

Anabaptism

Anabaptism (German: Täufer, Greek: Αναβαπτιστές) refers to a radical Christian movement during the 16th-century Reformation that advocated for the complete dismantling of Western church traditions and the radical reconstruction of the church based on the Gospel. Modern Protestant denominations that have inherited these ideas include the Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites. There are over 1.2 million members worldwide, and there is also one Anabaptist church in South Korea. In this document, "Anabaptist" primarily refers to the radical religious reformers of the 16th century. They emerged during the early stages of the Christian Reformation, rejecting infant baptism and asserting that only adult baptism was valid. They argued that not only infant baptism but also baptisms received in the existing Western Church were invalid, and therefore those people needed to be baptized again, which is where their name originates. While denominations that oppose infant baptism, such as the Baptists, also exist, they do not claim that existing baptisms are invalid. Most Christian denominations teach that baptism, signifying the forgiveness of sins and salvation, is something a person receives only once in their lifetime. However, the Anabaptists opposed this. They emphasized inner, direct illumination by the Holy Spirit rather than the Holy Spirit working in conjunction with the Word. They were warned of the dangers of emphasizing the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit rather than the authority of Scripture, which the Reformers had emphasized.

From the 16th century onwards, Anabaptist believers were consistently and severely persecuted by state churches, state-controlled Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. This was because their interpretation of the Bible conflicted with the official state church interpretation and local government control. As a result, Anabaptists enjoyed no special privileges. Most Anabaptists interpreted the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 literally, opposing hatred, murder, violence, military action, and participation in civil government. Members primarily viewed themselves as citizens of God's kingdom, opposing earthly governments and striving to emulate the life of Jesus as devoted followers.

Background

The history of the Anabaptists is distorted by both those who opposed their ideas and those who defended them. There are also differing opinions regarding whether their origins were monistic or pluralistic. Although a minority, some

claim that the Anabaptists were the true successors to the apostolic tradition of the early church.

Geographically, they can be divided into the "Swiss Brethren" (Grebel, Manz), the Dutch and Frisian Anabaptists (Menno Simons, Dirk Philips), and the Southern German Anabaptists (Hübmaier, Marpeck). Historians and sociologists further divide Anabaptists into radical Anabaptists and pacifist Anabaptists. Radical Anabaptists sanctioned the use of violence to establish a "New Jerusalem" on earth. The Münster Rebellion is an example of an event caused by radical Anabaptists. In contrast, pacifists who advocate non-violence based on the New Testament are the origin of the Mennonites. In other words, the origin of the Mennonites lies in Menno Simons, a Dutch Roman Catholic priest, who struggled between two traditional Anabaptist groups: the peaceful Obbenites and the radical Melchior Hoffman group. Later, he questioned, "How can someone who claims to be a Christian reconcile God's word with laying down spiritual weapons and embracing worldly things?" This led him to join the pacifist Anabaptist movement, and he eventually became its leader. His followers came to be called Mennonites, after his name. Menno advocated non-violence, opposing violence in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament. Key figures include Thomas Müntzer, Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Menno Simons. Others include Hans Hut, Hans Denk, and John Mattys, who advocated for millenarianism, and rationalist liberals such as Kaspar von Schwenkfeld and Faustus Socinus.

Persecution

Anneken Hendriks, a 16th-century Anabaptist from the Netherlands, burned at the stake as a heretic by the Spanish Inquisition.

Anabaptism, a doctrine that asserted the invalidity of a single baptism (especially infant baptism), was rejected as heresy by both the anti-reform forces of the Western Church (Catholicism) and the pro-reform forces (Protestantism), resulting in numerous martyrs. In 1525, the anti-Reformation (Catholic) regions of Switzerland, and the following year, the pro-Reformation (Protestant) government of Zurich, began executing Anabaptists for heresy and treason. This resulted in thousands of martyrs, and the methods of execution were brutal. They were often drowned alive, a cruel mockery of their baptism, and other methods included burning at the stake and dismemberment. Some studies suggest that over 13,000 people were killed in the Netherlands between 1523 and 1566. Amidst this extreme persecution, some Anabaptists developed radical apocalyptic beliefs, and religious extremism flourished. In 1930, the Bruderhof community, a branch of the Anabaptists, fled to England to escape Nazi persecution.

Anabaptist Martyrs

The early Anabaptist movement produced numerous martyrs amidst fierce persecution. In particular, Michael Sattler, a leader who drafted the Schleitheim Confession in 1527, was tortured and burned at the stake for advocating pacifism and adult baptism. In the same year, Felix Manz, one of the early leaders, was drowned in a lake in Zurich on Zwingli's orders for baptizing adults, which marked the symbolic beginning of the persecution of the Anabaptists. Furthermore, George Blaurock, one of the first to receive adult baptism, was burned at the stake in 1529, and the learned theologian Balthasar Hubmaier also met the same fate in Vienna in 1528, while his wife was drowned. Dirk Willems was a Dutch Anabaptist martyr who died on May 16, 1569. He is best known for an incident in which, after escaping from prison, he turned back to rescue his pursuer who had fallen through thin ice while chasing him. However, he was recaptured, tortured, and executed for his faith.

Doctrine

- Non-violence, Christian pacifism, opposing war, conflict, and violence
- Separation of church and state
- Practicing discipleship (living as a disciple of Christ) through the practice of equality and love
- Opposition to infant baptism
- Practicing a holy life and brotherhood
- Emphasis on salvation through faith
- Opposition to absolute predestination
- Rejection of Calvin's concept of the invisible church
- Not belonging to either Lutheranism or Calvinism, but only obeying the Great Commission

Scholar

- John Howard Yoder (December 29, 1927 – December 30, 1997) was a prominent American Anabaptist theologian and ethicist. A member of the Mennonite denomination, he advocated pacifism. It is said that if the early 20th century was the era of Karl Barth, the latter half of the 20th century was the era of Yoder. His representative work is "The Politics of Jesus," published in 1972 (IVP, 2007). He faced allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of power, and a book related to this, "Pulling the Teeth of the Beast," was published and translated (Daejanggan, 2018).

Anabaptists in Literature:

In Voltaire's famous novel *Candide*, there is a story about a kind Anabaptist who helps the protagonist, Candide. When Candide's life is saved on the battlefield and he goes to the Netherlands, people ask him, "Do you think the Pope is the Antichrist?" When Candide hesitates to answer, they insult him and chase him away. At this point, an Anabaptist named Jacques helps Candide and gives him bread and money. In this work, Voltaire portrays Catholic priests as corrupt and depraved figures but depicts the Anabaptists as kind and virtuous individuals.

Anabaptists in South Korea:

- Organizations: Korean Anabaptist Fellowship, and churches belonging to the Mennonite Church South Korea, including Nonsan Peace Nurturing Church, Jeju Sky Family Church, Jinju Jubilee Church, and Chuncheon Jesus' Heart Church.
- Publishing activities: Daejanggan Publishing House (daejanggan.org) has published over 100 books related to Anabaptism.