



page 689/9 Anabaptist

§ 29

The Anabaptists deliberately opposed the results of this compromise, and in so doing they also opposed the ~~whole idea of the Church, and of an ecclesiastical civilization.~~ This violent opposition, however, proves that in reality it had been caused by the Reformation itself. This is also proved by its apocalyptic-eschatological temper, an element which we do not find in the earlier evangelical sects. On this point the Anabaptist movement

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was in agreement with Luther, who felt that he could only interpret such a collapse of the whole ecclesiastical tradition from the point of view of the approaching End of the World, and the coming Antichrist, who had been proclaimed by prophecy.

page 699 Eschatological hopes,

To the Baptists, with their principle of small voluntary communities, separate from the world, this attitude seemed quite natural, for it was only possible to combine the idea of the world-wide dominion of Christ with the break-up of Christendom into small groups of this kind which separate themselves from the degenerate Church of the people, on the assumption that the great falling away of the masses, and the gathering up of Christendom into a small group of

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believers, prophesied in the Apocalypse, had already begun. It was only after these eschatological hopes had been raised that certain individual groups proceeded to try to erect the Heavenly Jerusalem by force.

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GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT

In fact, under the stimulus of the Reformation, on every hand there sprang into existence an enormous number of small groups of earnest Christians, living apart from "the world", claiming complete civil and religious freedom, whose main ideal was the formation of religious communities composed of truly "converted" persons, on a basis of voluntary membership. Their outward symbol of membership was Adult Baptism, which implied the voluntary principle. They

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rejected Infant Baptism, with its implications of an all-inclusive, non-ethical basis of Church membership. Another characteristic external sign was the demand for Church discipline, and authority to excommunicate, which was closely related to the demand for "a pure Church". They did not accept the ecclesiastical doctrine of the Sacrament. To them the Lord's Supper was mainly a festival of Christian fellowship, and an expression of personal faith in Christ. Thus they were classed with the "Sakramentierier". 1/ Their

1/ cont. Zwingli, Karlstadt, Oecolampadius, Schwenkfeld, and others. - Translator's note. (3)

real strength, however, lay in the emphasis which they gave to their desire to be a "holy community", "holy" in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount, and implying a voluntary community composed of mature Christians. In practice this "holiness" was expressed in the following ways: in detachment from the State, from all official positions, from law, force, and the oath, and from war, violence, and capital punishment; the quiet endurance of suffering

1/ Luther's epithet for those who denied the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He applied it particularly to men like

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ing and injustice as their share in the Cross of Christ, the intimate social relationship of the members with each other through care for the poor and the provision of relief funds, so that within these groups no one was allowed to beg or to starve; strict control over the Church members through the exercise of excommunication and congregational discipline. Their form of worship was a simple service, purely Scriptural in character, conducted by elected preachers and pastors who had been ordained by the laying-on of hands, and prayer by the synods representing the

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local groups. They also accepted the moral Law of Nature, but they opposed the relative conception accepted by the Church, the compromise of Natural Law with Original Sin. Like their mediaeval predecessors, they interpreted the Law of Nature as the absolute Natural Law of the Primitive State; from this interpretation they sometimes deduced conclusions which were as revolutionary as those proclaimed by the followers of Wyclif and Huss. In general, however, they held that it was impossible to carry out the Natural Law, and the Law of Christ with which they identified it, in the world, because the world is of the devil, and



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is the scene of suffering and endurance until the Advent of Christ, from which the faithful are to prepare themselves by separation from it.

page 697 Baptist Mov.: life of world = organ of love

They had an extremely high, almost Utopian ethical ideal. They had renounced the Catholic system of stages, and had given up the hierarchical authoritative direction of souls, but their great desire was to penetrate the whole mass of the population equally with the miracle of the strict Christian ethic of life, and thus to make the life of the world the direct organ of the love which religion inspires.

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