

Workshop 3

Our Forgotten Cousins: The Story of the Anabaptists

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Introduction

Story of the martyrdom of Michael and Margaretha Sattler in May 1527

- A. The heart of the Anabaptist witness was the notion of a gathered church, a voluntary society separate from political or ecclesiastical structures. This led to
1. radical separation from the world;
 2. rigorous application of church discipline;
 3. emphasis on works as the necessary corollary of faith; and
 4. rejection of the predestinarianism of the mainline reformers.
- B. The Anabaptists were part of the Radical Reformation, and what they were teaching was to their contemporaries extremely radical. Radical in three senses:
1. Their radical passion for their beliefs;
 2. Their radical refusal to defend their countries; and
 3. Their radical espousal of separation of church and state.
- C. The response of the majority of their contemporaries was bewilderment, leading to chagrin, ending in violence.

D. As dear as the Anabaptist story should be to us and as much as we should respect and admire their courageous stand, the Anabaptists breathed different air from the later Baptists and maintained a very different posture relative to the wider society. They are our closest cousins, but they are not our fathers. We can learn from them, but we did not descend from them. This is evident from the following facts:

1. Early Baptists did not view themselves as Anabaptists;
2. The key early Baptist leaders did not come from the Anabaptists; and
3. Baptists did not view culture and their place in it as the Anabaptists did.

Conclusion

While recognizing our distinct origins and more biblical perspectives, we Baptists should celebrate the heroism, theological breakthroughs, and godly motives of our forgotten cousins, the Anabaptists, men and women who drenched Europe with their blood primarily for standing for precisely what we today stand for: a regenerated church answering to Christ alone.