Anabaptist Historical Vignettes

1525-2025

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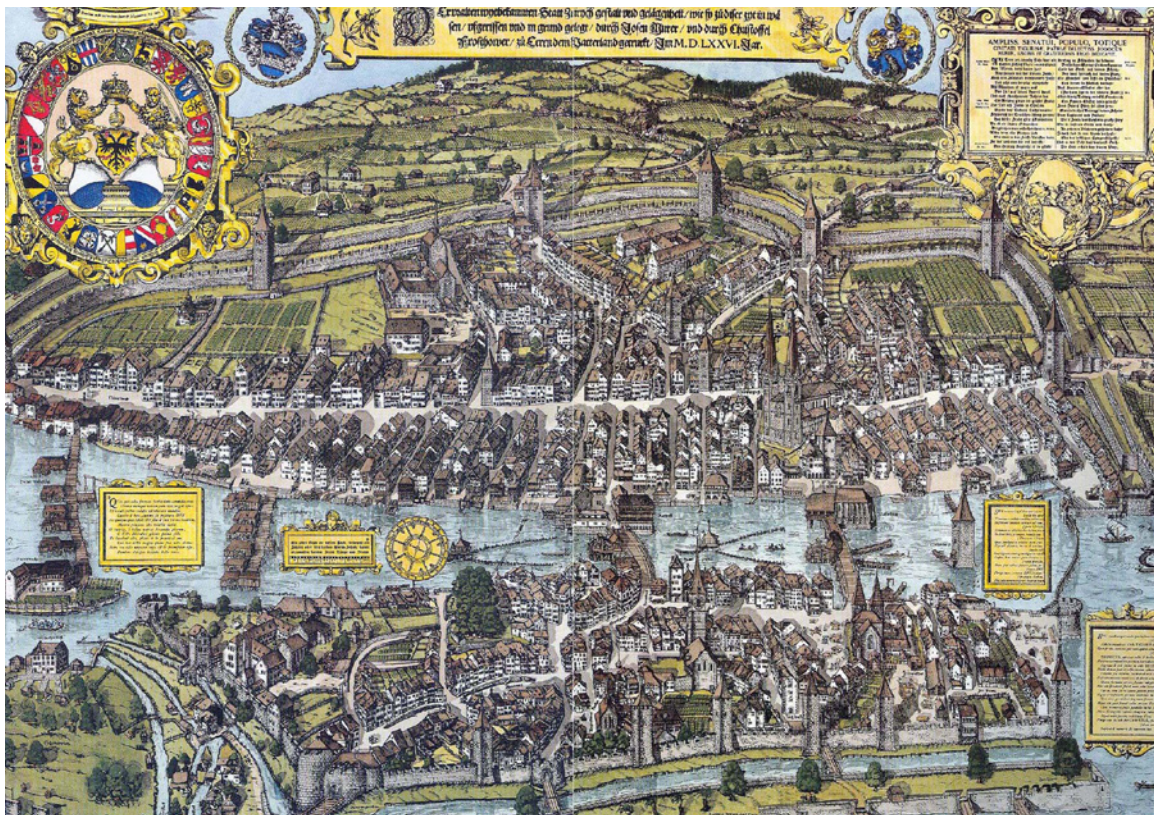


Jos Murer, City of Zurich (1576)

Hans Asper, Portrait of Ulrich Zwingli (1531)

The "Sausage Affair"

Zwingli's Friends Break Lenten Fast

Zurich workers openly defy church tradition

MARCH 1522 According to trusted sources, a group of Zurich handworkers, known for their radical views, thumbed their noses at the Lenten fast on Thursday night, March 9, at the Grabenstrasse printshop of Christopher Froschauer by openly consuming sausage. They were joined by two priests—38-year-old Huldrych Zwingli, who has served as city priest of Zurich at the Grossmünster cathedral since 1519, and his colleague Leo Jud, from Alsace, who is Zwingli's successor in the parish church at Einsiedeln.

Others who participated in this flagrant defiance of Catholic tradition were Hans Oggenfuss, a tailor, Laurenz Hochrütiner, a weaver, and shoemaker Niklaus Hottinger, along with Heinrich Äberli, a baker, who was confronted by faithful Catholics the previous day when he openly consumed a portion of roast beef at the bakers' guild house.

Froschauer apologized for his role in the actions of the group, explaining that he and his staff were forced to work "day and night, workdays and holidays" prior to the Frankfurt bookfair and he was tired of "eating gruel." City priest Zwingli was less apologetic. In a sermon after the "Sausage Affair," Zwingli has insisted that traditional Lenten rules regarding fasting are not justified by Scripture. Since breaking the Lenten fast is not a sin, he argued, the church has no right to punish individuals who do so. Fasting is a private matter, Zwingli asserted. "If you want to fast, go ahead; if you choose not to eat meat, don't. But all Christians should have freedom in the matter."

Zwingli's sermon "On Food and Freedom" will reportedly soon be printed by Christoph Froschauer, calling into question the sincerity of Froschauer's apology.

The "Sausage Affair" and Zwingli's response have led to numerous debates in local Zurich taverns, several of which have resulted in public brawls. Zurich city authorities continue to express their confidence in Zwingli as the "people's priest," but his radical actions have aroused growing suspicion and criticism from the Catholic bishop of Constance who oversees the city.

Religious Unrest Culminates in Disputation before Zurich City Council

Tensions growing as radicals challenge the mass, church tithes, and even infant baptism

OCTOBER 1523 Tensions over religious reforms continue to divide the city of Zurich as church officials from the Catholic dioceses of Chur and Basel and theologians from the University of Basel debated with Ulrich Zwingli, Zurich's city priest, for three days on October 26–28 before the Zurich city council. Representatives of the 12 Swiss Confederate states and the bishop of Constance chose not to attend.

The debate, which follows a similar disputation held nine months earlier on January 29, marked a clear escalation in a series of protests against traditional church practices. Zwingli, along with his counterpart Martin Luther in Saxony, has gained notoriety for his insistence that church practices must be defended solely on the basis of Scripture. Over the previous year, his sermons have openly challenged Catholic teachings on fasting and clerical celibacy and have sparked a vigorous debate over the legitimacy of various church tithes. Last January, the Zurich city council defended Zwingli against attacks by vicar general Johannes Fabri, ruling that he could continue preaching as long as his reform proposals were based on Scripture.

Some nine hundred people witnessed the debate before the council. The disputation emerged as a response to a demand by Leo Jud, Zwingli's close associate and priest at St. Peters Church, that all statues, icons, and other religious images be removed from Zurich's churches. "God is a spirit," Jud argued, quoting John 4, "and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Jud, Zwingli, and others also escalated the controversy by challenging the mass itself, calling into question the "real presence" of Christ in the eucharist. The mass, they have insisted, is a symbolic "commemoration" of Christ's sacrifice.

The disputation took an unexpected turn on Saturday when several of Zwingli's supporters, led by Conrad Grebel, went so far as to challenge infant baptism, arguing from Scripture that the early church practiced voluntary baptism. Representatives of the city council, fearing the social and religious chaos that could ensue from such thinking, drew a hard line. But several of Zwingli's radical colleagues pushed back, citing Zwingli's own words, by insisting that all such decisions should be decided on the basis of Scripture.

Last year, Zwingli resigned his position as Catholic priest at the Grossmünster; but the city council quickly reinstated him as an "evangelical" priest of the same cathedral. Now, as Catholics from nearby Constance threaten to restore order with force, the future of religious reform in Zurich rests firmly in the hands of the Zurich city council.

First Zurich Disputation (1523)

FURTHER DISPUTATIONS, 1520s TO 1590s

January 17 and March 20, 1525: Disputations with the Anabaptist leaders in Zurich dealing chiefly with the question of infant baptism. Zwingli agreed to meet their demands to replace the Catholic mass with a communion service and to introduce a new baptismal formula, but he held firm in his defense of infant baptism.

August 1525: A debate between the Anabaptists and Oecolampadius in Basel.

November 6–8, 1525: A disputation on baptism in Zurich attended by Zwingli, Leo Jud, and the Anabaptist leaders Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, held before "a great crowd" in the Grossmünster. After the debate, the city council passed several severe measures against the Anabaptists.

June 10, 1527: A second disputation in Basel, sponsored by the government.

January 1528: A major disputation in Bern on whether the city should become part of the Reformation; Anabaptists were present, but held under arrest until the close of the disputation. After a private discussion with the clergy on January 17, they were "completely convinced of their error" and banished from city and canton.

December 20–22, 1530: A debate at St. Gall in which the Reformed Church sought clarification on the demands made by the Anabaptists, especially regarding discipline and the ban.

July 1–9, 1532: A disputation at Zofingen (Bern) led by Reformed pastors Berchtold Haller of Bern, Caspar Megander, Sebastian Hofmeister of Schaffhausen, and Sulzer of Basel.

March 11–17, 1538: A significant disputation at Bern in which the Anabaptist were granted freedom to explain the biblical and theological bases for their convictions.

August 1557: Disputation at Pfeddersheim convened by Otto Heinrich of the Palatinate. Anabaptists were not permitted time to defend themselves.

May 28–June 19, 1571: Frankenthal Disputation—A major exchange between Anabaptists and Reformed theologians extending over several weeks. A full transcription, later published in German and Dutch, offers a window into the nuances of Swiss Anabaptist theology.

February 27–May 17, 1578: Emden Disputation—Occasioned by the imprisonment of an Anabaptist preacher for holding forbidden meetings. The disputation included 124 sessions with a published transcription of the proceedings.

August 16–November 17, 1596: Disputation in Leeuwarden between Ruardus Axronius and Pieter van Ceulenin held in the Dutch province of Friesland.

Secret Baptisms of Adults Reported in Villages around Zurich

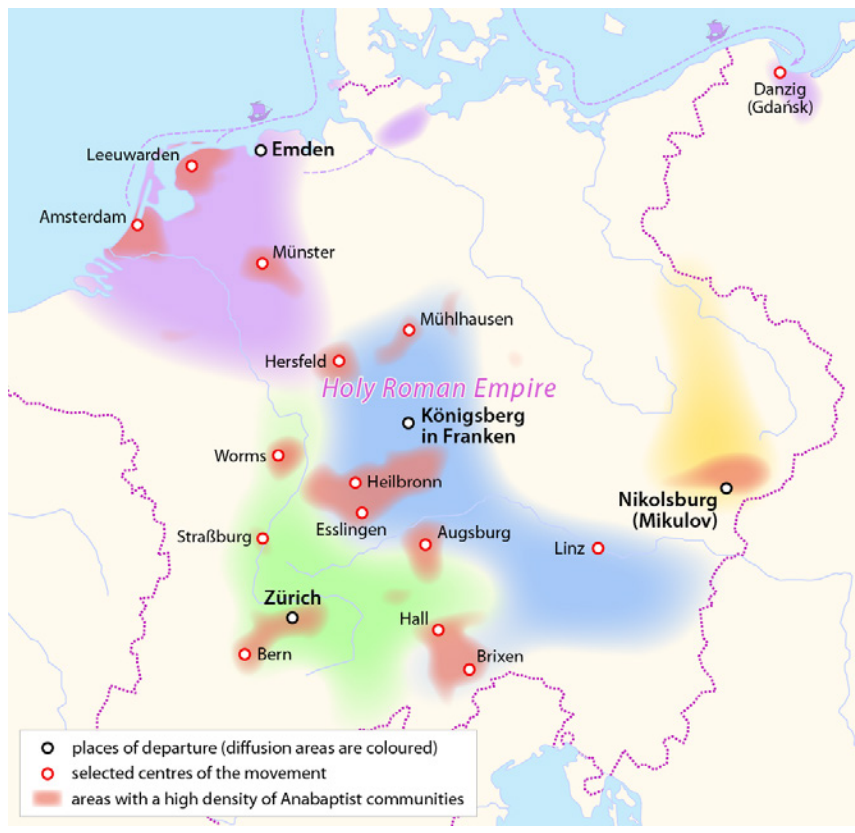
Anabaptist movement spreading

JANUARY 1525 According to a reliable source, sometime during the last week of January 1525, an unknown number of adults allowed themselves to be "rebaptized" at a secret gathering in the village of Zollikon, just outside of Zurich. The rebaptisms in Zollikon continue a pattern established at a similar event held the previous week in the Zurich home of known agitator Felix Manz. Authorities worry that the baptisms in Zollikon mark the escalation of a radicalized reform beyond the control of city priest Ulrich Zwingli and the Zurich city council.

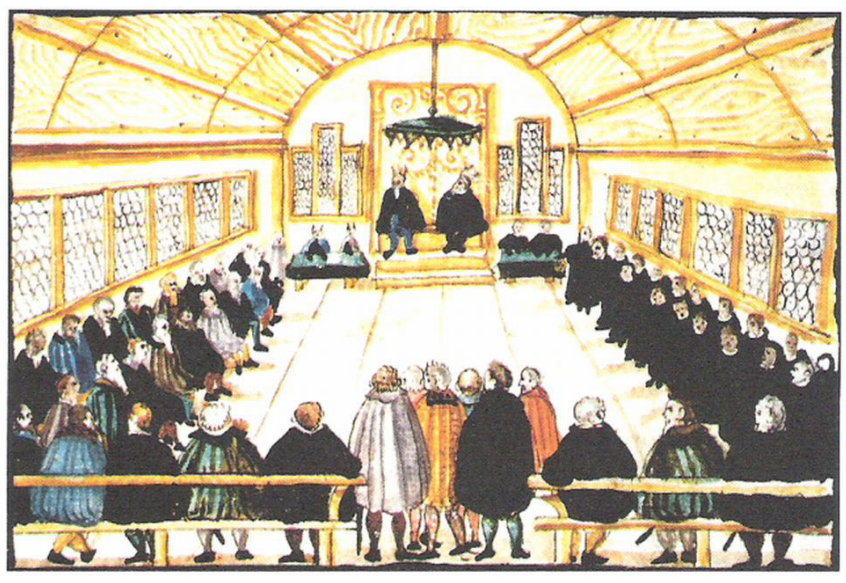
On January 21, Manz, along with Conrad Grebel, son of city councilor Jacob Grebel, and Jörg Blaurock, a radical priest from Chur, convened a secret meeting in clear defiance of a Zurich city council decree early in the day that ordered Grebel and Manz to "desist from arguing and questioning." All three men have been associated with a radical faction that has emerged within a Bible study group organized by Zurich's people's priest, Ulrich Zwingli.

Zwingli, whose critique of the mass, religious images, and clerical celibacy are well-known among the citizens of Zurich, sharply disavowed any association with these emerging radicals. Manz and Grebel nevertheless have insisted that their critique of tithes and rejection of infant baptism are all based on Scripture, citing Bible studies organized by Zwingli himself.

The radicals first emerged publicly during the disputation in Zurich in October of 1523, with an open challenge to the authority of the city council to rule in religious matters. Since then, Mantz and Grebel have argued vigorously that the practice of "rebaptism" is based on the biblical examples of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and the practice of the apostolic church, and that it signals a commitment to take the teachings of Jesus seriously in daily life.



Spread of the Anabaptists 1525–1550


First Disputation on Baptism (1525)

In response to growing critiques of infant baptism, the council issued a mandate on January 18 giving parents eight days to provide proof that all infants had been baptized. Any family not in compliance is to be forcibly expelled from the city.

Participants in the baptisms in Zollikon reject the charge that they are criminals. Citing the teachings of Jesus, members of the newly formed congregation in Zollikon have begun to share food and money with each other, have elected their own pastor, and have even raised questions about carrying weapons.

The Zurich council has asked Zwingli to rein in the movement, even as they are responding decisively to the radicals with further threats of imprisonment and hints of capital punishment.

Peasants War of 1525

Lucas Cranach the Elder, Martin Luther (ca1532)

Luther, *Against the Robbing, Murderous Hordes of Peasants* (1525)

Massacre of Peasant Army at Frankenhausen

Leader Thomas Müntzer executed; vision for social reform crushed

MAY 1525 Word has reached Zurich that a rebel army of peasants and artisans has suffered a massive defeat on a battlefield at Frankenhausen, near the city of Mühlhausen. Mühlhausen is home to the movement's most charismatic leader, preacher, and self-proclaimed prophet, Thomas Müntzer. According to reports, Müntzer, whose name has been closely associated with the new Anabaptist movement, was captured in the aftermath of the battle and executed on May 27, 1525

The peasant uprising began in Thuringia and other parts of central Germany in the spring of 1524 with peasants storming feudal manor houses and burning legal documents in protest against rising feudal dues and labor obligations. Inflationary trends have steadily reduced the value of traditional feudal financial obligations. In response, landowners have attempted to increase their incomes by rewriting contracts or by converting feudal dues into labor requirements. The peasants have insisted that their obligations are part of customary law and not subject to renegotiation.

Frustrated peasants recently united with thousands of unemployed artisans around the *Twelve Articles*, a call to arms written by the furrier and lay preacher Sebastian Lotzer of Memmingen. According to Christoph Schappeler, who wrote the preamble to the document, the demands in the *Twelve Articles* are based entirely on Scripture. Citing the example of the Saxon reformer Martin Luther and the principle of "Scripture alone" (*sola Scriptura*), Schappeler insisted that if any claim was refuted with a biblical argument, the peasants were prepared to concede the point.

Among the demands asserted in the articles is an end to unpaid labor obligations, the right of each community to select their own pastor, control over local tithes, the freedom to gather firewood in the forests and to fish in local streams, and an end to the death tax (*Todfall*) that serfs are required to pay upon the death of a family member as recompense for lost labor. The most revolutionary article calls for the abolition of serfdom. There is no biblical justification, the *Twelve Articles* assert, for social hierarchies that allow some Christians to be lords and princes while others remain peasants or serfs.

Early in 1525, inspired by the apocalyptic preaching of Thomas Müntzer, peasants and artisans from Tyrol to Alsace formed a massive army. Participants in the movement were greatly disappointed in May when Martin Luther denounced their cause in a pamphlet titled *Against the Murderous and Robbing Hordes of the Peasants*. In the text, Luther declared that God was "a God of order" and called on the princes to put down the rebellion "even if the blood should flow as high as the horses' bridles."

Mercenary troops of Landgrave Philip I of Hesse and Duke George of Saxony joined forces on May 14–15 to confront the peasant army at Frankenhausen. Reports have estimated the casualties among the peasants at more than seven thousand; only six soldiers fighting on behalf of the princes lost their lives.

Arrest of Anabaptist Leaders after Secret Gathering in Augsburg

Authorities hope to bring a decisive end to the Anabaptist movement

Jan Luyken, Anna Jansz parts with her child before her execution, 1539

OCTOBER 1527 Authorities in the south German city of Augsburg recently announced the arrest and execution of a large number of Anabaptist leaders who had gathered for a strategic planning meeting on August 20. Although information has been difficult to confirm, it appears that the meeting, led by Anabaptist theologian Hans Denck, included leaders from south Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Moravia. At the meeting, the group agreed on a shared strategy for mission, affirmed the principles outlined by Denck in his pamphlet *On True Christian Love*, and successfully persuaded apocalyptic preacher Hans Hut to cease his public predictions regarding Christ's return on Pentecost of 1528.

Only six months earlier, another major gathering of Anabaptist leaders took place in the Swiss village of Schleitheim, some 60 kilometers north of Zurich. There the group formulated a statement of agreement called the "Brotherly Union," which they hoped would give the movement a clearer structure and identity. The "Brotherly Union" is the most radical summary of Anabaptist theology to date, in that it purports to offer a biblical defense of the various radical positions for which adherents are notorious: baptism of adults; a rejection of the oath and the sword; a call for church discipline; a system for identifying their own pastors; and a general insistence that anyone who has not been "rebaptized" as an adult is part of the fallen world and under the dominion of Satan. Copies of this statement were found among those arrested in Augsburg after the August conference.

According to interrogation testimony, Anabaptist missionaries were commissioned to seek out "the elect" in various regions: Peter Scheppach and Ulrich Trechsel to Worms; Gregor Maler to Vorarlberg; Georg Nespitzer to Mittelfranken; Leonhard Spörler and Leonhard Schiemer to Bern; Leonhard Dorfbrunner to Linz; Hans Mittermaier to Austria; Eukarius Binder and Joachim Mertz to Salzburg; Leonhard Spörle and Leonhard von Prukh to Bavaria; Hänslin Müttermeier to Ingolstadt; Leonhard Dorfbrunner to Linz; Jörg von Passau to Franconia; Eucharius Binder and Joachim März to the Salzburg region; Hans Denck, Gregory Maler, and Hans Beckenknecht to the cantons of Basel and Zurich; and Ludwig Haetzer to Meissen by way of Donauwörth. Hans Hut was to remain in Augsburg.

Augsburg city preacher Urban Rhegius has responded to the gathering with a pamphlet published September 6 titled *Against the New Teachings on Baptism: A Necessary Warning to All Faithful Christians*. By the end of August, Augsburg officials had announced the arrest of nearly 50 Anabaptists. Several have recanted, others were expelled, and still others have been condemned to execution. According to an Augsburg mandate of October 11 anyone who has been rebaptized or provides support to Anabaptists is to be "severely punished in body or life or possessions."

NOTE: The August gathering in Augsburg was the last general meeting of Anabaptist leaders. Since most of those who had taken part in the meeting were eventually executed, the conference became known among Anabaptists as the Martyrs' Synod.

First Full German Edition of the Bible Published by Froschauer in Zurich

Swiss dialect text favored by Anabaptists

FRANKFURT, 1531 The latest sensation at this year's Frankfurter Book Fair is a folio edition of the Bible issued by the renowned Zurich printer Christopher Froschauer. It is the first text to include the entire Bible in German translation. Froschauer's Bible includes 14,775 parallel text annotations, 1,800 marginal annotations, and over two hundred woodcuts, many of them by well-known artist Hans Holbein the Younger.

The origins of this new translation go back to 1525, when the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and his associate Leo Jud established the so-called Prophezey in Zurich, an exegetical workshop for the clerics of Zurich, many of them humanist scholars with training in classical languages. Participants read scriptures systematically—the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek—and debated the meaning of the text for the evangelical church in Zurich as they prepared a new translation in High Alemannic (Swiss) German. The translation drew heavily on Erasmus's *Novum Testamentum*, a new Latin edition published in 1519 based on the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The Old Testament text borrowed heavily from the translation of the Major and Minor Prophets completed by Anabaptists Hans Denck and Ludwig Hätzer, who collaborated with Jewish rabbis in Worms.

The 1531 folio edition sets a new standard not only for its scholarly accuracy but also for its artistry. Froschauer's Bible opens with a beautiful title page, a woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger depicting the creation of the world. Holbein contributed another 118 woodcuts. Thomas Wolf of Basel created 21 woodcuts for the book of Revelation.

In the preface, Zwingli declares his hope that Scripture will be fully accessible to all Christians. "Let everyone purchase a copy; the cost is not too great. Great is the reward, precious is the treasure received." He also encourages readers to interpret Scripture with a peaceful heart, humility, love, and desire to pursue "heavenly matters."

NOTE: The Old Testament translation was revised in 1540, with a major revision to the New Testament in 1574. The Froschauer Bibles were in such great demand that from 1524 until 1585, editions appeared almost annually. Allowing for an average of three thousand copies per edition, this meant that for the 71 German Bibles and parts of the Bible printed during this time, the Froschauer print shop produced roughly two hundred thousand copies. Eventually, Swiss authorities banned certain Froschauer editions of the New Testament, which had become known as *Täufertestamenten* since they were closely associated with Swiss and South German Anabaptists. Numerous copies of the Froschauer Bible accompanied Amish and Mennonite immigrants to North America and can still be found in libraries and private holdings today.

Iron cages on the Lamberti Church

Anabaptist Kingdom at Münster Comes to a Bloody End

Renewed measures taken against Anabaptists throughout the Holy Roman Empire

JANUARY 1536 For nearly two years, the eyes of the empire were fixed on the Westphalian city of Münster as a small group of religious fanatics promoting community of goods and the rebaptizing of adults (w*iedertaufen*) barricaded themselves within the city under the leadership of Jan Mattys and the notorious Dutch actor Jan van Leyden.

The debacle began in the early 1530s with the apocalyptic preaching of Melchoir Hoffman, an itinerant self-proclaimed prophet in the lower Rhineland who drew thousands to his movement. Hoffman insisted that Christ would return in 1533 and called on his listeners to be rebaptized, identifying himself with the Anabaptist movement. Although Strasbourg authorities, who had been quite tolerant of the Anabaptists, effectively silenced Hoffman, his teachings continued to spread.

In the fall of 1533, one of Hoffman's followers, Münster preacher and politician Bernhard Rothmann, assumed political control of Münster. Rothmann began to preach against infant baptism from his pulpit at St. Lambert's Church. In January 1534, he and other members of the city council joined with Jan Matthys, a Hoffman acolyte, in declaring that Münster was the New Jerusalem and the site of Christ's imminent return. Thousands of misguided souls flocked to Münster, even as armies of the prince-bishop Franz von Waldeck besieged the city.

According to reports, on Easter Sunday, 1534, Matthys led a bizarre foray of radicalized believers out of the city gate convinced that his action would coincide with the return of Christ. Matthys and others were immediately killed, and their heads were posted on pikes outside the city.

Jan van Leyden (1509-1536)

Leadership of the besieged city was then assumed by Jan van Leyden, who compelled all inhabitants, under penalty of death, to undergo adult baptism. Eyewitnesses have reported that van Leyden also introduced the practice of polygamy, declared himself to be divine, issued coins depicting himself as ruler of the cosmos, and enforced community of goods, executing anyone who failed to turn over valuables.

The insurrection was suppressed in June 1535 after Waldeck's armies attacked the city and massacred its inhabitants, bringing an end to the "Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster." On January 22, van Leyden, along with fellow leaders Bernhard Knipperdolling and Bernhard Krechting, was tortured to death in the city's central marketplace. The bodies of the three ringleaders were torn apart and thrown in iron cages hoisted to the top of the Lamberti Church as a public warning against future political and religious rebellion.

Although spokespersons for the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland, South Germany, and Moravia have all denounced violence, political authorities throughout the empire have responded to the uprising in Münster with a series of draconian mandates against the Anabaptists. "What happened at Münster reveals exactly who the Anabaptists are," Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon declared. "They are offspring of the devil who cannot be tolerated."

Leadership of Anabaptism in the Low Countries has now been assumed by Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest, who has disavowed any connection to the Münsterite movement and sought to assure authorities of the peaceable character of Anabaptism.

Swiss Brethren Explore Unity with Dutch Mennonites

Delpixart / iStock / Getty Images Plus

Pont Couverts tower at Strasbourg where Melchior Hoffman was imprisoned.

Strasbourg meeting seeks common ground within a diverse movement

STRASBOURG, 1557 More than 50 Swiss Brethren leaders from Moravia, Swabia, the Breisgau, Switzerland, Württemberg, the Eiffel, Alsace, and the Palatinate met in Strasbourg to discuss questions related to original sin and to reach an understanding about the practice of "strict shunning"—a form of church discipline advocated by Dutch Anabaptist leader Menno Simons, which not only excludes excommunicated members from communion but calls for the avoidance of any social contact, including marital relations with a disciplined spouse.

The gathering in Strasbourg followed a meeting in August 1555 in which North German and Dutch Mennonite leaders came to Strasbourg to seek unity with Swiss Anabaptists on the doctrine of the incarnation. At that gathering the Dutch and North Germans advocated for a position associated with Melchior Hoffman that attempts to preserve the divinity of Christ by arguing for his "celestial flesh." According to this doctrine, Christ—though born of the virgin Mary and taking on the body of a human—passed through her without taking on any of her bodily (or sinful) characteristics.

That encounter ended inconclusively. Swiss Brethren ministers warned about the limitations of theological knowledge and insisted that adherence to the teachings of Jesus was more important than speculations regarding the mystery of Christ's flesh.

The 1557 meeting marks an ongoing effort by leaders in the far-flung and diverse Anabaptist movement to find common ground.

Since the Anabaptists first appeared on the scene in 1525, the group has been known for its tendency to fragment. Within the first several decades, for example, a host of distinct groups emerged, including the Swiss Brethren, the Gabrielites, the Philipites, the Obbites, the Hutterites, Hoffmanites, the Münsterites, the Mennonites, along with supporters of Hans Hut, Hans Denck, David Joris, and Pilgram Marpeck. In his church history of 1531, the chronicler Sebastian Franck noted that "the Anabaptist have become divided among themselves over so many different things and now have almost as many teachings as they have leaders." That same year, Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, wrote that "the Anabaptists are divided into numerous sects and each bans and denounces the other as if they were the devil."

Franck speculated on several reason for the many divisions, suggesting that the pressures of persecution have made it difficult for leaders to confer with each other, hold public gatherings, or access printing presses. Most Anabaptist groups also have a strong congregational polity and hold to high standards of personal moral behavior, with the expectation of group conformity to those standards.

The recent gatherings in Strasbourg have made it clear that Dutch and North German Anabaptist groups tend to emphasize forms of unity focused on doctrinal agreement, whereas the Swiss and South German groups prefer to focus more on concrete standards of behavior.

At the conclusion of the most recent conference, Swiss Brethren ministers challenged the ongoing emphasis on the doctrine of the "celestial flesh" by the Dutch and called for greater leniency in matters of church discipline.

NOTE: In 1559, Menno and the Dutch elders formally rejected the letter sent to them by the Swiss Brethren ministers who met in 1557 and issued a ban on the entire Swiss Brethren fellowship. At the Frankenthal Disputation a little more than a decade later, the Swiss Brethren insisted that they had nothing to do with the Hutterites and their practice of community goods, and they explicitly distanced themselves from the Dutch view of Christ's "celestial flesh."

View of the Grossmünster in Zurich (right) and the Wellenberg prison tower (center).

Swiss Brethren Leader Hans Landis Captured and Executed

Authorities hope action will bring a conclusive end to the Anabaptist "cancer"

SEPTEMBER 1614 On September 29, only hours after the city's Great Council judged him guilty of "stubborn and seditious rebellion," Hans Landis—70-year-old farmer and Swiss Anabaptist leader from Horgen—was executed by beheading in the Hauptgrube at the outskirts of Zurich.

Zurich authorities have been long acquainted with the gray-bearded Landis, notorious for his stubbornness as a leader of the Anabaptist sect. In October 1589, Landis and four other "teachers" and 10 lay members were arrested and imprisoned in the Wellenberg tower for spreading the heretical doctrines of the Anabaptists. Although most of the prisoners soon recanted, Landis and several others refused instruction on theological matters before they managed to escape from prison.

In the intervening years, Landis appeared frequently for questioning before Reformed clergymen and Zurich officials. In the fall of 1608, following reports that Anabaptists had been meeting regularly in the Landis home in Horgen, Hans Landis and his brother Heini were again arrested and interrogated. In his recorded testimony, Landis repeated a common Anabaptist complaint regarding the low moral standards and the absence of discipline within the state church. Though seeking to assure authorities that he was a loyal and peace-loving subject, Landis qualified his obedience: in external affairs he was prepared to do anything the officials wished, provided that it did not violate his religious conscience; but in matters of belief, he argued, the government had no authority.

In 1611, the Zurich council issued a new mandate against the Anabaptists, attempting to distinguish between religious and political crimes. The death sentence for Anabaptists was justified "not on account of their faith, but because they were seditious, perjurers, and led others astray, making them disobedient against their lords." A mandate of 1613 likened the stubborn persistence of Anabaptism in the region to a "cancer" that was slowly destroying the body of society itself.

In a public disputation at Wädenswil in January 1613, Landis insisted that the Anabaptists were not interested in more theological debate. "You already know what we believe," he said. "We don't teach anything other than what the Bible instructs and what the apostles did." He also rejected the threat of exile, citing Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's."

On at least three occasions—in 1589, 1608, and 1613—Landis and his fellow dissidents successfully escaped from prison, the most spectacular occasion coming in 1613 when rumors spread throughout the countryside that an angel had freed him and two others in Solothurn while they were being transported to the French ambassador to serve a sentence as galley slaves.

When Landis was recaptured earlier this month, the Zurich city council voted—125 to 87—in favor of execution. It was reported that Landis forgave his executioner immediately prior to his beheading.

The council considered a wide range of punishments for Landis—including *Einmauerung* (isolation and starvation in a sealed room), cutting off his ears, and banishment from the territory—before finally agreeing to execute him by beheading. Whereas previous Anabaptists executed in Zurich had all been drowned, the council explicitly rejected drowning because of its close association with the image of baptism and the religious crime of heresy. Beheading, the mode of execution for political criminals, confirmed the council's conviction that they were executing Landis not for his religious beliefs, but for his flagrant and repeated disregard for the laws and courts of the land.

Jan Luyken, Menno Simons (1681)

Memorial Stone to Honor Anabaptist Leader Menno Simons

Commemoration sparks debate in European Mennonite churches

SEPTEMBER 1879 On September 11, Doopsgezinde (baptism-minded) leaders from the Netherlands and Mennonite representatives from congregations in north Germany gathered at a location just outside the Friesen village of Witmarsum to dedicate a monument to the memory of Menno Simons.

Menno, a former Catholic priest, became the preeminent leader of the Dutch Anabaptist movement after the violent end of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster in 1535. His leadership helped to firmly establish the principles of nonviolence, Christ-centered discipleship, and a visible, disciplined church based on voluntary baptism as the hallmarks of the Anabaptist tradition. As the movement's foremost theologian, Menno's name has become closely associated with the many "Mennonite" groups who continue in the Anabaptist tradition.

According to tradition, the monument is situated at the former home of Herman and Gerrit Jansz, where Menno first preached after leaving the Roman Catholic Church in 1536 and where he often stayed. Among the inscriptions on the large stone obelisk is a reference to 1 Corinthians 3:11—"No other foundation can anyone lay, than that which has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ"—a verse that Menno included on the title page of every book he published.

The origins of the commemoration can be traced to a May 1859 essay in the *Mennonitische Blatter* written by August Heinrich Neufeld, pastor of the lbersheim Mennonite congregation in Rhine-Hesse. In the article Neufeld called on "every Mennonite congregation in the Old World and the New" to begin planning for "one of the most important days in our church fellowship"—namely, the three hundredth anniversary of the death of Menno Simons on January 13, 1861. Jakob Mannhardt, editor of the paper, expressed his full support for the plan.

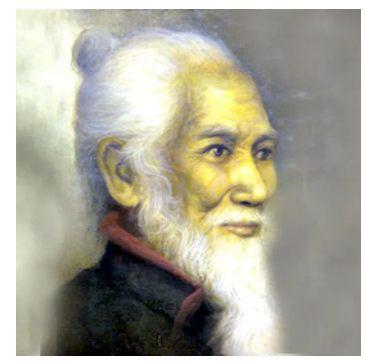
Neufeld hoped that a public celebration of Menno would encourage a scattered and divided church to develop a stronger sense of shared identity. Supporters of the monument noted that for decades, neighboring Protestants had celebrated the birth and death dates of their heroes—especially Martin Luther and John Calvin—with festivals, monuments, and other public commemorations. Now that Mennonites in Europe had gained full legal status, Neufeld and others hoped to redeem the reputation of the Anabaptist movement by integrating the Anabaptists as legitimate partners in the Reformation movement. Although Menno may have been a "lesser light," Neufeld and others argued that he deserved a place alongside Luther and Calvin.

Nevertheless, the proposal triggered a major debate within the Mennonite community. Christian Schmutz of Rappenau (Baden) led the critique, supported by Mennonites in America, by characterizing the effort to create a monument to Menno Simons as an "act of idolatry which Menno himself would have strongly opposed." Elevating the accomplishments of human individuals, Schmutz argued, "paid homage to the spirit of the age" and diminished the centrality of Christ to the identity of their church.

After a lengthy delay, leaders in the Doopsgezinde church of the Netherlands have moved forward with the monument as a testimony to the farsighted and courageous leadership that Menno Simons provided the Anabaptist movement at one of its darkest hours.

Memorial to Menno Simons at Witmarsum

Members of the Banyutowo congregation, a church established by Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung



Inanta, portrait of Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung

Anabaptism Springs Up in Indonesia

Before Pieter Jansz there was Tunggul Wulung

FEBRUARY 1885 Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung, Javanese mystic, itinerant evangelist, and sometime collaborator with the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society, died earlier this month. He leaves behind four large congregations numbering more than a thousand members, as well as a vision for a "settlement" model of church planting and a legacy of fierce independence from the Dutch missionaries with whom he worked.

Relations between Tunggul Wulung and the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society were complicated. In 1851, Pieter Jansz and his wife Wilhelmina arrived on the island of Java, settling in the small coastal town of Jepara, where Pieter began working as a teacher. On March 16, 1854, they celebrated the baptisms of the first five Javanese believers. But the couple made little progress in establishing a church. Indeed, it was not until Tunggul Wulung became associated with the mission effort that the church began to flourish.

Tunggul Wulung's story began under a different name. After a failed uprising of the Javanese against the Dutch colonizers, Kyai Ngabhoolah, a local hero of the struggle, retreated to a hermitage on Mount Kelud for a period of meditation and prayer. There Kyai had a vision of a famous 12th-century Javanese general, Tunggul Wulung, a person closely associated with the "Just King"—a messianic figure who the Javanese believed would restore justice and harmony to their land.

At the same time, Kyai began to read the Bible and slowly became convinced that Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Just King. At that point he changed his name to Tunggul Wulung (eventually adding Ibrahim as his Christian name) and began to teach the gospel in a distinctly Javanese idiom as a "teacher of wisdom" (*guru ngelmu*).

Almost immediately, Tunggul Wulung attracted numerous followers in the area around Mount Muria in central Java. At the heart of his message was a vision for creating independent Christian communities, clearly separated from the dominant Muslim culture, free from the onerous labor obligations imposed by the Dutch government on Javanese peasants, and committed to preserving Javanese culture, language, and folkways. In a jungle clearing in Bondo (Jepara), Tunggul Wulung established the first of these Christian settlements, which he hoped would embody the virtues of the kingdom of the Just King.

When Tunggul Wulung and Pieter Jansz first met in 1854, the exchange did not go well. Jansz thought Tunggul Wulung's beliefs were too syncretistic—an eclectic blend of Islam, Buddhism, Javanese mysticism, and Christianity that lacked sufficient theological clarity. Tunggul Wulung, in turn, regarded Jansz as a proud Westerner who was too enmeshed in Dutch culture for the two to work together.

But over the next two decades, the two leaders continued to collaborate. Between 1853 and 1875, Tunggul Wulung traveled as an evangelist throughout all of Java, establishing at least four settlement-congregations. Along the way, Jansz came to recognize the strength of the settlement model for church planting and spent the rest of his life trying to convince the Dutch mission board of the wisdom of the strategy.

NOTE: In 1888, Pieter Jansz completed the first translation of the New Testament into Javanese and was instrumental in creating a Javanese dictionary.

The congregations that Tunggul Wulung established became the foundation of the Muria Javanese Mennonite Church (GITJ), an indigenous church that now numbers some 40,000 baptized members.

Soehadiweko Djojodihardjo, one of the GITJ's most influential 20th-century leader and an active participant in Mennonite World Conference, openly acknowledged his spiritual debts to Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung.

Mennonite World Conference Resumes Global Assemblies

First gathering since end of WWII an occasion for reconciliation

Delegates to 1948 Mennonite World Conference, North Newton, Kansas

AUGUST 1948 On Wednesday, August 4, as the first order of business of the Fourth General Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference meeting in Goshen, Indiana, Dirk Cattepoel, pastor of the Krefeld Mennonite Church in Germany, addressed one of the most urgent questions facing the global Mennonite church.

For most of the past decade, many of the 10 countries represented at the gathering were locked in a devastating war that resulted in the death of roughly 80 million people and reduced many of cities in Europe and Asia to smoldering ruins.

Contrary to the Anabaptist principle of nonviolence, numerous Mennonites on both sides of the conflict were caught up in the nationalist spirit of the time. Many joined the military and likely encountered each other as enemies somewhere on the battlefield.

Now for the first time—as questions of refugee resettlement, "war guilt," and the legacy of the Holocaust dominate the public discussion—Mennonites from these formerly warring nations met face-to-face to discuss their shared future.

The encounters organized by the Mennonite World Conference were not easy. Relations between German and Dutch delegates traveling together on the trans-Atlantic voyage were especially tense. But at the opening session of the conference, Cattepoel appealed to his Dutch, French, and American counterparts for forgiveness. "Terrible things have happened to your people through representatives of mine," Cattepoel acknowledged, "so much that from the human angle forgiveness seems impossible. And yet, for Christ's sake I ask you: Forgive us! and thus grant us—in the name of Christ—a new beginning of Christian fellowship."

Much of the remainder of Cattepoel's speech focused on the suffering that German Mennonites had undergone because of the war—the coercive nature of the Nazi regime, the loss of a generation of men, and the plight of postwar refugees. The work of true reconciliation and "right remembering" remain. But by all accounts, this month's MWC assembly has helped the Anabaptist-Mennonite family reorient its understanding of geopolitics and the church.

The origins of MWC can be traced to a small group of Mennonites—representing six European countries and the United States—who gathered in June of 1925 for worship in Basel, Switzerland. The official reason for the meeting was to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. But the discussions that followed also focused on coordinating relief efforts for Mennonite refugees in South Russia displaced from their homes by the Bolshevik Revolution and now facing severe famine.

In 1930, the group reconvened in Danzig as the "World Relief Conference" and again in 1936 as the "General Congress of Mennonites" to share reports from their various church bodies, reflect on their common heritage, and collaborate in ongoing relief work. The gatherings, which this year became known as the "Mennonite World Conference," were not intended to be a formal ecclesial structure. Indeed, the North Americans and several other groups agreed to participate only if it was clear that the worship services would not include communion.

But the vision behind MWC is the hope of an Anabaptist-Mennonite church that can transcend the narrow tribalism, political loyalties, and national boundaries that are the source of so much discord in the world.

NOTE: Today, Mennonite World Conference remains a vibrant and growing organization, with 110 member conferences representing some ten thousand congregations and nearly 1.5 million of the 2.13 million Anabaptists in the world today. Since 2009, the ongoing work of MWC is carried out largely through its four commissions (Faith and Life, Deacons, Peace, and Mission). MWC has also created a Task Force on Creation Care and helped to foster five networks (the Global Mission Fellowship, the Global Anabaptist Service Network, the Global Peace Network, the Global Anabaptist Education Network, and the Global Anabaptist Health Network) that have enabled dozens of national church conferences to collaborate in their witness to the world.

MKC choir (top); students at MK College (middle); MKC worship service (bottom)

Ethiopian Meserete Kristos Church Thrives amid Adversity

Faith-informed strategies for witness and resistance

MARCH 1990 The recent announcement that the Ethiopian government will no longer pursue policies of Marxist socialism marks the end of the revolutionary Derg government and a new day for the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) as it emerges from nearly a decade of repression.

On January 24, 1982, leaders of the Derg Marxist government of Ethiopia, who had seized power from Emperor Haile Selassie eight years earlier, initiated a series of restrictive policies against the MKC, a Christian renewal movement of some five thousand members that emerged out of Mennonite mission work begun in the mid-1940s. In the weeks that followed, the government nationalized numerous MKC properties, imprisoned all six of its ordained leaders, froze congregational bank accounts, forbade public worship, and demanded that church members participate in public patriotic rallies.

Yet by all accounts, the church flourished during the years of persecution, adopting a host of new mission and leadership strategies as an underground movement. With the cessation of repression, MKC has grown to 34,000 baptized members.

Under the revolutionary government, MKC members faced a relentless barrage of tactics pressuring them to conform, including interrogations, surveillance, false accusations, social ridicule, harassment by hostile mobs; economic threats to business and property, forced participation in patriotic rallies, and, ultimately, arrest and execution.

According to interviews with MKC leaders, members developed a variety of strategies for resistance. When public worship was forbidden, MKC quickly adapted to form cell groups of five to seven people, who gathered secretly in homes for regular Bible study, prayer, and mutual support. These groups—connected by a network of lay leaders and a shared curriculum of discipleship training—steadily grew and divided as they welcomed new believers and trained new leaders.

Sometimes resistance was as simple as visibly posting a motto ("Live the whole day fearing God") in a home or place of business. Some members made it a point to pause for prayer before a meal in public settings or pinned a cross to their clothes. Sometimes, when forced to attend Marxist indoctrination classes, MKC leaders would listen carefully to the arguments and offer critical rebuttals. Many MKC members rejected slogans such as "Ethiopia first" or "The revolution is above everything," insisting that loyalty was "first to Jesus and then to country." When Jazarah [a pseudonym] was forced to participate in patriotic events, she always kept a purse in her left hand and an umbrella in her right hand so she would not have to raise her hand with the crowd. "I went through all those years without saying a slogan," she reported.

MKC members soon came to regard persecution as a crucible for spiritual formation. "We learned through persecution," reported Desta [a pseudonym], "that if you live a holy life . . . you will face suffering of one type or another." Virtually every member also recalled a moment when they were no longer afraid. Zere [a pseudonym], for example, who was initially hesitant about hosting cell group meetings in his home, testified that after three days of prayer and fasting, "I realized that God's presence, God's glory, was really surrounding us and that we should not be afraid of any coming danger."[1]

Nearly five hundred years after the Anabaptist movement began, those who follow in that tradition are still challenged to consider the spiritual dimensions of resistance in uncertain political contexts.

1. Cf. Brent L. Kipfer, "Thriving under Persecution: Meserete Kristos Church Leadership during the Ethiopian Revolution (1974-1991," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91 (July 2017), 297-369.

NOTE: Today, MKC claims some 475,000 members, making it the largest national group in the Anabaptist-Mennonite global family.

Mennonites and Lutherans Formally Reconcile after 485 Years

Service of repentance and forgiveness marks new era for Anabaptists

JULY 2010 In a moving gesture of humility, delegates to the 11th Lutheran World Fellowship Assembly gathering in Stuttgart, Germany, on July 22, unanimously expressed their repentance for the persecution of the Anabaptists in the 16th century by kneeling.

The vote to approve the "Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists," included an expression of repentance for "past wrongdoings" and for the ways in which Lutherans "subsequently forgot or ignored this persecution and have continued to describe Anabaptists in misleading and damaging ways." It also included a commitment to interpret Lutheran confessions in light of this history of persecution, as well as a desire for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between Lutherans and Mennonites.

"Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit," said Kathryn Johnson, LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs, "we moved in a remarkable fashion from repentance to reconciliation. No one who was present in that hall that day doubted that the Holy Spirit had been at work."

Danisa Ndlovu, a pastor from Zimbabwe and president of the Mennonite World Conference, also confessed the tendency of many contemporary Anabaptists to use the martyr stories as a badge of Christian superiority. "We cannot come to this point and fail to see our own sinfulness," he said. "We cannot come to this point without recognizing our own need for God's grace and forgiveness."

The story behind the worship service of repentance and forgiveness started six years earlier when representatives of the LWF initiated a series of dialogues with a group of theologians and historians representing the Mennonite World Conference. The dialogues focused on the condemnations of the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. The confession, which sought to establish the Christian orthodoxy of the fledgling Lutheran church, condemned the Anabaptists in five instances—language that placed the Anabaptists spiritually outside the church while also identifying them as criminals, worthy of the death penalty that the Holy Roman Emperor had mandated the previous year.

Building on previous ecumenical conversations in France, Germany, and the United States, the LWF-MWC International Study Commission convened to discuss the condemnations completed their work in 2009. Their report, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*, detailed the contentious relations between Lutherans and Anabaptists in the sixteenth century as both groups emerged amid the turmoil of the Reformation. The report concluded by calling on both traditions to "move beyond the condemnations" to a new relationship of forgiveness and reconciliation.

For many lay Mennonites and Lutherans, the 2010 service of repentance and reconciliation in Stuttgart may go unnoticed. But for others, it raises basic questions of memory and identity. How do Christians divided by five hundred years of theological differences and sustained memories of persecution move forward in a new spirit of reconciliation? How does this new status change the way each group tells their story, particularly the heroic stories of group beginnings that sustain collective identity? That challenge may come into increasing focus as Protestants around the world anticipate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Anabaptists commemorating their own beginnings in 2025 will face a similar challenge.

LWF Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and MWC president Danisa Ndlova at the 2010 service of reconciliation

NOTE: Although the Augsburg Confession is nearly five centuries old, the document remains the authoritative statement of faith for nearly 72 million Lutherans around the world today. At their ordination, Lutheran pastors swear to uphold the confession in its "unaltered" form. Before the 2010 reconciliation gathering, most contemporary Lutherans were likely unaware of the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession—and even fewer would have associated the Anabaptists named there with modern-day Mennonites, who have actively cultivated the memory of Anabaptist spiritual forebears who were imprisoned, tortured, and executed at the time of the Reformation.

Looking to the Future of the Global Anabaptist Church

Mennonite World Conference and Anabaptism at 500

The five hundredth anniversary of Anabaptist beginnings offers an occasion for reflection on changes and trends in the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church today. Listed below, in no particular order, are 10 recent themes to consider.

1. Growth: Between 1975 and 2025, the global Anabaptist-Mennonite communion grew from 600,000 million to 2.2 million members; since 2000, 92% of the growth in MWC member churches has come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

2. Gatherings: Although delayed and disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, Anabaptists from 44 countries gathered between July 5 and 10, 2021, in Indonesia, a nation that is 87% Muslim, for the 17th global MWC assembly. The event—which featured singing, inspirational worship, seminars, and fellowship—concluded with a worship service in Semarang, Central Java, at the 12,000-seat Holy Stadium, a Mennonite congregation that is one of Indonesia's largest churches.

3. Ecumenical encounters: As described in an earlier article, on July 22, 2010, representatives of the Lutheran World Fellowship and MWC gathered for a joint service of reconciliation in Stuttgart, Germany. MWC has also engaged in ecumenical conversations with global Seventh-day Adventists and the World Communion of Reformed Churches and recently concluded a Trilateral Dialogue on Baptism with Lutherans and Catholics.

4. MWC reorganizes: In 2009, MWC reorganized its structure into four commissions—"the four chambers of the heart." Since then, the Faith and Life, Deacons, Peace, and Mission Commissions have carried forward the primary work of MWC between assembly gatherings. MWC has also appointed 12 regional representatives to help national churches better connect with each other. Under the MWC umbrella, the Global Anabaptist Service Network, Global Mission Fellowship, and Global Anabaptist Peace Network bring together mission, service, peace organizations from around the world into regular conversation.

5. Young Anabaptists: The Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) has enabled dozens of young adults from the Global South to participate in cross-cultural ministry and to forge international friendships. MWC's YABs (Young Anabaptists) leadership team has fostered other young adult networks and hosts the Global Youth Summit.

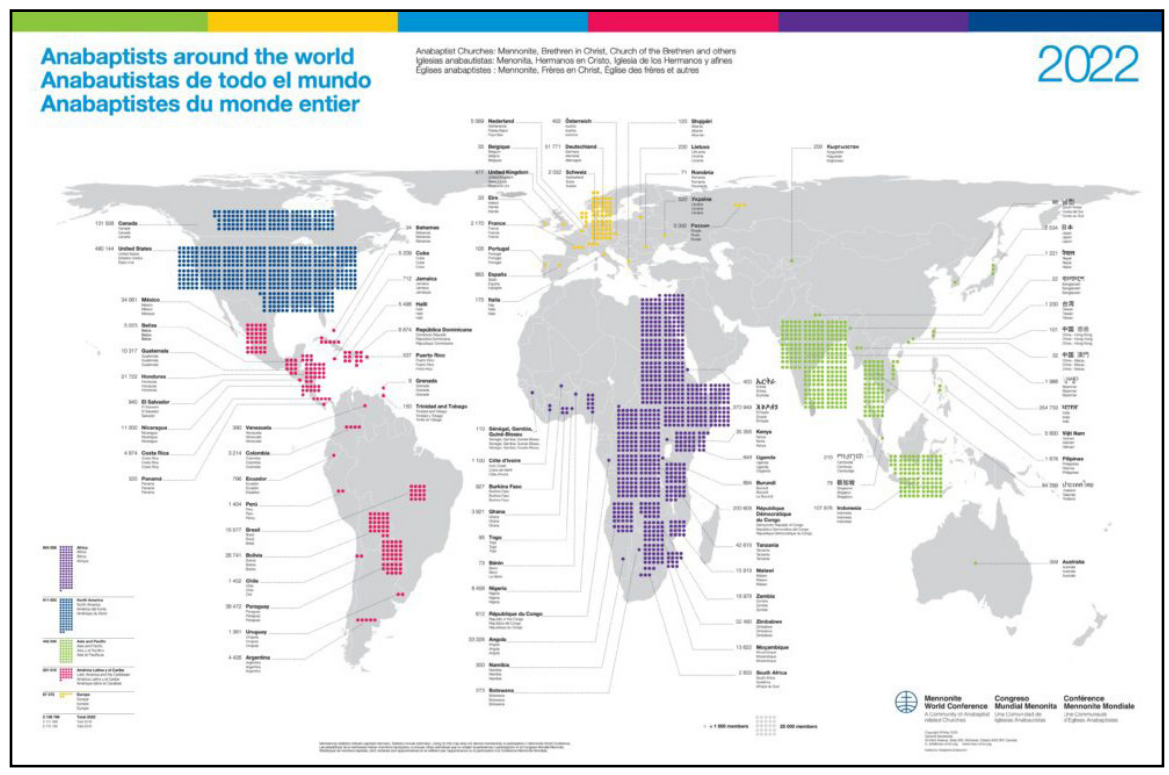
6. Women Doing Theology: For more than 20 years, Anabaptist-Mennonite women in the United States, Africa, Asia, and especially Latin America have connected with each other under the heading of "Women Doing Theology." The All-India Mennonite Women group regularly hosts a gathering titled Theologically Trained Anabaptist Women in India.

7. Solidarity: During the past decade, representatives from the Mennonite World Conference's Deacon's Commission, with support from the Global Church Sharing Fund, have made numerous fraternal visits to churches suffering from natural disasters or celebrating milestones. MWC provides worship resources for the annual World Fellowship Sunday and World Peace Sunday and posts regular prayer requests.

8. Cultivating an Anabaptist identity: The MWC Shared Convictions, a statement of faith affirmed by all of MWC's member churches in 2006, continued to gain visibility and broad affirmation, as did MWC's statements on *koinonia* and Anabaptist tradition. In 2012, the five-volume Global Mennonite History project was completed, and each volume is now available in at least three languages. The Global Anabaptist Profile, a survey of beliefs and practices of 24 MWC member churches, was completed in 2016. In 2017, MWC launched Renewal 2027, a 10-year series of events commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement.

9. Looking ahead: In 2025, the MWC General Council will meet in Germany to celebrate its hundredth birthday, followed by a global gathering in Zurich, Switzerland, to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of Anabaptist beginnings. The theme of the Zurich gathering is "The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500." In 2028, the Anabaptist family will convene again for MWC's 18th global assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, hosted by the Meserete Kristos Church, the largest Anabaptist church in the world.

10. Imagining the future: It feels almost impossible to imagine a world five hundred years from now, but it's a good exercise nonetheless! What will the next centuries bring for our world? For the Christian church? For the Anabaptist family of faith? For your congregation?



"Anabaptists around the world," https://mwc-cmm.org/en/membership-map-and-statistics. Used with permission.

ANABAPTISM at FIVE HUNDRED

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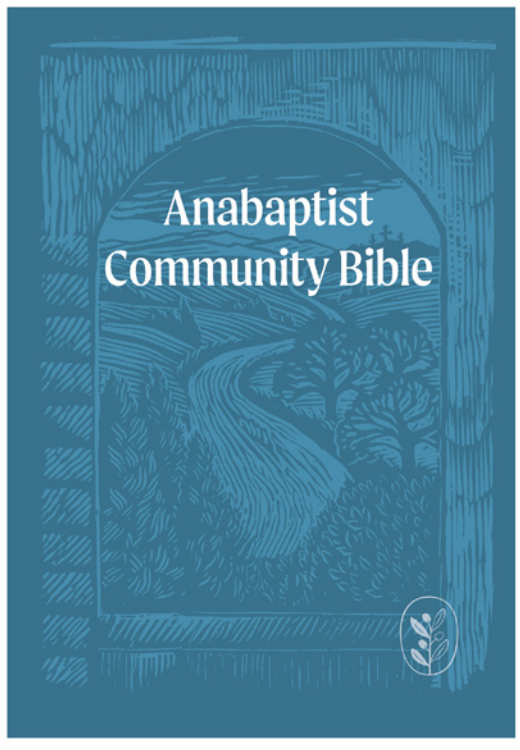
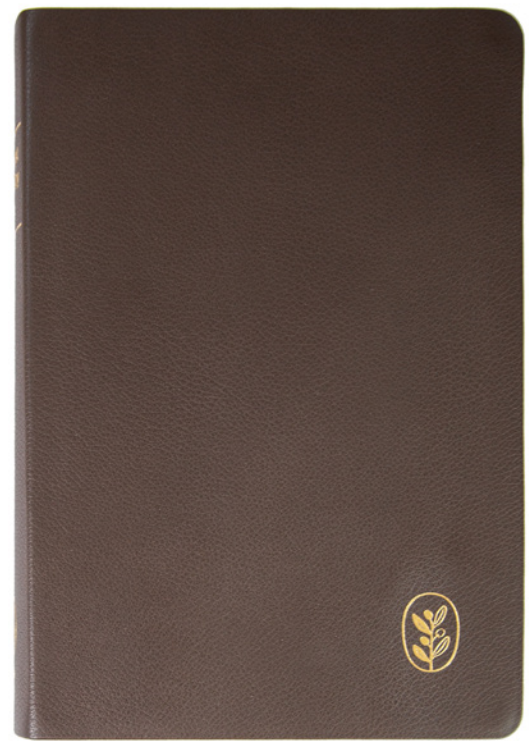
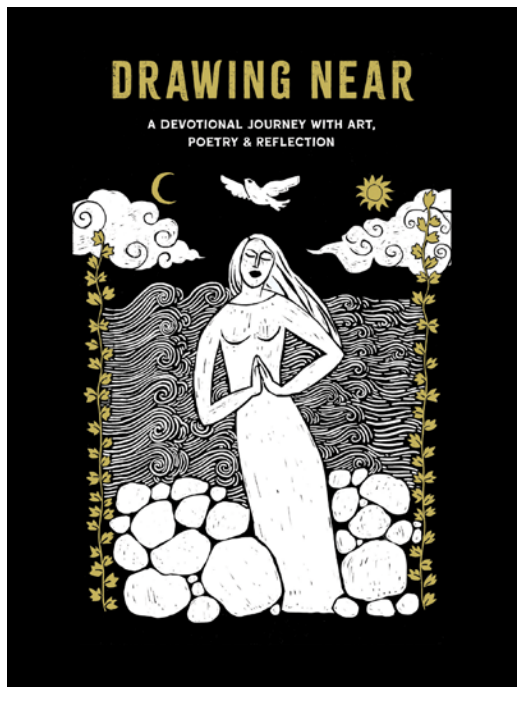


Anabaptist Community Bible (hardcover)



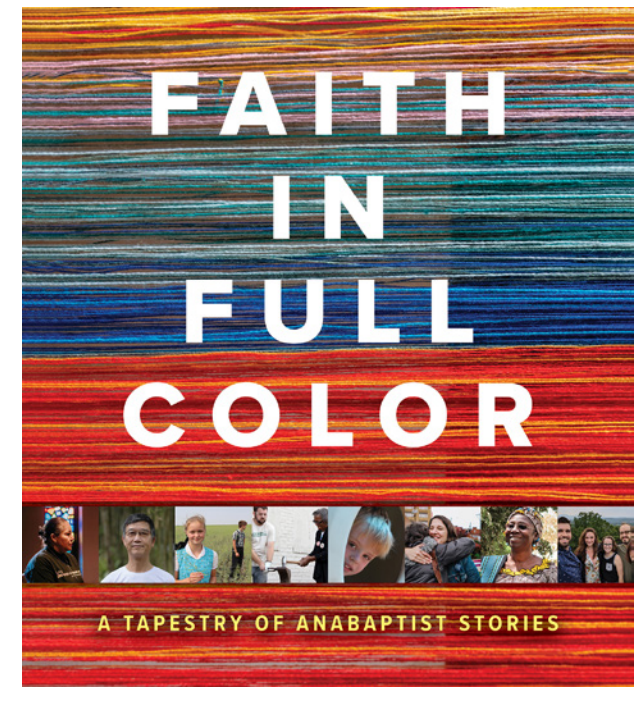
Anabaptist Community Bible (Leather)

Anabaptist Community Bible (soft touch)

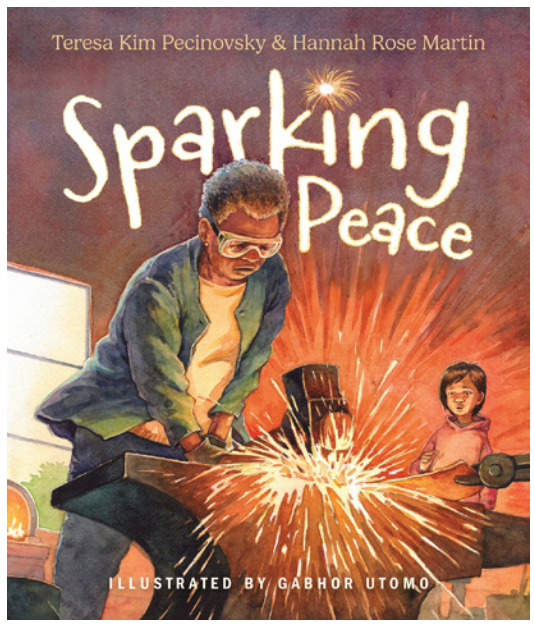


Drawing Near: A Devotional Journey with Art, Poetry, and Reflection

Footsteps of Faith: A Global Anabaptist Devotional

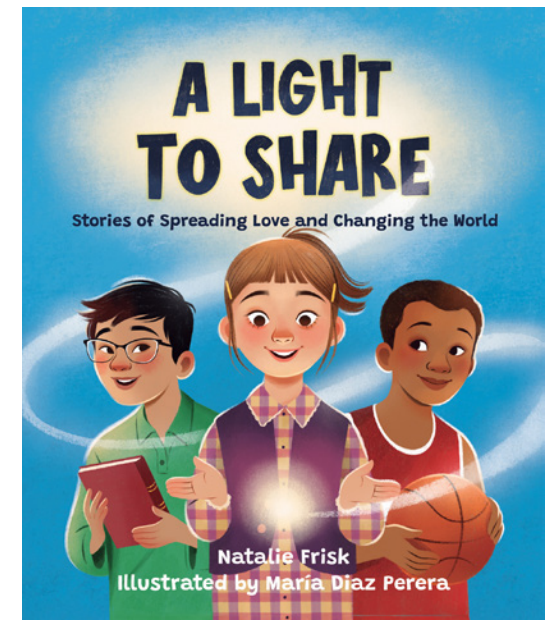


Faith in Full Color: A Tapestry of Anabaptist Stories, stories compiled and written by Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi



Sparking Peace by Teresa Kim Pecinovsky and Hannah Martin, illustrated by Gabhor Utomo”

Stitched Together by Aimee Reid, illustrated by Kate Cosgrove



A Light to Share: Stories of Spreading Love and Changing the World by Natalie Frisk, illustrated by María Diaz Perera”