

The Reformation

Context, Characters

Controversies, Consequences

Class 6: The Fires of Radicalism:

The Anabaptist Challenge

Musical Prologue

- Consider these two songs by Michael Card.
- What do they suggest about the nature of the Christian message?

Class 6 Goals

- Explore the development of the Radical Reformation
- Look at the views of the early Anabaptists and the controversies surrounding them.
- Evaluate the violent legacies of Thomas Müntzer and the City of Münster

Opening Questions

- Is persecution a sign of God's blessing and approval?
- Is theological or political compromise a sign of weakness and/or heresy?

Luther on Politics

“All efforts to govern the world by the gospel of free forgiveness would lead either to unrestrained chaos and destruction or to a demonic crusade against all perceived ‘evil empires.’ To Luther the identification of any political program, regardless of its intrinsic merit, with the will of God subverts both politics and the gospel. The political process is subverted because the claim to absolute righteousness precludes the ambiguity present in all social life as well as the art of compromise necessary in social relations. Group and national self-righteousness lead people to see political opponents as followers of the devil, that is the ‘ungodly’ who have no right to live. The gospel is subverted when identified with a political program because then all citizens are forced to conform to a religious norm, and salvation is made dependent upon a particular political affiliation and program, a political form of good works.”

Carter Lindberg

The Contagion of Reformation

- Once the break with Rome has begun, how far will it proceed?
- Can the original reformers maintain control over their reforms?
- What will the new sacraments of the church be?
 - How will they be defined and conducted?
- Can violence be an acceptable tool for building the Kingdom of Heaven?
- How much will ideas about authority, deference, and obedience be altered?
- Should the church be completely separated from the state?
- Do we really believe in the “Priesthood of all Believers?”

Andreas Karlstadt

- Early colleague of Luther
- Renounced his academic degrees, and titles, “a simple layman,” and dressed as a peasant
- Called to Orlamünde where he rejected church music and art, and rejected infant baptism
- Lord’s Supper as a “memorial of Christ’s death
- Got into a “tract war” with Luther over the inner witness of the Spirit and Congregational autonomy



Thomas Müntzer

- Important leader of the Radical Reformation and Anabaptists
- Called Luther, Dr. Liar and the Wittenburg Pope
- Believed that church reform would lead to persecution and martyrdom
- Defended merchants against Luther's attacks, and attacked the princes and feudalism
- Claimed “nothing without the consent of the people” - worldly authority dependent upon support of the people



Müntzer's *Ordo Rerum*

- The “Order of Things”
- Knowledge of God can't be taught – only conferred by a spirit-worked faith, saturated with experience.
- The “Word of God” should be heard from God's mouth
- Scripture is part of Revelation (but historically limited)
 - The Living Word of God, Nature, and History are also valid.
- Highly influence by mystical traditions and neo-Platonism
- Instead of *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Experientia*

Müntzer's Career

- (1520-1521) Called as a minister in Zwickau, but fired for controversial sermons against both Catholicism and Luther (defended by weavers.)
- (1521) Served as a minister in Prague – began criticizing the “Godless clergy” who had no experience of God. Soon fired and expelled from Prague.
- Called to a church in Allstedt – against the desire of the Elector of Saxony.
 - Translated psalms into the vernacular and wrote hymns
 - Saw himself as the “hammer and sickle of God against the godless”
 - Created a small military league that destroyed “unfaithful churches.”

A Letter to Thomas Münster

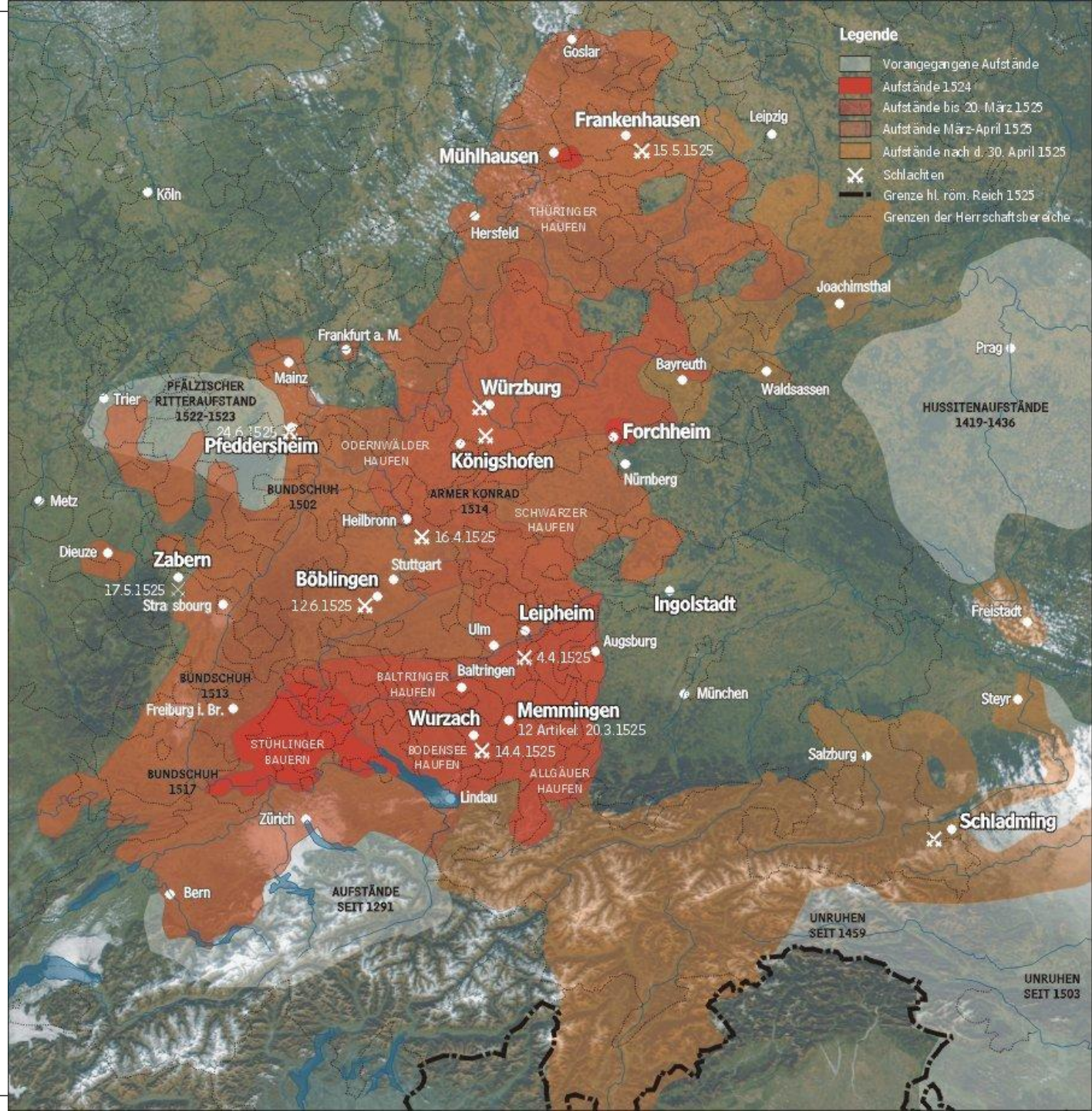
- As you read the primary source consider the following:
- What is the attitude of the authors toward Münster?
- What are their primary religious concerns?
- Do you share their understanding of Baptism and pacifism?

Müntzer as Revolutionary

- Believed Luther and the Magisterial Reformation were protecting the princes and an unjust status quo.
- Thought force should be used to institute the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.
- The righteous must take the sword from the princes because the separated the people from the will of God.
- Believed the peasant war was an eschatological sign marking the time to act. (Yet there were ungodly among the peasants too)
- Despite the sign of a halo around the sun, Müntzer and his forces were attacked and slaughtered by the princes armies (6,000 to 6)
- Müntzer was captured, tortured, then executed.

“Revolution of the Common Man”

- AKA – The German Peasants’ War
 - But extended beyond Germany, included more than just peasants, and began before the Reformation.
- A revolt of the common man against “noble and ecclesiastical lords.” Had a strong anticlerical element
- Had precursors in rebellions throughout Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries, but now Christian Freedom and Priesthood of all Believers
- In Germany these rebellions joined rural peasants and urban commoners and called for reform couched in Apocalyptic language.
- The rebellions failed due to lack of military experience, poor communication, and “excessive equality” in the ranks.







The “Radical” Reformation

- Criticized by contemporaries as enthusiasts (en theos/within-God), spiritualists, fanatics, Anabaptists, baptist, *Schwärmer* (Luther) “too many bees chasing too few bonnets.”
- Had diverse leaders, with many executed before consolidating influence.
- Had no clear confessional statement.
- Most important doctrine was that only believing adults can be baptized.
- Many Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, agreed that Anabaptists should be burned at the stake.

Anabaptist Beliefs

- The Church as a voluntary communities – with member scrutinized and the unworthy removed and excommunicated
 - Not coextensive with the political community.
 - Seen as threatening and divisive for dropping out of “state churches”
- The Bible only taught Baptism of adult believers
- No scriptural warrant for union of church and state
- Read the Sermon on the Mount literally, believers must separate from the world.
- Believed the Bible can be easily understood if read in love under the influence of the Spirit.
- Rejected oaths, taxes, tithes, military service, embraced pacifism

Views of Baptism

- Rejected the Catholic view that Baptism removed original sin.
- Baptism is the sign of a renewed community.
- Admission to the community is open only to disciples.
- Discipleship is possible by God's grace, through the Holy Spirit, leading to repentance.
- Three Fold View of Baptism
 - First inner baptism by the Spirit.
 - Second outer baptism as a sign of faith and renewed life.
 - Outer baptism will lead to rejection and persecution, resulting in the third form, "baptism of blood" or martyrdom.

Towards Separation

- After being condemned by Zwingli and the Zurich town council over Baptism and the Tithe, January 21, 1524 Blaurock and Grebel baptized one another and the rest of their followers and soon thereafter served communion.
- Their action was seen as heretical and treasonous.
- Associated in the minds of their opponents with the Peasant Uprisings (popular in the same areas)
- Many were imprisoned, exiled, or killed (typically execution by drowning).

Schleitheim Articles

- Baptism upon repentance and life change
- Excommunication of members who don't keep the commandments
- Lord's Supper as memorial meal
- Radical separation from the evil world
- Shepherd as model of godly life, elected by the congregation, and supported voluntarily
- Rejection of bearing arms and holding public office (Michael Sattler preached non-resistance as the Turks invaded Austria)
- Prohibition of oaths
- Seen as the further development of ideas put forward during the peasants' revolt.

Münster

- Influenced by the visions and prophesies of Melchior Hoffman.
 - Melchior claimed to be a new Elijah and was imprisoned in Strasbourg
 - Taught that the ungodly would be killed and the saints would rule in cooperation with the second Jonah and second Solomon.
- 1532 Münster was declared an “Evangelical City” under Bernard Rothmann and Anabaptists began flocking there.
- Jan Mathijs took control of the city for six weeks.
 - Non baptists were expelled or were forcibly rebaptized.
 - Common property ownership was instituted
 - The use of money was banned.



Münster II

- Mathijs was killed fighting against the besieging bishop's army (No divine protection from the weapons of the godless.)
- Jan of Leiden took over as the prophet and became tyrannical
- Two separate attacks by the Bishops forces were repelled.
- Sinners were to be executed.
- Introduced polygamy to the city (wanted to marry Mathijs widow and there was a gender imbalance in the city)
- June 25, 1535 the city was betrayed, invaded and most inhabitants were slaughtered.
- A common lesson: Anabaptist beliefs leads to Müntzer and Münster

Legacies

- Future Anabaptists withdrew from the world but no longer attempted “militant, millenarian communalism.”
- Menno Simons established the Mennonites in the Netherlands and Northern Germany – strongly pacifist.
- Jacob Hutter formed the Hutterites in Moravia.
- Both groups moved to North America and promoted religious toleration, liberty, religious pluralism, and separation of church and state.
- The Radical Reformation was “a chorus of protest against the clergy, secular authorities, and Reformers” fueled by disappointment over the timidity or slow pace of reform, and pushing for a utopian intention and the praxis of Reformation ideals.” Lindberg

Next Week

- John Calvin – Genevan Crucible