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The Politicization and Criminalization of Anabaptism:
Perspectives of Huldrych Zwingli and Menno Simons

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Introduction

The development of Anabaptism re-defined Protestantism. What started as an offshoot of Huldrych Zwingli's reform movement in Zurich quickly turned into a movement associated with fanaticism and political insurrection. Though Anabaptism did not remain a dominant force, the threat it posed for a short time forced reformers to defend their faith and establish clear theological practices. This paper focuses on two men, one of whom can be theologically linked to Anabaptism. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the reasons each reformer had for rejecting ties to Anabaptism, and to show that this theological movement was politically motivated.

Although often perceived as a radical extension of the movement that originated with Luther, Anabaptism had various distinguishing elements of faith and was categorized by "a theology of discipleship," a phrase coined by Harold S. Bender (author of *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*) in an effort to define a group that is not often associated with the development of a unique theology. The movement originated as an offshoot of the reform led by Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich when George Blaurock and Conrad Grebel performed the first acts of "re-baptism". Justo L. González writes in *The Story of Christianity Volume II: The Reformation to the Present Day*: "George Blaurock, a former priest, asked another of the brethren, Conrad Grebel, to baptize him. On January 21, 1525, at the fountain that stood in the city square in Zürich, Grebel baptized Blaurock..." (González, 2010, p. 69). In Catholicism infants are baptized, and by performing this sacrament again as adults,

Blaurock and Grebel made a public declaration that their first baptism wasn't a sufficient source of salvation.

Anabaptism developed from the same Humanist and Lutheran thought as Huldrych Zwingli's movement and they have a similar theology of the sacraments. At the core of Anabaptism and Zwinglian reformation was a stringent Biblicism in which all church practice should be derived from Scripture. Theologically different views of baptism provoked ardent responses from both sides, yet arguably the main difference between Anabaptists and Zwingli's brand of reform was their relationship with the government. González confirms this notion with his assertion:

Although that opposition was usually couched in theological considerations, in fact Anabaptists were persecuted because they were considered subversive. In spite of their radical views on other matters, both Luther and Zwingli accepted the notion that church and state must live side by side, supporting each other, and both refrained from any interpretation of the gospel that would make it a threat to the established social order. (González, 2010, p. 69)

Zwingli did not have the same urgency as Anabaptists in his promotion of changes to established church practice, choosing instead to make concessions and work with the governing authority in Zurich. This plays a significant role in why Anabaptism was a persecuted faith and did not endure, save for small communities of worshippers.

The influences of Zwinglians and Anabaptists are similar, as with many early reformation groups, so much so that Martin VanGelderren wrote in *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt: 1555-1590*: "During the first half of the sixteenth century there was simply no instant, clear-cut choice between well-defined versions of traditional Roman Catholicism, Christian humanism, Lutheranism, Anabaptism

and Calvinism” (VanGelderens, 1992, p. 65). As a foil for Zwingli, I selected Menno Simons because he published a distinct theology for his brand of Anabaptism, emphasizing pacifism while many Anabaptist groups are characterized by martyrdom and violent rebellion. One such group developed in Münster and resulted in the dissimulation of that group as well as provoked criticism from Catholics and Protestants alike. Both Zwingli and Simons make an effort to distinguish themselves from Anabaptists because of this association. The basis for the violence such as that which occurred at Münster could be explained as stemming from multiple sources. Possible political and theological reasons for violent reactions to Anabaptism will be explored.

Huldrych Zwingli and the Organization of the Swiss Church

Huldrych Zwingli was born on the first of January, 1484 in Wildhaus, three years after the Stanser agreement¹ was implemented to maintain the decentralized structure of the Swiss Federation. This reformer must be understood within the context of his Swiss background; political change fueled the style of sermon that was soon his trademark. Bruce Gordon in his book *Swiss Reformation* neatly sums up the political implications of belonging to the Swiss Confederation with the statement: “Indeed, the very term ‘Swiss’ implies an artificial unity”; the term Switzerland wasn’t used to refer to the country until 1803 (Gordon, 2002, p. 1). Despite a lack of primary historical documents detailing the formation of the original three cantons

¹ Also called the “Stanser Verkommnis”, the Compact of Stans was negotiated in December 1481 by Nicholas von Flüe. Urban and Rural cantons were at odds with one another and this agreement prevented civil war, outlining that the Confederacy should defend one another and promote peace. (19, Gordon)

(Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden), their agreement centered around mutual defense following the death of Emperor Rudolf I. Surrounded by larger powers with established political systems, Switzerland was unique in its loose alliances.

Cantons in the Swiss Confederacy were generally united through a common threat posed by the Hapsburg dynasty in Austria. The population was simultaneously engaged in continual disputes of land and dependant on economic ties through craft goods and trade. Land has always been an issue for the Swiss; the mountainous, inhospitable terrain makes sustainable agriculture and agribusiness difficult. Disputes which focused on control of land resulted in a series of triumphant military victories of the Swiss over the Hapsburgs and the Confederacy expanded necessarily into the lower lying cantons of Zurich and Lucerne, where agriculture was easier to implement. Confederate elites were dependent on patronage and cooperation of the Hapsburgs as far as trade was concerned, but the harsh geography of the original cantons made support of a growing population nearly impossible.

Early in the accumulation of land, cantons did not always act in alliance with one another. Bern specifically engaged in military ventures that were targeted at land accumulation, leaving its fellow confederates to fight independently at some times and joining it at others. Power was directly tied to land and livestock; families with these attributes were elevated into a position of power politically and economically. Cantons maintained political independence to a large extent, reserving the right to conduct their own affairs and structure government differently from canton to canton.

Zwingli would make his reformationist mark in Zurich, an oligarchical canton that by the fourteenth century had successfully established a guild system; tradesmen joined together to cooperatively enact policies that would benefit their specific trade. During Zwingli's lifetime the Swiss Confederacy was composed of thirteen cantons and was associated with militaristic prowess. Zwingli studied at the University of Vienna and the University of Basle, both likely sources of the humanist and classical references seen throughout his publications. Prior to his placement in Zurich, Zwingli served as a priest in Glarus and Einsiedeln. He began his ministry in Zurich on January 1, 1519, with a close study of the Gospel of Matthew based only on what is scripturally evident, and scriptural study became the basis for his ministry in the city.

Swiss people were esteemed throughout Europe for their mercenary services, stemming from original attempts to defend their territory from Austrian forces. Zwingli's publications, even prior to his arrival in Zurich, were categorized by political allegory. He publicly decried his countrymen's ties to mercenary service, illuminating how this created disunity and put the Swiss at the mercy of the countries that purchased their services. War throughout Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provided a means of living for the Swiss as well as a source of financial stability; Zwingli's contempt for this system made him a target for Swiss political leaders.

The structure of religious life within the Confederacy further promoted disunity; the majority of the population fell within the diocese of Constance but inconsistencies with how the lines were drawn meant that religious and political

borders overlapped. This made executing church authority difficult. Another major development in the fifteenth century was the implementation of rural deans, an additional member of the church hierarchy. They acted as agents of the bishop, mediating between the bishop and the priests to ensure that statutes were implemented. This effectively eliminated direct communication between these parties. Bruce Gordon notes: "There was no shortage of people prepared to talk about the abuses in the church and how reform was essential, but there was no effective means of implementing change" (Gordon, 2002, p. 26). Prior to Zwingli's arrival in Zurich, certain reforms were already in effect, such as marriage among the clergy. Religion was also extremely localized; traditions and local saints meant that there was already acceptance of decentralized belief. Zwingli's request for formalized recognition of reform was made with the understanding that these reforms were already occurring throughout the Confederacy.

Menno Simons and Reform in the Netherlands

Menno Simons was born in 1496 in the province of Friesland and died in 1561. At a young age he was consecrated to the Catholic Church and devoted himself to a monastic lifestyle and in March of 1524, he was ordained. Simons does not indicate that he was aware of reformation movements occurring during the first years of his ministry, but there is speculation that at some point he came into contact with Lutheran doctrine because he expressed doubts over the nature of transubstantiation early in his priesthood. As a result, he read the Bible for the first time two years after his ordination, discovering that the scriptural message did not synchronize with traditional church teaching.

Friesland was under Hapsburg rule in the period preceding the Eighty Years War. The influences of Martin Luther and Erasmus shaped the Reformation in the Low Countries and the area was characterized by pacifism. Early in the appearance of Anabaptism, individuals were being executed on the basis of their heresy; Hans J. Hillerbrand includes the account of one such execution in his book *The Division of Christendom: Christianity in the Sixteenth Century*: on March 20, 1531, a tailor named Freerks was publicly executed for receiving a second baptism (Hillerbrand, 2007, p. 124). This execution is one of the first occasions that Simons recounts hearing about Anabaptism.

Simons didn't cut his ties with the Catholic Church immediately, later citing greed, desire for monetary gain, and social comfort as reasons for his refusal to do so. Finally, in January of 1536, Simons left his office as a priest and was baptized by Obbe Philips, a founder of the Obbenites. Ernest B. Bax writes in *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*:

Some authorities state that he did not definitely join the party till 1536, though he seems to have had relations of some kind with the movement for three or four years previously, having supported the teaching of the moderate and non-political section in 1533 against Jan Matthys, whose star was then in the ascendant.
(Bax, 1970, p. 326)

Once adopted into the Anabaptist group, Simons' quickly ascended the ranks, becoming a well-known speaker. His ascension was partially aided by Philips' withdrawal from Anabaptism around 1540.

Humanism, or the philosophy that humans as agents are valuable, placed a stress on rationality as a source of knowledge over faith; this is reflected in publications of both Zwingli and Simons. Zwingli incorporated elements of

humanism into his theology, particularly in publications after 1522. Even in his allegorical sermons referenced later (“The Ox” and “The Labyrinth”) there are biblical references paralleling humanist pleas for peace and pacifism. Where Erasmus and Zwingli differed is the issue of the literal vs. allegorical nature of Scripture. Erasmus did not indicate that Scripture was clear in a literal sense; he condoned a more allegorical understanding whereas “Zwingli affirms the literal sense of scripture, and, though he also allows the mystical sense, it is (much more than in Erasmus) given a typological rather than an allegorical meaning” (Stephens, 1986, p. 14). Both men used non-Christian sources in their explanation of Biblical thought but Erasmus leans much more on pagan writers whereas Zwingli uses classical authors more as a tool to explain rhetoric, and even in this sense the use is limited. Platonism and Stoicism were popular concepts during this period, as classical thought resurfaced in popularity and these influences can be seen in Simons’ publications throughout his ministry.

Role of the Clergy

Qualifications for authority figures (who was qualified and what qualified them) were a point of contention between Zwinglians and Anabaptists. Both Zwingli and Simons started their careers as Catholic priests, thus both men were products of a highly structured system of authority. Zwingli’s ascent into his role as a leader of his own branch of reform varied greatly from Simons, though both saw the clergy as being largely corrupt. The nature of Simons’ ascent to power in the Anabaptist movement varies greatly from the practices of ordination in the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Simons was approached by Obbenite authorities and asked to join their ranks without the need for any formal training.

Simons' addresses the issue of Church authority in his "Foundation of Christian Doctrine". He outlines the legitimate ways in which people can be called to the church:

They must have been urged into the vineyard of the Lord through the true and unfeigned love of God and their neighbor, and through the power of the Holy Ghost. They must put to interest the talent of grace which they have received from God, must rebuke sin and teach faith and righteousness without any respect of persons; and must further the Word and praise of the Lord. They must faithfully perform the work and service of the Lord, and so bring the gathered sheaves into the Lord's barn, and the acquired coins into his treasury.
(Simons, 1956, p. 160)

For Anabaptists, leaders must have been legitimately called to service and operate according to what is dictated in Scripture. The process for becoming a leader in the Anabaptist church was informal as far as preparation on the part of the initiated. Baptism and acceptance by the group were the main factors that legitimized authority; formal education was not an essential component. This oversight was a point of criticism for Zwingli, who saw formal education as essential in creating church authority who can read and interpret Scripture in its original form.

Robert Friedmann in *The Theology of Anabaptism* also notes what could be considered a foundational difference between Anabaptism and Zwingli's branch of Reform; the role of education. "One could perhaps say that the Anabaptists were not learned men and not trained in rational or intellectual pursuits, which, of course, is largely true" (Friedmann, 1973, p. 20). The author goes on to argue that rational and intellectual pursuits are not the basis of theology, but does not dismiss the

significance that formal education played in the way the authority of the church was perceived.

Simons' establishes a system to curb church authority in his "Foundation of Christian Doctrine" where he outlines "The Doctrine of the Preachers"; by doing this he indicates to his church that he is aware of the possibility of corruption. He urges his readers to critically assess the vocation of their preachers along the guidelines he provides, assuring readers that a portion of preachers are not preaching from a place of pure devotion to Christ. At the end of this explanation, he clarifies that he is specifically critiquing the popish priests. "What the vocation and mission of the Lutherans and Zwinglians is, by what spirit they are driven, what they seek, and what fruits of repentance they achieve by their doctrines and sacraments, we willingly leave to the judgment of all who have been taught by God" (Simons, 1956, p. 164). Simons does not explicate what he means by those who have been "taught by God" but carefully works to establish that his critique is only based on the system that he came from. Simons explains that ordination in the Catholic model, where the individual is not necessarily called into the priesthood, is flawed because these individuals often live contrary to the behavioral model of Christ. Being called to a position of authority, and being held to certain standards by one's congregation, is enough reason for Simons to stand behind the spiritual authority of those who preach in the Mennonite Church.

Stephens writes, explaining Zwingli's argument in scriptural terms, that Zwingli likened the necessary reforms to a well-known passage in Matthew, where Christ advocated that one should remove a part of the body if it proved offensive.

“In like manner Zwingli called for the removal of bishops, preachers, or rulers who placed unbearable burdens on the people” (Walton, 1967, p. 79). Response to corruption was a major motivator for both reformers and by the admission of non-educated individuals into Anabaptist leadership the elevated nature of the priesthood deteriorated.

Common Dissociation with Anabaptism

Both Menno Simons and Huldrych Zwingli targeted much of their energy to defending their respective groups from being labeled Anabaptists. This raises the issue of what defines an Anabaptist; the adoption of rebaptism and the rejection of infant baptism are the qualities most often associated with the title, though these qualities have not been the only ones taken into account when distinguishing between reform groups. According to E. Belfort Bax, author of *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* the distinguishing factor for Anabaptists is adult baptism itself. Referring to Thomas Münzer, Bax labels him as a fake Anabaptist because “To its special sign, re-baptism, Münzer attached no significance” (2, Bax). Bax immediately incorporates Zwingli into his explanation, indicating that he spearheaded a reform movement of which Anabaptism was an offshoot.

In this explanation, Bax indicates that Zwingli had tolerated Anabaptism and its association with Reform until the movement was better established in Zurich. The Anabaptists split further between those who strictly practiced pacifism and those who were willing to engage in physical altercations to promote their message. The zeal with which the Brethren pushed Zwingli toward radical reform could have compounded his bitterness against the group; Zwingli’s reform resulted in more

changes in church ceremony than past reformers but Zwingli attached little importance to the immediacy of change, showing a willingness to make concessions and appease the local leadership of the Zurich Council. One of the clearest examples of this is also a core issue leading to the split between Zwingli and the Anabaptists, the issue of taxation.

Zwingli's hesitation to support the Brethren was partially rooted in the issue of taxation. Zwingli had originally supported the abolition of taxation, but in order to preserve his standing with the burghers, changed his stance. "Accordingly, on June 22nd, the Council passed a resolution condemning emphatically the idea of attacking the existing sources of Church revenue" (Bax, 1970, p. 13). Zwingli's position was solidified in a sermon delivered three days later, where he indicated his stance as a moderate in the Reformation movement. His actions indicated his willingness to put specific reforms to the side if they weren't met with favor by the political body in Zurich.

Theological issues, specifically centered on baptism, were key in causing disunity between the groups. Still, political arguments based around the proper structure of government and its role in relationship to the church had an arguably more significant role. One of the core issues for the split with Anabaptism surrounded Zwingli's recognition of the practicality in maintaining good relations with the Zurich Council, especially in light of opposition from the bishop. Ultimately, as those with political authority backed Zwingli, his influence became solidified throughout Zurich and tension with remaining Catholic cantons became more

oppressive. These tensions resulted in actual factional splits between cantons who remained Catholic and those who supported reform.

Many individuals published in an effort to indicate the differences that made their specific brand of reformed Christianity unique. Zwingli's efforts appear in his "Fidei ratio" and "Expositio fidei", written to Charles V and Francis I in 1530 and 1531 respectively. These letters attempt to further distinguish between Zwingli's movement and that of the Anabaptists. Here he lists his grievances in an organized manner, arguing that Anabaptists swindle followers in order to fund their exploits and associates the movement with a plague. Jean Rilliet, in his book *Zwingli: Third Man of the Reformation* writes: "There is nothing in common, he [Zwingli] asserts, between the authentic reformation and this spurious branch of it" (Rilliet, 1964, p. 285). These claims stem from Zwingli's experience with Swiss Anabaptists groups and define his claims about the branch of faith more generally.

Simons similarly defended his Mennonites from the label Anabaptist, writing in "Reply to False Accusations": "As to the inane slur, Anabaptist: The learned ones call us Anabaptists because we baptise upon confession of faith as Christ commanded His disciples to do...and besides because we with the Nicene Council cannot accept the heretical baptism which is of Antichrist as Christian baptism" (Simons, 1956, p. 571). Simons does not deny that by performing baptism he fits the label ascribed to Anabaptists. He defends his practices, saying they are scripturally motivated. His motivation behind distancing himself from the label Anabaptists are the accusations piled on the group, stemming from the uprising at Münster. The primary objective for Simons is to defend the intention behind the sacraments, saying his followers still

celebrate the holy mystery, and that it is ultimately more profane to administer the sacraments to the impenitent in society.

The need for Zwingli and Simons to defend against these accusations led to a more comprehensive theology. W.P. Stephens summarizes this in his book *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* saying:

The debate with the anabaptists led directly or indirectly to development in a number of important areas in Zwingli's theology: the nature of the church and ministry, the role of government, the use and interpretation of scripture, the understanding of covenant, and election. (Stephens, 1986, p. 40)

Simons similarly compiles a more comprehensive theology as a defense to the accusations weighed against him that ultimately forced him out of the public domain.

Clarity of Scripture

Under the leadership of both Simons and Zwingli, there was an emphasis on Biblicism as a foundation to every aspect of faith. Following in the footsteps of Luther and the German Peasantry, both men emphasized reform as meaning a return to Scripture as the basis of religious life. Zwingli and Simons similarly defended the clarity and self-evidence of scripture, though the intention of this declaration diverges. This stems partially from their differences in opinion over the role of education in church authority and whether knowledge of Biblical languages was necessary to properly translate the text.

Zwingli responded to this predicament by saying that Scripture was self-evident but having a learned interpretation was always useful. In order to properly understand Scripture, study of original texts was essential, and thus, knowledge of

original biblical language. Studying a translation was not dismissed as being uninformative, but the addition of bias on the part of the translator had to be accounted for. Despite a foundational Biblicism, Zwingli cites the church fathers, the council, and other spiritual and political authorities to lend strength to his arguments. Stephens quotes Zwingli in “A Commentary”:

I have quoted these things from the weightiest of the fathers, not because I wish to support by human authority a thing plain in itself and confirmed by the word of God, but that it might become manifest to the feebler brethren that I am not the first to put forth this view, and that it does not lack a very strong support.
(Stephens, 1986, p. 53)

In this passage Zwingli clearly states that church fathers are authorities on scripture and that their reflections can be a useful source for those who are weaker in their faith. The issue of how to interpret what characterizes Biblicism, whether or not it is to be taken literally, is not cohesively resolved. Essentially what he argues is that Scripture is self evident, but there are only certain interpretations that are valid.

Zwingli will sometimes see the absence of something in Scripture as indicative that it settles the point. In regards to food he says that the lack of explanation regarding food can indicate that Christians are able to consume all foods. Still, Zwingli was aware that the simple presence or absence of something in scripture was not decisive. In this sense Zwingli is just as inconclusive as Simons; a case in point is their disagreement over the sacraments. Both men claim to operate under ‘sola scriptura’ yet their interpretations have slight variations. If scripture were self-evident then variation would either be completely unacceptable, or appreciated as a natural result of interpretation. Zwingli writes in “The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God”: “I know that you will reply that you have worked

through the scriptures and discovered texts which support your opinion.”

(Stephens, 1986, p. 59). This is a clear example of Zwingli’s acknowledgement that Scripture can be used to support more than one opinion.

The Reverend G.W. Bromiley writes in *Zwingli and Bullinger* “By the certainty or power of the Word Zwingli means its capacity to bring to pass the things that it declares or signifies. Of that capacity he [Zwingli] finds plain confirmation in many parts of Scripture” (Bromiley, 1953, p. 53). The Word has prophetic power and is able to bring enlightenment to readers. In order to prove this, Zwingli references biblical passages that may be interpreted to readers in the same manner, but argues that only through keeping an open heart are you truly able to understand the intended meaning of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is essential in deducing the true meaning of the text, a claim that parallels Anabaptism. Bromiley further explains what Zwingli meant by the accessible nature of the Bible in the following passage:

Naturally, Zwingli had no wish to deny that the essential message of the Bible is within the grasp of any ordinary rational intelligence. For that reason the lay Christian may understand the Bible just as well as the learned exegete or theologian, although, of course, the work of the scholar is useful and necessary in order to elucidate more difficult passages and to fix the precise meaning of individual words or sentences. (55, Bromiley)

Zwingli makes the problematic claim that Scripture is straightforward in its message and can be interpreted as such. If meaning of individual words or phrases could be aided by interpretation of a learned individual, Zwingli’s cannot make the claim that the true meaning of Scripture is self-evident. His attempt to make that argument, even if he could not back it up sufficiently, made Scripture more accessible but didn’t result in a completely foreign system of church hierarchy like Anabaptism.

Unification through Sacraments

Fundamentally, Zwingli and Simons operated within traditions that were more theologically similar than different. Both men regarded baptism and the Lord's Supper as essential to church practice, the differences in theology center on the mentality of the believer when taking the sacrament. The symbolic nature of baptism and communion runs through the theologies of both reformers. The issue of re-baptism provoked a particularly impassioned response in publications from Zwingli and Simons. Foundational theological practice for both reform groups would necessary result in drastic responses from believers.

Huldrych Zwingli started his discussion of the sacraments by deconstructing the term itself. "Sacrament", from the Latin *sacramentum*, initially referred to an oath or a way to bind individuals. This led Zwingli to dismiss the term sacrament in reference to ceremonies that were not explicitly outlined in Scripture. Stephens writes that Zwingli sees the term 'oath' as referencing a pledge from the believer, not a pledge from the perspective of God towards human believers (Stephens, 1992). Following this logic, an oath made by a believer does not guarantee any form of salvation. Performing a sacrament can work to strengthen the faith of a believer but cannot be the cause of faith. Still, on a scriptural level, Zwingli recognizes the value in being baptized because it was common practice for believers throughout the Bible as signifying faith. "Signs cannot be what they signify, or they are no longer signs" (Stephens, 1992, p. 81). If baptism were actually responsible for salvation it would not be a symbol anymore.

Both Zwingli and Simons placed profession of faith before participation in sacraments and held that participation in a sacrament could not result in faith on the part of the individual; one must necessarily come before the other. The symbolic nature of baptism as an outward symbol was also common to both believers. Menno Simons, like Zwingli, rejected sacraments not explicitly referenced in Scripture. Simons extended Zwingli's argument to the level of removing the acts that conflicted with a definition of sacraments while Zwingli insisted on delineating between things instituted by God and things instituted by men, but didn't remove all man-instituted rituals from church practice.

Zwingli addressed the presence of iconography in churches in public debates, held in December of 1523. His rationale for removal of the images was that they acted as a distraction from what was really important: the scripture itself. Despite his support for reform, he favored an approach that would incorporate the Council. Stephens notes that, addressing radical reformers who based their approach to reform on the model of the Sermon on the Mount, "Zwingli recognized the force of their appeal to what he called divine righteousness, but he argued that human society must be based on human rather than divine righteousness. Their different understanding of the church emerged in October 1523 when Zwingli was prepared to leave the timing of change to the council, whereas they thought that the council had no place at all in the life of the church" (Stephens, 1992, p. 85).

Robert C. Walton explains Zwingli's justification for keeping some man-instituted rituals and rejecting others. His fear was that non-essential elements of church practice would, if given attention, distract from the real aim of the reform

movement. “As long as Zwingli was free to preach the Gospel, and the mandate of 1520 guaranteed this freedom, he had no reason to doubt that the reform would eventually be carried out” (Walton, 1967, p. 80). His gospel was contingent on the approval of the Council and his method of attaining change was to be patient and promote change through teaching.

Baptism

Christ Jesus commanded the baptism of believers; both Zwingli and Simons saw this as scripturally validated. Despite this similarity, the starkest contrast in sacramental thought centered around the ultimate significance of baptism. Zwingli published his theology surrounding baptism at the same time as his rejection of Anabaptism; he disagrees with the mentality prescribed for followers in order to receive the sacrament. Both Zwingli and Simons understand baptism as resolving to participate in the church body and publicly representing this to the church community. Baptism is deeply grounded in biblical law; Christ has commanded in Mark 16: 16 that believers should be baptized and it is ultimately a work of faith “...namely, the answer of a good conscience toward God, which none can have save those who have faith, there being but one literal baptism taught in the holy Scripture” (Simons, 1956, p. 247). This one literal baptism has to be baptism into the true church, and for Simons this would mean into the Mennonite group.

Zwingli’s critique of Anabaptist beliefs centers on the expectation of spiritual preparedness entering the sacrament. Both Zwingli and Simons, because they consider the act incapable of producing spiritual change, see the need for some spiritual change to take place prior to baptism. Simons and other Anabaptist

leaders aspire for believers to live a sinless existence, promoting an idealistic image of humanity; Zwingli rejects this image, openly acknowledging the sinful nature of humans which baptism will not impact. What Zwingli does not acknowledge in his critique is the threefold explanation of sin given by Simons to account for his definition of a sinless existence.

Simons cites Romans 3:5-8 in claiming that we are all subject to sin but through Christ it isn't counted as sin against us. He indicates that he strongly holds to the validity of the concept of original sin, saying it is inherent at birth, and defining it as any desire contrary to God's law. Actual sin, on the other hand, is defined as actions that are sinful, such as adultery and fornication. Actual sin is categorically different from original sin because we cannot account for sinful actions through birth, we are born sinners but not all sinners commit acts such as adultery. This actual sin is born of our original sin, but not everyone falls subject to it. Simons writes in "Reply to False Accusations":

Wherever original sin, which is the mother, and actual sin, which is the fruit, are connected together, there is no forgiveness nor promise of life; but there wrath and death abide unless these sins are repented of, as the Scriptures testify (Simons, 1956, p. 563)

This explanation of sin is ultimately why Simons' sees baptism as essential; our natural birth is unclean and sinful so we must be born anew through the Spirit. New birth in Christ breaks the power of this original sin as the participant is born again through faith.

Simons outlines a third type of sin, also in his "Reply to False Accusations", which he claims even saints and those who have been born again fall subject to. These are "...human frailties, errors, and stumblings which are still found daily

among saints and regenerate ones, such as careless thoughts, careless words, and unpremeditated lapses in conduct” (Simons, 1956, p. 564). Those who are born again have developed an awareness that causes them to be fearful of all sin; the difference between the first two types of sin and the third sin is the attitude that dictates the behaviors. Those who have not been changed commit sin without hesitation and in some regard do not consider their actions to be sinful while those who have been changed know their actions are sinful and are in a struggle with their flesh. Awareness is the difference between what categorizes sin. Simons gives voice to this in the following passage from “Reply to False Accusations”:

“They are not rejected by the Lord on account of such lapses, even though they are sinful lapses, which are not committed willfully and intentionally but contrary to their will, out of mere thoughtlessness and weakness...They exercise themselves in a constant and unending battle; they crucify their lusts as long as they live; they watch and pray incessantly; and although they are such poor, imperfect children, they nevertheless rejoice in the sure trust of the merits of Christ, and praise the Father for his grace.” (Simons, 1956, p. 564)

This passage, a description of how sin changes as a result of salvation through Christ, is how Simons can justify his claim that his group of followers can adopt their view of baptism, which suggests that those baptized no longer live in the grasp of sin. By defining a third category of sin outside original sin and actual sin, he is able to claim that his followers are not engaging in either of the first two. They, through their awareness of sin, are able to perform sinful acts and not held to a life that is completely sinless; instead there is an expectation that through baptism they will be engaged in a life where they are constantly aware of the implications of sinful behavior and will be held to a level of piety where they will struggle and grieve with the knowledge that they can never attain a perfectly sinless existence.

Simons creates a loophole that allows him to acknowledge human predisposition to sin but claim that a sinless existence is possible. Both men cite I John as affirmation of their beliefs. Simons quotes the gospel in “Christian Baptism” saying: “As John observes, Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (Simons, 1956, p. 245). This passage, in its biblical context, is found in the concluding affirmations of the text and refers to the faithful who are baptized. The passage reads: “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them” (1 John 5:18, NIV). This passage provides a solid scriptural foundation for Simons to claim that living with guilt places the believer in a different category of sin. Simons bases his definition of sin on intention; those who don’t intend to commit sin aren’t subject to the same fate as those who sin knowingly.

Zwingli references another passage from I John, in the text *Zwingli and Bullinger*, to validate a different message: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (Zwingli, 1953, p. 139). The use of the same passage to make conclusions that are so contradictory calls back into question the authority of Scripture and proper interpretation. Both reformers are taking the literal translation and using it to their advantage when a contextualization of the message can’t yield two contrasting results. The verse Zwingli refers to is found in Chapter 1 of the text:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

(1 John 1:8-10, NIV)

The text presents a paradox: we are lying if we say that we can live a sinless existence yet confession of our sins will yield forgiveness and purification. The next logical conclusion is that a sinless existence can be achieved so long as the individual doesn't make the false claim that they are acting in a sinless way. This proves problematic because if a person were acting in a truly sinless way they would be able to profess as much without sinning, as they would be telling the truth.

Neither reformer openly acknowledges the possibility of a sinless existence but Anabaptism clearly tends toward a more optimistic view of human nature than Lutherans, Calvinists, and Zwinglians. At the core of Zwingli's complaints about Anabaptism is the notion that they will not recognize any church but their own. He would argue that baptism into the Mennonite faith is baptism into that particular branch of faith instead of into the larger Christian body. Simons condoned re-baptism for adults who had been baptized but Anabaptists only saw validity of one baptism. Anabaptists aimed to eliminate infant baptism entirely so the label "re-baptizer" is a misnomer.

Christ Jesus commanded the baptism of believers, a commandment that provided the basis of Simons' insistence on baptism. Whether or not someone is baptized, Simons' cautions sharply against sin. Simons breaks down his theology of baptism in his publication dated from 1539 and titled "Christian Baptism". Simons' indicates a belief that would allow a baptism to be broken down into sections. First, the believer must acknowledge their sinful existence-in order to do this they must come to faith in Christ because it is through faith that one becomes aware of the

truly repugnant way in which they exist. Baptism is a necessary second step in the process; Simons writes: "Those who believe receive remission of sins, not through baptism but in baptism, and in this manner" (Simons, 1956, p. 244). Simons warns against this invalid form of baptism, saying that outward baptism will not be the cause of a change of heart in the believer. "In case we seek outward baptism only and trust in the literal rite and continue in our old, corrupted life, then indeed our baptism is vain, even as it was in such cases a vain sacrifice among the wicked and carnal Israelites" (Simons, 1956, p. 245). Simons uses the biblical example of the Israelites to make an example of the intentionality behind baptism. Sacrifice, a necessary act on the part of the Israelites, was completely dictated by the attitude with which the sacrifice was given, as much as it was linked to the quality of the object being sacrificed. For those who gave a perfect specimen to be sacrificed but did not enter into the act with a completely contrite heart, their sacrifice was invalid. In the same way, there is a necessary element of spiritual preparedness associated with the act of baptism. Both Zwingli and Simons valued spirituality as the essence of belief; their views diverge over the necessity of an act, which is not in itself, spiritually significant. As much as Simons argues that the person receiving baptism must enter it with a level of spiritual preparedness, he views the act of baptism as a crucial element of becoming a member of the church, more is wrapped up in the act that what Zwingli allows for.

Zwingli also recognizes the spiritual commandment to baptize believers but asks his readers to consider that some of the most influential church leaders were not themselves baptized. Spirituality was all that was necessary in order to make

them valid authorities in scripture; baptism was not ultimately viewed as a hindrance to their authority in the message.

Infant Baptism

Only after the split between the Anabaptists and other Radical Reform groups in the Swiss Republic was the issue of infant baptisms given prominence. Prior to this the act of second baptism was performed, and called such because those who received, as products of their time, had received infant baptism. This issue led directly to political action suppressing Anabaptist meetings and is thus often categorized as the critical issue in defining the split between Anabaptists and the rest of Reformers at this time.

Zwingli's original publications did not account for infant baptism though this became an essential point as he distinguished himself from other reform groups, including the Mennonites. Stephens writes: "Zwingli's writings on baptism arise out of his conflict with the anabaptists. It was in the attempt to answer their challenge to infant baptism that he reformulated his view of baptism as well as developed his case for the baptism of infants" (Stephens, 1986, p. 194). What is clear throughout Zwingli's development of ideas surrounding baptism, something that did not change even as other points may have, was that faith was of greater importance ultimately than the physical act of baptism. The reason that infant baptism was acceptable to Zwingli was not because it was seen as erasing original sin. He viewed the act as more significant on the part of the parents; it was a pledge that they were committed to properly instructing their children in the ways of the faith. He articulate his flaws in a previous argument, as explained by Stephens: "He relates

this to the erroneous view he held of baptism as strengthening faith, pointing out that this was inconsistent with infant baptism, as children are unable to believe” (Stephens, 1986, p. 194). Both Simons and Zwingli recognized that faith was something that could only be accomplished as a mature believer; children could not appropriately comprehend the requirements for salvation but in the case of Zwingli, it was appropriate, seeing as baptism was entirely symbolic, that the parents acted as spiritual guidance for the child, and thus could infant baptism retain some validity. How valid this actually was remains in question as Zwingli did not see the act to be necessary-if the parents wished to perform the sacrament, it would not ultimately prove harmful, but the implication in making it optional, was that it wasn’t ultimately that powerful. It’s usefulness was a purely symbolic one.

Simons wrote very harshly to the parents that chose to baptize their children, laying out exactly what was sinful about the act. He published in “Christian Baptism”, giving one section the mocking title “Christian” Parents”. He opens the section calling those who bring their children to be baptized a “mockery” to the faith. This particular section of his text is centered on the idea that parents baptize their infants so that they might be categorized as Christians. Simons accounts for the decision to baptize infants as perhaps related to more than a fear of what would happen should original sin not be reversed. Parents who were themselves baptized as infants may understandably see infant baptism as the thing that categorizes the young as Christians, before they are old enough to accept the faith of their own cognition. In answer to this, Simons vehemently attacks the illegitimacy of the act-baptism must come via faith because many who call themselves Christians act in

ways that are totally contrary to God's laws and in doing this illegitimate the Christian faith for others.

What is ultimately the issue regarding infant baptism is the implication this has on the notion of original sin. Infant baptism was established as a tool to reassure parents that their children would escape the fires of hell in a time when infant mortality was high. What Simons and Zwingli both discovered is a lack of biblical support for the act; like purgatory, infant baptism was something established by the Church authority in order to appease a worried population.

Ultimately Zwingli argues that baptism is not a spiritual requirement and is a symbolic representation of a change in the believer. In regards to infant baptism, Zwingli acknowledges that there's no scriptural evidence condoning the act but does not dismiss it as a spiritual practice. Simons however, adamantly rejects the practice, viewing parents who engage in it as knowingly corrupting their children.

The Eucharist

The Eucharist and how it was to be practiced highlighted fundamental differences that exist, not only in development from the ideas of the medieval church, but also among Reformers themselves. Zwingli first specifically addresses the Eucharist in a publication in the year 1523. Ultimately his view of the Eucharist ties back to his affirmation that 'faith is the sole cause of salvation'. Stephens writes the following in regards to an exposition of the eighteenth article at the first disputation in 1523:

There is the repeated denial that the mass is a sacrifice, based especially on the presentation of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ in the letter to the Hebrews, and the insistence on communion in both kinds as corresponding not only with the institution of Christ and the

custom of the apostles, but also with the former Eucharistic practice in Switzerland. Zwingli claims that for some years he has called it 'a memorial of the suffering of Christ and not a sacrifice'. He calls it a memorial precisely because the commemorating of a sacrifice that has happened denies the view of those who make the eucharist a sacrifice. The fact that Christ said 'Do this in remembrance of me' and not 'Offer this up to me' shows that he did not intend the eucharist to be a sacrifice, but 'a memorial and renewal of what happened once and is eternally powerful and precious enough to satisfy the righteousness of God'. 'Memorial' means renewing with remembrance of what Christ has done for us. (Stephens, 1986, p. 219)

Zwingli, in the passage above, explains his view of the Eucharist as a sacrament, linking it back to the language of the Eucharist itself. In the text of the last supper Christ himself acknowledges the act as one of remembrance. The Catholic explanation of the sacrament (the interpretation that both Zwingli and Simons would be basing their reforms off) transubstantiation, dictates that the act of the priest giving the participant the bread and wine is not purely a symbol of an act that has occurred. In that moment, though the bread and wine remain physically as they are, they change into the body and blood of Christ. This view spoke to the necessity of the clergy in implementing the act; in everyday existence bread and wine, when consumed, remains bread and wine. Zwingli calls a sham, saying that the Eucharist is a memorial of something that has happened-the act only happened once; every time believers partake in the consumption of bread and wine, the events of the Last Supper aren't played out again.

The nature of Simons' view of the Eucharist is obviated in the title he chose for the subsection of his "Foundation of Christian Doctrine"; the Lord's Supper is the first point under the section "II. Refutation of Roman Catholicism". Immediately, the nature of Simons' theology as contrary to that of the Catholic Church is made clear.

Simons' first order of business is to criticize the inclusiveness of the act, tying the notion of the true practice of the Eucharist directly to the notion of the necessity of baptism as the mark of belief. The Lord's Supper can be practiced by all who call themselves Catholic, the only prerequisite to participation is baptism into the church, which Simons' has already noted is culturally dictated as it was the norm for parents to baptize their children. Morality or the effort to remove yourself from sin plays no role in the act, completely debasing the spirituality of the act. Simons' acknowledges the representative nature of the act in this publication:

It is so that it may become to you a living and impressive sign, that it might represent and signify the Lord's great and abundant kindness, the heartfelt peace, the love and union of His church, the communion of His flesh and blood; so that you may die to wickedness and pursue righteousness and godliness, fly from the devil's table and sit down at the Lord's table in the church of Christ, with true faith, a pious, penitent, and regenerated life, and with unfeigned, brotherly love. (Simons, 1956, p. 142)

What can be concluded from this statement? First of all, that the act is an essential way to ritually create unity among the church population; a criticism of Catholicism was the intention of the priests when giving the bread and wine to the populous-the way the ritual was conducted was with "offensive pomp and splendor" and the hearts of the priests administering were, according to Simons, hypocritically seeking worldly honor and comforts.

Simons and Zwingli both note that the change in the sacrament has no scriptural base-even the rites performed by the Israelites as ordered by God were a remembrance. Passover, for example, is significant not for the reason that the angel of death actually passes through again; it is a symbolic remembrance of God's mercy and enduring love. The point of repeating actions performed by Christ is to

remember that Christ shed his blood for undeserving sinners. Again citing his “Foundation to Christian Doctrine”: “In a word we should recall how that Jesus Christ through His obedience undid the disobedience of Adam and all his seed and by His painful death restored life” (Simons, 1956, p. 145). The nature of the sacrament requires believers to assess their ability to fully participate in symbolically reliving the Lord’s Supper. The nature of what Christ did is an indication that he recognized the broken nature of humanity. Christ would not have shared the bread and the cup with his disciples if they could achieve a sinless existence without his action. The purity of Christ’s intention with this action, an invitation to symbolically partake in the Holy being, prevents sinners from taking this sacrament. Transubstantiation is considered a ‘perversion of the Lord’s Supper’ in that it makes physical food into the literal body and blood of Christ. Christ was already sacrificed and sits at the right hand of God. In this sacrifice sinners are saved, they do not need any other element to further their salvation. Spiritual change does not require consumption of the flesh and blood of Christ; confessing the name of the Lord is the necessary act in order to participate in salvation as a member of the body of Christ. Simons also dismisses sacramentalism as heretical, saying that the participation in the Eucharist does not lead to remission of sins.

The main difference between the reformers concerning the Eucharist is the natural division over who is qualified to take it. By virtue of Simons’ claim that the Lord’s Supper is only intended for those who are in the proper mindset, and who are members of the body of the Christ, he is excluding those outside what he considers to be the true church-his church. Even if a Zwinglian were to enter into the Lord’s

Supper with pure intentions, they would be operating outside of baptism into the body of the true Church. This is a further indication of Zwingli's complaint that Anabaptists held their version of faith as superior to all others, though it was created without the cooperation and input from the larger body of those who consider themselves Christians.

Defense Against Link to Münster

Anabaptism occurred in many forms throughout Europe and there is a dangerous tendency for every Reformation group to get labeled as Radical Protestantism. The danger lies in the breadth of the spectrum of reform; this is explicitly important when situating Menno Simons politically. Simons himself recognized this danger and in his "Brief Apology to All Theologians" he indicates that his followers were consistently and incorrectly linked to the followers of Melchior Hoffman and Jan Matthys, two reformers linked to outbreaks of violence. This link led to an association between Anabaptism and violent behavior while in fact Simons led a group of more Moderate believers who had always endorsed pacifism. The events in the Münster Rebellion are consistently linked to a radical description of Anabaptism and provide the basis for most of the stereotypes and grievances listed against the group.

The Anabaptists led by Melchior Hoffman laid the foundation for the bloody events of 1535, when a failed attempt at establishing a theocracy in Münster ended in civil unrest. Jan Matthys, a baker and follower of Hoffman, headed this attempt in

the years following the German Peasant Rebellion². On January 5, 1534, a number of Matthys' disciples entered the city and began offering adult baptism. Münster was labeled the "New Jerusalem" and Matthys grew in power, prophesying the destruction of the wicked and takeover by newly baptized followers. On Easter Sunday, the day of the prophesied judgement, Matthys was killed and John of Leiden was installed as the new "king". Leiden and his alleged kingship provided the subject for Simons publication "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden" where he attacks the entire Münster takeover.

Leiden claimed absolute power: legalizing polygamy, establishing community of goods, and justifying every action with the claim of divine authority. Anabaptist leaders taking politically active roles is unusual and this attempt at theocracy is the last occasion where reformers who claimed to be Anabaptist found themselves in such a position. After the suppression of the rebellion governments naturally took preventative measures against anyone who could be categorized as Anabaptist and many movements went underground. Some members of the Münster church found leadership under Simons who voiced his doctrine of false teachers in "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden". Ephesians is referenced as proof of Christ's authority:

"That power is the same as the mighty strength he [God] exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:19-21 NIV).

² The German Peasant Rebellion was a previous attempt to establish a theocracy, made by German peasants who were familiar with Lutheran doctrine. Luther took a middle position while Thomas Müntzer, a clergy member, made the radical move of aligning with the social rebellion over efforts for religious reform.

Simons' main grievance with the Münsterites is that they deified one man; anyone who poses as a Savior is the Anti-Christ. Anticipating a biblical argument in opposition to this claim, Simons recognizes the divinity of David, who was sanctified by God. This lineage, however, was broken in later years thus any ruler claiming to be chosen by God did not have Scripture to validate their claim.

This uprising informed the rest of Simons' ministry. There was a necessity to distinguish what separated Mennonites from the group involved in the violence at Münster. Despite shared beliefs concerning the true role of baptism, Simons refused to label himself as an Anabaptist, indicating that there must be some other significance to that term. As outlined by Robert Friedmann, "The real conflict was rather one of *evidencing faith in life*; that is, a correspondence of faith *and* life..." (Friedmann, 1973, p. 24). The origins of Anabaptism indicate lack of clarity with what living out Anabaptism meant. To some groups, namely the Obbenites out of whose ranks Simons appeared, pacifism was the logical method of living out baptism. To the Münsterites, violence was justified as a means to live out their faith; religion has long been linked with a tendency toward violent behavior and this particular group saw their actions as a means of gaining access to the new Jerusalem.

Zwingli was by no means a pacifist, his death certainly indicates this. Samuel Simpson gives a dramatic account of the reformer's last moments in his book *Life of Ulrich Zwingli: The Swiss Patriot and Reformer*. Zwingli took to the battlefield as a chaplain for the soldiers in the Second War of Cappel and was a casualty of war.

Post mortem his body was the subject of Council as he had been labeled a heretic and traitor to the Confederacy and he was quartered and cremated.

Conclusion

Conflict and violence toward Anabaptism does not have just one cause. In the Swiss Confederacy Zwingli and the Anabaptists were grouped together, and in the early years of Zwingli's reform the two groups were basically indistinguishable. The role of the state in church affairs provided the cause for some of the first disputes between Zwinglians and Anabaptists. During the dispute the role between church and state was not clearly delineated so the two authorities cannot be separated. The Münsterites' failed attempt to establish a theocracy would forever link Anabaptism with the characteristics of that specific group. For this reason, Zwingli and Simons argue, through publications and sermons, that their groups do not fall under the category of Anabaptism.

In every faith there are practitioners that take their belief to a level that can be considered fanaticism and, similarly to "re-baptism", this designation is relative. In the same way that Anabaptists did not see adult baptism as a second baptism but simply the first valid baptism, people at Münster and throughout Europe who martyred themselves for faith and acted out in violence could justify their actions as sanctioned by God. Anabaptism has, since its inception, been linked to accounts of theocracy and communal living. In a letter to Erasmus sent from Antwerp, taken from *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*, it is stated "there was scarcely a village or town where the torch of insurrection did not secretly glow" and the success of the movement was attributed to communistic doctrine (Bax, 1970, p. 265). Zwingli and

Simons dedicated themselves to deconstructing why actions at Münster were radical and not theologically sanctioned according to their beliefs. Both reformers denied any ties to Anabaptism though Simons' beliefs concerning baptism clearly link him to this category of faith.

Both of the reformers discussed can be categorized as Moderate in their movements. Zwingli appears to recognize that his Congregation is deeply rooted in Catholicism and this is likely a factor in his ambivalence towards removing infant baptism as a sacrament. Simons does not make concessions regarding scripturalism but unlike many other Anabaptist leaders he did not call for an upheaval of government, he promoted pacifism and appealed to the magistrates as their subject. Still, Simons' lack of involvement in central government could play a role in the necessity of his distancing himself from his community and living in hiding. The major motivator for both Zwingli and Simons was self-preservation and preservation of their groups. Both reformers were eventually deemed outcasts by their governments but Zwingli's reforms to church practice had already been well established and endure.

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