

The Birth of Anabaptism—Report on Early Rebaptisms (January 30-February 7, 1525)

Abstract

Starting in the mid-1520s, the leaders of the young Protestant movement faced a constellation of opponents who were united by two basic beliefs. First, they insisted on the validity of adult baptism alone (Anabaptist = re-baptizer); and second, they recognized only the voluntary, gathered congregation and opposed official churches of any kind. Anabaptists appeared in Thuringia, Upper Swabia, Tyrol, and Switzerland. Many subsequently migrated to the Low Countries or Moravia to escape persecution, the most serious of which lasted for about a decade. Anabaptists were widely (and in the main falsely, with one exception) believed to advocate violent revolution—a charge that led them to be implicated in the German Peasants' War. The following account describes some of the first Zurich-area rebaptisms performed by Anabaptist leaders Georg Blaurock (1491–1529) and Felix Manz (c. 1498–1527). Their activities were roundly condemned by the Zurich City Council, which investigated the two, and ultimately made adult rebaptism punishable by death. Manz was executed in 1527 for his role in rebaptism; Blaurock was burned at the stake two years later.

Source

Hearing Concerning Blaurock and Felix Manz

Rudy Thoman von Zollikon gives his answer: He wanted to eat the last [meal before their departure] with the old helper [Johannes Brötli] and the man from Wittikon [Wilhelm Röubli] and invited them to his house and otherwise knew of no one else [having been invited]; [but] many others came in addition, so that the room was full. And among other things, they spoke with each other and read for a long time, and then Hans Bruggbach from Zumigen stood up, sobbing, and he cried that he was a great sinner and asked that they all pray to God on his behalf. Then Blaurock asked him whether he yearned for the grace of God, and he answered yes. Then Manz stood up and said, “Who will prevent me from baptizing him?” And Blaurock answered, “No one!” And so he took a tub of water and baptized him in the name of God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. After which Jacob Hottinger stood up and asked to be baptized. Felix Manz baptized him as well. And then the others all went away, and Manz and Blaurock stayed with him [Thoman] overnight. The next day, they arose early. Then Blaurock said to his [Thoman's] son-in-law, Marx [Boßhart]: “Until now, you have been a merry young man, and now you must become a new person. Set aside the old Adam and take on a new one and better yourself [1. Cor. 15, 45–53; Eph. 4, 22–27].” Marx answered that he wanted to do his best. Then Blaurock asked whether he desired the grace of God. And when he answered yes, Blaurock said, “Come here, I want to baptize you, too.” And Marx went to him, and Blaurock baptized him. And then Blaurock said to him [Thoman] that he was an old man and nearing death, and that he should better himself, too, and that if he desired the grace of God, he [Blaurock] would baptize him as well. And when he said yes, he baptized him, too. After which, Blaurock wanted to have no rest until he had baptized the whole household. [And now Thoman] asks my lords to do the best to him [i.e., to show him mercy], for neither before nor afterwards did he ever have any dealings with them [i.e., Anabaptists] except for that one night. He has also never confessed to be one of them.

He said further, that when they had the bread on the table, Blaurock said, “Whoever believes that God has saved him through His death and red-colored blood, let him come and eat with me from this bread and drink with me from this wine.” Then some [of them] ate from the bread and drank of the wine.

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Source of original German text: *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, edited by Leonard von Muralt and Walter Schmid. Volume 1. Zurich: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1952, pp. 42–43.

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