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Against the World: *The Doctrine of Separation* Within the Political Context of the Origins of Swiss Anabaptism



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There has been a longstanding argument in Anabaptist studies between revisionist scholars, who tend to emphasize the social and material context of the Radical Reformation, and traditional scholars, who tend to focus on the theological ideas of these communities.

The former have been more prone to describe a polygenetic origin of Anabaptism, whereas the latter argue for a monogenetic and theologically uniform tradition. Recently, Andrea Strubind revived this old debate by resurrecting a version of the theologically uniform theory, exciting, at least in part, a sustained response from Arnold Snyder in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. As Snyder summarizes, Strubind argues that the origins of the Swiss Anabaptists “must be read and described primarily as a theological narrative, and, further, that when read through the lens of historical theology, Swiss Anabaptism displayed a separatist, ‘free church’ ecclesiology from the start, in unbroken continuity from the early Zurich radicals to the Schleithem Articles.”¹ In contrast to this view, however, Snyder seeks to proffer a reading that cuts a middle path between the monochrome and polygenetic arguments, reconciling a notion of continuity with local inconsistencies of thought and action in his account of the origins of Swiss Anabaptism, particularly on the issue of separation from the world.

Using Snyder’s essay to set the context for discussion, this paper will argue that, though many scholars are generally in agreement with his essay,

Snyder's account gives insufficient attention to the broader political context that sets the backdrop for the decisive break in 1523 between Zwingli and the Swiss radicals who had to that point been his followers. Following Abraham Friesen, I will contend instead that attending more closely to this larger political setting provides a better understanding of what the radicals took to be at stake in their ecclesial break from the framework of Christendom. Consequently, I argue that because he fails to include the larger political context, Snyder is unable to grasp the source of the radicals' frustration and the political horizon to which they reacted. Thus, he cannot ultimately offer a satisfactory explanation of the theological perspective that precipitated the Anabaptists' call for separation from the world of Christendom. The key political catalyst for their rejection of and secession from the world of Christendom, and the essential event Snyder's study elides, is the Nuremberg Edict of 1523, as Friesen has pointed out, with its contradictory mandate that the "holy gospel be preached" but "no changes be made in the church services."²

This paper will explore how the edict not only initiated the division between Zwingli and his more radical followers but also set the political backdrop within which various proto-Anabaptist conceptions of separation emerged. Only when one understands the "world" from which these early Swiss Anabaptists felt the need to separate themselves from traditional Christendom can one see the Anabaptists' attempt to enact the material and social changes which they believed were required by the gospel. They would make limited use of local authorities while simultaneously opposing the larger order. Recognizing that the edict destroyed the structural possibility for enacting the changes put forward by the radicals allows one to understand why they saw the need to separate themselves from the governmental authorities of this sullied and recalcitrant corpus Christianum and why they began to turn their attention more directly to rural communities and smaller villages.³

As can be seen from Snyder's mediating approach, the weight of evidence in recent studies of the Radical Reformation has established the connection between the emergence of Anabaptist communities and the social, economic, material, and political context of the early sixteenth century.⁴ Not only have these studies pointed to the links between the Anabaptists and the peasants' uprising of 1525, but they have also elucidated the way in which these people drew off of the lay impulses and implications within the

Reformation message in an attempt to embody them. It is quite certain that Anabaptism, in its various strains, sprang from a context wherein "The reception of Luther's ideas fused with the pervasive concern for a new ordering of the whole of society. Ecclesiastical or scriptural concerns such as those for the free preaching of Scripture and the right of communities to appoint their own pastor were quite inseparable from social and political ones."⁵

Against the old prevailing divides of Radical Reformation scholarship, which tended to emphasize either the doctrinal development of the Anabaptists over the material conditions that gave rise to the movement or vice versa, it now seems more likely that what would become Anabaptism actually formed somewhere in the middle. One can appropriately say of this movement that "where egalitarian yearnings surfaced, they were invariably couched in biblical terms. The aim was to make 'all Christians equal,' to hold all things in common."⁶ Any attempt to understand the birth of the Swiss Anabaptists, therefore, must begin with an explication of their social imaginary,⁷ that is, by considering the theological ideas and the material and social conditions of the world they inhabited.

In a broad sketch, theologically, there was a strong focus on the proximity and accessibility of Christ at this time, a theme that had become a feature of the popular imagination since at least the time of the Hussite revolution and even Francis of Assisi. Much of the art of this era depicts the humanity of Jesus, "demonstrating that Christ was accessible to all, not just the clergy, [and] was to be everywhere."⁸

One dramatic image that appeared in Bern during Lent in 1522 illustrates the prominence of this theological perspective. It depicted Christ on one side of an alley, amid a throng of poor and vulnerable folk, riding on a donkey and wearing a crown of thorns. He was juxtaposed to "a martial three-crowned 'pope' surrounded by a pompous procession of cavalry and footmen, drums and trumpets." As explained by an associated pamphlet, which appeared later in 1525, this image not only aroused the ire of the peasants who "realized they were being fleeced of their money by the pope," but also pointed them to the fact that "the humble rider on the donkey was '[their] highest treasure, sweet, mild, and merciful, the eternal father's word, who has invited [them] to the heavenly supper in the highest king's hall.'⁹ Theologically, Christ stood not with the honor, power, and wealth of the pope and the clergy, but he could be found among the poor and the suffering. Christ was fully human, and his gospel was for the common person.

At the same time the material and social conditions, which set the stage for the birth of Anabaptism both in Switzerland and the German states, were particularly difficult for the peasants. The heavy yoke of serfdom; tax increases; restrictions on common lands, streams, and the game that filled them; restrictions on marriage; and a growing population all converged upon the suffering peasants, nearly pushing them to the breaking point. As Peter Blickle writes, detailing the agrarian crisis of the time,

Gradually, through the fifteenth century, the farmer's position worsened, and this process accelerated in the decades before 1525 because usage rights were restricted, services were increased, and tax burdens fell with full effect on the farming enterprises. Even though the lively market for agricultural products around 1500 meant that market-oriented peasants could make higher profits than before, the resulting situation for most peasants must have been miserable. The fact that these extra burdens were experienced as innovations could only further antagonize the peasant and sharpen the conflict.¹⁰

While occasionally the princes, monasteries, and lords made small concessions to the peasants, these rulers refused to initiate any substantial changes. The peasants soon began to respond in their own ways to the economic and political crisis they faced. Although an economic and political crisis alone would not likely have been enough to rouse the expectations of the peasants toward an all-out revolt, the ideals they soon discovered in Reformation teaching would supply the imaginative momentum for an insurrection of considerable proportion. Even more than putting forward a mere list of demands, in the minds of the common folk the Reformation encompassed "a vision of a world in which reform would come from below, based on divine justice."¹¹

These two factors coalesced in the reading of Scripture, which would become the source of the call for change sought by the radicals. It was in the reading of Scripture that the peasants and common folk found not only the precious treasure of the beggar-God, the Word incarnate, but they also discovered the powerful sociopolitical resource of the divine law. The rediscovery of the gospel opened up by the Reformation evinced the recovery of the unique authority of the Scriptures for all human action. The Scriptures were not simply to be understood spiritually; they were to be lived out in personal, social, and political life.¹² Hence, the center of the peasants'

uprising, the foundation of their critique of the clergy, lords, and monasteries, and the source of their vision of the new community that could emerge on the other side of this crisis was the divine, enfleshed Word of Christ who could be found in the Scriptures when they were read in the Spirit. Thus, "This could not be called a populist gospel any more than it was a Biblicist one. The Christ of the poor who emerged was also the Christ of the Gospels. The marginalized of the sixteenth century woke to find themselves central to the message of the prophets, the apostles and Jesus."¹³ Having suffered under imperial rule and Curial policy, the peasants found in the Scriptures a powerful message and new divine law to counter the status quo theology and political structure of the ancient régime.

Only within this context can one begin to understand the birth of Swiss Anabaptism and the progression of its development. This approach to Scripture engendered the movement that began with Ulrich Zwingli, who was appointed priest of the Great Minster of Zurich in 1519, and blossomed, via a circuitous route, into Swiss Anabaptism. The gospel was the "bedrock" of the Zurich Reformation, and it was to remain the foundation for the Anabaptist movement that was to emerge a few years later.¹⁴

Operating from this foundation, Zwingli's reading of Scripture elicited strong invectives from his pulpit against the false piety of the clergy and the shortcomings of the Church.¹⁵ Consequently, under the tutelage of Zwingli, his followers began to provoke and harass the clergy with a series of actions as early as the spring of 1522.¹⁶ Moreover, Zwingli's reading of scripture and his "attacks on traditional pious practices led to the defiant 'Wurstessen'—the ceremonial eating of two sausages by about a dozen people on March 9, 1522, in contravention of the Lenten fast."¹⁷ Christopher Froschauer, a publisher who partook in the act, reasoned in his defence before the town council that "we must direct our lives and actions by the rule of the Gospel else we are not Christians . . ."¹⁸ While it is clear that Zwingli did not partake in this demonstration, he did attend. His teaching of the Scriptures continued to cause problems for the clergy over the next several months. Convinced by the necessity of the Reformation, Zwingli's preaching and teaching of the newly rediscovered gospel essentially promoted the continued progress of reform by encouraging the critique of priests and monks, the disruption of sermons, the desecration of images, and eventually a refusal to pay tithes.¹⁹

While some of the actions of Zwingli's followers clearly display their willingness, even at this early stage, to press the reform all the way to an

attack on church structures, it is clear from the evidence that Zwingli had not yet distanced himself from these radicals at this point in 1522.²⁰ The rupture between the radicals and their teacher did not come until a year later.

In 1523, as Snyder notes, Zwingli accused his radical followers of wanting to establish what he called a "special church."²¹ Although it is not clear within Snyder's account what exactly precipitated this break, the roots of this division become visible if one considers the wider political horizon. The break between Zwingli and his followers, who later became the founders of Swiss Anabaptism, was not merely a disagreement over the interpretation of Scripture and a desire to separate in order to form a pure church, but was a necessary step in the minds of these radicals in the pursuit of divine law. That is to say, the radicals' instinct to separate was driven by the larger political powers, which intentionally set out to drive a wedge between the preaching of the gospel and the sociopolitical implications of living it out. It was dissatisfaction with this distinction that pressed the radicals to separate from a worldly political and ecclesial establishment set against the divine law and the structural changes it required. Zwingli, however, was unwilling to go this far.

As noted above, while it is clear that there was no break between Zwingli and his radical followers in the spring of 1522, a division is visible in the disputations between them in the later months of 1523, the fissures of which began to emerge between the First Zurich Disputation of that year and the Second Disputation in December. By the latter, as Goertz notes, "passions were roused, and the result was the polarization of the Zwinglian camp" because the radicals "felt that they had been abandoned by Zwingli," prompting them to "[resolve] to pursue their own, radical path."²² In a letter written to his friend on December 18, 1523, Grebel was to go so far as to say that the council and Zwingli together "have disregarded the divine will" in their caution, preferring instead a lukewarm "middle ground" devised with "diabolical prudence" such that the "Word was overthrown."²³

While Snyder recognizes the growing tension between Zwingli and his followers at this time, the actual events that stimulated and facilitated this division remain shrouded in mystery by his account. Arguing correctly that "Zwingli's public support for a centralized, government-led reform marked a key divisive moment within the reform movement, separating the populist reforming group from the more conservative, elitist movement led by Zwingli

and controlled by the council," Snyder, however, seems to assume that this division sprung merely from an interpretive argument over the reading of Scripture, paying scant attention to the larger political atmosphere.²⁴ As a result, Snyder's picture of Zwingli portrays a figure that seems strikingly inconsistent in 1523 with his arguments and positions in 1522.²⁵ In this respect, the rupture within the reform camp of Zurich appears to be the result of a whimsical turn in Zwingli's understanding of the message of Scripture, a turn that cannot be understood, in Snyder's telling, because it emerges in a political vacuum.

The decisive aspect of Zwingli's outlook that initiates the disagreement between him and his radical followers is the role of the city council in the life and reform of the church.²⁶ Such is evident in the solidification of his conservative position over the course of the year 1523 between the two disputations. To grasp what was at stake in this disagreement from the side of the radicals, attention must be given to the broader imperial backdrop. When this larger context is considered, one can see that the essential disagreement behind this argument is not merely the role of the council in the life and reform of the church, but more importantly, it is the nature of the function carved out for the council by the imperial edict of 1523. It was a concern over this function that prompted the move toward separation pursued by the radicals.

Before the release of this edict, the outbreak of the Reformation throughout the German and Swiss states had engendered a response from the Vatican. Though the Diet of Worms had earlier ruled on the error of Luther's teaching, it had succeeded little in quelling the rapid explosion of his ideas in the churches under the safety of Prince Frederick of Saxony, one of the head figures of the Imperial Diet's Governing Council (*Reichsregiment*). As a result, Pope Adrian VI called a Diet at Nuremberg in 1522 both to deal with the increasing spread of Luther's teaching and to consider the need for reform within the Catholic Church.

Freely acknowledging the corruption of the Catholic Church and openly calling for its reform, the council also called Frederick, as one of its own, to account. "On January 20, 1522, the *Reichsregiment* in Nürnberg ordered Frederick to stop Protestant innovations in the Mass, the flight of monks and nuns from their cloisters, and the marriage of priests in electoral Saxony."²⁷ This admonishment was not completely lost on Frederick, who was already disinclined to the ecclesial and social changes and quickly

announced a “reiteration on Feb 13 that ‘disputation, writing, and preaching’ were permitted ways to reform, not formal ‘innovations’ (Newerung) and tumult.”²⁸ Enshrining his own approach to the Luthersache (the Luther problem), this policy was pushed through the *Reichsregiment* by Frederick’s own representative, Hans von der Planitz, against the opposition of the Catholic ecclesiastical princes.²⁹ Once ratified in the form of an imperial edict, Frederick moved quickly, having it “communicated to the nuncio on February 8, 1523, [and] published to the Empire on March 6 as a resolution issued in the name of the Emperor,”³⁰ disseminating it to the principalities and free imperial cities of the realm. Moreover, it seems that Zwingli and Fabri were both aware of the discussions of the diet as they composed their own arguments for the contemporaneous First Disputation in Zurich.³¹

In its mandate, the edict instituted the deep tension that lay in Frederick’s own approach to the Reformation. First, the teaching and preaching of the holy gospel was to be encouraged. Second, and at the same time, the hostile and disruptive actions of the radicals seeking to implement the life depicted in these teachings were to be squelched. The mandate read:

Every elector, prince, prelate, count and other estate or realm shall, with all possible diligence, so order and decree that all preachers in his territory are justly and equitably advised to avoid everything that might lead to disobedience, dissention and revolt in the holy empire, or that might cause Christians to be led astray (in their faith). Instead, they are to preach and teach only the holy Gospel and that in accordance with the interpretation of the Scriptures as approved and accepted by the holy Christian Church.³²

Explicitly commanding that the pace and trajectory of reform be the charge of the rulers, the mandate admonished them to proceed with no innovations until the Nuremberg Council could agree on further steps. For the radicals caught on the horns of this contradiction, abiding by the first part of the edict’s mandate necessitated in their minds disobedience to the second. Operating from their perspective, was it not infidelity to the gospel not to immediately apply its teachings to what they had been instructed to see as a Christian society?

It is against this backdrop that one must consider the development of Swiss Anabaptism, as it was the contradictory dictates of the Nuremberg Edict that provided the political horizon upon which both Zwingli and his

radical followers thought and acted. The imperial policy, which made no provision for liturgical, economic, social, or clerical restructuring—all the while conceding merely the possibility for preaching and formal disputation as the only route to spiritual reform—struck at the heart of the full message of what these radicals had come to see as the gospel. Hence, though Zwingli was willing to remain within this political order and abide by its established policy, his radical followers were not so compliant.³³

By the summer of 1523, cracks were beginning to emerge around the issue of paying the tithe, leading Grebel to grumble in a letter to Vadian on July 15 that “the people of our world of Zurich are doing everything tyrannically and like the Turk in this matter of the tithes.”³⁴ Yet, indicating his own ambivalence toward Zwingli and the fact that his eye was on Nuremberg, he penned a letter the next day (July 16) recommending Zwingli’s *Schlussreden* (exposition) to Vadian and suggesting the distribution of three hundred copies in the imperial city.³⁵ His concern is obvious even as he remains attached to his mentor. How could one accept the corrupted state of Christendom exposed by the light of the gospel and yet look to that same corrupt structure as the shepherd of renovation? The vision of a truly Christian society provided in the gospel was a direct challenge to the sociopolitical and ecclesiastical order of Christendom affirmed in the edict. For the radicals, it simply defied a configuration of the world no longer inhabitable by faithful followers of the gospel. The true gospel, for them, could not be separated from the reforms necessary to live in accord with divine law.

Divergent receptions of the edict thus sparked the conflict between Zwingli and his radical followers, shaking Zurich.³⁶ That the emerging policies of the Nuremberg Diet, which was in session at the time, comprised the backdrop of the First Zurich Disputation between Zwingli and Johann Fabri is well established, even to the point of influencing the Zurich Mandate of January 29, 1523. As Abraham Friesen reports, “At the first disputation in January 1523, and in some of John Fabri’s later comments on that discussion, it is clear that not only did Zwingli and Fabri make numerous references to this law, but Zurich also had its representatives at the Diet itself.”³⁷ Further evidence of the policy’s impact on Zurich is obvious in the fact that the edict also shaped the later mandates of the neighboring Swiss cities of Bern and Basel.³⁸

Though published formally on March 6, the imperial edict was already in circulation as early as January of 1523, imposing political limits on the

reforms and forcing all would-be reformers to move more slowly or give up their offices. While Zwingli was willing to settle for simply preaching the Reformation gospel instead of seeking to enact its message throughout the whole of life, his radical followers were not so contented.³⁹ From their perspective, the powers issuing this command and all those who agreed with it had jettisoned the true and full gospel. As Friesen argues, from their point of view “the church had become the world,” and as such had displaced the foundation of *sola scriptura* with the false truth of the establishment.⁴⁰ Thus, when Zwingli commenced upon a substantial “reinterpretation” of his earlier conclusions to align them with imperial policy, some of “his followers, on the other hand, proceeded to induce an entirely new model of church and society from the very same scriptural truths.”⁴¹

From this larger standpoint, the division between Zwingli and his radical followers makes more sense. The more Zwingli began to play by the rules of the political order behind the edict, turning to the council of Zurich to determine the pace and practice of reform, the greater the division between him and his followers grew.⁴² Against this political horizon, one can understand why, as even Snyder notes, “Zwingli’s public theological apology for Zurich’s centralization of power drove the thin edge of the wedge between him and his populist followers, and marked the beginning of a serious rift in the Zurich reforming front.”⁴³ It was a rift that would grow throughout the various disputations of the year 1523, and would eventually give birth to a separate community distinct from the official church.⁴⁴

By the end of 1523, Grebel was disillusioned with Zwingli, writing, “Whoever thinks, believes, or declares that Zwingli acts according to the duty of a shepherd thinks, believes, and declares wickedly.”⁴⁵ And coincidentally, Zwingli, frustrated with the antics of the radicals, declared them “the worst enemies of the teachings of God.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, these radicals soon found common cause with the rural peasant communities operating on the fringe of the social and political world of the empire. Reacting to the political establishment solidified in the edict, these radicals discovered that their only alternative was to enact reform their own way: from the margins of power against the “world” of Christendom. It is easy to see, then, that

When Grebel and other friends in the town spoke out against Zwingli and marched with Reublin and Stumpf, they made the rebellious goals of the rural communes their own and merged their anticlerical struggle

with a political battle: the radicals formed themselves into a religious and social-revolutionary movement. For this early period . . . it is almost impossible to distinguish between the rebelling peasants and those who would emerge as Anabaptists after 1525.⁴⁷

Hence, while it is by no means the case that there was one solidified theology among these radicals, especially concerning the use of force, one finds a strongly unified and shared conclusion regarding the need to enact the measures of reform against the standing imperial order and its policy. That is to say, they agreed on the problem.

Thus, one can see that Snyder is both correct and incorrect to assert that the letter written by these radicals to Thomas Müntzer was a “mulligan stew” of views and by no means a solidified and agreed-upon statement of a proto-Anabaptist faith.⁴⁸ While no one argues that each of these signees was in complete agreement on every point of the letter, one can firmly establish that they were theologically and sociopolitically unified in their opposition to the implications of the edict. They were also unified in their desire to cut an alternative course that more closely adhered to the political and social enactment of the divine law—the public and corporate performance of Christ. The center of this movement, then, was not a completely unified view of baptism or nonviolence. Instead, it was a radically social gospel that directly challenged the traditional hierarchical society strongly confirmed in the imperial edict.⁴⁹ Their plan, as they would write to Müntzer later, was to “create a Christian church with the help of Christ and his rule such as we find instituted in Matthew 18.”⁵⁰ Political and ecclesial separation was, thus, the only alternative.

Contrary to a top-down doctrinal approach operating from pre-established theological conclusions and a safe location, these radicals were working out their theological conclusions within a context where separation from the traditional church and the empire was, in fact, a political necessity since they had no place of their own to start afresh. This reality played out in the lives of Grebel and Brotli, who wavered on the proper way forward from different locations while recognizing the absolute necessity for separation from the order of Christendom.⁵¹

Against Strubind’s depiction, which tends to present an apolitical picture of the emergence of Swiss Anabaptism, Snyder emphasizes the fact that these radicals were “not ‘apolitical.’ From the beginning, the radical

Zwinglians were not only engaged in resolving 'religious' issues, but also social, economic, and political issues that related to their understanding of a biblical church and its place in society.⁵² Furthermore, it has become clear from investigating the break between Zwingli and his followers that the larger political situation facilitated a peculiar type of break by setting the surrounding context and, thereby, defining the nature of the separation from the world they took to be necessary. Hence, one can say against the revisionists that "the rebels' political agenda was not national and 'ahead of its time,'"⁵³ but instead, drew upon the social and political possibilities of its day to respond to the challenge to the gospel they perceived in the solidification of the status quo of the edict. Coincidentally, one can assert contrary to the traditionalists that "the religious imagination of the Reformers . . . 'took no prisoners' and recognized no limits. It threatened to take over not only the realm of spirit, the intellect, and social mores but to challenge the authority of both church and state."⁵⁴

In conclusion, enlightened much by Abraham Friesen's work, my study offers a new perspective on the origins of Swiss Anabaptism and its emerging view of separation. Siding neither completely with Strubind, who tends to emphasize the theological unity of the radicals even at the time of the "Letter to Thomas Müntzer," nor with Snyder, who focuses upon the variance of viewpoints between these figures, this essay points, instead, to the need to consider the broader political context in order to understand the origins of this movement. Arguing that the germination of Swiss Anabaptism occurs within the context set by the political horizon of the Nuremberg Edict, one can better understand what precipitated the break of these radicals from Zwingli along with the unified position they held on the necessity of separation. As a result, the arguments of both Strubind and Snyder can be woven together in a way that allows quite a bit of room for differences among these radicals on the ground level where the reliance on local authorities and use of violence played out while maintaining that they still held to a broadly conceived but unified belief in the necessity of separation from the world.

For these radicals, separation from the world, understood within the broader framework of the political order of Christendom, operated by seeking to create a distance inside the dominating structures even while it was being worked out in the daily, local life of their communities. In contrast to the route preferred by Zwingli (and Luther) that sought to pursue reform through the structures of the political world of the empire, for these radicals

“their own community became in consequence a ‘counter-world,’ the prototype of a better society.”⁵⁵ Without a fully conceptualized notion of what this alternative “counter-world” should be, it was natural that there were varying opinions and wavering positions as it was being worked out on the ground in the interstices of the empire. However, this does not imply that there was no theological nor sociopolitical and ecclesial unity to the radicals’ movement. The unity was one derived in opposition to the top-down process of reform instituted by the edict, a process that the radicals saw as only rectifying the status quo and, therefore, anathema to the real gospel. Joined in their hostility to this program, the radicals of the emerging movement of Swiss Anabaptism began to formulate a doctrine of separation from the world as an alternative to the dominant structure of Christendom. This view makes better sense of why “the Anabaptists only decided on total separation when all hope of steering the Reformation in their own direction had vanished.”⁵⁶ As stated previously, the possibility of relying on the Reformation to bring forth a full institution of the divine law vanished with the issuance of the Nuremberg Edict. As a result, to live out the gospel fully, the Anabaptists determined that a form of ecclesial and political separation from the world was the only possibility left. Consequently, while the radicals who stood at the origins of Swiss Anabaptism did not share one theological catechism or a standard course of action, they were nonetheless unified in their theological aspirations.

Notes

1 C. Arnold Snyder, “The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80:4 (2006): 501.

2 Abraham Friesen, *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer Between Luther, Erasmus, and the Holy Spirit a Study in the Problem Areas of Menno Scholarship* (Xlibris, 2015), 76, 3-39; and “Response to Snyder’s ‘The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism,’” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80:4 (2006): 668.

3 While it goes beyond the purview of the present essay, I should note here that I do believe the Anabaptist call for ecclesial and political separation to be intimately connected to the apocalypticism widely prevalent in their teaching. The Anabaptists, as can be seen vividly with Müntzer, saw themselves as connected to the apocalyptic inbreaking of God into the world and the resultant disruption of Christendom.

4 See Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady Jr. and H.C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003); Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1996); Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001); C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002) and "The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism," *MQR* 80:4 (2006): 501-645; and James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

5 Matheson, *The Imaginative World*, 66. The preaching of the gospel was provoking social upheaval and inclined the bishop of Constance, Hugo von Hohenlandenberg, to issue an admonition to the Great Minster of Zurich on May 24, 1522, insisting that the authority of the church should be maintained along with its rituals, ceremonies, practices, and ordinances or "all political order would fall to the ground" (Samuel Macauley Jackson, trans. and ed., *Ulrich Zwingli: Early Writings* [Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987], 214).

6 *Ibid.*, 56.

7 See chapter 4, "Modern Social Imaginaries," of Charles Taylor's monumental work, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 159-211, and his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) for a full discussion of this concept. Taylor uses this term to capture the notion of the range of possibilities available within a specific historical context limited and formed by the material conditions and the conceptual ideals of a community that together nurture its vision of the past, present and future.

8 Matheson, *The Imaginative World*, 29.

9 *Ibid.*, 4-5, citing Niklaus Manuel, *Ein Fassnacht spyl/ so zu Bernn uff// der Herren Fassnacht in den M.D. XXII./ jar/ von burgers sünen gemacht ist . . .* Fiche 938/2345, 1525.

10 Blickle, *The Revolution*, 51. For a full discussion of the economic, social and political background of this period, see Blickle's discussion in "The Twelve Articles and Their Economic, Social, and Political Background," 25-57.

11 Matheson, *The Imaginative World*, 9.

12 Stayer, *The German*, 49-50.

13 Matheson, *The Imaginative World*, 47, (emphasis added).

14 This emphasis is obvious in many of Zwingli's writings from the time. In his letter to Myconius on July 24, 1520, Zwingli speaks of "a renaissance of Christ and the gospel" having come through the return to Scripture, and of his intent to host a Bible study "with some beginners" in the coming months. See Leland Harder, ed., *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 113-115. See also Snyder, "The Birth," 504. Interestingly enough, Snyder does not mention the role of Erasmus' translations and "Paraphrases" of Scripture at all—even though his influence was strong in Zurich at this time, impacting Zwingli profoundly. See Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

15 See, for instance, Zwingli's essay, expanded from a sermon he preached on March 23, 1522, "Concerning Choice and Liberty Respecting Food" in Jackson, *Zwingli: Early Writings*, 70-112.

16 Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 8-9. An account written by Bernhard Wyss on July 7, 1522, indicates Zwingli's own involvement, or at least close relation, to these disturbances. See Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 172-176.

17 Snyder, "The Birth," 505.

18 Carter Lindberg, ed., *The European Reformations Sourcebook* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 106.

19 Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 9.

20 Snyder, "The Birth," 505.

21 *Ibid.*, 522. In his recollection of the separation, Zwingli says that Stumpf and Grebel had approached the leaders in Zurich, saying, "It has not escaped our attention that there will always be those who will resist the gospel, even among those who boast in the name of Christ. It is therefore never to be hoped that all souls will be so established in unity, as Christians should be permitted to live. According to the Acts of the Apostles, those who had believed separated from others, and then as others came to believe, they joined those who were already a new church. That is just what we must do" (Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 278).

22 Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 10.

23 Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 276.

24 Snyder, "The Birth," 513.

25 Snyder notes this inconsistency but attempts to lodge it solely within Zwingli's reading of Scripture. He says, "On the one hand, then, Zwingli maintained that obedience to God was primary (Acts 5:29). This was a key text for him in his struggle against the authority of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, 'Christian governments' had God-given authority in human matters (Romans 13), and the tithe was one such matter" ("The Birth," 511).

26 W. Peter Stephens, "The Theology of Zwingli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92.

27 Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 143.

28 *Ibid.*, 143-44. See also Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 11.

29 Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 75.

30 Johannes Janssen, *History of the German People at the Close of the Middle Ages*, vol. 3, trans. A.M. Christie, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), 329.

31 The disputation focuses intently on the fact that the ceremonies of the church are being challenged and disrupted by the radicals, a key component of the Diet's focus. For his own part, Zwingli calls for the "[admonishment of] all the priests who have benefices under Milords of Zurich or in their reigns that each one be studious and strive to read the holy Scriptures," a point that coincides nearly directly with the decision that ways to be promulgated in the edict. See Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 199, 202.

32 Quoted in Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 76. See also Janssen, *History of the German People*, 329, for a summation of the mandate.

33 Though it remains beyond the bounds of this study to pursue further how this was possible within Zwingli's thought, it may suffice to note his strong patriotism as one aspect of his willingness to acquiesce to this process of reform. Stephens notes that "his patriotism was expressed in his earliest surviving work, *The Ox*, an attack on Swiss mercenaries fighting for foreign powers" ("The Theology of Zwingli," 80).

34 Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 220.

35 *Ibid.*, 221.

36 Friesen, "Response," 669. The conflict, as Friesen notes, was not localized to Zurich, but instigated the strife in Allstedt between Müntzer and Ernst Count of Mansfeld. He states that "because of the imperial edict's emphasis on preaching 'only the holy Gospel,' the relationship between Anabaptism and the Peasant War is much closer than most scholars have thought" ("Response," 669; *Menno Simons*, 76-77).

37 Friesen, "Response," 668.

38 Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 34.

39 Zwingli's inclination to defer to the council is already evident in his "Sixty-Seven Articles," as in article 35 he states the "secular authority does have rightful power and is supported from the teaching and action of Christ . . ." Moreover, he continues in article 37, contending that "all Christians are obliged to be obedient [to these authorities], with no exceptions" (Lindberg, *European Reformations Sourcebook*, 113).

40 Friesen, "Response," 667.

41 Ibid.

42 See Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 11. The source of the frustration that engendered the break is evident in the report of the Second Zurich Disputation in October 1522. Exasperated with Zwingli's deference to the council in matters of reform, Simon Stumpf angrily replies, "Master Huldreich! You have no authority to place the decision in Milords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides. If therefore Milords were to discern and decide anything that is contrary to God's decision, I will ask Christ for his Spirit and will teach and act against it" (Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 242).

43 Snyder, "The Birth," 512.

44 Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 12.

45 Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 276.

46 Lindberg, *European Reformations Sourcebook*, 109.

47 Ibid., 11.

48 See Snyder, "The Birth," 526.

49 See Stayer, *The German*, 54.

50 Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 289.

51 For a discussion of the tortuous development of the theological perspectives held by Grebel and Brotli, see Snyder's account in "The Birth," 520-538.

52 Snyder, "The Birth," 538.

53 Stayer, *The German*, 32.

54 Matheson, *The Imaginative World*, 79.

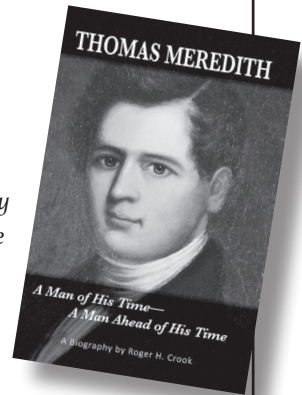
55 Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 14.

56 Ibid.

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