

Radicals, Charismatics and Heretics

History of the Church
Maranatha Chapel
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Münster 1534 – Melchiorites’ New Jerusalem (Waco?)



Munster

- Melchor Hofman taught that the world would soon end and that the new age would begin in Strasbourg, where he was imprisoned in 1533 and died c. 1543.
- Some of Hofmann's followers came under the influence of the Dutchman **Jan Mathijs** (died 1534) and of **John of Leiden** (Jan Beuckelson; died 1535).
- Dreams, Visions and Prophecies (where were the tongues?)
- The two leaders and many refugees settled in 1534 in **Münster**, Westphalia, where they gained control of the city.
- All Property To Be Held In Common
- theocracy
- polygamy.
- The people believed that the Second Coming was about to happen, and proclaimed Münster the New Jerusalem.
- Jan of Leyden took the name King David on August 31, 1534.

1534, Münster, a 16th Century “Waco” or “Heaven’s Gate”

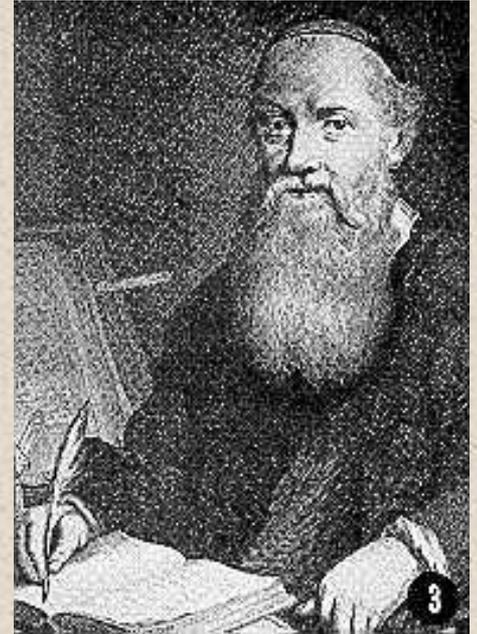


- MunsterStarved Into Surrender
- The city was captured in 1535
- by an army of Catholics *and* Lutherans
- executed the leaders and publicly exhibited their bodies in iron cages hung from the tower of St. Lambert's Church.
- From that day, unjustly, Anabaptist theology has been held to result in revolutionary upheaval.

Menno Simons (Simms) (1496-1565)

Biblicist Pacifist

- Dutch Catholic priest.
- During his first year as priest he began to question the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.
- Influenced by **Erasmian humanism** and the ethical concerns of the **Brethren of the Common Life**.
- These doubts led Menno to read both the Bible and the writings of **Martin Luther** for the first time.
- By 1528 he was known as an evangelical preacher, though he continued as parish priest.
- Unfortunately, over the practice of church discipline, referred to as "**the ban**" (the shunning of unrepentant, erring brethren), Simons' strict stand, which would call for the breaking of a marriage if necessary, ultimately caused a split in the Dutch Mennonites.



- Developed the model of a disciplined, visible church ruled by the authority of Scripture.
 - espoused Biblicism
 - No private visions
 - renounced violence
 - renounced political power.
- In the spring of 1535, as the horrors of the Münsterite kingdom unfolded, Menno penned his first surviving tract, a polemic *against* Jan of Leyden, in which he denounced the private visions and impatient violence of the Münsterites and laid the groundwork for a biblical hermeneutic based firmly on the teachings of Christ.
- Wary of his contemporaries who had allowed personal revelations and visions to transcend the authority of the written Word, Menno continuously defended Scripture as the foundation of the Christian life.

Menno's Biblicism – Reaction to Munster



Menno's Writings, 1536-40

- Simons would become the most prolific of the Anabaptist writers and would unify Dutch and Northern Germany Anabaptism.
- *The Spiritual Resurrection* (1536),
- *The New Birth* (1537),
- *Christian Baptism* (1539),
- *Foundation of the Christian Doctrine* (1539-40).
- His readings of the New Testament led him to the firm conviction that only persons of mature faith, who acknowledged Jesus as Lord and had counted the cost of following him, could be eligible for membership in the church.



Faith Alone

Menno On Salvation.

- Few reformers emphasized the centrality of the New Birth more than Menno;
- The experience of conversion came to be central to all of Menno's life and theology.
- the New Birth was more than simply the inner experience of forgiveness of sins.
- emphasized the link between the New Birth and the life of the "new creature," *a life of Christian discipleship that gave tangible evidence of the gift of grace.*
- the believer never is fully freed from the taint of original sin---Menno did not preach perfectionism---but he had no patience for the popular appropriation of Luther's doctrine of justification that seemed to promote "easy believism".
- Because we have been saved and transformed by grace, we too will embody that same grace-filled love with all relationships, including- indeed, especially-those who might be considered our enemies.

Lordship Salvation”?

•It will not "help a fig to boast of the Lord's blood, death, merits, grace or gospel if the believer is not truly converted from his sinful life."



"True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful, it shelters the destitute, it serves those that harm it, it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all people."

Menno Fights Lutheran “Easy Believism”



- The regenerate "live no longer after the old corrupted nature of the earthly Adam, but after the new upright nature of the new and heavenly Adam, Christ Jesus."

- "Where is the power of the gospel you preach? . . . Where are the fruits of the Spirit you have received? Is it not all hypocrisy that you preach? Shame on you for the easygoing gospel!"

Menno On The Church

- define the character of the true church in contrast to the state-dominated official churches of his day.
- the true church was found in the local body of adult believers who voluntarily gathered to study the Word and pledged themselves to lives of discipleship and mutual aid one for the other.
- To maintain its purity, the church must exercise church discipline as an act of Christian charity and love to the struggling or fallen believer.
- Menno's emphasis on the church as a deeply committed fellowship challenged the Protestant temptation to regard the church as an institution closely allied with the state, with an identity virtually independent of the lives of individual believers.



The Separated Church



"They verily are not the true congregation of Christ who merely boast of his name, but they are the true congregation of Christ who are truly converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerate mind by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Divine Word, and have become children of God, have entered into obedience to him, and live unblamably in his holy commandments."

Menno's Believers' Baptism

•“We are not regenerated because we are baptized; we are baptized because we have been regenerated.”

"I examined the scriptures diligently, and pondered them earnestly, but could find no report of infant baptism."

Departure from the Papacy



- Baptism symbolized a new life in Christ as lived in the nurturing fellowship of other believers.
- Baptism marked a public statement of incorporation into a new body, the church.
- Used pouring, not immersion

Mennonite Pacifism

"The Prince of Peace," wrote Menno, "is Jesus Christ. We who were formerly no people at all, and who knew of no peace, are now called to be...a church...of peace. True Christians do not know vengeance. They are the children of peace. Their hearts overflow with peace. Their mouths speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace" (*Reply to False Accusations*).

- Menno would argue that violence of any sort in the name of Christ is blasphemy, which calls for repentance.
- His writings call upon Christians to resist the seduction of a violent culture (even when that violence is sanctioned by the state).



Questions to Consider

- **Are you a Calvinist baptist or a baptist Calvinist?**
- **How far should we take the regulative principle? Greeting with kisses? Foot washing? Head coverings? What about having all things in common? Where do we draw the line or do we draw a line?**
- **How literally should we comply with scriptures? Do we need to climb on our roof to proclaim the good news from the “rooftops”? How about “mountaintops”? Done any “extreme evangelism” lately?**
- **Are we allowed to “take oaths”? What about that passage in James?**
- **Will current end times mania bring discredit to those churches caught up in it?**
- **If you’re an infant baptist, why aren’t you an infant communionist?**
- **Should Christians “bear the sword”? What about the Sermon on the Mount? Does that sermon apply to us? Why not? Given away any of your coats lately?**
- **Does too much emphasis on “by grace through faith” undermine the need for good works? Does it lead to anti-nomianism (easy believism)?**
- **Does too much emphasis on “faith without works is dead” undermine grace and lead to legalism or so-called “Lordship salvation”?**
- **Few of us believe in church state merger today, but are there too kinds of Christians in the church (disciples and everybody else or spiritual Christians and carnal Christians)? If you answer “just one” are you “Reformed” or “Anabaptist”?**