empire of Charles V was consolidating political power in Europe, science and global exploration were taking off, and the Ottoman Turks were invading southeastern Europe.

While these apocalyptic tensions can and have led many to violence, including many early Anabaptists, it is important to recognize that historically, it is not the case that the majority or default position of the apocalyptic imagination was violent, however this is how many historians have tended to treat it. Similarly, in the study of sixteenth century Anabaptism, much of the scholarship around Anabaptist apocalyptic thought has centred on the radical and violent expressions, largely ignoring how those Anabaptists who remained peacefully nonresistant, comprising the majority of the early Anabaptists, were also influenced by the apocalyptic thought of their era.[3] This study seeks to explore the linkages in sixteenth century Anabaptism between apocalyptic expectations and positions of nonresistance. How and why would the perceived imminent end of the world lead a Christian to nonresistance instead of violence? What does a nonresistant apocalyptic expectation look like? How did the early Anabaptists conceive of nonresistance in the End Times? These are the sorts of questions that will be explored in this study.

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3. Ibid.

1.1 Apocalypticism and Eschatology

Before proceeding any further, it is essential to establish a few key distinctions and definitions. Apocalypticism must be distinguished from the more inclusive term, eschatology. While these two terms are relatively similar and are sometimes used interchangeably, they need to be distinguished because they represent different areas or genres of Christian thought. Exploring the etymology of these words clarifies their meanings. Apocalypse comes from the Greek word, *apokalupsis*, which means to uncover or reveal. This is where the biblical book, titled, Revelation gets its name. It is literally the great revealing of God's plan for the future. However, the term is generally used to refer to the end of the world. Eschatology, by contrast, comes from the Greek word, *eskhatos*, which means the last or the end. Eschatology is then the study of the last, end, or final things, which can encapsulate that part of theology concerned with death, judgement, and the final destiny of the soul or humankind.

Where these definitions can become more difficult is when one considers how these terms are used in contemporary culture. Because the biblical book of the apocalypse, Revelation, can be understood as largely dealing with eschatology (ie. "the end"), apocalypse and eschatology have come to mean much the same thing in their modern usage. Similarly, in books and films, "apocalypse" also tends to refer to eschatological things. A careful reading of Revelation would reveal (pun intended) that it is not a book about the end of all things, but rather a revealing that there are greater things at play in God's plan for the future. It functions as a second bookend for the Bible, from creation to new creation. In this way, apocalyptic literature is

a separate genre from eschatological literature. At the same time, some apocalyptic literature can also be eschatological, but not all of it is, and almost all eschatological literature is apocalyptic.[4]

For the sake of this study, apocalypticism should be understood as defined by Klaassen, as referring to "the imagining and depicting of those end time events which were expected to take place on Earth prior to the return of Christ, the Last Judgement, and the end of time," as outlined in the apocalyptic books of the Bible.[5] Apocalypticism takes shape in a Christian in the form of "living in the present in the light of a known past and a hoped-for future. The shape of any particular apocalyptic vision will reflect the religious and political specifics of contemporary experience."[6] Apocalypticism can be conceived of in a number of ways, including, but not limited to the Parousia (the Second Coming), the Last Judgement, Millennialism/Chiliasm, the Resurrection, Restitution, the coming of the Antichrist, and the Age of the Spirit.

1.2 Sixteenth Century Anabaptist Apocalypticism

The sixteenth century Anabaptists drew heavily on medieval apocalyptic writers who used a considerable mix of allegorical and literal-historical interpretations of apocalyptic texts; the main writers being Otto von Freising and Joachim of Fiore, the latter was the most significant medieval apocalyptic writer. Bernard McGinn writes that Joachim's apocalyptic vision stressed "the domination of the spiritual and charismatic over the institutional and rational in the future Church [which] was diametrically opposed to the forces that triumphed in the thirteenth

4. One possible non-apocalyptic example of eschatological literature may be scientific approaches to eschatology.

5. Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*, vi.

6. Ibid., 1.

century," particularly the papacy.[7] Joachim's radical critiques of the thirteenth century Church mark the beginning of the reaction against the papacy, which was to lead ultimately to its identification with the Antichrist by later reformers.[8]

Apocalypticism in the sixteenth century had a particularly strong and widespread literal-historical interpretation, owing largely to the religious, social, and political upheavals that were occurring simultaneously in Europe. Examples of these upheavals can be seen in the events of the Reformation, the German Peasants' War, and the Habsburg attempts at political consolidation in Europe, to name a few. Klaassen describes the general apocalyptic sense in Europe in the sixteenth century like the experience of expecting a storm or tornado in the late afternoon of a very hot day: "We all know the signs; a gradually darkening sky, a great stillness, lightning flashes, growling thunder in the distance. We fasten things down and prepare to take shelter. Everyone in the community can see it coming. There is a consensus concerning the coming storm."[9] So certain of this "coming storm," Martin Luther rushed his translation of the book of Daniel in the hope that it would have a chance to warn people of what was to come, supposedly afraid that his translation of the Bible would not be finished in time before the End.[10]

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7. Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1979), 129.

8. Ibid., 159.

9. Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*, 20.

10. Thomas F. Torrance, "The Eschatology of the Reformation," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Papers no. 2 (1953): 43.

Apocalyptic expectation was a formative force that preoccupied the majority of sixteenth century theological writers, and the Anabaptists were no exception to this.[11]

C. Arnold Snyder notes that during the sixteenth century, a common apocalyptic understanding was that during the Last Days, Christ's Spirit would be poured out on humankind, "resulting in dreams, visions, and direct revelations, just as it had been in the time of the Old Testament prophets."[12] This, combined with the belief that they were in fact living in the Last Days, led many Anabaptists to scrutinize the prophetic books of the Bible, enabling them to interpret contemporary events as confirmations of their apocalyptic readings of Scripture. For Snyder, early Anabaptist apocalypticism was "a natural working out of the necessary conjunction of spirit and letter," which led many Anabaptists to embrace charismatic leaders with strong apocalyptic messages rooted in biblical prophecy.[13]

One of these leaders that many Anabaptists embraced, or at least sympathized with to a certain extent, was Thomas Müntzer. Though technically not an Anabaptist, Müntzer's popular movement of radical reform came to influence many notable Anabaptists, including Hans Denck, Conrad Grebel, and Hans Hut. Müntzer believed that the End Times had arrived, and that a new apostolic church must gather God's elect and separate themselves from the godless. In his *Sermon Before the Princes,* Müntzer boldly presented himself as the "New Daniel" that will lead

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11. Notable sixteenth century (non-Anabaptist) theologians who were not concerned with apocalypticism were Erasmus and Zwingli.

12. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction,* Revised Student Edition (Kitchener, ON.: Pandora Press, 1997), 154.

13. Ibid.

God's elect to "wipe out the godless."[14] He believed that "the weeds must be plucked out of the vineyard of God in the time of the harvest. Then the beautiful red wheat will acquire substantial rootage and come up properly."[15] In his sermon, Müntzer appealed to the Saxon Princes to join him in this Crusade against the godless, warning them that if they did not join him in wielding the sword against the godless, "the sword will be taken from them."[16] In 1525, Müntzer found expression for his apocalyptic beliefs in the German Peasants' War. Convinced that he was taking part in the End Times, Müntzer urged the peasants gathered at Frankenhausen to fight the professional army of the princes, resulting in a slaughter with over six thousand peasants losing their lives. Müntzer was captured, brought to recantation, and executed in Mühlhausen in May 1525.

Hans Hut was one of the early Anabaptists who embraced Müntzer, and was present at the Battle of Frankenhausen, however not as a combatant, but rather as a sympathetic spectator.[17] As an Anabaptist, Hut blended Müntzer's apocalyptic convictions with Anabaptism, allowing him to develop mystical and apocalyptic emphases in his theology that have their origins in Müntzer.[18] Regarding his position on wielding the sword, James Stayer notes that Hut is

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14. Thomas Müntzer, "A Sermon before the Princes on Daniel 2 (1524)," in *Christianity and Revolution: Radical Christian Testimonies, 1520-1650*, ed. Lowell H. Zuck (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1975), 37.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. James M. Stayer, "Hans Hut's Doctrine of the Sword, an Attempted Solution," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol. 39, no. 3 (1965): 182.

18. For example, his theological understanding of a "three-fold baptism," as well as yieldedness to God's will (or *Gelassenheit*).

simultaneously "praised as a champion of nonresistance and condemned as a man of violence."[19] The reason for this seemingly ironic contradiction is that Hut's nonresistance was provisional. While Hut was the defender of the nonresistant *Stäbler* (staff-bearer) position at the Nikolsburg Disputation against Balthasar Hubmaier and the *Schwertler* (sword-bearer), he also believed that "a Christian can indeed have a sword, as long as he allows it to remain in the sheath until the Lord tells him to draw it… At that time the saints would punish the others, the sinners who had not repented. Then the priests who had preached falsely would have to give an account of their teaching and the powerful of their government."[20] Hut believed that the date of this apocalyptic Judgement would be on Pentecost 1528, three and a half years after the German Peasants' War.[21] On this Day of Judgement, the 144,000 elect who had been baptized with the eschatological "Sign of Thau" would execute God's justice with the sword, allowing Christ to return.[22]

Another early Anabaptist leader that was closely associated with charismatic apocalypticism was Melchior Hoffman. Like Hut, Hoffman had an overwhelming concern with the End Times, and it governed his reading of Scripture. His apocalyptic visions led the Strasbourg prophets, Lienhard and Ursula Jost, to identify Hoffman as Elijah, one of the witnesses of the End Times. Hoffman's revelations led him to believe that Christ would return in 1533, and that Strasbourg would be the "New Jerusalem" where the 144,000 elect, baptized with

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19. Stayer, "Hans Hut's Doctrine of the Sword," 181.

20. Ibid., 185.

21. Ibid., 186.

22. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 194. The Sign of Thau is an apocalyptic reference to the seal of the 144,000 elected of the End Times in Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 7. Notably, the Melchiorite and Münsterite Anabaptists also baptized their converts with the Sign of Thau.

the Sign of Thau, would rule together with Christ in the Millennium. However, unlike Hut, Hoffman taught that the elect were not to take up the sword to usher in Christ's return. Rather, he believed that there would be pious political rulers that would function as God's instruments of judgement (aided in part by the invading Turks), destroying the godless for them.[23] Given Hoffman's ambiguous commitment to nonresistance, his Anabaptist followers, the Melchiorites, ended up expressing their apocalyptic expectations in both violent and nonviolent ways.

The most infamous example of violent Melchiorite apocalypticism was the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster, which, after Hoffman's expectation for Strasbourg in 1533 failed, became the site of the New Jerusalem. At Münster, the Anabaptists led by Jan Matthijs, Bernhard Rothmann, and King Jan van Leiden established an Anabaptist theocratic government modeled on the Davidic kingdom in the Old Testament. Rothmann, the kingdom's leading theologian, moved the Münsterites beyond Hoffman's peaceful chiliastic apocalypticism, and argued for a position similar to that of Thomas Müntzer's in his treatise, *Concerning Revenge*, calling for the Christian elect to take a much more active and violent role in slaying the godless to allow for Christ to return.[24] In reality, the Anabaptist kingdom came to be defined by violence, the institution of polygamy, and an increasingly desperate situation for the people inside the city suffering under the siege of the city by the armies of the local Catholic and Lutheran princes. Matthijs believed that Christ would return on Easter, April 5, 1534 in Münster, liberating the besieged city and ushering in the Millennium. The city eventually fell to the besieging armies on

23. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 211-212, 282. Snyder notes, "Hoffman expected the godless to be eradicated before Jesus' return partly by the agency of the Turks."

24. Bernhard Rothmann, "Concerning Revenge (1534)." In *Christianity and Revolution: Radical Christian Testimonies, 1520-1650*, ed. Lowell H. Zuck (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1975), 102.

June 25, 1535, leading to a slaughter of the city's inhabitants. While Hoffman should not be understood as directly causing the events at Münster, his revelations and teachings certainly acted as a catalyst for them. Klaus Depperman notes that, despite his nonresistant teachings, "the idea that the extermination of the godless must precede the day of final judgement, and with the conception of an earthly reign of the saints in a theocratic intermediate kingdom until the return of Christ, Hoffman had created the most important ideological presuppositions for the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster."[25]

These fiery and charismatic figures do not fit well within the Benderian narrative of Anabaptist beginnings described in "The Anabaptist Vision," and are usually sidelined as outliers, extremists, or exceptions to the peaceful Anabaptist norm.[26] The problem with this narrative is that it also sidelines by association much of the role of apocalypticism in the early Anabaptist story. As we have seen above, sixteenth century Europe was dramatically apocalyptic, and it is essential for us to understand that the Anabaptists were also part of that world. We should not imagine them as withdrawn or separate from this world, but rather as right in the middle of it. These people did not emerge from a vacuum, but rather they were products of their time, place, and community, and thus cannot and should not be separated from the apocalypticism of sixteenth century Europe.

Due to our contemporary sensibilities that are shaped by scepticism and rationalism, it can be very hard to read some of the apocalyptic texts of these early Anabaptists, particularly if

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25. Klaus Depperman, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, UK.: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 187.

26. In "The Anabaptist Vision," Bender refers to Hut, Hoffman, and Münster as an "aberration" that obscured the genuine character of Anabaptism. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol 18, no. 2 (1944): 73.

one tries to read them as authoritative or meaningful for contemporary theological reflection in the Anabaptist tradition, given that their apocalyptic expectations of the imminent end obviously did not materialize. However, for most early Anabaptists, their apocalypticism was primarily expressed "in being obedient followers of Jesus, in submitting themselves to the discipline of the Church, keeping it pure for the Bridegroom's return, and witnessing to the truth of the gospel."[27] For others, like Hut and the Münsterites, their apocalyptic interpretations led them to seek ways to faithfully assist God in establishing his Kingdom on Earth in a visible and tangible way. Despite being influenced by apocalypticism to different ethical positions, both the "violent" and "peaceful" Anabaptist groups are just as much products of the Reformation and legitimate expressions of Anabaptism. If observers ignore or sidelines the role of apocalypticism in early Anabaptist life and thought, sidelining it along with the "violent" Anabaptists, they will miss the vital connection that exists between early Anabaptist ethics and apocalypticism.

As hinted at above, apocalypticism emerges alongside, and is often a function of, worsening social and political conditions, but for many in the sixteenth century, it was also a

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27. Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*, 94. Examples of this can be seen in Michael Sattler's writing, "The elect servants and maidservants of God will be marked on the forehead with the name of their Father. The world has risen up against those who are redeemed from its error. The gospel is testified to before all the world for a testimony. According to this the Day of the Lord must no longer tarry." - Michael Sattler, "Letter to Horb," in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, ed. and trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1973), 61.; Conrad Grebel was reported to have claimed that the Messiah was at the door - Leonard von Muralt and Walter Schmid, eds, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Taüfer in der Schweiz, Band 1: Zürich* (Zürich, Schweiz.: Salomon Hirzel Verlag, 1952), 122.; the letters of Jacob Hutter reveal a growing sense of the approaching end - Jacob Hutter, *Brotherly Faithfulness: Epistles from a Time of Persecution*, ed. Hutterian Brethren (Rifton, NY.: Plough Publishing House, 1979).; and Menno Simons regularly refers to apocalyptic language when discussing the perversions of the Gospel - Menno Simons, "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing." in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 303. Menno Simons, "Epistle to Martin Micron." in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 927, 943.

motor for social change. This can be seen in the social, economic, and political goals of the peasants led by the apocalyptic Thomas Müntzer in the German Peasants' War,[28] the disastrous end of which, Klaassen suggests, led to a vast disappointment of ordinary people with the mainline Reformation.[29] This disappointment led many to embrace or seek out new avenues for their apocalyptic hopes for reform, with many eventually finding a home among the emerging Anabaptist groups. For these people, the coming apocalypse would bring with it justice for the oppressed, the end of economic inequality, and the cessation of the general persecution and exploitation of the ordinary people in the lower classes of society in the great levelling process of the End. In their expectation of God's overturning of the existing order, God would establish in its place a new order of justice and peace in the Kingdom of God that would last forever as part of the divine summing up of history. In this way, their apocalyptic expectations were directly linked to their deep passion for justice, and was in no essential way different than people today who would join a revolution or movement out of a vision of justice and peace for the future.

1.3 Thesis Statement and Method

Apocalyptic expectation had a tangible effect on the way that the sixteenth century Anabaptists lived their lives and practiced their faith, and it is necessary to study the relationship between apocalypticism and ethics in sixteenth century Anabaptism. While the vast majority of scholarship on Anabaptist apocalypticism has focused on the dramatic and violent approaches taken by Anabaptists such as Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman, and the Münsterite Anabaptists, this study argues that apocalyptic thinking in Anabaptism also has the possibility of leading to a

28. See: "The Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants," in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge, United Kingdom.: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231-238.

29. Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*, 115.

nonresistant position. In what follows, this study will show this to be the case in examining the theologies of Clemens Adler and Menno Simons who were influenced by apocalypticism, arguing that despite their roots in apocalypticism, they were drawn to positions of Christian nonresistance.

Rather than trying to describe the apocalyptic expectation of an entire movement as broad and diverse as sixteenth century Anabaptism, this study will instead focus on two particular Anabaptist reformers chosen for their geographical, ecclesial, and chronological distance from each other in early Anabaptism. This study will pay special attention to both of these Anabaptists' theological and biographical details to describe the nature of their visions of the End Times and how they developed, reflecting the fact that apocalypticism is understood intellectually, but is lived out physically.

The point of this argument is not to suggest that Anabaptist approaches to apocalypticism were always peaceful or rooted in Christian nonresistance, but rather to broaden our understanding that apocalyptic thinking is not always violent. It is to broaden the apocalyptic lens for the study of sixteenth century Anabaptism. This study will do this by first outlining the biographical details of Clemens Adler, paying close attention to the context that his apocalyptic thought emerges from, as biographies can work to locate and contextualize the apocalyptic theologies of these sixteenth century Anabaptists. Then this study will be able to examine more thoroughly his theological writings, paying special attention to how his apocalyptic beliefs led him to develop his position of nonresistance. This same method will then be used to explore the life and writings of Menno Simons, investigating how his apocalyptic thought led him to develop his nonresistance. Finally, this study will conclude by comparing and contrasting the two different approaches taken by Adler and Menno, presenting their lives and writings as examples

of sixteenth century Anabaptist apocalyptic thought that led to the development of nonresistance, rather than violence.

1.4 Clemens Adler and Menno Simons

The two sixteenth century Anabaptists chosen for this study are Clemens Adler and Menno Simons. Clemens Adler was an Anabaptist missionary that operated among the proto-Hutterian groups in the Austrian Habsburg territories of Silesia and Moravia, in modern-day Czechia and Poland, from the mid-late 1520s till his execution in 1536. While much is still unknown about Adler's origins, a lot of what we do know comes from his one known extant treatise, "Judgement Concerning the Sword," a theologically rich account of the history and nature of God's ordering of the sword. Very little has been written about Adler and his treatise, but this study will seek to provide all known details of his life and explore this treatise to examine how his apocalypticism translates into his Christian nonresistance.

Menno Simons, on the other hand, has been the subject of numerous studies, and more has been written about him than nearly any other sixteenth century Anabaptist. Menno was a former Catholic priest in the Netherlands who joined the Dutch Anabaptists in the early-mid 1530s, and served as their leader from 1540 until his death (by natural causes) in 1561.[30] Because of his success in the building and maintaining of connections between the many scattered groups of Dutch and northern German Anabaptist groups during his ministry, his followers became known as the Mennonites.

As we can see, these two Anabaptists are quite different: one is a former Catholic priest and the other is a missionary, one Dutch and the other Moravian, one dies of old age and the

30. Following the fall of Münster, David Joris was the primary leader of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany until he abandoned the movement in 1540, after which, Menno took control. This is explained in more detail in Chapter Four.

other a martyr, one operates earlier than the other, one is the well-known founder of the Mennonites and the other is relatively unknown. The fact that they are so different is vital for this study because it will be able to show that a relationship between apocalypticism and nonresistance will not be geographically isolated or unique to a certain period of sixteenth century Anabaptism.

While this study will examine some familiar topics and concepts in sixteenth century Anabaptist scholarship, the main area of focus is relatively new ground for this field. While there have been studies on the phenomenon of apocalypticism in Anabaptism and the Radical Reformation, they deal almost exclusively with figures like Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman, and the Münsterites. The only attempt at a broad survey of apocalypticism in sixteenth century Anabaptism is the volume by Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages*, which does not directly consider the connection between apocalypticism and sixteenth century Anabaptist peace theology, specifically, as this study seeks to do.

In terms of the chosen Anabaptists, very little has ever been written in depth about Clemens Adler, and what does exist is largely done in a passing manner that makes mention of the quality and good worth of his writings, as can be seen with scholars like Harold Bender, who noted that Adler's treatise is "a thoroughly nonresistant work, and of high quality,"[31] and Cornelius J. Dyck, who stated that the treatise deserves more attention.[32] The first scholar to give attention to Adler's leadership within the rise and development of Anabaptism in Silesia and

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31. Harold S. Bender, "Adler, Clemens (d. 1536)," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Volume IV, ed. Cornelius Krahn (Harrisonburg, VA.: Herald Press, 1959), 1056. However, Peter Brock offers a dissenting view, finding little of substance in Adler's treatise. See: Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 75.

32. Cornelius J. Dyck, "Research Notes: Topics for Research in Anabaptism," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol. 64, no. 1 (1990): 74-76.

Moravia was Werner O. Packull, who devotes a section of a chapter to defining Adler's role in the establishment of pre-Hutterian communities in Moravia and mission work in Silesia.[33] Other scholars have provided theological analyses that compare Adler to other early Anabaptists and his writings to the *Schleitheim Articles*,[34] and James M. Stayer examines his nonresistance, describing it as "radical apoliticism in the broad context of a Christology, a providential interpretation of history and an allegorical connection of Judaism and Christianity."[35] While a full translation of Adler's treatise is yet to be published,[36] short excerpts have been published in a number of places, including in Peter J. Klassen's *The Economics of Anabaptism, 1525-1560*, where he includes a section concerning temporal goods.[37] In terms of more recent scholarship, Martin Rothkegel has provided the fullest assessment of Adler's ministry in Silesia (largely in German), building on Packull's earlier work, as well as providing a more thorough analysis of

33. Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore, ML.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 106ff. See also: Werner O. Packull, "Clemens Adler: A Swiss Connection to Silesian Anabaptism?," *The Conrad Grebel Review* vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 243-250.

34. See: Gerald Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion: Radical Confessional Rhetoric from Schleitheim to Dordrecht* (Telford, PA.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2006), 123ff.

35. James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword, Revised Edition* (Lawrence, KS.: Coronado Press, 1976), 169.

36. Jonathan Seiling is expecting to publish his writings on Clemens Adler, including his translation of "Judgement Concerning the Sword." Seiling has provided me with an early copy of his translation to assist me in this study, and it is used throughout. I am truly grateful for Seiling's generosity.

37. Peter J. Klassen, *The Economics of Anabaptism, 1525-1560* (The Hague, Netherlands.: Mouton and Co., 1964), 123-125.

the development of Anabaptism in Silesia.[38]

For Menno Simons, on the other hand, so much has been written about him with divergent opinions and interpretations on nearly every aspect of Menno's life and writings, that a full review of the literature is next to impossible.[39] However, very little has been written regarding his apocalyptic expectations, as many Mennonite scholars have tended to gloss over this aspect or distance Menno from it to keep him free from any possible Münsterite connections.[40] Cornelius Krahn does this as he addresses Menno's eschatology, emphasizing his pacifism and biblicism in his theology, in contrast to Münster's militant apocalypticism.[41] Krahn intentionally frames Menno's eschatology as peaceful and Münster's apocalypticism as militant in order to distance Menno from Münster without acknowledging their similarities.[42] Likewise, William Keeney acknowledges that Menno developed a "fervent eschatological hope," but argues that he also entirely repudiated the Münsterite program and apocalypticism.[43] While both

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38. Martin Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, eds. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden, Netherlands.: Brill, 2007), 163-216; Martin Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," *Archiv für Schlesische Kirchengeschichte*, no. 61 (2003): 149-209.

39. To get a sense of the wide field of study on the life and writings of Menno Simons, see Appendix 2 for a select list of biographies written about Menno Simons.

40. For example, see: Abraham Friesen, *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer between Luther, Erasmus, and the Holy Spirit* (Bloomington, IN.: Xlibiris, 2015), 43 ff. Friesen understands Menno as being more influenced by Martin Luther and Erasmus than Melchior Hoffman and the Melchiorites.

41. Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons* (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1984), 110.

42. Cornelius Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought* (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1981), 128-129.

43. William E. Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice from 1539-1564* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1968), 179.

Krahn and Keeney engage with and acknowledge Menno's eschatology (rather than his apocalypticism) in their works, they fail to recognize the similarities that Menno has with Münster due to the shared Melchiorite origins.

In exploring Menno's Melchiorite origins and apocalypticism, this study relies on a wide range of scholars when considering his apocalyptic expectations and his relationship with the Münsterites. Of these, Helmut Isaak's *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* functions as the most extensive treatment of Menno's apocalyptic expectations, especially in regard to his Melchiorite vision of the New Jerusalem, while Sjouke Voolstra's *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* provides a nuanced interpretation of Menno's life and writings, without needing to take steps to distance Menno from Münster. In terms of Menno's writings, most direct quotations made will come from the collection edited by J. C. Wenger, *The Complete Works of Menno Simons.*[44]

While this study will most likely be classified as intellectual history, or perhaps even as theology, it should be recognized that any historical study of apocalypticism essentially removes the artificial barrier between intellectual and social history. This is because the phenomenon of apocalypticism is concretely historical and is not at all conceived of or experienced abstractly. Since apocalypticism is interpreted as representing contemporary persons, institutions, and events, the historical and biographical realities of these Anabaptists cannot be separated from their theological conceptions. In this study, we will explore the biography and writings of Clemens Adler, and then move on to Menno Simons to do the same. The lines between the

44. There are a few instances where this study will consider the first editions of Menno's writings, particularly *The Foundation Book*, that are not included in the Wenger collection, but rather will refer to translations and quotations from Isaak and Willem de Bakker. These earlier editions are helpful for shedding light on Menno's initial feelings regarding Münster, which he later abandons in subsequent editions.

historical and the theological tend to blur in this sort of study, despite best attempts to analyze them separately, but even within this "blur" we can get a sense for how both Adler's and Menno's historical situations and experiences necessarily influenced the nature of their theological writings.

Chapter 2: Clemens Adler, A Spiritualist Anabaptist Missionary

Clemens Adler was a sixteenth century Anabaptist leader and missionary in the territories of Silesia and Moravia (in modern-day Poland and Czechia, respectively), who, despite being a relatively obscure figure in the early Anabaptist movement, developed a thoroughly nonresistant Christian ethic steeped in an apocalyptic system oriented toward the return of Jesus Christ on holy Mount Zion on the great Day of the Lord. The goal of this chapter will be to illustrate how Adler's apocalypticism influenced the development of his position of nonresistance. This chapter will seek to examine his biographical details and historical situation, out of which his apocalyptic theology emerges, identifying and contextualizing the apocalyptic tensions that existed in his life to provide a historical framework upon which his theological and ethical system can be examined further in the next chapter.

2.1 Discovering Clemens Adler

Adler's only known extant writing is his treatise entitled, "Judgement Concerning the Sword and the Distinct Ways it Applies Force in the Three Principalities – the World, the Jews and the Christians – Including Other Matters"[45] (hereafter "Judgement Concerning the Sword"), which was found in an eighteenth century Anabaptist codex by Samuel Geiser in 1946 in the attic of a Mennonite farmhouse in the Emmental region of Switzerland.[46] In this treatise, Adler develops a covenantal theology based on the covenants God made with humanity that is rich in apocalyptic imagery, but ultimately leads to a position of Christian nonresistance. The codex was an "old leather-bound volume, partly worm-eaten and entirely handwritten," and along with

45. The original German title is: *Das Urteil von dem Schwert mit unterschidlichem gewalt Dreier Fürstenthum der Welt, Juden, und Christen, mit Anderen Anliegenden sachen*.

46. Samuel Geiser, "An Ancient Anabaptist Witness for Nonresistance," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol. 25, no. 1 (1951): 66.

Adler's treatise, the codex contained thirteen hymns from the Ausbund and four other theological treatises by Socinian writers.[47] Because the codex was found in Switzerland, Geiser and other scholars believed Adler to be Swiss in origin, and began looking for him in Swiss Anabaptist sources, but to no avail.[48]

In 1961, a second codex containing Adler's treatise was found in a former Hutterite dwelling in Sobotište (Sabbatisch), Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia).[49] This connection to the Hutterian Brethren led Werner Packull to begin looking for Adler in Hutterite sources. While no mention is made of Adler in the *Hutterian Chronicle*, Packull eventually found a reference to an "Adler" among a Gabrielite community in Silesia, and a "Clement" who was an early Anabaptist leader in the area, making the connection that these Anabaptists were in fact one and the same.[50]

2.2 Clemens Adler: Swiss or Bohemian?

Packull assumed that Adler may have originated in Switzerland, but fled to Moravia with the Swiss Anabaptists, joining the Gabrielites, and operated as a missionary for the group in Silesia, a territory neighbouring Moravia. [51] The Gabrielites were a proto-Hutterian Anabaptist group led by Gabriel Ascherham that had a strong presence in Silesia. It is significant to note that Ascherham's group represents a communitarian and pacifist Anabaptism with an increasingly

47. Ibid. Adler's treatise is the first of the five treatises in the codex.

48. Packull, "Clemens Adler," 243.

49. Robert Friedmann, *Die Schriften der Hutterischen Täufergemeinschaften: Gesamtkatalog Ihrer Manuskriptbücher, Ihrer Schreiber und ihrer Literatur, 1529-1667* (Wien, Österreich: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1965), 35-37, 105. Attempts to establish the location of the manuscript have failed since at least 1986. This was believed to have been the original autograph created by Adler.

50. Packull, "Clemens Adler," 244.

51. Ibid., 245.

spiritualistic tendency and a chiliastic apocalypticism. Packull also supports Harold Bender's theory that Adler was a "Moravian Anabaptist of Austerlitz belonging to the *Stäbler* party of Jakob Widemann, which later became the Hutterites."[52] Packull's theory of Adler's connection to the Gabrielites appears to be fairly credible, given the Gabrielite presence in both the German and Polish cultures in Silesia, linking the Anabaptist communities in Moravia with the Polish Socinians, whose writings were found with Adler's in the Geiser codex. However, the fact that Adler's life, ministry, and martyrdom make no appearance in the *Hutterian Chronicle* suggests that he may have fallen out of favour with the group, perhaps even being banned, after which he took leadership of his own Anabaptist community in Silesia.[53] Another possible connection between Adler and Swiss Anabaptism comes from a sixteenth century Hutterite song recorded in *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, attributed to Bastel Glaser (Hubmayer),[54] written in 1537. The nineteenth verse of the song is roughly translated as:

> Leo Jud to Adler did speak
> and shout, his unrighteousness reveal.
> So that it angered the dragon,
> that he was to be cast out and eternally lost.[55]

It is difficult to decipher the original meaning of this verse, as it can be interpreted literally or allegorically. Allegorically, it could be interpreted as a confrontation between the "Lion of

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52. Harold S. Bender and Samuel J. Steiner, "Adler, Clemens (d. 1536)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)*, 1959; updated January 2015, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Adler,_Clemens_(d._1536)&oldid=165776.

53. Martin Rothkegel suggests this. See: Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," 194.

54. No relation to Balthasar Hubmaier.

55. *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, 5th ed. (Cayley, AB.: MacMillan Colony, 1983), 74. "*Der Leo Jud tät zum Adler reden / Und schreien, sein Ungerechtigkeit anzeigen / Das tät dem Drachen also Zorn, / Dass er verivorsen ivar undeivig verloren*."

Judah" (Leo Jud), representing Jesus, and the "eagle" (Adler), an imperial symbol of the House of Habsburg, or literally, it could be a confrontation between Leo Jud and Clemens Adler. Leo Jud was a reformer in Zürich during the Reformation, and a close colleague of Ulrich Zwingli.[56] Conrad Grebel notes that Leo Jud was sympathetic to and privately conceded the better argument to the Zürich Anabaptists on the issue of baptism.[57] If we hold to the literal interpretation of this verse, noting the clear connection between Leo Jud and the Swiss Anabaptists in Zürich, from whom Packull believed Adler to have originated, this verse could point to a confrontation between Leo Jud and Clemens Adler in Zürich that ended with Adler being expelled, or "cast out" of the city, which may have led him to seek refuge in Moravia.

What is clear, however, is that Adler was preaching in Silesia and gaining a following as early as 1525. An old history of the Reformation in Silesia reports of a "Clement" who was the "chief Anabaptist"[58] in Silesia, and that he had reportedly brought Anabaptism to Silesia from Moravia in 1525.[59] This "Clement" is almost certainly Clemens Adler, but the given start date of 1525 is more questionable, as this is quite early in the Anabaptist timeline. If Adler is believed to have come to Moravia and Silesia from Switzerland, perhaps after being expelled from Zürich, it is possible that Adler may have brought Anabaptism with him as early as this report suggests. If,

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56. It is interesting to note that Leo Jud also developed a covenantal theology, strikingly similar to that seen in Adler's own treatise. Perhaps this could point to a deeper connection between the two.

57. Leland Harder, ed., *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents* (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1985), 553.

58. Heinrich Schubert, *Bilder aus der Geschichte der Stadt Schweidnitz* (Schweidenitz, Deutschland: Verlag von L. Heege, 1911), 241. "*Wiedertäuferhäuptling*."

59. Schubert, *Bilder*, 241. "*Die Wiedertäuferumruhen, die höchst wahrscheinlich aus Mähren nach Schlesien getommen sind und hier zuerst im Jahre 1525 fich bemerkbar machten*."

however, Adler is not of Swiss origin, it could be argued that the 1525 date marks the beginning of his radical reform work in Silesia before he officially joined the Anabaptist movement a couple of years later. This would fit Martin Rothkegel's assumption that Adler was originally a priest from Bohemia before becoming an Anabaptist and joining the Gabrielites.[60]

The archival source that Rothkegel uses to support his hypothesis notes that Adler was "a learned man" and he could speak three languages fluently, "Latin, Bohemian (Czech), and German," and that prior to his ministry in Silesia, he "had been preaching in Bohemia for a long time."[61] It is important to recognize that "preaching in Bohemia" does not necessarily rule out a Swiss origin entirely, as the two are not mutually exclusive. Adler may have been expelled from Zürich and fled to Bohemia where he became a preacher before moving on to Silesia. The issue then becomes a matter of just how long he was preaching in Bohemia before going to Silesia. If Adler was preaching in Bohemia earlier than the January 1525 Anabaptist baptisms in Zürich, it is unlikely that he has roots among the Swiss Brethren in Zürich, but there is no evidence available to decisively establish this date one way or the other.

2.3 Anabaptism in Sixteenth Century Silesia

In the early sixteenth century, Silesia was ruled by the King of Bohemia and Hungary, Louis II Jagiello, who fell to the Turks on the battlefield in the Battle of Mohács on August 26, 1526. Because Louis II died without an heir, the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand I of Habsburg succeeded to the throne, ruling over all of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and parts of Hungary. By

60. Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," 194.

61. "Paul Pförtner (Phörtnerus) und Sebastian Gutteter, Cronika, hieriennen seind beschrieben die geschichtenn, so sich im lanndt Schleisen unnd sonderlich in der stadt Breslaw begebn hatt, 1554 (Abschrift von 1571)," BUWr, IV F 121, Bl. 198v. Biblioteka Uniwersytecka we Wrocławiu (Wrocław University Library), Wrocław, Polska.

this time, Anabaptism had already begun to spread into Moravia, with Swiss Anabaptist refugees establishing communities in Nikolsburg and Austerlitz. The Anabaptists benefited from the tolerant religious attitudes of the Moravian lords as, since the fifteenth century, Hussites and Catholics had coexisted peacefully, which led to the emergence of a "supra-denominational" ethos among the Moravian nobility.[62] Religious dissenters continued to be tolerated by the Moravian lords, even in the face of persistent attempts by Ferdinand I to suppress the Anabaptist movement in his territories.

However, in Silesia, where a culture of toleration was not quite as strong, Ferdinand I's attempts to suppress the Anabaptist movement were more successful. In the fifteenth century, Silesia had remained Catholic in the Hussite Wars, and maintained a strong connection to the Holy Roman Empire. Despite this, some regions of Silesia were Lutheran as early as 1523, and areas of Lower Silesia had become an active territory for Anabaptist missions as early as 1525. In the territory of Liegnitz, Caspar Schwenckfeld arose as an alternative reform leader of a spiritualist movement arising within the Lutheran Reformation.

Gabriel Ascherham was a key Anabaptist leader in Silesia, and along with Clemens Adler, worked as an Anabaptist missionary in Silesia and established communitarian Gabrielite settlements in Moravia by leading converted Silesian Anabaptists to the toleration of Moravia. Many of these Gabrielite converts would later join the Hutterites. Besides the Anabaptist missions that brought converted Silesians back to Moravia, there is also evidence of "local Anabaptist conventicles or congregations" existing in the 1530s and 1540s.[63] Hans Hut was another significant Anabaptist leader who operated in Silesia, whose apocalyptic expectations led

62. Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," 164.

63. Ibid., 194.

the Silesian authorities to become concerned with the threat of the Anabaptists revolting against the government, as Hut had participated in the German Peasants' War only a few years earlier. However, there is no mention or indication of any interaction between Adler and Hut in Silesia. In 1527, Balthasar Hubmaier dedicated his second treatise on "Freedom of the Will" to Duke Frederic II of Liegnitz, the Lord of Lower Silesia, perhaps in an attempt to gain toleration from the Duke.[64]

Due to Ferdinand I's punitive mandates against the Anabaptists, Schwenckfelders, and Lutherans, many religious dissenters were exiled from Silesia as early as 1526, including Caspar Schwenckfeld, who fled to Strasbourg on April 5, 1529.

2.4 Adler's Ministry in Silesia: "A New Story"

Details about Adler's life become clearer after he joined the Anabaptist movement. Silesian sources reveal that Adler was active as an Anabaptist missionary in the territories of Schweidnitz, Glatz, and Jauer.[65] An archival source found in a Hutterite codex, entitled, "A New Story That Occurred Recently at Glatz in Silesia"[66] (hereafter "A New Story"), sheds light on Adler's reforming work and preaching in the Silesian territory of Glatz. The account begins by introducing Adler's mission to the city of Glatz as being inspired by a strong sense of living in the "last days."[67] It says that Adler was "moved by the Lord to first preach repentance in

64. Balthasar Hubmaier, "Freedom of the Will, II" in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. and trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1989), 449.

65. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings,* 107.

66. "*Ein Newe Geschichte Nemlich beschehen zue Glatz in der Schlessig*."

67. "Ein Newe Geschichte Nemlich beschehen zue Glatz in der Schlessig, 1571," Codex Hab. 5, 168-170, MICA, Archív mesta Bratislavy (Bratislava City Archives), Bratislava, Slovensko.

Glatz,"[68] where he entered "the temple of idols, interrupted mass, and ordered the priest to be silent."[69] In a manner reminiscent of George Blaurock in the church at Hinwyl, he stepped up to the pulpit and began to preach to the gathered congregation. In response, "the priest and his students"[70] began to sing or chant to drown out his preaching, forcing Adler to move outside and continue his sermon. These actions resulted in Adler being seized by the authorities and imprisoned for the night, after which he was expelled from the city. However, Adler's preaching seemed to have carried the favour of the local gentry, as a "brother and gentleman of Glatz"[71] named Tschischwitz brought Adler to a nearby estate to continue his preaching to the people gathered there. "Among those assembled was a nobleman named Bannawitz,"[72] who also invited Adler to his estate for another service. News of Adler's presence at the Bannawitz estate quickly spread, and the next morning a large crowd of peasants gathered to hear Adler speak, including, "young and old, women and men, servants and maids,"[73] requesting that he "reveal the will of God"[74] to them. Adler replied, "dear friends, look to it that you do not engage in monkey

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68. "*Wisst, das Clement Adler vom Herrn bewegt ist, bueß zuverkündigen, erstlich zue Glotz*."

69. "*Im götzentempel den prediger still haissen schweigen, und ainer stundt lang da geredt*."

70. "*Pfaffen und schuelern*."

71. "*Do hat in ein brueder von Glatz gelait zu ainem edlmann*."

72. "*Under diesen freunden ist ein edlman gewesen, genannt Bannawitz*."

73. "*Jung und alt, frauen und mann, knecht und mägdt*."

74. "*Er sol inen anzaigen den willen des Herren*."

business. The will of the Lord is in you. Live according to it."[75] Adler then began to preach under a large "linden tree."[76]

Adler's sermon to the peasants centred on the coming of the New Adam and nature of the "Lord's covenants,"[77] likely being very similar to the covenantal theology found in Adler's "Judgement Concerning the Sword." When news of Adler's preaching reached the authorities, Adler was arrested. This angered the peasants, who ran angrily alongside the guards who took Adler back to Glatz. Adler was first placed in an "ecclesiastical prison,"[78] and then brought to the chancellery for questioning and an examination of his theological beliefs. When asked about his position on the Sacraments, he is reported to have told them that he thought as much of them "as of your priests!"[79] (in other words, very little). His critique also extended to their "practice of [infant] baptism."[80] For this, he was imprisoned in the "councillors' tower."[81] Perhaps due to his popular support in the city, both by the peasants and the gentry, Adler was once more sentenced to exile and taken out of the city. Four members of the gentry who were arrested with Adler were also released. Adler then left Glatz, moving on to the town of Reichenbach.

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75. "*Secht an, lieben freundt, das ir kain affenspil treibt. Der willen des Herren ist in euch, ich wil euch nicht verborgen haben, secht nur, das ir mit worten darnach thuet und lebt.*"

76. "*Lindenbaum*." Though likely unrelated, it is interesting to note that Menno Simons is also associated with linden trees, having planted one at his home in Wüstenfelde, under which he was reportedly buried.

77. "*Bund*."

78. "*Pfaffenthurm*."

79. "*Gleich als vil als euren pfaffen*."

80. "*Auch der tauff halben gefragt*."

81. "*Rathaußthurm*."

Rather than addressing Adler's subsequent ministry, writings, and martyrdom, "A New Story" concludes with an interesting epilogue that draws on a prophecy from the fifteenth century Franciscan reform preacher, John Capistran. It states that Capistran prophesied that as a sign of the End Times, "the true Gospel would be preached under a linden tree."[82] As a further sign, "the person who cut down the tree would be smitten with blindness."[83] When and if this tree produced new shoots, "the Day of the Lord would be at hand."[84] The author then notes that people were not aware of Capistran's prophecy at Adler's sermon, but that it only became evident upon reflection afterward.[85]

The account found in "A New Story" reveals that Adler was a popular Anabaptist preacher in Silesia, having support from both the peasantry and the gentry. His sermons seemed to have a similar covenantal theology that is found in "Judgement Concerning the Sword," and his trial in front of the authorities in Glatz reveal that he was also anti-clerical, anti-sacramental, and opposed the practice of infant baptism. The exact date of these events is hard to approximate, but given that it is recorded in Hutterian sources, it would have likely happened before his presumed break from the Gabrielites, potentially happening in the early 1530s. A dating as early as 1525 cannot be necessarily ruled out either.

According to Rothkegel, the beginnings of Adler's Anabaptist mission in Glatz was promoted by individual nobles in Silesia, like Bannawitz and Tschischwitz, and even by some of

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82. "*Von diser linden… so wer das recht war Evangelion darunder grpredigt warden*."

83. "*Das der man erblindt ist, der die linden abgehauet hat*."

84. "*Und nit lang darnach wardt der Jüngste Tag kumen*."

85. "*Vor der predig hat niemandt daran gedacht oder in acht gehabt*."

Caspar Schwenckfeld's followers in the region.[86] Adler's Anabaptist mission in Glatz was not separatist at the outset, as it participated in the public worship and it was not restricted to a specific social target group. However, Adler's movement toward separatism intensified as the toleration for the Anabaptists decreased. Much of his missionary method was focused on public preaching in the town centre, often with a positive and spontaneous reaction from the crowd, which would then lead to a mild response from the authorities. Adler's spiritualism and preaching in the vernacular was received by the common people as a liberating alternative to a more restrictive and prescribed Catholic doctrine. Adler's support from both the peasantry and the gentry was quite intimidating to the civil authorities, with the potential for a revolt or overthrow of the establishment being a real possibility.

What is most puzzling about the account of Adler's mission in Glatz is the reference to the Franciscan Capistran prophecy. The epilogue suggests that at the time of writing, Adler had preached under the linden tree, a man had cut down the tree and been smitten with blindness, and the stump of the tree was sending up new shoots as a sign that the "true Gospel" had been preached. The only thing that remained was the coming judgement of the Day of the Lord. Since "A New Story" does not appear in any later Hutterite codices, this suggests that as interest in End Times predictions lost some of their attraction, Adler's story was left out. Along with impressing upon the sixteenth century reader that the Day of the Lord was imminent, "A New Story" functioned to describe and authenticate Adler's reform ministry in Silesia by appealing to a similar popular reform preacher who had operated in Silesia in the fifteenth century. This would grant Adler's Anabaptist message credibility, but more importantly, precedence as representing a

86. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 193.

new Capistran. The inclusion of this epilogue has also led Packull to speculate that Adler may actually have been a Franciscan monk before joining the Anabaptists.[87] The fact that other significant Anabaptist leaders that emerged from Silesia, notably Oswald Glaidt, Bartel Werner, and Michael Steinberg, all left the Franciscan establishment at Schweidnitz (a territory where Adler was active) to join the Anabaptists, supports this theory.[88] Other possible explanations for this odd Franciscan prophetic epilogue could be that the author, rather than Adler, was a former Franciscan, or perhaps writing to appeal to other Franciscans to join the Anabaptist movement. Or this could even just be an example of selective, first-generation Anabaptist borrowing from medieval Catholicism.

2.5 Toleration and Persecution

Suspicion of the Anabaptists from the civil authorities in Silesia can be seen as early as 1528, as they believed that the Anabaptists were seeking a violent overthrow of the government in the spring of 1528.[89] These fears were rooted in the teachings of Hans Hut, who believed that the end of the world was coming on Pentecost 1528. After 1528, toleration for the Anabaptists from the governing authorities in Silesia began to diminish. While there was relative toleration for the Anabaptists in Liegnitz under Frederic II, once he converted to Lutheranism in 1529, all Anabaptists and dissenting groups, including the Schwenckfeldians, were no longer tolerated.[90]

87. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 111.

88. Ibid.

89. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 157.

90. It is interesting to note that Caspar Schwenckfeld also operated in Liegnitz at this same time, as Frederic II supported his reforming work and granted him toleration. Further, it is significant to point out that the date given on Adler's treatise of April 12, 1529 is exactly one week after Schwenckfeld reports to have fled Silesia for Strasbourg. Perhaps Adler's [continued]

In response to Frederic II's decree, the Anabaptists penned a petition to the civil authorities in Silesia on July 28, 1529, requesting an opportunity to defend their theological beliefs.[91] They were requesting safe passage to the assembly so that they might be able to defend their religious views on the basis of Scripture, assuring the assembly that they gave to the emperor what was the emperor's and to God what was God's.[92] As this petition is written shortly after Adler penned his treatise (April 12, 1529), it is possible that "Judgement Concerning the Sword" may have accompanied this Anabaptist petition and could have been used to provide a defence against charges that the Anabaptists were seeking an overthrow of the governing authorities.[93] In "Judgement Concerning the Sword," Adler repeatedly insists that God ordains the wielding of the sword by the secular authorities, and that faithful Christians (ie. the Anabaptists) must submit to them. This call to Christian submission to the secular authorities is a further apologetic appeal for toleration, as their submission would necessarily discount any possible overthrow or insurrection. However, after this loss of toleration, Adler began to lead the Anabaptists that he converted back to the relative safety of Moravia to join other Anabaptist communities there, where toleration still continued.

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treatise was an apologetic attempt to maintain Frederic II's tolerance.

91. Schubert, *Bilder aus der Geschichte der Stadt Schweidnitz*, 242.

92. It is worth noting this request for safe passage may also be an allusion to Jan Hus, who was promised safe passage to defend his beliefs at the Council of Constance, but was instead arrested and burned at the stake for heresy. By claiming the identification with Hus, someone that the Silesian duke would have likely respected or had considerable sympathy for as a local hero, these Anabaptists were also comparing the persecution they were experiencing to that leveled by the Catholics during the Hussite Wars.

93. Jonathan R. Seiling, ed. and trans., *Anabaptist Nonresistance and God's Vengeance: Adler (1529), Burda (1530/31), Haffner (1532)* (Unpublished), 13. Provided by Jonathan Seiling.

On October 13, 1533, following Frederic II's conversion to Lutheranism and his subsequent crack down on dissenting groups, the authorities in Schweidnitz and Jauer were warned that Adler was proselytizing in their territory and that he persuaded many "poor people to move away with him."[94] Adler had apparently convinced the inhabitants of two entire villages to move away with him to Moravia. Frederic II then had Adler imprisoned for several weeks in Wohlau where he had been preaching, and then expelled him from his territories. It appears that Adler was captured and arrested numerous times, including another instance in Reichenbach where he was arrested after delivering a public sermon in 1534, likely similar to the sermon he gave in Glatz under the linden tree.[95]

News of disruptive Anabaptist activity in Silesia led Ferdinand I to issue a warning on April 6, 1535 to the governor of Glogou, Cristoph von Schweinitz, notifying him of the presence of Anabaptist missionaries from Moravia in his territories.[96] The sudden cause for alarm from Ferdinand I in regard to the Anabaptists is likely in response to the Anabaptist Kingdom at Münster, which would have been under siege at the time, falling a few months later in June 1535. As reports of Anabaptist activity in Silesia continued to grow, the king followed up a year later

94. "An Karl von Münsterberg-Oels: Abwanderung von Wiedertäufern aus Schlesien, insbesondere der Erbfürstentümern Schweidnitz-Jauer, nach Mähren, 1533 IV 23," SÚA, Rg. 2, S. 70f., Wien, Österreich.

95. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 177.

96. "An Bischof von Breslau, Karl von Münsterberg-Oels, Friedrich II von Liegnitz, Landvogt Oberlausitz, Landvogt Niederlausitz, Landeshauptmann Schweidnitz, Landeshauptmann Glogou und Landeshauptmann Troppou: Eindringen mährischer Wiedertäufer nach Schlesien, Vertreibung schlesischer Wiedertäufer, 1535 IV 6," SÚA, Rg. 14, Bl. 40., Wien, Österreich.

with an order on April 20, 1536 to expel all Anabaptists from Silesia.[97] In the territories of Schweidnitz and Glogou, two territories where Adler's ministry was most prominent, it is noted that five thousand Anabaptists were expelled in 1536.[98] The aim of the expulsion order from Ferdinand I was by no means the resettlement of the Anabaptists elsewhere, but rather to create a hopeless situation for the refugees, which he hoped would encourage the Anabaptists to abandon their heresy in order to remain in Silesia. However, the threat of expulsion did not stop Anabaptist missionaries like Adler, who apparently continued a successful ministry in Silesia, and encouraged those he had converted to join other Anabaptist groups in Moravia.

Rothkegel suggests that these new converts "developed a hermeneutic of exodus and persecution" that informed their new lives as Anabaptists after they accepted their rebaptisms.[99] These new converts stepped out of their old lives and into a new existence as aliens and exiles, incurring ostracism and persecution, and sometimes even martyrdom. This experience, Rothkegel argues, profoundly influenced their hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture, leading to the development of a more separatist ecclesiology, as seen in Adler's writing. Additionally, despite the relatively minor geographical shift from Silesia to Moravia, these new converts also went from being part of a large minority religious community in a German speaking territory to now becoming a linguistic minority in Moravia as well. By becoming a "double minority," that is, religiously and ethno-linguistically, these pressures would have likely encouraged their separatism further.

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97. "An Fürsten und Stände in Schlesien: Wiedertäufer in den Erbfürstentümern Glogou und Schwiednitz, 1536 IV 20," SÚA, Rg. 14, Bl. 214v-215r., Innsbruck, Österreich.

98. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 201.

99. Ibid., 161.

Archival sources note that following this order, Adler was arrested again at Glogou in 1536 with three other Anabaptists, including Joachim Wittich, who was a tailor from Breslau.[100] In the course of the trial, Adler mainly was accused of having been the cause and beginning of Anabaptism in Silesia, and of betraying the poor people with his "seductive emptiness."[101] After being found guilty of being an Anabaptist, Adler was tortured and then executed by beheading. Rothkegel notes that the death penalty was rarely ever used in sixteenth century Silesia, but was almost exclusively reserved for Anabaptist missionaries.[102] While we do not know the exact date of Adler's execution, archival sources note that Ferdinand I received confirmation of Adler's execution on June 8, 1536, after which he ordered the same to be done to the other Anabaptists arrested with him.[103] In a historical folk song from Glogou written before 1581, verses 1087-1094 mention the execution site of two Anabaptists, likely being Adler and Wittich:

> You are cold on the Oder (River)
> When you go behind the castle you will soon see
> A sandy plain was there,
> For years, many a brave man
> For the sake of his teaching and faith
> Were executed on the spot,
> Even then it is buried in the sand,
> That their souls were no more.[104]

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100. "Schlesische Chronica von dem jahr 1062 bis auff das jahr 1539 (Handschrift aus der Mitte des 16 Jahrhundert)," BUWr, B 1646, Bl. 221r. Biblioteka Uniwersytecka we Wrocławiu (Wrocław University Library), Wrocław, Polska.

101. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 165. His "seductive emptiness" could be a reference to his spiritualist theology.

102. Rothkegel, "Ausbreitung und Verfolgung der Täufer in Schlesien in den Jahren 1527-1548," 158.

103. Ibid., 183.

104. F. W. von Raczek (ed.), *Lobspruch der Stadt Groß-Glogau, zum ersten Male nach einer Handschriften aus dem 16 jahrhundert vollständig herausgeg* (Glogau, 1865), 13. Rough translation: "*So man dan an der Oder kalt / Beim schlos hinumb gehet, so siehet man* [continued]

In summary, it is unclear whether Adler is of Swiss or Bohemian origins, but he clearly was preaching in Bohemia at some point and joined the Gabrielite Anabaptists, leading to a ministry in Silesia. His preaching was well-received by the peasants and the gentry alike, and he even led two whole villages of converted Anabaptists back to Moravia to join Anabaptist communities there. His sermons, as recounted in "A New Story," illustrate a profoundly apocalyptic tone that called his listeners to faithfulness, as the Day of the Lord was imminent. Additionally, the Franciscan Capistran prophecy places Adler firmly within the narrative of the End Time events that were to come with the new shoots growing out of the linden stump. While Adler never got to see the Day of the Lord, he was eventually captured, tried, and executed in Glogou in 1536 for being an Anabaptist missionary, becoming a martyr for his faith. His only known extant writing is "Judgement Concerning the Sword." It is to an analysis of this treatise we now turn.

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baldt / Ein sandigen plan dahinden stan, / Darauff vo jahren manch tapffer man / Umb seiner lehr und glaubens willen / Wardt hingerichtet an der stillen, / Auch alsdan verschorren ist in den sand, / Das sein fast innen ward nimand."

Chapter 3: Judgement Concerning the Sword - Christian Nonresistance and Apocalyptic Dispensationalism

Clemens Adler's only known extant writing, "Judgement Concerning the Sword," was written on April 12, 1529, and provides a helpful glance into a sixteenth century exiled Anabaptist community's struggle to establish an enduring Christian ethic of nonresistance that holds the entire Bible and all of God's covenants as authoritative. Adler achieves this by developing a covenantal theology of history, reminiscent of the eschatology of Joachim of Fiore, where the entirety of biblical history is divided into a dispensational clock system of "hours," with Christ being the eleventh hour, and his apocalyptic return on the Day of the Lord represented by the twelfth.[105] Adler believed that the Day of the Lord was imminent, and this apocalyptic expectation led him to call his listeners to faithfulness in the last days. Undergirding this apocalyptic system of hours, Adler introduces the various covenants that God created with humanity, and how these covenants govern the three realms of ethics that apply to the heathens, the Jews, and the Christians, which he argues function as the ethical bases for each realm in God's vision for humanity. This chapter traces the apocalypticism identified in the previous chapter, and examines how it manifests in his treatise and ultimately leads Adler to his theology of Christian nonresistance.

3.1 The Purpose of the Treatise

The Anabaptist communities that Adler ministered to in Silesia sought a peaceful existence in their separation from the world, and ironically, this could only be achieved under the protection and tolerance of local lords. Given the argument from the previous chapter that "Judgement Concerning the Sword" may have accompanied a petition to the governing

105. For a visualization of Adler's "clock," see Appendix 1.

authorities of Silesia for tolerance, Adler's repeated insistence that God rightfully ordains the governing authorities to use the sword and collect taxes further presents collaboration with local authorities as the primary purpose for writing the treatise. The fact that Adler's treatise stresses Christian obedience to Romans 13 in his theological-ethical system, may also point to an apologetic function against charges that Anabaptists were seeking an overthrow of the governing authorities.[106]

Internal evidence also reveals significant engagement with both the Lutherans and the *Schwertler* Anabaptists, like Balthasar Hubmaier. While no direct reference is made to Hubmaier's 1527 treatise "On the Sword," Adler critiques the *Schwertler* as living lives that are "quite inconsistent and not at all with the teaching and life of Christ, and they are neither heathens, nor Jews, nor Christians," as they interweave the law of Moses and the teachings of Christ, noting "only to the degree that cabbage, herbs, and turnips rhyme should these things be considered one thing."[107] As for the Lutherans, Adler criticizes them for lacking a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures, being Scriptural literalists. For Adler, a literalist hermeneutic belongs to the Old Testament and Jewish realm of ethics, whereas the New Testament, Christian realm requires a spiritualist hermeneutic. These two critiques point to a further polemical motivation for Adler's writing of the treatise.

Adler's spiritual emphasis mixed with his concrete missional aspirations to build nonresistant Anabaptist communities that resembled traditional monastic islands of "elite" Christians within a larger society of nominal Christians. As can be seen in "A New Story,"

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106. See pages 26 and 31 above.

107. Clemens Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword and the Distinct Ways it Applies Force in the Three Principalities – the World, the Jews, and the Christians – Including Other Matters*, ed. and trans. Jonathan R. Seiling, Unpublished: Provided by Jonathan Seiling, 27.

Adler's popular mission in the city of Glatz sought to recruit people to join his community of spiritual "elites" from all levels of society and occupations, as they awaited Christ's return on the Day of the Lord, the striking of the twelfth hour. This allows Adler to integrate a thoroughly nonresistant Anabaptist position with a spiritualist hermeneutic that is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments, oriented toward the apocalyptic expectation of Christ's imminent return.

3.2 Covenantal Ethics and the "Hours" of History[108]

Adler's system of covenantal ethics explains world history through the twelve "hours," and the three ethical realms that emerge from God's covenants with humanity. As noted above, this tri-partite conception of history as dispensations was popularized by the twelfth century Franciscan, Joachim of Fiore, and was adopted by other writers in the sixteenth century, but the notion of the "hours" of history is not traceable to Joachimite writings, and its combination with a tri-partite dispensational model is unique to Adler.[109] The realms of the heathens, the Jews, and the Christians are to be understood as coexisting, but qualitatively different, with separate covenants governing their ethics and their God-ordained roles. However, for Adler, the Christian covenant in Christ is necessarily superior to those normative for the heathens and the Jews. In this way, Adler's covenantal ethics function as a restorationist eschatology which sought purity in the End Times and served as a reference point to criticize contemporary abuses by the Church while also interpreting contemporary events as signs of the End Times.[110]

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108. For a helpful illustration that maps out Adler's covenantal "clock," please see Appendix 1. It is interesting to note the similarities Adler's "clock" shares with the "doomsday clock" that was developed by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists in 1947, which serves as an illustrative tool for how close the world is to a "global catastrophe" by how many minutes are left on the clock until "midnight."

109. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings,* 112.

110. Ibid.

Adler's stated purpose for writing this treatise is to help the reader "to recognize, know and understand the real reason God ordained government and its force."[111] He begins by acknowledging that "the highest degree of all force and power to punish evil rests with God and this was endowed and commanded to humans to use in different ways, according to various circumstances in their measure, purpose, duration and occasion."[112] This power was entrusted to humanity after the Fall. Throughout world history, God has sought to reconcile fallen humanity and bring them back to God's vision for humanity. This has been done incrementally through the establishment of different covenants with different people. These "Divisions have distinct lines of descent and hours, ages and durations," with "various circumstances of God's gifts and commandments to each people."[113] Even though "we are all creatures of one Creator, people of one Lord… we were made distinct people according to a given age, duration, hour, and [God's] commandment."[114] Adler illustrates how with each covenant that God makes with humanity, God incrementally adjusts the ethical expectations for humanity, particularly in regard to the use of violence. By ratcheting up the ethical requirements in each subsequent covenant, God is slowly working through history toward full reconciliation with humanity.

At the beginning of world history, God created the world, and Adam and Eve lived together in the Garden of Eden peacefully. During this first hour, the Fall and God's curse/covenant brought about the subordination of woman to man, of wife to husband, and child

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111. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 1.

112. Ibid., 2.

113. Ibid., 1.

114. Ibid.

to father.[115] This is the point, according to Adler, where all power and authority began, and the resulting patriarchy with its familial or clan discipline represent the power wielded by one human over another. This was a direct result of humanity's first disobedience and sin, and the point where all temporal authority originated in the need to control the evil that had entered the world with original sin. Then, following the Great Flood, God created another covenant with Noah during the third hour,[116] and ordained the emergence of nations and races through Noah's descendants. In this covenant, God also ordained the practice of capital punishment for murderers, through the justice of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."[117]

This first line of descent, represented by the heathens, thus operates within this ethical realm, characterized by these first two covenants, where God ordained the wielding of the sword to protect the just, and punish the unjust. For Adler, all kings and rulers are ordained by God "from the first age until the end of the world, …including Turks and unbelievers regardless of their tongue or language," as they "are God's servants for vengeance and the punishment of evil."[118]

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115. Gen. 2:14-19 (New Revised Standard Version).

116. Not every hour has a corresponding covenant or biblical character associated with it, which is why Adler jumps from the first hour to the third.

117. Gen. 9:6 (New Revised Standard Version).

118. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 3. This reference to the Turks as legitimate rulers, ordained by God, could indicate Adler's opposition to a defensive war against the invading Turks, who were besieging Vienna in the year Adler was writing this treatise. The fact that Adler does not denounce the Turks as illegitimate may also point to why local authorities did not trust the Anabaptists and opted to execute Adler. This is similar to the Austrian Hapsburg response to, and execution of, Michael Sattler for his refusal to resist the Turks.

Next, Adler introduces the second line of descent, represented by the Jews, in the sixth hour with Abraham, where God promised that Abraham's biological offspring would be God's chosen people and they would come to inherit the land of Canaan, bearing the physical sign of circumcision.[119] The Abrahamic covenant then becomes supplemented and reinforced in the ninth hour by Moses and the Law. Central to the ethical realm of the Jews is the literal, physical Mosaic Law. While Adler frequently refers to the Law as "physical" or "incomplete," suggesting that its true fulfillment only comes with Abraham's "promised seed" in Christ, he frames the Law as an important developmental step that "makes the sins of humanity apparent so that they may be recognized."[120] In regard to wielding the sword, Adler states that "Israel desired a physical King, just like the customs and habits of the other countries around them," noting that initially this was certainly not the command of God.[121] Eventually, "God permitted their ignorant request: Out of wrath and rage [God] commanded Samuel to give them a king according to the desire of their hearts, …however, they really regretted it afterward."[122]

Finally, the coming of Christ initiated the eleventh hour and ushered in the new ethical dispensation which contradicted the customs of the heathens and transcended the Jewish Law. The Christian realm is a spiritual realm, and it marks the highest stage of God's covenants with humanity so far, which will stand until the return of Christ in the apocalyptic twelfth hour on the Day of the Lord. While the Christian realm is the greatest of the realms, all three still coexist. Adler notes that in order for a Christian to attain eternal life, "one must allow the heathens and

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119. Gen. 15 (New Revised Standard Version).

120. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 6.

121. Ibid., 10.

122. Ibid., 11.

Jews to fall into error."[123] In other words, in order for a Christian community to thrive on Earth, governing authorities, who are necessarily not Christian, are needed to protect them and punish evildoers. This would suggest that if all of society were to be proper Christians, the society would not be able to function, as there would be no one to rightfully wield the sword of secular government. A true Christian uses only the ban, never the sword, and always forgives the repentant.

3.3 The Sword and Separatism

Adler's treatment of the sword hardly addresses the question of whether a Christian should participate in the military,[124] but rather Adler's concept of the sword is used generally to relate to the governing authorities and the execution of secular justice. In this way, Adler does not seek to develop an argument targeted at one specific theological issue (ie. whether a Christian may wield a sword), but rather he seeks to develop a paradigmatic and all-encompassing ethical framework that addresses any use of violent force, ranging from individual violence to the offices of governing authorities and war. Much like the *Schleitheim Articles*, the greater significance of Adler's argument on the sword is its symbolic function that illustrates the division between the ethics of the world and the ethics of the Kingdom of God. Because Adler's argument hinges on the relationship between Christians and the state, the issue of Christians wielding a physical sword becomes only one of many issues in which Adler admonishes Christians to become totally separated from the world in preparation for the End Times.

123. Ibid., 4.

124. The section near the end of Part I. C, 'The Kingdom of Peace' is the only place in the entire treatise where he mentions war explicitly.

It is significant that Adler does not seek to condemn the secular rulers, since they are ordained by God to protect the just and punish the unjust. In his interpretation of Romans 13, Adler writes, "one should pay interest, pension, dues, taxes and be subject to [the governing authorities], as long as they demand nothing contrary to God, for one must obey God before them. Therefore, [God] does not want Christians to rule and take part in secular regimes."[125] Adler sees the text as supporting the idea that Christians should refuse to use any sort of force, since God's command always supersedes that of the governing authorities. Drawing on Jesus' command to "Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and unto God what belongs to God," Adler suggests that "with these words Christ divides and separates the kingdom of this world from the Kingdom of God. Between them there is as great a difference as between Heaven and Earth."[126] Adler's argument for the Christian submission to the governing authorities directly leads to Christian separatism, since if one gives full allegiance to the Kingdom of God, they do not need to be concerned with the kingdom of the world. It should be noted, however, that Adler's separatism is far from quietism, as he states that Christians should use the Word of God to hold to account the disobedient rulers and nations of the world, "due to their sin and for the sake of justice."[127]

Adler's treatise is a clear refutation of the *Schwertler* Anabaptists, like Balthasar Hubmaier, and it is a significantly more elaborate theological system than was developed in the

125. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 4.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid., 41

Schleitheim Articles.[128] Adler's direct critique of his "neighbours," the sword-bearers, implies Adler's familiarity with the events of the Nikolsburg disputation, as he identified as a *Stäbler*. Like Hubmaier, Adler argues that the sword came about as a direct result of the Fall and of human sin. However, unlike Hubmaier, Adler believes that "the work of Christ frees humans even from subjection to the violence and coercion-based order of the world."[129] Using an argumentation reminiscent of the dualism of Schwenckfeldian spiritualism,[130] Adler argues that "a spiritual kingdom cannot wield a temporal sword."[131] For Adler, the physical sword is not only disallowed, but it has also become outmoded and irrelevant in the spiritual Christian community. This move denies the magisterial reform option and rejects any territorial form of Anabaptism. Adler understands the rejection of the sword in favour of the ban to be the litmus test of true Christianity, and for this reason, he rejects the *Schwertler*.

As noted above, Adler's "Judgement Concerning the Sword" echoes the arguments put forward in the *Schleitheim Articles*, which were written two years before Adler's treatise, but

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128. Although, Adler's treatise would still be in full agreement with the *Schleitheim Articles*, as is argued by Biesecker-Mast in *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion*, 123ff.

129. Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion*, 123.

130. When this study refers to "Schwenckfeldian" or "Schwenckfeldian-like" spiritualism, it is referring to the physical-spiritual dualism that is very prominent in the spiritualist theological writings of Caspar Schwenckfeld. This characteristic also features prominently in Adler's treatise, and may be a sign of borrowing from or being influenced by Schwenckfeld, as both operated in the same Silesian territories and would have likely encountered each other. While it is difficult to definitively state whether Adler's theology has actual elements of Schwenckfeldian spiritualism or not, this study will use the term "Schwenckfeldian-like" (or similar descriptions) to note the similarities without making an absolute statement on the connection.

131. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 10.

reinforces the position that the sword is "an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ,"[132] by adding a dispensational divide and distinguishing between the realms of the physical and the spiritual. Like Sattler, Adler rejects the possibility that a Christian can participate in the political authority's wielding of the sword, but develops a far more elaborate theological justification, rooted in an apocalyptic and spiritualistic hermeneutic. One potential explanation for this more elaborate theological system is that it could be an attempt to resolve some of the tensions or confusion generated by the *Schleitheim Articles* by explaining why and how the sword can simultaneously function for civil good while also being off limits to Christian believers.[133]

3.4 Spiritualist and Apocalyptic Hermeneutics

In his attempt to craft this paradigmatic and all-encompassing ethical argument on the issue of the sword to reveal how Christian ethics are different from the ethics of the world, Adler uses his system of the hours as the basis for his hermeneutical framework to illustrate universally how all of Scripture can be read as spoken by one consistent God by recognizing that different texts and injunctions are directed at different groups of people, namely, the heathens, the Jews, and the Christians. By recognizing which texts apply to which group, Adler is able to avoid hermeneutical problems and biblical inconsistencies that could be used to justify the Christian wielding of the sword. In order to understand the complexity of Adler's argument, it is essential to understand how he is able to integrate a Schwenckfeldian-like spiritualist dualism into his

132. Michael Sattler, "Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles," in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, ed. and trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1973) 39.

133. Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion*, 124. Given how much Adler is in agreement with and elaborates on the *Schleitheim Articles*' position on separatism and the rejection of the sword, perhaps it should not be surprising that "Judgement Concerning the Sword" was discovered among the descendants of the Swiss Brethren.

apocalyptically-oriented covenantal hermeneutics in order to defend his theological position of nonresistance while supporting all of Scripture as equally divine revelation.

Central to Adler's hermeneutics and theology is that God is consistent throughout the Old and New Testaments and God's mind does not change, but provides progressive revelation as God relates to different people through the hours of history, creating covenants to guide them throughout. Confusion can arise among Christians who use a "flat" reading of the Bible, holding all of Scripture to be directly applicable to them and carrying an equal weight of importance. Adler argues that these people misread the Bible, and mistakenly believe that they can live in the ways that God permits the heathens and Jews to live. While Adler believes that all of Scripture is true and applicable, it is essential that one is able to recognize that "some parts pertain to Jews (but usually not in the same way to Christians), some pertain to heathens (but certainly not to Christians), and some pertain only to Christians, that is, those who both call themselves Christians and want to follow Christ 'in spirit and in truth' as Adler repeats."[134] While a "physical" reading of Scripture, like that used by the Jews, leads one to a "flat" and literal interpretation, Adler advocates for a "spiritual" reading in order to see how God's Word is consistently true and applicable today. One can undertake a spiritual reading of Scripture when they read the Old Testament sincerely with an attempt to discern God's full intention, which is not necessarily literal.

Adler does not reject the Old Testament, but rather believes that its witness is to be recognized by Christians as a physical and incomplete representation of God's plan. Christians are led by Christ to understand the Law in its spiritual meaning, that is, "in spirit and in truth," not as a way of contradicting the physical sense, but rather how Christ completes and fulfills its

134. Seiling, ed. and trans., *Anabaptist Nonresistance and God's Vengeance,* 16.

original intention. Adler's interpretation of the Old Testament demonstrates an allegorical and typological exegesis that allows him to construct a spiritual meaning. From this, Adler's system develops into a form of dispensationalism that proceeds through biblical history in a progressive revelation of God's plan for humanity.

The spiritualism found in Adler's treatise uses allegorical forms of exegesis in understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, while also calling for a literal obedience to the New Law found in the teachings of Christ. Adler's strong physical-spiritual dualism is reminiscent of Schwenckfeldian spiritualism, but incorporates Anabaptist separatism in a way that is substantially different from Schwenckfeld in some significant ways. For example, while Adler and Schwenckfeld share a very similar understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and they both insist on a clear distinction between the temporal and spiritual realms, Adler's spiritualism centres around the Christian congregation versus the world, while Schwenckfeld is more concerned with individual inner commitments.[135] For Schwenckfeld, as far as the "outer" Christian was concerned, "the Christian remained subject to temporal authority, but that temporal authority had no role in spiritual matters, although magistrates could belong to Christ's Kingdom."[136] In this way, the kingdoms of the world, which have been ordained by God for temporal matters, needed to be distinguished from the Kingdom of God, which governed spiritual matters.

Adler seeks to justify his hermeneutical approach by appealing to the future covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31, which states that, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it

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135. Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion*, 123.

136. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 117.

on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."[137] Here, Adler identifies a covenantal shift that points to the New Law that is revealed in Christ, signalling God's intention for a progressive development in the Law. Christ's work of reconciliation, as Adler describes it, is to shift our physical obedience to the Law toward its spiritual fulfillment in the New Law.[138] The "heart" plays a central role in Adler's theology, as God has written the Law on our hearts.[139] He examines the significance of locating the Law inside us, on our hearts, by identifying how it, like the Temple for the Jews, has become our centre for worship and spiritual engagement with the New Law. For Adler, our heart is "the holy of holies" and is the dwelling place of God, from which righteousness flows;[140] it is the "field" where we are to make a "daily sacrifice" unto God;[141] and the place where we yield to God "in spirit and truth."[142]

Adler's rich "heart" imagery is rooted in the concepts of "the ground of the heart"[143] and "the abyss of the heart."[144] These terms are closely related, and they appear to be used fairly interchangeably. For Adler, this is the place where one experiences God, where one can know God, and where one yields to God; in other words, it is the very root of one's being. The heart is a helpful metaphor for the Law, as the heart can also be experienced in a physical sense and in a

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137. Jer. 31:33 (New Revised Standard Version).

138. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 7.

139. Adler makes no fewer than sixty-eight references to the "heart" in his treatise.

140. Ibid., 41.

141. Ibid., 37-38.

142. Ibid., 9. Also on pages 13 and 20.

143. *Von Grund yres Hertzens.*

144. *Abgrund des Hertzens*.

spiritual sense. We entrust ourselves to God "in the abyss of our hearts," Adler writes, "so that we obey [God] alone, love [God] alone, love [God] above all things from our whole heart."[145] This embodied spiritualism, reminiscent of late medieval mysticism, uses the heart as a conduit for God's life-giving love to inform everything that we do and how we understand Scripture, rooted in this endless and bottomless source of God found in the abyss of our heart. Because the human heart has become the focus of spiritual regulation, and not the physical temple as with the Jews and the Old Law, it can be seen how Adler's spiritualist hermeneutics would lead to the rejection for the need to worship God in a physical temple, as God is worshipped daily in the abyss of our hearts.[146]

3.5 The Great Day of the Lord

Adler ends his treatise with a prayer on "rightly keeping the Sabbath."[147] Here, he distinguishes between three different forms of Sabbath, namely the literal, the spiritual, and the eternal. The literal Sabbath is that which is practiced by the Jews according to Mosaic Law, and the spiritual Sabbath is the Christian entering into God's respite in their hearts. The eternal Sabbath, however, carries an apocalyptic expectation that is prefigured in the year of Jubilee. This is the point toward which all of history is building, the great Day of the Lord, the striking of the twelfth hour on Adler's clock.

145. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 20.

146. Seiling cites an archival source that describes the followers of Adler as rejecting institutional religion, as one witness attests: "For them the whole city was a temple; in private homes of citizens they held their meetings." Seiling, *Anabaptist Nonresistance and God's Vengeance*, 13.

147. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 46.

During this time of apocalyptic Jubilee, the Jews and the Christians will be gathered together as one people in an end time conversion of the Jews. Adler compares the coming together of the Christians and the Jews under Christ on the Day of the Lord to how "Judah, which was the lesser lineage… and Israel, which was the greater lineage," were brought together by King David "into a single kingdom under one king, and following that they lived in peace."[148] Adler envisions the Jews and the Christians becoming the "spouse and bride of Christ," respectively, for the return of Christ, the Bridegroom, at the Wedding of the Lamb in the End Times.[149] They will be brought together in Christ in such a way that they will not be two peoples, but one: "one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and mind, one heart, one bread and one body in Christ."[150] Here, on Mount Zion, the physical people of God (the Jews) and the spiritual people of God (the Christians) would be united with Christ, their "eternal king and priest according to the order of Melchizedek."[151] As a spiritual and eternal king, Jesus rules over "neither a physical kingdom nor [a physical] priesthood, but a spiritual and eternal one."[152]

For Adler, this vision of Mount Zion is the true Christendom and Kingdom of God. It is also a kingdom of peace, where the "wolf will be at peace with the lamb," and all the people will

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148. Ibid., 15.

149. Ibid., 14. This is an interesting image, with the Church as the "bride" of Christ, and Israel as the "spouse." This is not to be understood in a polygamist way, but rather with the Christians and the Jews united into one people who will be wed to Christ. Werner Packull also notes that "a similar eschatological spiritualism appears to have inspired the Sabbatarianism of Oswalt Glaidt and Andreas Fischer." This connection is worth further consideration, as Robert Friedmann had found a copy of Adler's treatise in 1961 in Sobotište (Sabbatisch), Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia), which bears the name of the Sabbath. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 116.

150. Adler, *Judgement Concerning the Sword*, 14-15.

151. Ibid., 12.

152. Ibid., 14.

have “made their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”[153] Even in Adler’s apocalyptic expectation for the return of Christ, his vision is not one of violence, judgement, and punishment, but rather one of reconciliation and a coming together in Christ.

As has been illustrated in this first study of Clemens Adler, the apocalyptic tensions and contemporary events of his life led Adler to believe that the Day of the Lord was near. He worked as an Anabaptist missionary to share this message and call others to faithfulness in light of the coming end. In his pursuit of faithfulness, Adler developed a tripartite covenantal theology that clearly defined the ethical expectations of Christians, which are found in the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and is primarily characterized by an ethic of nonresistance. In this way, Adler is led by his apocalyptic expectations to develop a clear and decisive Christian ethic of nonresistance.

153. Ibid., 15.

Chapter 4: Menno Simons, the Melchiorites, and Münster

In the previous two chapters, this study has considered the biography and theological writings of Clemens Adler, examining how his apocalyptic expectations influenced his development of an ethic of Christian nonresistance. Next, this study will seek to do the same thing for Menno Simons. First, this chapter will begin by examining the events of Menno's life and his decision to leave Catholicism, as well as his connections to the apocalyptic Melchiorite and Münsterite Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany. The next chapter will proceed in a similar manner to the Adler chapters by exploring Menno Simons' extensive writings to identify how his apocalyptic expectations influenced his development of a position of Christian nonresistance.

This chapter will seek to contextualize the apocalyptic tensions present in Menno's life, as well as examine his Melchiorite origins in relation to the events at the Anabaptist Kingdom at Münster. The goal of this study of Menno Simons will be to illustrate how his apocalypticism led him to develop his position of nonresistance. The purpose of this chapter is to examine his biographical details and historical situation, out of which his apocalyptic theology emerges, identifying the apocalyptic tensions that existed in his life, which will help to contextualize the apocalypticism in his writings that will be identified and examined in the next chapter.

4.1 The Significance of Menno Simons

Menno Simons was a sixteenth century Anabaptist leader who was active throughout the Netherlands and in northern Germany. While he is not the founder of the Dutch stream of Anabaptism, his legacy remains significant in the fact that his followers, the Mennonites (and *Doopsgezinden*, as they are called in the Netherlands), developed into and remain the largest Anabaptist group to emerge from the sixteenth century. Because Menno became the leader of the

Dutch Anabaptists later in the decade following the Anabaptist uprising in Münster, he is sometimes considered a "second-generational figure" in the Anabaptist movement, but Menno was actually the same age as earlier Anabaptist leaders like Michael Sattler and Melchior Hoffman.[154] This is because he came to the movement at a much later point in his life than these other early Anabaptists, and ended up living much longer, as he did not die a martyr's death like most other early Anabaptist leaders.

Due to his significance in the Mennonite tradition, particularly because it continues to bear his name, research pertaining to Menno's life, writings, and beliefs has produced numerous works of biographical and theological study, particularly within the past century and a half.[155] While scholarship on Menno is extensive, especially from Dutch and German scholars, it has led to substantial disagreement among these scholars about how to interpret Menno's life and writings. A significant reason for the disagreement is the fact that much of this scholarly work has been carried out by Mennonite scholars who have had a vested interest in how Menno is portrayed and understood, as Menno is seen as representing the Mennonite tradition as a whole, regardless of whether his theology is still relevant or formative to the contemporary Mennonite believer or not. This has led to the findings of these scholars often reflecting the scholar's own time in history and their theological orientations.[156]

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154. Irvin B. Horst, "Menno Simons: The New Man in Community," in *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1982), 206.

155. See Appendix 2 for a select list of biographies written on Menno Simons.

156. For example: Influenced by Pietism, Johannes Deknatel wrote in 1746 that Menno was "the most formidable founder of our church, comparable to Luther and Calvin in their churches. For Menno was not only exceptionally talented, blessed, zealous and suited to his task; in addition he was not an uneducated man." Gerald R. Brunk, ed., *Menno Simons, a Reappraisal: Essays in Honour of Irvin B. Horst on the 450th Anniversary of the Fundamentboek* (Harrisonburg, VA.: Eastern Mennonite College Press, 1992), 20. For Karel Vos, [continued]

It is also disputed how important Menno Simons actually was to the Mennonite tradition that developed after him. The Dutch Mennonite historian, Wilhelmus Johannes Kühler argues, "Menno did not belong to the great spiritual leaders of his time," claiming that Menno's writings only have historical value, and no contemporary Mennonite would ever consider consulting his writings for theological reflection.[157] And on the other hand, there is the Mennonite Brethren movement, which originated as a Mennonite schism in Russia in 1860. In their *Document of Secession*, they conclude their statements noting, "In all other articles of our confession, we are in full agreement with Menno Simons."[158] This chapter does not seek to make any claim on the importance of Menno Simons to the Mennonite tradition that developed after him, but will rather seek to highlight the apocalyptic tensions that were present during his life to illustrate in this and the next chapter how his Melchiorite apocalyptic theology led him to develop a position of nonresistance.

4.2 Menno's Early Life and Melchiorite Roots

Menno, the son of Simon (or Simonzoon), was born in January 1496 in the village of Witmarsum in the rich and fertile Dutch territory of Friesland. He was born into a peasant

writing in 1914, Menno was the long-term spiritual leader of the Dutch Anabaptists. He credits Menno with developing the foundation for the basic theological tenets of the later Dutch Mennonites (Doopsgezinden). Karel Vos, *Menno Simons, 1496-1561: Zijn Leven en Werken en Zijne Reformatorische Denkbeelden* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1914), 217.

157. Quotation from Kühler found in: Helmut Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* (Kitchener, ON.: Pandora Press, 2006), 215-216.

158. Mennonite Brethren Church, "Document of Secession (Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1860. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Document_of_Secession_(Mennonite_Brethren_Church,_1860)&oldid=163484.

farming family with three other boys: Peter, Tijde, and Jan.[159] Friesland, during much of Menno's childhood, was the site of a severe conflict over Frisian independence between the Vetkoper and Schieringer factional parties,[160] which left the domain of Sjoerd van Aylva (the ruling noble family) near Witmarsum completely devastated. Then in 1524, following the conflicts in the region, Friesland was forced to submit to the authority of the Spanish Habsburg empire of Charles V. Along with witnessing the horrors of warfare and plunder, Menno and all of Friesland would come to experience further drought, pestilence, and cattle disease in the wake of these conflicts.[161] Additionally, according to the historian Albert F. Mellink, these pressures led to economic stagnation in the Dutch textile, fishing, and shipping industries, leading to further unrest in the Netherlands.[162]

During this same time of social, political, and religious instability, in 1524, Menno was ordained as a Catholic priest in Utrecht on March 26 at the age of twenty-eight, likely without any formal academic education. He was first installed as a vicar in Pingjum, near his hometown of Witmarsum. Menno notes that from the beginning of his ministry, he was already coming to question the doctrine of transubstantiation, which Helmut Isaak suggests was likely due to the

159. Piet Visser and Mary S. Sprunger, *Menno Simons: Places, Portraits and Progeny* (Morgantown, PA.: Masthof Press, 1996), 14.

160. The Vetkopers or Fetkopers (roughly "fat-buyers") were so called because they represented the wealthier aristocracy who could afford to buy fat products. The Schieringers or Skieringers (roughly "speakers"), on the other hand represented the poor Frisians who first sought discussion, rather than resorting to violence.

161. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 14.

162. Albert F. Mellink, *De Wederdopers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1531-1544* (Groningen, Nederland: J.B. Wolters, 1954), 11-13.

influence of the Sacramentarian movement in the Netherlands.[163] Based on Menno's reflections on this time, he does not seem to be deeply convinced of the sacredness of his ministry, and states that he spent most of his time with the other priests "in all manner of folly: empty talk, vanity, playing [cards], drinking, and eating."[164] During this time, Menno also became acquainted with the biblical humanism of Erasmus and the Reformation era critiques that were being leveled by Martin Luther, as in 1526, Menno was able to get a copy of the New Testament in Luther's translation.[165] Menno's access to a Bible that was translated into the vernacular allowed him to conduct more Bible studies on the topic of transubstantiation, revealing to Menno how far "we were deceived."[166]

Around the year 1530, Menno was also learning of the Anabaptist ideas being spread by the messengers of Melchior Hoffman. His followers, the Melchiorites, were the first Anabaptists in the Netherlands,[167] and they were preaching about believer's baptism, the symbolic meaning of the Lord's Supper, and the imminent return of Christ. In March 1531, Menno learned about

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163. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 30. At this point, the Sacramentarian movement was a heterogenous religious movement that rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, and was generally influenced by Martin Luther's *Sola Scriptura*, which held Scripture to be a greater authority than the doctrines and traditions of the Church. Later, many Sacramentarians would merge with the Anabaptist-Melchiorite movement in the Netherlands as their sacramental critiques extended to infant baptism.

164. Menno Simons, "Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm, c. 1537," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 71.

165. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 18.

166. Menno Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 668.

167. Although, there is some debate about the possible presence of Anabaptism in the Netherlands before 1530.

the beheading of Sicke Frericksz Snijder at Leeuwarden, a man who was executed for receiving a second baptism upon confession of his faith. This event led Menno to consult his Bible and to study what was actually written about baptism, much like he did when he was experiencing doubts about transubstantiation. Once again, his conclusion was "that we were deceived in regard to infant baptism."[168]

At the end of 1532, Menno was promoted to the role of priest in his hometown parish of Witmarsum. In this new role, Menno found willing ears among his new parishioners for his increasingly evangelical preaching and growing critiques of the Roman Church. Meanwhile, in May 1533, Hoffman was arrested and imprisoned in Strasbourg, where he had been receiving apocalyptic visions about the Second Coming of Christ. In early 1534, Melchiorite leaders in the Netherlands picked up on and radicalized Hoffman's visions further, and began establishing an Anabaptist government in the Westphalian city of Münster, where an Anabaptist group had come to power. During this time, Menno was debating Anabaptist ideas with various Melchiorite messengers, some of which were even in his own congregation.

There is also strong circumstantial evidence that Menno was baptized as a Melchiorite "covenanter" during his time as a Catholic priest in Witmarsum.[169] The exact time of Menno's baptism has always been a subject of speculation, but it has been traditionally believed to have occurred at some point following his departure from the Catholic Church in January 1536. Isaak

168. Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 669.

169. Helmut Isaak also suggests this point, but does not adequately flesh it out. Melchiorites referred to themselves as "covenanters," signifying the new covenant they have made with God in baptism. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 32-34. Karel Vos also believed Menno to have been baptized as a Melchiorite while still a priest in Witmarsum. Vos, *Menno Simons*, 29.

notes that "this assumption is supported by tradition, but has no other support in the sources."[170] Menno only makes one explicit reference in his writings to his baptism, which occurs many years after the event during his debates with John a Lasco in 1544, but he does not disclose any specific details regarding the event.[171] Sjouke Voolstra supports the hypothesis that Menno was baptized as a Melchiorite before the fall of Münster, pointing to a source that notes he was baptized following an Anabaptist riot in Groningen around February 2, 1535, "after which Obbe [Philips] … rebaptized Menno Simons and admitted him to his Anabaptist congregation."[172] Another source supports this, noting that Obbe Philips baptized eight people at 't Zand on February 2, 1535, at a farm called "De Arke Noachs" (Noah's Ark).[173]

Isaak also attempts to approximate the time of Menno's baptism by examining the date of publication of Menno's first writing, *Concerning Spiritual Resurrection* (hereafter, *Spiritual Resurrection*). While this writing has been traditionally listed as being published in "circa 1536," solely based on the assumption that he wrote it after leaving the Catholic Church, Isaak, in his analysis of the original publication dates of Menno's writings, suggests instead that the *Spiritual*

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170. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 31.

171. Irvin B. Horst, *A Bibliography of Menno Simons, ca. 1496-1561: Dutch Reformer, with a Census of Known Copies* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1962), 94. "Yes, I was often so troubled at heart, even after my baptism, that many a day I abstained from food and drink by the great anxiety of my soul." Menno Simons, "Brief Confession on the Incarnation," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. by John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 427.

172. "Inlassingen in Bullinger, 'Teghens de Wederdoopers' (1569)," in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* Vol. VII: Zestiende-eeuwsche schrijvers over de geschiedenis der oudste Doopsgezinden hier te lande, edited by Dr. S. Cramer, 362. 's-Gravenhage, NL: Martinus Nijhoff, 1910. Cited in Sjouke Voolstra, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* (Newton, KS.: Mennonite Press, 1997), 88.

173. Albert F. Mellink, ed., *Friesland en Gronigen (1530-1550)*, vol. 1 of *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica* (Leiden, NL: E. J. Brill, 1975), 113, 128, 122.

Resurrection was actually published in early 1534.[174] This early writing is significant because it functions as an early confession of faith for Menno, upon which Anabaptists are typically baptized in the practice of believer's baptism. From this, Isaak suggests that Menno may have been baptized in early 1534.

In the *Spiritual Resurrection*, Menno refers to baptism as "the Sign of Thau," which is an apocalyptic reference to the seal of the 144,000 elected of the End Times in Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 7, and was the standard practice for baptism among the Melchiorites and the Münsterites. "Thau" is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, resembling a "T" shape, and the symbolism of Thau is significant in two ways. First, as the final letter in the Hebrew alphabet, it can signify the End Times, having a similar function to the Greek letter "Ω" (Omega) in Revelation. Secondly, the T-shape of Thau closely resembles the shape of the cross, symbolizing salvation. Menno confirms in his second edition of *The Foundation Book* (1554/1555) that he was baptized with the Sign of Thau, stating, "We do acknowledge, dear sirs, that some of the false prophets [ie. the Münsterites] were baptized with one and the same baptism, and were one with us in appearance."[175] Given the direct connection to Münster that baptism with the Sign of Thau would have had for Menno and his detractors, it would not make sense that he would have chosen to be baptized in this way after the fall of Münster (June 1535), as is traditionally held.

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174. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 70. He argues this by inferring from a reference in Menno's tract, *Reply to False Accusations*, written in 1551, that it had been seventeen years since his conversion - Menno Simons, "A Clear Account of Excommunication," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 547. Assuming Menno's reference is correct, 1551-17 = 1534.

175. Menno Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 198.

Given the importance of believer's baptism in Menno's theology, it is also odd that he does not share any details about the time of his baptism. However, if it is given that he was baptized as a Melchiorite in or before February 1535 with the Sign of Thau, his secrecy around his baptism may be understandable.

4.3 Menno and Münster

As noted above, Melchior Hoffman had been receiving visions regarding the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world, and to begin Jesus' reign in the Millennium. The Strasbourg prophets, Lienhard and Ursula Jost, identified Hoffman as the Elijah of the End Times. It was believed that Christ would return in 1533, and Strasbourg would be the New Jerusalem, the site where all poverty, hunger, injustice, and persecution would come to an end and the 144,000 elect, baptized with the Sign of Thau, would rule the world together with Christ in the Millennium. Before this could happen, Hoffman was imprisoned in Strasbourg, and 1533 passed without Christ returning. With Hoffman in prison, a group of radical Melchiorites in the Netherlands came under the influence of Jan Matthijs, who claimed to be Enoch, the second witness of the End Times. Matthijs picked up Hoffman's apocalyptic visions, though with some notable differences, including a changed time and place of the Second Coming of Christ to Easter, April 5, 1534 in Münster. In early 1534, the Anabaptists came to power and organized an Anabaptist government around the leadership of Matthijs and Bernhard Rothmann in Münster, with Bernhard Knipperdolling serving as mayor starting on February 23. On February 27, anyone who refused baptism with the Sign of Thau was expelled from the city, so that the Anabaptist leadership could create a Christian society in the New Jerusalem, which would allow for Christ to return. Almost immediately, the Catholic Bishop of Münster, Franz von Waldeck, along with the Lutheran Philip of Hesse besieged the city to take it back from the Anabaptists.

At this point, Menno was still serving as a Catholic priest in Witmarsum, though, as argued above, already baptized as a Melchiorite "covenanter." Menno did not openly object, and never does in his later writings either, to the early stages of Anabaptist Münster.[176] In fact, he likely supported these Münsterites, as he shared with them their theological "doctrines of incarnation, the Lord's Supper, believer's baptism, nonresistance, and their eschatological expectation, which for Münster soon became apocalyptic."[177] The siege was seen by the Münsterites as the final apocalyptic confrontation between the powers of evil and the Kingdom of God. This apocalyptic expectation made it easier for the Münsterites and their supporters to fully commit to the New Jerusalem, and many thousands from all over the Netherlands and Westphalia left for Münster. Not all Melchiorites left to join the Münsterites, and neither did Menno, but many of his parishioners did, including his brother, Peter.[178] Once the prophesied return of Christ on Easter 1534 passed without Jesus' glorious return, Matthijs sought to force God's hand by charging out to face the besieging army almost single-handedly, ultimately ending his life.

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176. Isaak notes, "Apparently, he had no objections to the taking over of Münster by the Anabaptists through legal elections, miracles and charismatic actions, given his silence on these matters." Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 44-45.

177. Ibid., 37. Regarding the nonresistance of the Münsterites, James Stayer notes: "The Anabaptist regime in Münster arose from a peaceful Anabaptist movement established in the town since the summer of 1533." James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montréal, QC.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 123. Isaak adds that Menno "did not object to the taking over of Münster by the Anabaptists through legal elections. Even the defence of the city against the siege of the bishop might have been acceptable to him as a function of legitimate government." Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem,* 37. Regarding the violent defence of the city, Stayer notes that "the Münsterites were forced out of a peaceful position by the need to defend themselves, and… the idea of an apocalyptic crusade developed only after the beginning of the siege." Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword,* 235.

178. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons,* 24.

After the death of Matthijs, the Münsterites were without their apocalyptic leader. Bernhard Rothmann, in his treatise, *Concerning Revenge*, appeals to Jeremiah 30 to support the idea of a "ruler [that] will arise from among them."[179] This leader that God has raised from among the people of Münster was Jan van Leiden, who was crowned king, as the New King David, "a joyous king over all, the joy of the disconsolate."[180] Rothmann believed that Jan van Leiden, as a prophetic and messianic king, must lead the restoration of the "true Israel" by taking vengeance on the wicked so that Christ can return and establish his kingdom of peace.[181] Only once this time of vengeance was over, Rothmann argues, could Christ actually return.[182] After Jan van Leiden was crowned king in Münster, the city developed into a Davidic theocracy that understood itself as leading an apocalyptic crusade against the wicked, a belief that gained more support by the fact that the city was under siege. In this way, Münster had gone from a refuge for the persecuted Anabaptists where justice, equality, and community of goods were practiced, to become the apocalyptic kingdom of vengeance under King Jan van Leiden, the New David.

Up until this point, Menno had remained relatively quiet regarding Anabaptist Münster, instead engaging with Münsterite messengers in debate while serving as the priest in

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179. Jer. 30:21 (New Revised Standard Version).

180. Menno Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1986), 32.

181. Robert Stupperich, *Die Schriften Bernhard Rothmans* (Münster, Deutschland: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970), 285-295.

182. The concept of the punishment and destruction of the unbelievers before the Second Coming of Christ was already expressed by Hoffman during his trial in Strasbourg on May 29, 1533: "The true Jerusalem cannot be built or rise, unless Babylon with all its crowd and following is overthrown and destroyed." Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Taüfer, VIII, Band, Elsass II, Teil* (Gütersloh, Deutschland: Mohn, 1960), 18.

Witmarsum. With the proclamation of Jan van Leiden as the New Davidic king, the "joyous king over all, the joy of the disconsolate," Menno responded with his treatise, *The Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden* (hereafter, *Blasphemy*).[183] The proclamation of this slogan of King David, which had clear messianic overtones, was unacceptable to Menno, and he repeats this five times at the beginning of this tract. While directed primarily at this "blasphemy," Menno also denounces Münster's aggressive use of the sword, and their apocalyptic crusade which sought the conquest of the entire world in preparation of the coming Millennium. Instead, Menno argued that it is Christ who is the promised King, and he is already the Lord of Heaven and Earth. By claiming to be "the joyous king over all," Jan van Leiden was putting himself above Christ, which for Menno was the ultimate blasphemy.

In the *Blasphemy*, Menno identifies himself with the Münsterites, addressing "all true brothers and fellow members of the covenant," and constantly uses the first-person plural pronoun, "us."[184] This implies that Menno was not writing this critique of the developments at Münster as an "outsider," but rather as a fellow Melchiorite covenanter addressing the takeover

183. While there is some debate about when, for what occasion, and even if Menno wrote *The Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden*, given that it was only published posthumously in 1627, the argument from Helmut Isaak that it was written against Jan van Leiden in late 1534/early 1535 seems the most plausible. "Internal evidence indicates that Menno wrote his tract against the Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden after the proclamation of Jan van Leiden as the messianic King David of the New Jerusalem on the 31st of August, 1534." Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 38. For an opposing view, Willem de Bakker believes that *Blasphemy* was actually written against David Joris after the fall of Münster. For a full examination of multiple different perspectives and arguments, including de Bakker's, see James M. Stayer, Helmut Isaak, and Willem de Bakker, "A Research Symposium: Menno Simons, The Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden: When and Why was it Written?" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol. 89, no. 4 (2015): 599-630.

184. Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," 32. This also gives further support to the hypothesis that Menno was already baptized as a Melchiorite covenanter, given he identifies himself as a "fellow member of the covenant," ie. the baptismal covenant.

of this group, with which he identifies, by a blasphemous heretic. Menno rejected Jan van Leiden's blasphemous messianic kingship, as well as the use of physical violence as a means to usher in the Kingdom of God, and the polygamy that was being practiced in Münster. Menno uses a fairly basic hermeneutical principle that the Old Testament should only be read and applied through the message of the New Testament, which rejects the use of the sword. He writes, "Christians should fight, namely, with the Word of God which is a two-edged sword," which is not a physical sword.[185] Additionally, in his first edition of *The Foundation Book*, written in 1539, after the fall of Münster, Menno refers to the Münsterites as his "dear sisters and brothers" who "simply erred a little," referring to their use of violence.[186]

When reading Menno's critique of Münster in the *Blasphemy*, it is important to recognize that Menno does not reject the early foundations of Anabaptist Münster, nor their Melchiorite concept of the New Jerusalem. Menno's understanding of the End Times in the *Blasphemy* is still apocalyptic, but is clearly unlike the Millennialism that was developed by the later Münsterites. It is this violent millennial crusade that Menno rejects, insisting that true Christians are not to use the sword, and violence is not needed before Christ can rule the Kingdom of God because it has been given to him already. However, Menno was sure to note that the present time of grace that they were living in was also the End Times, the final invitation to the Wedding of the Lamb before the final day of judgement when "the faithful servants shall enter into the Kingdom of their Lord; then the wicked will be punished, and all those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire."[187] Menno believed (as Hoffman did) that the

185. Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," 43.

186. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 51-52.

187. Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," 48.

Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem, could only be anticipated through Christ-like service and suffering love, not through violence and vengeance, and for this reason he understood Jan van Leiden and the Münsterite kingdom as an aberration without biblical foundation, for "no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."[188]

As the situation in Münster became more desperate while under siege, additional uprisings led by Münsterite supporters occurred in Bolsward and Amsterdam. In Bolsward, a group of three hundred Anabaptists, led by the Münsterite apostle, Jan van Geelen, marched on the Oldeklooster, a Cistercian monastery in Friesland, and occupied it on March 30, 1535. Among those present at Oldeklooster was Menno's own brother, Peter, who had worked his way up in the Münsterite leadership, serving as steward of Queen Divara, one of the many wives of Jan van Leiden.[189] These Anabaptists held the monastery for only a week, as the forces led by the stadtholder Schenck van Toutenburg stormed the Oldeklooster on April 7, killing many of those inside, including Menno's brother, Peter. Jan van Geelen managed to escape, and he moved on to Amsterdam to mobilize more Anabaptist support. There, a group of Anabaptist men and women ran naked through the streets as "New Adams and New Eves," warning their neighbours of the coming End Times.[190] During the night of May 10, another group attempted to occupy the city hall on the Dam Square, but they were swiftly defeated and executed.[191] Things unfolded no differently in Münster, where on June 25, 1535, the gate was left open for the besieging army, who promptly retook the city, ending the blasphemous rule of Jan van Leiden. Along with Jan

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188. 1 Cor. 3:11. This passage, which became Menno's motto, was also printed on the cover of all his books and pamphlets.

189. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 24.

190. Ibid., 26.

191. Ibid.

van Leiden, other members of his council, Bernhard Knipperdolling and Bernhard Krechting, were executed and had their corpses put on display in iron cages atop the St. Lambert's Church, where the cages continue to hang today.

4.4 Menno the Anabaptist Leader

After the fall of the Anabaptist Kingdom in Münster, the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands and northern Germany was in shambles. Anabaptists, including those beyond the Low Countries, were now all painted by the authorities with the same Münsterite brush. Their detractors warned of the dangers of Anabaptism by pointing to Münster. It is at this time, in January 1536, at the age of forty-two, after a long conflict of conscience, that Menno Simons takes a stand and formally departs from "Popedom."[192] Menno writes, "And so I, a miserable sinner, was enlightened of the Lord, was converted to a new mind, fled from Babylon, entered into Jerusalem, and finally, though unworthy, was called to this high and heavy service."[193] Due to the increased suspicion and persecution of the Anabaptists following the events at Münster, Menno was forced to flee Witmarsum and go into hiding near Groningen in East Frisia, which was just outside the Habsburg domain. In many respects, Menno had joined the Anabaptists at the worst possible time, just after the collapse of Anabaptist Münster.

At some point during this time in hiding, Menno married Geertruydt Jansdochter, a former Beguine, though the date and location of their marriage is unknown. In his writings, Menno also notes that during this time he "could not find in all the countries a cabin or hut in which my poor wife and our little children could be put up in safety for a year or even half a

192. As noted above, Menno was likely already *informally* joined the Anabaptists as a baptized Melchiorite covenanter in 1534 or 1535. This is Menno's *formal* departure from the Catholic Church.

193. Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 672.

year."[194] Little is known about Menno's children, but they likely included at least two daughters, and a son, Jan.[195] Prior to leaving Witmarsum, Menno would have likely made the necessary contacts with peaceful Anabaptists, like Obbe and Dirk Philips, as by the autumn of 1536, Menno was undertaking secret missions with them, including the conversion of the priest of Eppenhuizen and conducting disputations with other reform leaders.[196] Around this same time, Menno notes that one day, "some six, seven, or eight persons," which included the Philips brothers, came to him and prayerfully requested that he accept ordination with the group and make "the great sufferings and need of the poor oppressed souls" his concern, since their hunger was so very great and the faithful stewards so few.[197] Menno and this delegation agreed to pray about the matter for a season, but when they came to him again in early 1537, Menno surrendered his "soul and body to the Lord… and commenced in due time… to teach and to baptize, to till the vineyard of the Lord, …to build up his holy city and temple and to repair the tumble-down walls."[198] While Menno did not emerge as the primary leader of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany until after David Joris abandoned the movement and went into hiding in Basel in 1540, this marks the beginning of Menno's ministry among the Anabaptists, working to pick up the pieces of the movement and gather the scattered flock.

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194. Simons, "Brief Confession on the Incarnation," 424.

195. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons,* 32. Only one of his children (a daughter) survived Menno, and will later gave some information about Menno to Pieter Jans Twisck, while living in Hoorn.

196. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons,* 30.

197. Simons, "Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm, c. 1537," 671.

198. Ibid., 672.

While Menno was initially surprised that this delegation perceived leadership qualities in him, they considered him authoritative, and perhaps most significantly, recognized that he was not burdened with the Münsterite stain since he only publicly joined the Anabaptists in 1536, which would serve him well in defending Anabaptist teachings to outsiders and detractors.[199] During this time, some remnants of the Münsterites still remained with the followers of Jan van Batenburg plundering and robbing throughout the eastern Netherlands, and David Joris who received visions and constituted himself as "the Third David" with dreams of a New Jerusalem in Delft.[200] Menno moved quickly to distance himself from these groups, and traveled around Friesland and East Frisia for the next couple of years, organizing the peaceful Anabaptists and installing local leadership along the way. In 1538, while in Friesland, Menno stayed in the home of Tjaard Renicx in Kimswerd. However, this hospitality led the authorities to execute Tjaard in January 1539.[201] Similar fates would fall upon others close to Menno and those who would shelter him throughout his life.

In 1539, Menno's writings were disseminated for the first time in print; they were printed in secret in Antwerp by Matthias Crom, as well as by another anonymous printer in the eastern Netherlands.[202] These early publications included his writings on *The New Birth*, as well as his

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199. Because the elders who ordained Menno all came out of the pre-Münster Melchiorite stream, their association to the events at Münster destroyed their credibility to outsiders, despite their peaceful expression which denounced the later developments in the city. This nuance was not recognized by their critics. With Menno, however, because he had not yet joined the Anabaptists by the end of Münster, he was free from accusations of direct collaboration, but the shadow of the Münsterite tragedy would follow him throughout his life.

200. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 32. This attempt at establishing another Münsterite kingdom was quickly squashed.

201. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 32.

202. Ibid., 34.

most important work, *The Foundation Book*, in which, Menno attempted to convince the authorities that his Anabaptist teachings were peaceful and purely evangelical, and were completely unrelated to the violence that occurred in Münster. In 1541, Menno committed himself to writing *The True Christian Faith*, where he formulated his vision of a pure Church "without spot or wrinkle,"[203] as well as *A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline*, his first book on the ban.

On December 7, 1542, in response to the wide circulation of Menno's writings, the Habsburg government ordered the death sentence for anyone caught publishing, disseminating, or reading Menno's writings.[204] Additionally, they promised a reward of one hundred Carolus guilders to anyone who handed Menno over to them. Despite the considerable risk, Menno continued to travel and preach in Amsterdam and throughout the Zaan region. Menno miraculously managed to escape his persecutors and would-be betrayers during this time, working to improve the organization of the scattered Anabaptist groups by installing local leaders and bishops as he went. By February 28, 1545, the Inquisition began operating in the Netherlands, making it too dangerous for Menno to continue operating there.[205] Menno instead traveled and preached along the Rhine, throughout the Hanseatic cities along the Baltic coast, and as far east as Danzig (Gdańsk) in the Vistula delta, where the group that would become the Prussian Mennonites was beginning to settle.[206] In 1550, Jan Neulen, an Anabaptist that was

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203. Menno roots this purity-oriented ecclesiology in Ephesians 5:27.

204. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 36.

205. Ibid., 40.

206. Within these regions, Menno was specifically operating in and around: Bonn, Wesel, and Cologne along the Rhine; the Hanseatic cities of Lübeck, Wismar, and Emden; and Danzig (Gdansk) on the Vistula delta.

captured near Roermond, confessed that he had listened to Menno preach at night in a farmer's field five years earlier. From the report of his arrest by the authorities, we get a description of Menno's appearance from him: "A stout, fat, heavy man, broken or rough of face and a brown beard, could not walk well."[207] Menno had suffered an injury during his travels, which severely decreased his mobility, limiting him to traveling by wagon or ship.[208]

Between all these trips from 1545-1554, Menno was able to publish many more of his writings, the majority of which were apologetic attempts to convince the authorities and other theologians to exercise greater toleration toward his group of Anabaptists. By 1554, Menno and his family were able to find shelter in Wüstenfelde on the Fresenborg estate of Bartholomaeus von Ahlefeldt near Bad Oldesloe, between Hamburg and Lübeck in Holstein. Since 1543, Bartholomaeus had been allowing Anabaptists to live on his land, much against the will of King Christian III of Denmark.[209] With his assistance, a printshop was built in what would later be called the "Mennokate" (Menno cottage). From here, Menno was able to write letters and publish his writings under the protection of Bartholomaeus.

One such letter that Menno received while in Wüstenfelde informed him of a situation where Swaen Rutgers was banned by Leenaert Bouwens, the elder in Emden, in 1555 because she refused to shun her banned husband. Church discipline and the use of the ban were the focus of a number of Menno's writings, but the issue of how it was to be applied in a marriage relationship remained controversial. To address the situation, Menno invited other fellow elders to Wüstenfelde in April 1556 for a discussion on the issues surrounding the ban. While Menno

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207. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 40.

208. In a letter from 1555, Menno signs his name, "Menno the lame." Ibid., 52.

209. Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 50.

found Swaen's excommunication to be too rough, he tried to defend marital shunning as biblical, but found little support among his colleagues. Unable to come to an agreement, Menno tried to hold the conflicting groups together by not settling firmly one way or the other, but he was confronted by Bouwens who threatened to ban him if he did not support marital shunning.[210] Menno yielded to Bouwens in order to preserve the peace, but in the process lost considerable respect among the Waterlander and High German groups for his flip-flopping on the issue.

Menno's wife, Geertruydt died in Wüstenfelde around September 1557, and the issue of the marital ban continued to gnaw at Menno for the rest of his life, as it left the group that he worked hard to build up together once again divided. In December 1560, Menno became very ill and was confined to his bed. From his bed, he confided to those around him, "How I am grieved that I have consented to the marriage-shunning."[211] Exhausted after twenty-five years of running and being hunted as an Anabaptist heretic, Menno Simons died on January 13, 1561 at the age of sixty-five. He was buried in an unmarked grave in his kitchen garden under a linden tree in Wüstenfelde. While Menno may not have been the most gifted theologian, his hard work and dedication allowed him to pick up the scattered pieces of the peaceful Dutch Anabaptists after the events of Münster, when he was able to reorganize them with local leadership. In part, because of his reorganization of the peaceful Anabaptists, many of these groups came to bear his name as Mennonites.

In summary, this study has shown that Menno Simons was a baptized Melchiorite covenanter with a distinctly Melchiorite apocalyptic expectation, but in such a way that was markedly different from the apocalypticism of the Münsterites. While Menno opposed the

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210. Ibid., 54.

211. Ibid., 58.

blasphemous kingship of Jan van Leiden, he harboured a degree of sympathy for the earliest stages of Anabaptist Münster, calling those people his “dear sisters and brothers.” Even though he opposed the violent and millennial developments at Münster, Menno continued to anticipate the New Jerusalem, as will be evidenced in his writings in the following chapter. This apocalyptic expectation would lead Menno to seek the establishment of a disciplined and pure Church, characterized by a Christian ethic of nonresistance.

Chapter 5: Menno's Melchiorite Peace Theology

As has been illustrated in the previous chapter, Menno Simons was a Melchiorite Anabaptist that at least nominally supported the earliest stages of the Anabaptist government in Münster, only denouncing Anabaptist Münster after the blasphemous proclamation of Jan van Leiden as the "joyous king over all, the joy of the disconsolate." Despite his denunciation of this later stage of the Münsterite kingdom, the concept of the New Jerusalem, or the Kingdom of God, remained central to Menno's thought for the rest of his life. While both Menno's and Münster's conceptions of this New Jerusalem emerged from the same Melchiorite origin, the later Münsterite conception became warped by Millennialism and violence, and Menno's came to justify a spiritualistic theology that led him to embrace a position of nonresistance rooted in the suffering love of Christ in the community of regenerated believers. This chapter seeks to illustrate that Menno Simons does not come to his nonresistance apart from or despite his Melchiorite roots, but rather, because of them. It is the apocalypticism of Menno's Melchiorite origins that allows Menno to develop his nonresistance.

5.1 Menno Simons and the Melchiorites

In order to understand how and in what way Menno Simons was a Melchiorite, it is essential to examine how the Melchiorite movement developed. Snyder explains the development of Melchiorite Anabaptism by dividing it into three phases. In the first phase, characterized by the teachings and visions of Melchior Hoffman beginning in 1530, Snyder describes it as being quite apocalyptic, but essentially peaceful, as the nonresistant Melchiorite Anabaptists were to play no part in initiating or carrying out the wrath of God in the Last Days.[212] In the second phase, beginning in 1533 after Hoffman's vision for the establishment of

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

the New Jerusalem in Strasbourg failed to materialize, Melchiorite Anabaptism shifted toward a violent expression under the leadership of Jan Matthijs in the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster. Unlike Hoffman, Matthijs taught that the saints of the Last Days (ie. the Münsterite Anabaptists) were to take the "sword of righteousness into their own hands, to prepare the way for the return of the Lord."[213] Finally, the third phase, beginning after the fall of Münster in 1535, is largely characterized by a return to the peaceful nonresistance of the first phase of Melchiorite Anabaptism. Snyder notes that while David Joris was also an important Melchiorite leader during this time, Menno Simons eventually emerges as the main leader of the movement during this phase.[214]

While Menno's leadership of the third phase of the Melchiorites saw the group's return to a position of nonresistance and a reining in of the excesses and extremism of the Münsterites, Voolstra notes, "the apocalyptic drive to purify religion was something Menno Simons continued to have in common with the Melchiorites and the Münsterites."[215] Menno understood obedience to Christ's teachings and ordinances, particularly the ordinance of baptism with the Sign of Thau, as marking "the assembly of true penitents and completed their separatism from the godless world."[216] Menno's Melchiorite apocalypticism led him to believe that this assembly of true Christians would come together in a New Jerusalem; however, unlike Hoffman and Matthijs, Menno never set a fixed date or location for this Day of Judgement.

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213. Ibid.

214. Ibid.

215. Sjouke Voolstra, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* (Newton, KS.: Mennonite Press, 1997), 98.

216. Ibid.

5.2 Menno's New Jerusalem

Menno Simons was a Melchiorite Anabaptist, receiving rebaptism with the Sign of Thau, and personally identifying as a "fellow covenanter" in his tract written against Jan van Leiden's blasphemous kingship in Münster. Despite his rejection of Jan van Leiden's Münster, in the first edition of *The Foundation Book*, written in 1539, Menno writes of the Münsterites:

> There is no question in my mind that our dear brothers, who formerly misbehaved a little against the Lord since they wanted to defend their faith with arms, have a gracious God… They did not seek anything other than Christ Jesus and eternal life. For this reason they gave up house, garden, land, sand, father, mother, wife, child and also their own life… It is no wonder that they were seduced at this time, because they did not yet have the discernment of the spirits. The honest and the pious I call my sisters and brothers. They failed because of their ignorance. But the insincere, who did not seek God with pure and clean hearts although they were called sisters and brothers, and the princes of the seduction as in Münster and Amsterdam, I leave in the hand of the Lord.[217]

In this section, which is later omitted from Menno's second edition of *The Foundation Book* (1554-1555), Menno clearly identifies with "the honest and the pious" Münsterites, whom he called his "sisters and brothers," as his fellow Melchiorite covenanters. These Münsterites only "misbehaved a little" because they chose to "defend their faith with arms." If Münster had remained nonviolent and without a blasphemous king, it is possible that Menno would have fully supported their movement, as he shared with the "honest and pious" Münsterites the Melchiorite theological doctrines of the incarnation, the Lord's Supper, believer's baptism, nonresistance, and their eschatological expectation.[218]

Of these shared Melchiorite doctrines, Menno's apocalyptic orientation toward the New Jerusalem is central to his theological thought from the very beginning of his Anabaptist writings, and informs his entire theological project from individual piety to ecclesiology. While

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217. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 51-52.

218. Ibid., 37.

he rejected the violence used by the Münsterites under Jan van Leiden to usher in the Kingdom of God, Menno believed that the Kingdom could only be anticipated through service and suffering love, characterized by the way of Christ, but the fullness of this Kingdom would only be realized after the return of Christ with the establishment of a new Heaven and new Earth.[219] Helmut Isaak identifies a key distinction in Menno's writings about the Kingdom of God, highlighting the differences between "external" and "visible." He notes that for Menno, Münster was only an external kingdom because it only existed as a physical kingdom, and was motivated by "selfish ambition, greed, and lust."[220] Menno's vision, however, emphasizes that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, which only becomes a visible reality through "repentance, regeneration and new life."[221] At the same time, Menno believed in the possibility of this New Jerusalem being established on Earth as both a visible and external reality, as long as it did not establish itself with the sword of violence or fall into the temptations of "selfish ambition, greed, and lust."[222] For Menno, the physical establishment of the external kingdom of the New Jerusalem was only secondary to the Kingdom's primary reality as the visible community of the regenerated Christians.

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219. Ibid., 44-45.

220. Ibid., 131.

221. Ibid.

222. Menno writes extensively on the possibility and form of an external Christian government, and Helmut Isaak examines this in detail in *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem,* 98-106. Isaak makes good sense of Menno's writings on Christian government, arguing that a Christian can serve in the office of government, but would have to do so without shedding blood. The function of a Christian government was to keep order, suppress false teachers, and do it without violence, as it worked to realize the external Kingdom of God. Menno points to the Old Testament models of Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah and others as models for Christian governments. Menno does not hold to the *Schleitheim* conception of government as "an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ." By the 1550s, Menno's position shifts slightly to see the external Kingdom as a separated minority living under the cross as the body of Christ.

It is significant to recognize that while Menno's expectation is apocalyptic, in the sense that it is oriented toward the final unveiling of the End Times and Christ's return, he is not millennialistic like the Münsterites. Menno refuted the Münsterite claim that they were to punish the evildoers before the Kingdom could be handed over to Christ in the End Times, arguing that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the Kingdom had already been established and given to Christ. When Christ does return, it will be for the final judgement, which Menno explains in *The Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden*, writing, "then the faithful servants shall enter into the Kingdom of their Lord; then the wicked will be punished, and all those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire."[223] Menno reiterates this in *True Christian Faith*:

> For idolatrous, bloodthirsty, confused Babylon shall perish and be destroyed, and fair Jerusalem, the city of peace, shall increase, and through the power of Almighty God be built up in glory. Therefore, all who are called to the marriage of the Lamb rejoice, whose names are written in the book of life with God. Here is the understanding, wisdom, faith, and patience of the saints. Let him that has understanding observe that the Word of the Lord is true. Blessed are they who are prepared and wait for the coming of the Lamb.[224]

Menno's anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ is not for the establishment of the Millennium, but for the final judgement, which is to be carried out by God, not humans. The regenerated Christians, through faith and obedience, await Christ's return peacefully, which can take place in an external Kingdom like early Münster (but is not required), while living out the visible reality of the Kingdom through Christ-like service and suffering love.

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223. Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," 48.

224. Menno Simons, "The True Christian Faith," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 400.

5.3 Celestial Flesh and the Church without Spot or Wrinkle

Perhaps the most telling sign of Menno's Melchiorite roots is the fact that he held to the Christological doctrine of "celestial flesh," a distinctly Melchiorite position, until he died.[225] This doctrine, introduced to the Dutch Anabaptists by Melchior Hoffman and widely held by his followers, holds that Jesus' flesh was completely of heavenly, celestial origin, yet was still fully human flesh born out of Mary. In his *Brief Confession on the Incarnation*, Menno writes:

> This eternal Word of God is become flesh. It was in the beginning with God and was God (John 1 :2)… It was conceived and derived from the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:20); and according to this same flesh, or with this same flesh, which was conceived of and brought forth from the Holy Ghost, He was born of Mary, the pure virgin, who was of the seed and lineage of David.[226]

Significant to Menno's position is that, although Jesus was born "of" Mary, he was not born "from" Mary, but rather "from" the Holy Ghost.[227] This slight difference in wording does not seek to make a claim on Jesus' physical birth, but rather only on the origins of his human flesh or genetic material. While Hoffman argued that Jesus passed through Mary as "water through a pipe," denying any physical traits of the motherhood of Mary, Menno diverged slightly and claimed, "Mary furnished the womb only and not the flesh of Christ," analogous to "a ray of sunshine penetrating a glass of water without taking on part of the water."[228] This means that Jesus would have been nourished and fed in the womb, but his flesh or "seed" would have been

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225. Though slight variations existed among the Gnostics.

226. Simons, "Brief Confession on the Incarnation," 436. Menno then links David's lineage to (the first) Adam, emphasizing the role of Jesus as the New or Second Adam.

227. Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice*, 89.

228. Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism*, 259.

not from Mary, but from Heaven. The distinction which Menno emphasized was that the Word "became" flesh, but it did not "take" flesh.[229]

While this Christological position can be seen as Docetic, denying or downplaying the humanity of Christ in favour of his divinity, Menno's Christology actually holds Jesus to be quite human, and perhaps even of a more "pure" form of humanity. This is because Menno also understood Adam's flesh to be of this same type of "celestial flesh" and being similarly "from God" and pure before the Fall.[230] This is important because Menno does not view human flesh as inherently evil, but merely as fallen after Eden because of human sinfulness. When Christians are baptized with the Sign of Thau, Menno argues, they symbolically die to the sinful seed of Adam, and are reborn into the seed of Christ. In this way, they are regenerated or reborn into a new creation with the "heavenly seed" of Christ's divine nature being born within them, and their flesh returns to the state of a pre-Fall Adam, pure like that of Christ, the "New Adam."[231] This new birth would result in new lives as faithful and obedient Christians in the Church, and while sin still existed, it was now capable of being overcome thanks to the spiritual power of Christ's divine nature born within. Menno continues by drawing on 1 Corinthians 15, arguing that the humanity of Jesus was of the same origin and nature as Adam prior to the Fall, allowing Jesus to be fully divine and fully human, without Jesus having to necessarily participate in the fallenness of humanity by being born into the sinful seed of (post-Fall) Adam through Mary, and thus

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229. Simons, "Brief Confession on the Incarnation," 428.

230. "For Christ Jesus, as to His origin, is no earthly man, that is, a fruit of the flesh and blood of Adam. He is a heavenly fruit or man. For His beginning or origin is of the Father (John 16:28), like unto the first Adam, sin excepted." Simons, "Brief Confession on the Incarnation," 437.

231. Irvin E. Burkhart, "Menno Simons on the Incarnation, Continued," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* vol. 4, no. 3 (1930): 179.

corrupting the humanity of a perfect and pure Christ.[232] Menno conceived of Jesus as constituting a "holy humanity" through his celestial flesh, offering the world "leverage against the corruption of the Fall and [freeing] Christians to share in Christ's divinity," and through this new celestial flesh, they could become "whole human beings" once more.[233]

This strange and often misunderstood Christology was highly controversial in Menno's time, as well as for later Mennonite piety and historical theology for its connection to Melchiorite apocalypticism and the violence at Münster.[234] Additionally, Menno's Melchiorite theology is not isolated to his Christology or understanding of individual piety, but also gets extended into his understanding of ecclesiology. Menno's ecclesiology is centred around purity and perfection, and oriented toward the great "marriage of the Lamb" in the End Times, where the Church will stand as Christ's glorious bride "without spot or wrinkle."[235] For Menno, this community of regenerated Christians is the Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem, where unless they are reborn and conformed to Christ, they cannot enter.[236] Menno addresses this most fully in his *Spiritual Resurrection,* where he writes:

> These are they who died with Christ unto sin and have truly risen. These are the newborn to whom the power is given to become the sons of God. These are the redeemed out of all the tongues and nations and peoples. They have on wedding garments for the marriage of the Lamb. They have received the sign Thau on their foreheads by which the servants of

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232. William E. Keeney, "The Incarnation, A Central Theological Concept," in *A Legacy of Faith; the Heritage of Menno Simons: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Cornelius Krahn*, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Newton, KS.: Faith and Life Press, 1962), 57.

233. Gerald J. Mast, "Jesus' Flesh and the Faithful Church in the Theological Rhetoric of Menno Simons," in *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective: Essays in Honor of J. Denny Weaver*, eds. Alain Epp Weaver and Gerald J. Mast (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2008), 183.

234. Ibid., 175.

235. Simons, "A Clear Account of Excommunication," 469.

236. Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 111.

> God are marked. These are the spiritual bride of Christ, His holy Church, His spiritual body, flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone. These have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, which came down from Heaven.[237]

This phrase, "flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone," is another reference to the creation story with Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:23, but is also frequently used at Christian weddings, using the imagery of "becoming one flesh."[238] This similarity is not accidental for Menno. The Church is the bride of Christ, a pure and glorious bride without spot or wrinkle, and through the regeneration of baptism, Christians become wedded to Christ in the Church: they become one flesh. In this spiritual sense, their flesh can become "celestial flesh," as they are united with Christ in the Church.

If individual Christians, who together constitute this pure bride of Christ, cannot conform to this standard of purity in the Church, they necessarily compromise this very purity. For this reason, Menno was compelled to take a strong stance on Church discipline through the use of the ban and shunning, as we have seen in the previous chapter. By banning unrepentant sinners, the Church is able to ensure that they remain pure and without spot or wrinkle for their marriage with Christ. Further, because the Church is the "flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone," it also constitutes the body of Christ, and by implementing the ban, the Church can effectively cut off or amputate any "diseased limb" from this body "with the knife of the divine Word," lest the whole

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237. Menno Simons, "The Spiritual Resurrection," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561,* ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 59.

238. In *The New Birth*, Menno refers to the Church as "the new Eve, the pure and chaste bride" to pair with Christ as the new Adam and the Bridegroom. Menno Simons, "The New Birth," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 93-94.

body become infected.[239] Only once the sinner has repented and has eradicated their "disease" may they be welcomed back into the body. Then together, as individual believers in the Church, submitted in faith and obedience to their Bridegroom, Christians can be built up as "the living stones of the Lord's temple" and become "the true citizens of [New] Jerusalem."[240] Therefore, this purity or perfection lies in the attachment to the spiritual body of Christ, the Church, where being without spot or wrinkle is only possible when Christians act as faithful members of Christ's body.[241]

This strict application of Church discipline applied most specifically to participation in the Lord's Supper. For Menno, because Jesus' flesh was pure and perfect, in that it was not fallen and corrupted with sin as was Adam's seed, only the pure and perfect who were truly regenerated and transplanted into Christ's seed could partake in the communion of the celestial flesh.[242] Only the grains of wheat that had been "pulverized by the mill, kneaded with water, and baked by the heat of the fire" could partake in Christ's celestial bread from Heaven, the bread of life.[243]

William Keeney, in "The Incarnation, A Central Theological Concept," identifies in Menno's writing that John 6 serves as a clear outline of Jesus' intention in the Lord's Supper. He

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239. Menno Simons, "A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561,* ed. John C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 414.

240. Simons, "The True Christian Faith," 370.

241. Mast, "Jesus' Flesh and the Faithful Church in the Theological Rhetoric of Menno Simons," 183.

242. Simons, "A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline," 413.

243. Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 145.

writes that Menno believed that "to eat His flesh and drink His blood signifies the acts of trust and obedience which are the spiritual equivalents to carnal eating and drinking."[244] In this way, to partake in the Lord's Supper was "not only symbolic, not only a memorial," but rather, "the real experience of partaking of the same being of Christ."[245] This was not meant in a physical way, as Menno's former Catholic theology of transubstantiation would suggest, but rather that "it is a spiritual reality, and in this sense Jesus Christ is really present in the Lord's Supper."[246] For Menno, the Lord's Supper brings together the regenerated Christians in the Church that constitutes the bride of Christ, and unites them with Christ, their Bridegroom, anticipating the Wedding of the Lamb in the End Times, where they partake in the same being of Christ, becoming one, celestial flesh. By trusting in and being obedient to Christ and his teachings, which for Menno required a life of nonresistance, we can partake spiritually in the same being as Christ.

5.4 Christocentric Ethics and Nonresistance

The main point of divergence between Menno and Münster in their Melchiorite theologies lies in their interpretations of John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and lived among us."[247] For the Münsterites, the incarnation was understood as legitimizing the radical, millennial revelations of Jan van Leiden and Bernhard Rothmann, because Christ, the Word become flesh, literally dwelled inside and among the celestial flesh of each regenerated Christian baptized with

244. Keeney, "The Incarnation, A Central Theological Concept," 62.

245. Ibid., 62-63.

246. Ibid., 63.

247. John 1:14 (New Revised Standard Version).

the Sign of Thau.[248] Thus, any revelations made by these truly regenerated Christians would also necessarily be a revelation from Christ, who literally dwelled inside them. The Münsterites used this to justify their use of violence in destroying the godless, which was given support by the dire situation the city's inhabitants were facing while under siege by an army of "the godless." For Menno, on the other hand, the incarnation meant that only Jesus' words and his earthly life had a normative, revelatory significance.[249] It is because Christ, the eternal Word of God, became flesh and lived among us, showing us the way to regeneration and rebirth into his heavenly flesh, that the example and ethics of Jesus must be normative and authoritative for all Christians. For Menno, Christ as the incarnate Word of God was the absolute norm and content for all Christian life, which he regularly pointed to with his personal motto, "For no one should lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."[250] This means that Menno's expectation for the imminent return of Christ and the New Jerusalem did not rely on the Münsterite revelations, but only on the Gospels and the teachings of Christ.

The anticipation of the Kingdom of God, for Menno, required both looking forward to his Second Coming and living lives in the present that conformed to his teachings and example, as he wrote, "He has taught and left unto His followers an example of pure love, and a perfect life."[251] This pure love and perfect life of Christ's must be imitated by Christians "as the chosen

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248. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 67. John 1:14 was the central concept of Jan van Leiden's Münster, and the verse was engraved on each of the coins that were minted in Münster in 1534.

249. Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, 67.

250. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this motto taken from 1 Corinthians 3:11 was inscribed on the title page of all his writings.

251. Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 109.

children of God, so as to inherit the kingdom of their Father."[252] For Menno, this seeking of Christian perfectionism is firmly rooted in his celestial flesh Christology, which similarly claims a perfect Christ and a perfect Church. Menno writes, "For if they believed Him to be wise and perfect, how could they thus shamefully adulterate, break, despise, and garble His perfect evangelical Word and ordinances? If they acknowledged Him to be spotless, why do they seek their salvation in such impure and strange means, and not in the only pure sacrifice which is Christ Jesus?"[253] Here, Menno rooted his pure Christocentric ethics in a call to the imitation of a perfect Christ.

Central to Menno's conception of a pure life of following the perfect Christ was an emphasis on nonresistance as a binding norm for all faithful Christians. Menno rejected the possibility of a Christian use of violence, writing, "How can Christians fight with the implements of war? Paul plainly said, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.' Now Christ Jesus was minded to suffer; and in the same way all Christians must be minded."[254] Christians are to embrace the example of Christ by being obedient in service and suffering love. Menno writes, Christians "teach and acknowledge no other sword, nor tumult in the Kingdom or Church of Christ than the sharp sword of the Spirit, God's Word."[255] Thus, the only weapons of a Christian are "powerful, fervent prayer, a longsuffering and patient heart, strong, immovable faith, a living hope, and an unblameable life."[256] It is with these weapons that Christians are to

252. Simons, "The Spiritual Resurrection," 59.

253. Simons, "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing," 314.

254. Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," 42-43.

255. Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 200.

256. Ibid., 175.

bring forth the Kingdom and anticipate Christ's return, not with the violence of the physical sword.

As has been illustrated above, Menno Simons arrives at a peaceful position of Christian nonresistance, not apart from his Melchiorite roots in apocalypticism, but rather, because of them. His critiques of Jan van Leiden's Münsterite kingdom highlight Menno's belief that the actualization of the Kingdom of God and the establishment of the New Jerusalem did not depend on any worldly government or violence. Rather, it has always been present in this world, becoming a visible reality through the incarnation and life of Christ, the Word become flesh, and through our repentance and regeneration, we can be reborn into a new life and become a part of it. By living pure and perfect lives of service, suffering love, and peaceful nonresistance in the imitation of Christ in the Church, assisted through strict Church discipline, we constitute the pure bride of Christ without spot or wrinkle, anticipating the great Wedding of the Lamb in the End Times. Through Menno Simons' development of a peaceful Melchiorite theology, we can see how he is able to hold the same Melchiorite apocalyptic expectations as the early Münsterites and a peaceful position of Christian nonresistance simultaneously, proving that even a Melchiorite apocalypticism can lead to peaceful Christian practice, despite the violent and millennial mutations that developed at Münster under Jan van Leiden.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the two Anabaptist reformers explored above, we have seen how the apocalyptic expectations of both Clemens Adler and Menno Simons shaped their lives and writings, as well as influenced their development of Christian nonresistance. Even though these instances are only two examples, they effectively illustrate that apocalyptic expectation had a formative influence on sixteenth century Anabaptism, not just in the violent, radical extremists.

6.1 Similarities and Differences

While both Clemens Adler and Menno Simons developed positions of Christian nonresistance that emerged out of their apocalyptic expectations, these two Anabaptists reach this point in different ways. As has been seen in the chapters above, both Adler and Menno are driven to a pursuit of Christian faithfulness because of their expectation that the End Times are coming soon. In their two separate approaches to Christian faithfulness, they both turn to developing theological systems that involve an internalized, spiritual faith. For Adler, this can be seen in his development of a Christian realm of ethics centred around the life and teachings of Jesus, while integrating a spiritualized faith that encounters Christ in the abyss of the heart. Similarly, Menno seeks a form of Christian purity in the Church that will enable individuals to be truly reborn into a life of service, suffering love, and peaceful nonresistance, where the Christian becomes one with Christ in his celestial flesh, with Christ dwelling within them.

Another similarity found in both Adler and Menno is the wedding imagery used to describe the Wedding of the Lamb on the Day of the Lord. While Adler uses this imagery to envision the Jews and the Christians coming together as “the spouse and bride of Christ,” becoming one flesh with Christ, Menno envisions the wedding of the Church of the truly regenerated Christians with Christ, becoming one celestial flesh. The differences are relatively

minor, but they are both seen as the ultimate culmination of history and God's plan for reconciliation with humanity. Secondly, while Adler believes this event will take place on Mount Zion, and Menno believes it will happen in the New Jerusalem, both essentially function and operate in the same way to designate a sacred space for this glorious wedding and divine reconciliation.

A significant difference between the theological approaches of Adler and Menno is that Adler appears to be more directly concerned with individual and spiritual piety, whereas Menno is more concerned with ecclesiological purity. While both Adler and Menno obviously have concern for both the individual and the ecclesial, their differing approaches seem to lean more one way or the other. Adler's approach seeks to establish a clear ethical framework for Christian life with nonresistance as a primary characteristic. Because ethics are enacted on an individual level, his systematic approach is geared to be more individualistic. In contrast, Menno aims to establish purity in the Church, which includes a strict application of nonresistance and discipline. Similarly, because Menno's approach envisions Christian life within a disciplined community, his systematic approach appears much more concerned with the ecclesiological.

6.2 Further Study

Further study in this area building on this research should consider how apocalyptic expectation influenced the shaping of Anabaptist ethics and ecclesiology more broadly, in particularly, how a short-term view, given the belief that the End was near, influenced the development of Anabaptist ethics and ecclesiology. If one truly believes that the End is coming soon, even in their own lifetime, long-term planning and development would not be given much thought. However, given that the End evidently did not come, and elements of these early Anabaptists' ethics are visible in the tradition today, exploring how these short-term ethics

eventually developed into practical theology in the Anabaptist tradition in later generations after the apocalyptic zeal had largely faded away would be a fascinating study.

6.3: Peace in the End Times

If one takes a didactic view of history, this study of apocalypticism and ethics has contemporary relevance. Even though many contemporary Christians and Anabaptists would reject the apocalyptic conceptions of the sixteenth century, it is important to recognize that there are still apocalyptic leaders with us today, though with different names and teachings from those seen in the sixteenth century. We can see them almost every day on the internet or television, pointing to this or that as "signs of the times," or calling for Christian opposition to a particular political candidate who has been identified as the Antichrist. These sorts of charismatic leaders often rise in popularity during times of social, economic, and political crises, much like that which is being experienced in 2020-2021. When considering apocalypticism in our own time, we can reflect on these examples of the sixteenth century Anabaptists to see how apocalyptic expectation shaped their faithfulness. While many may be led to take up the sword of violence, it is vital that the Church learns how to be faithful in peace as it anticipates the return of its Bridegroom.

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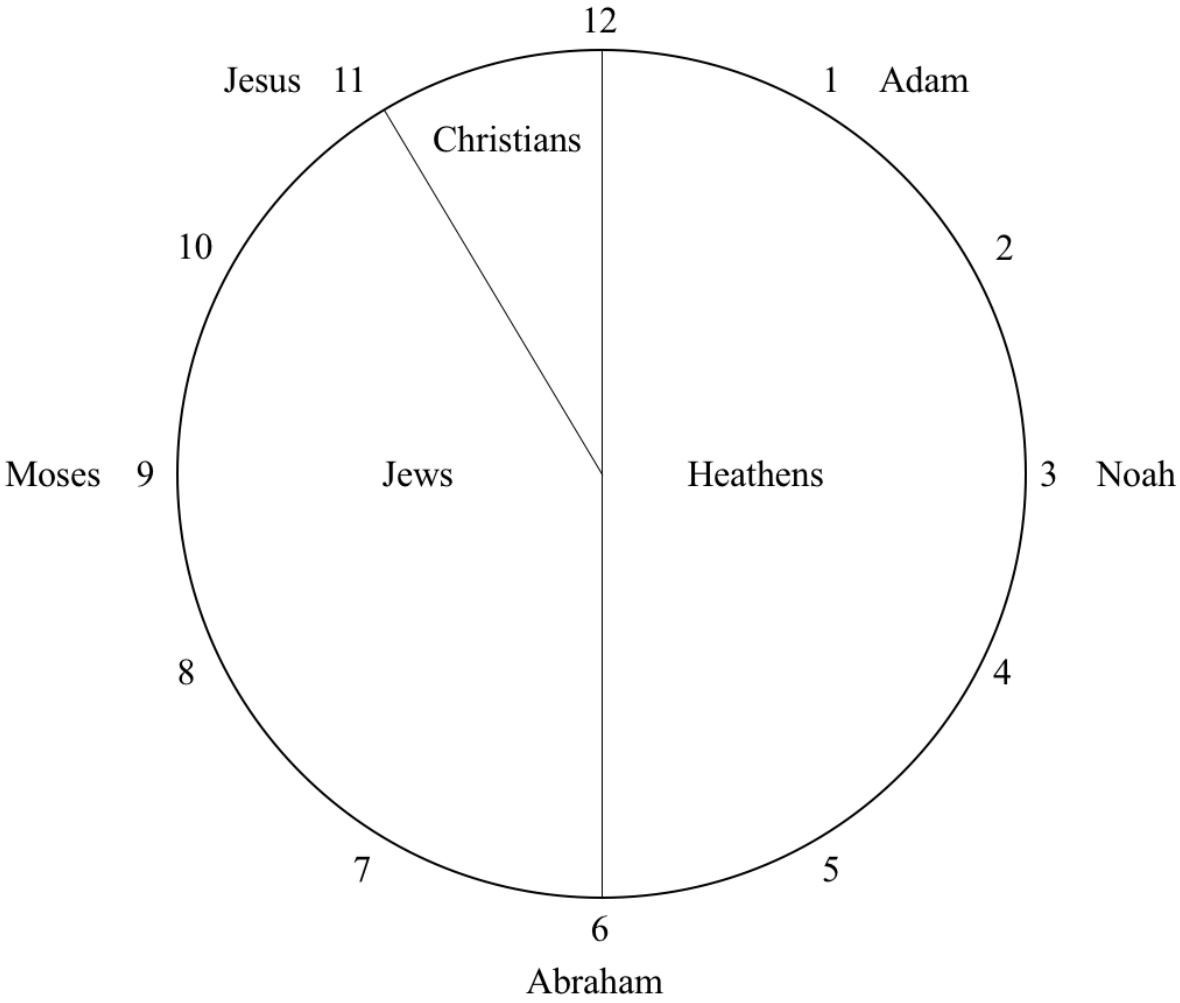
Appendix 1: Clemens Adler's "Clock"



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257. This list is largely taken from the “Menno Simons (1496-1561)” GAMEO page, but updated to reflect the biographies written since the article’s publishing in 1990. - Cornelius Krahn and Cornelius J. Dyck, “Menno Simons (1496-1561),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)*, 1990, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Menno_Simons_(1496-1561)&oldid=160744.

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