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Anabaptist Dramatic Readings

Written by Alan and Eleanor Kreider

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Alan and Eleanor Kreider are experienced teachers who have taught in schools and universities in North America and England. For thirty years as representatives of the Mennonite Mission Network they lived in England where they helped develop the Anabaptist Network: www.anabaptistnetwork.com. They now live in Elkhart, Indiana; emails: akreider@ams.edu, elkreider@frontier.com.

Introduction to Anabaptist Dramatic Readings

The Anabaptists are exciting! Christians of over 400 years ago have things to say to us and can change our lives. Are we ready to listen?

We discovered the Anabaptists' relevance as we, for ten years, traveled around England visiting Anabaptist Study Groups. For some years English Christians of many denominations have been discovering Anabaptism. Many of them are now members of study groups in the Anabaptist Network. They enjoy discussing their own lives and the lives of their congregations in light of Anabaptist writings. There is Anabaptist life in England!

We developed the Anabaptist Dramatic Readings in this collection for use by these English study groups. We chose topics that seemed important, and personalities that are colorful and reveal the variety of the early Anabaptist movement. We have based the readings on 16th-century historical sources and represent solid scholarship. But we have felt free to alter them. We have shortened most of the sources, often simplifying the language. In a few instances, we have written dramas that are our own, imaginatively entering into the situations of the early Anabaptists in order to bring them to life. We've always tried to be fair, both to the Anabaptists and their opponents.

When English people used these readings, how did they “work”? Pretty well. We discovered that people found it easier to deal with ideas when they meet the Anabaptists themselves. Further, we found that people enjoyed “playing” the stories. They didn't need to rehearse them or perform them with professional polish; they could simply stand up and read the texts. Some people read them quite coolly. Others allowed themselves to make faces, to express anger and pain, to gesture, whisper and sing. Almost always, the dramatic readings led to good discussions, and the participants had fun as they studied history. Baptists, Anglicans, Mennonites and Pentecostals said that the dramas helped them to develop a deeper sense of identity as Christians—as Anabaptist Christians.

Invariably, questions arose and we didn't always know the answers. For informational questions, good sources are available, and some of these are now online. Pride of place must go to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, now available as the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (www.gameo.org). An indispensable resource is C. Arnold Snyder's *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997) and should be in every Mennonite school library. Students may want to do further reading for class papers on topics growing out of the dramas. And the dramas raise questions that go beyond information. Can we allow ourselves to dialogue with the Anabaptists, questioning them in light of our experiences and letting them question us?

We returned to our native USA in 2000. Since then, we have used these dramatic readings in many settings—churches, small groups, seminary classes and schools. When the leaders of the Mennonite Education Agency experienced how these readings worked in the classroom, they encouraged us to prepare them for wider distribution. This collection of 24 readings is our response to their commission. We hope that you, wherever you find yourself, will find these dramas fascinating and useful. Most of all, we hope that they will inspire you. May you follow in Christ's footsteps with hope and joy.

Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider
May 6, 2011

Who are Alan and Eleanor Kreider?

Alan and Eleanor have been involved in the Mennonite church and Mennonite education for many years. From 1968-1972, they both taught at Goshen College: Eleanor in music and Alan in history. In 1974, after two years for historical research and musical training in England, they were appointed as Mennonite missionaries to England. Together, Alan and Eleanor were in charge of the London Mennonite Centre, 1974-1991. They also served as elders of Wood Green Mennonite Church in London. During these years Alan lectured part-time in church history at London School of Theology (formerly London Bible College).

From 1991 to 1995, Alan and Eleanor served as theologians-in-residence at the Northern Baptist College in Manchester, England. Alan also lectured in history at the University of Manchester.

In 1995, for their final five years in England, the Kreiders moved to Oxford, England. They were both members of the Theology Faculty of Oxford University and based at Regents Park College. Alan became the director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, and Eleanor taught liturgy and worship.

During the 1990s, the Kreiders taught and spoke in theological colleges and conferences in many countries, e.g. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Bible College of New Zealand; conferences in India, Japan, Indonesia and Australia. In 1993 Alan became the book review editor for *Anabaptism Today* and continued to serve in that role until 2000.

In 2000 Kreiders moved from Oxford to Elkhart, Ind., and have continued their work as traveling teachers, speakers and mission educators for the Mennonite Mission Network. Alan taught church history half-time at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary until he retired in 2010 but continues teaching one course in early church history each year. Alan occasionally teaches courses for the Anabaptist Learning Institute, an educational program of Mennonite Schools Council and MEA.

Their son, Andrew, his wife Katie and their three children also live in Elkhart, Ind. The Kreiders are members of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

Alan Kreider, professor of church history and mission (*retired*)

- B.A., Goshen College, 1962
- Princeton University, 1962-63
- Heidelberg University, 1963-64
- M.A., Harvard University, 1965
- Ph.D., Harvard University, 1971

Eleanor Kreider

- B.A., Goshen College, 1957
- University of Michigan, 1957-1958; M.Mus. (music), 1961
- Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 1978- ; occasional courses
- University of Notre Dame, 1979; courses in early Christian liturgy
- King's College, University of London, 1980-84; liturgical studies with Geoffrey Cuming and Gordon Heulin

The Farmer and the Preacher: Jacob Hottinger, 1523

Background: Jacob Hottinger was an “anticlericalist” from the village of Zollikon near Zürich. Like many people in the early 16th century—farmers as well as townspeople—Jacob was critical of the behavior of religious leaders and of the religious, economic and social systems (such as the compulsory tithes) that supported the Roman Catholic Church. Anticlericalism was fueled by the availability of printed versions of the Bible in the vernacular (everyday) languages. Jacob Hottinger, like his daughter Margaret and other members of the Hottinger clan, became an Anabaptist. In 1530 he was beheaded while he was attempting to escape to Moravia.

Requirements: Five persons

* * * * *

Narrator: Meet Jacob Hottinger, a farmer from Zollikon, just an hour’s walk from central Zürich. The Hottingers around Zollikon are an enormous clan. Many of them are passionate about issues of religious and social reform.

On June 23, 1523, a visiting preacher—none other than Doctor Lorenz, preacher of the Gross Münster in Zürich—came to the village church of Zollikon. Doctor Lorenz preached about the passion of Christ. Afterwards as people clustered around to listen, an old bearded man, Jacob Hottinger, came up to the eminent theologian and accosted him—as the record says—with “sharp, hard and intolerable words.”

Jacob: You, you have lied to this congregation!

Lorenz: Indeed! Never!

Jacob: You, Doctor Lorenz, said that the sacrament of the altar, in the form of *the bread alone*, is the true God, the humanity, blood and flesh. This is not true. You should no longer lie from the pulpit. We want to hear the truth from the pulpit.

Lorenz: Now, my good man, you must understand the teaching of the church regarding this.

Narrator: At that, Dr. Lorenz launched into a long explanation of Catholic teaching on the Mass.

Jacob: (*interrupting*) Look, we don’t want philosophical proofs. You must demonstrate with the Gospel. For Christ took the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this, this is my body” *after which* he took the cup and said, “Take this, *This is my blood.*” Now I want you to know. I did not receive the sacrament this morning. And I do not intend to do so until I find someone will give me both bread *and* wine, as the Gospel says.

Lorenz: Well, I am not so sure on this point.

Jacob: If you won’t do it, then let *me* do it.”

Narrator: Jacob was a peasant farmer, but he was a literate man. Unusual for a farmer, Jacob read the New Testament in German in private religious gatherings in Zollikon. He could write with a clear and distinctive hand.

Reader 1: Jacob's readiness to argue with Doctor Lorenz concerning the Lord's Supper was the impertinence of an upstart peasant, but it was more than that. It was a demonstration of biblical literacy. He was convinced that his ability to read the "clear Word of God" put him on an equal footing with learned theologians and churchmen. He called them to account before the bar of Scripture.

Reader 2: The atmosphere in the pro-Anabaptist cells must have been electric with Bible reading and discussion, forming the energetic center around which daily life and work continued. It is easy to detect a strong anticlerical current—along with the conviction that before God and the truth of God's Word—social and economic rank are of no account.

Narrator: Jacob, as we might expect, was soon in trouble again. Here is a story about him that quickly made the rounds in the parish and was reported to the authorities by a number of people. One Sunday morning in 1523, Jacob stood up after Mass in the local church.

Jacob: My friends and neighbors, I beg you, stay here for a few minutes. I have something to say to you.

Narrator: Everyone quickly gathered around Jacob.

Jacob: My friends, I must tell you that a woman has come to speak to me. She reports that a rumor is going around about me. This rumor is: "Jacob Hottinger said he would rather see a cow defecate than to take the Mass." Now this rumor is not true. In fact I, Jacob Hottinger, did not say that. But today I wish to say plainly in the hearing of you all: I would rather see a cow defecate than to take the Mass.

Narrator: The authorities were outraged. They threw Jacob into prison and released him only after he had paid a hefty fine. Jacob and his brother Klaus persisted in making earthy remarks against the clergy—always visually striking and highly insulting. A few months after this episode, in the spring of 1524, the authorities once again rebuked and fined Jacob for coarse jokes about the Mass and the priests who administered it.

Source: C. Arnold Snyder, "Margret Hottinger of Zollikon", in Snyder and Huebert Hecht, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, 43 ff.

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Gradual Reform? Radical Reform?: A Zürich Disputation, 1523

Background: This disputation is often regarded as the first clear sign of a division between Ulrich Zwingli, the leader of the Reformation in Zürich, and the early Anabaptists. In fact, the two sides were not very far apart, but Zwingli's more cautious approach and the Anabaptists' determination to act radically are already evident and would quickly become polarized positions. In a very short time, Simon Stumpf's church in the countryside near Zürich would be cleared of all its images, contrary to the Council mandate. And a little over a year later, in January 1525, Conrad Grebel and several of his companions would be baptized, breaking a law that carried a death sentence and committing themselves irrevocably to the course of radical rather than gradual reform.

Requirements: Seven persons

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Narrator: It was Monday morning, October 26, 1523. Excitement buzzed in the air as more than 800 priests and laymen gathered in the large Council Hall of the city of Zürich. Feelings about reforming worship in the churches ran high in the city. In fact there were recent incidents of smashing religious statues and images in churches. Burgomaster Roist had called for three days of debate over hot issues. Is the Mass valid? Is the use of images in the church buildings to be allowed?

The pastor of the central church in Zürich, Ulrich Zwingli, tried to separate the issues. The purpose of the disputation, he said, was to discern the Word of God on these matters. It quickly became clear that not everyone present agreed with this distinction. The Zürich City Council was to carry out any practical implementations following the three-day debate.

During the first day, Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, [*Ball-ta-sar Hoob-my-er*] a pastor from Waldshut, a town 40 miles north of Zürich, got up and addressed the meeting on the issues under discussion.

Hubmaier: Now it cannot be denied—it is public and clearer than the sun—that for several hundred years much error and abuse has been infiltrated into Christian practices, and added to them by the devil who never rests. This has happened on these two subjects: the images of saints and the abuses of the Mass. This is why the worthy, prominent, honorable and wise lords of this praiseworthy old city of Zürich decided that it would be good and Christian to carry out a friendly brotherly conversation so that such tension and division that had arisen might be alleviated without disturbance or disorder. Some want to stand by the old practices and others by the new. All of this cannot take place more fittingly nor properly than through the proclamation of the clear Word of God as written in both Testaments. With all divisive questions and controversies, only Scripture canonized and sanctified by God himself should be the judge; no one else.

Narrator: Nobody spoke against Hubmaier then. But on the following day Conrad Schmid, commander of the Johannite monastery and a firm supporter of Zwingli, sounded a note of caution.

Schmid: I wish that people would speak more reservedly of the Mass, for it seems to me a hard argument to say that the Mass comes from the devil and that the devil has created and invented monks and orders. That is speaking coarsely. There are many monks who wear the robes and even so are Christians. It seems to me that if those who say this kind of thing would leave us in peace and not speak so immoderately and wickedly, they would do less harm.

Narrator: Schmid was concerned that unguarded words might lead to further incidents of image-smashing. Zwingli rose to reassure Schmid that he supported his plea for restraint.

Zwingli: I could have done without having the subject of the monks dragged in by my dear brother Schmid since it adds nothing to the topic. I know well and it grieves me that some preach about this more immoderately than is perhaps good. I myself have been acrimonious in the pulpit at times, but I have never incited anyone.

Narrator: Schmid was pleased with this response, but Balthasar Hubmaier was on his feet again, urging that steps should be taken to remove the abuses of the Mass and the image of saints. Moderation and patience were needed but so too was proper teaching and practical progress.

Hubmaier: Lord Burgomaster and other dear brothers in Christ! Yesterday in our debate it became thoroughly clear from Scripture that there should be no images. One of these two must be true: images are useful in the church or they are useless. If they are useless, why keep them? If they are useful, then God was not telling the truth because he said in Isaiah 44 that they are not useful to anyone.

But since the images have come into the church, we have to look carefully how to deal with them, so that no one will be scandalized, and so that brotherly Christian peace may not be troubled. For there are many persons who adhere mightily to the images. Therefore the true holy Word of God against images and idols must be shown to the people earnestly and often with care and thoroughness. Then a whole parish church will gather and decide unanimously without any disorder that the images are to be moved out and laid to sleep.

Narrator: But Conrad Grebel, one of Zwingli's inner circle, was growing increasingly impatient with his pastor. He proposed more radical action. Why should the Mass and images be tolerated for a day longer?

Grebel: I propose that while we are still together, all the priests should be given instructions how to proceed with the Mass from now on. This will have been a futile debate if we do not begin to change the Mass. Much has been said about the Mass, but no one is willing to stop this great abomination. Furthermore, there are many abuses in the church greater than the Mass. We should discuss these also.

Zwingli: My lords of the city council will discern how the Mass should henceforth be properly observed.

Narrator: The radical Simon Stumpf was outraged at this. Stumpf was a former monk who was now pastor of Höngg, just outside Zürich, and who had previously been in trouble with the authorities for advising his parishioners not to pay the tithe. He jumped up.

Stumpf: Master Ulrich! You have no authority to place the decision in my lords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides. If therefore my lords [of the city council] 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.

Zwingli: That is right. I shall also preach and act against it if they decide otherwise. I do not give the decision into their hands. They shall also certainly not decide about God's Word. This convocation is not being held so that they might decide about that, but to learn from the Scriptures whether or not the Mass is a sacrifice. Then they will counsel together as to the most appropriate way for this to be done without uproar.

Narrator: By this time, night had fallen and the Burgomaster Roist adjourned the debate until noon the following day. The debate continued with Zwingli and Grebel disputing about various issues and the speed with which reforms should be carried through. The City Council then retired to consider the issues further and summarized their position.

City Councilman: Here is our mandate:

- a written account of the debate is to be distributed to parish priests;
- several priests are to undertake a preaching tour to explain biblical teaching on the issues under discussion;
- in the meantime, no more images are to be destroyed;
- the Mass is to be celebrated in the traditional way.

Source: The Second Zürich Disputation (excerpts), in Leland Harder, ed., *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 4 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 234-252. Adapted and dramatized by Stuart Murray.

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Baptisms in Felix Mantz's House: January 21, 1525

Background: This drama tells the story of the first believers' baptisms in Europe in many centuries, and as such, marks the beginning of the Anabaptist movement.

Requirements: Six persons—Three persons read while three persons engage in simple, mimed action.

* * * * *

Narrator: The year is 1525. Meet three friends in Zürich, Switzerland:

Conrad Grebel, [*gray-bull*] one of the aristocracy (*Conrad removes hat and bows with a flourish of his arm.*)

Felix Mantz, a learned scholar of Hebrew (*Felix is somber, bows deeply and formally with no flourish.*)

George Cajacob [*ka-ya-kob*] called “Blaurock,” a straightforward simple pastor from the town of Chur [*Kur*]. (*George, standing with arms folded with sober, matter-of-fact expression, nods his head.*)

These three friends often met and talked at length on matters of faith, including the baptism of believers. They came to one mind on these things, and in the pure fear of God, they saw that a person must learn from the divine Word a true faith which shows itself in a holy Christian life with all godliness. And a person must be steadfast to the end—even in the face of tribulation, danger and difficulty.

Reader 1: On the night of January 21, 1525, the three friends were together with others in the house of Felix Mantz in the city of Zurich. They called this a “school.” It was a Bible study group. As they read the Scriptures, a sense of holy awe came over the whole group. Their hearts were moved.

Reader 2: They got down on their knees in prayer and implored God, the One who knew their hearts, “Help us to do your divine will. Show your mercy towards us.” It wasn’t human ambition that drove them because they knew very well what they would have to bear and suffer.

Reader 1: After the prayer George, the pastor, got up and asked Conrad, the aristocrat, to baptize him for the sake of God and with true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. George knelt down, and Conrad baptized him.

Reader 2: After that was done, the others similarly asked George to baptize them which he did upon their request. And so they gave themselves to the name of the Lord in the high fear of God.

Reader 1: Each confirmed the other in the service of the gospel, and they began to teach and keep the faith.

Narrator: Anabaptism was born with this group of Christians who emphasized the necessity of a personal commitment to Christ as essential to salvation and a prerequisite to baptism. The introduction of believer's baptism was not an unpremeditated act. Even though its revolutionary character might well have struck the hearts of those assembled on that January night with fear, it was a culmination of earnest searching of the Scriptures.

Sources: *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, eds., George Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 43-44; <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/anastory.html>.

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I Appeal to the Scriptures: Michael Sattler, 1527

Background: After the death of Conrad Grebel (1526) and Felix Manz (1527), Michael Sattler was the most noteworthy leader of the Swiss Brethren. His martyrdom took place only a few months after that of Manz. Captured by the Roman Catholic authorities, he was tried on May 17, 1527, and on May 21, 1527, was tortured then burned at the stake.

Requirements: Four persons

* * * * *

Narrator: The date is May 17, 1527. The place is the imperial city of Rottenburg in Germany. The court is in session with Count Joachim of Zollern in the chair. On trial is Michael Sattler and 13 other alleged Anabaptists.

Count: Defendants, you may choose a lawyer to represent you.

Sattler: Thank you, sir, but we choose not to be represented. Though we know you are servants of God in your capacity as judges, we also know that the Word of God gives you no right to judge matters of faith. This court is not competent to try us.

Count: You insolent fellow! You will soon see what we are empowered to do to you. Clerk, read the charges.

Clerk: The charges against Michael Sattler are:

- 1) that he and his adherents have acted contrary to the decree of the emperor;
- 2) that he taught, maintained and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the sacrament;
- 3) that he taught and believed that infant baptism does not promote salvation;
- 4) that they rejected the sacrament of extreme unction for the dying;
- 5) that they despised and scorned the Mother of God and the saints;
- 6) that he declared that one should not swear before a magistrate;
- 7) that he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, that is, placing the bread and wine on a plate, eating and drinking of them;
- 8) that he has left his religious order and has married a wife;
- 9) that he said that if the Turks invaded the country, we ought not to resist them, and if he approved of war he would rather take the field against the Christians than against the Turks, who are the greatest enemy of our holy faith.

Count: Michael Sattler, how do you answer these serious charges?

Sattler: May I ask for them to be read again so that I may fully understand them?

Clerk: He has boasted that he has the Holy Spirit. If that is true, we do not need to read the charges again; the Holy Spirit can inform him!

Sattler: Please read them again.

Clerk: Very well.

Count: Will you now reply to these charges?

Clerk: The charges against Michael Sattler are (1) that he and his adherents acted contrary to the decree of the emperor.

Sattler: We deny this. The imperial mandate forbade people to adhere to Lutheran doctrine, and to preach only the gospel and the word of God. We have obeyed this for we have not acted contrary to the word of God.

Clerk: (2) that he taught, maintained and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the sacrament.

Sattler: The second charge I accept as true, and I will show you many Scriptures to defend this.

Clerk: (3) that he taught and believed that infant baptism does not promote salvation.

Sattler: The third also is true, for baptism is for believers, not for infants, as the Scriptures clearly show.

Clerk: (4) that they rejected the sacrament of extreme unction.

Sattler: We have not rejected oil, for it is made by God and so is good. But a blessing by the pope or other clergymen does not improve it.

Clerk: (5) that they despised and scorned the Mother of God and the saints.

Sattler: We do not dishonor the Mother of God, for the mother of Christ is to be praised above all women because God gave her the grace to give birth to the Savior of the whole world. And we do not revile the saints. But the Scriptures do not allow us to treat Mary or the saints as intercessors for us.

Clerk: (6) that he declared that one should not swear before a magistrate.

Sattler: The sixth charge is true, for swearing oaths is forbidden by Christ himself.

Clerk: (7) that he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, placing the bread and wine on a plate, eating and drinking of them.

Sattler: I will make no response to the seventh charge, for it is not worth defending.

Clerk: (8) that contrary to the rule he has married a wife.

Sattler: As to my marriage, this is an ordinance of God. How many chaste priests do you know?

Clerk: (9) that he said that if the Turks invaded the country, we ought not to resist them, and if he approved of war, he would rather take the field against the Christians than against the Turks, who are the greatest enemy of our holy faith.

Sattler: As regards the Turks, we will not fight them for we are told in Scripture “Thou shalt not kill.” We are to beseech God with earnest prayers to repel and resist them. But if it were right for Christians to fight, I would rather go into battle against the so-called Christians who persecute, apprehend and kill pious Christians than against the Turks. Because the Turk is a genuine Turk and knows nothing of the Christian faith. But you claim to be Christians, boast of Christ and still persecute the faithful witnesses of Christ. You are Turks according to the Spirit.

Count: Is this your full reply?

Sattler: I am happy to discuss these matters in greater detail with you if you will allow me to appeal to the Scriptures.

Narrator: The judges became infuriated at Sattler’s calm confidence and began to ridicule and threaten him, but he did not lose his composure. At length they conferred, pronounced him guilty and declared the sentence.

Two days later Sattler was executed. His ordeal began in the market place where a piece was cut from his tongue. Pieces of flesh were torn from his body with red-hot tongs. He was tied to a cart and the tongs were used five more times on the way to the site of execution. To the guards’ amazement, Sattler was still able to speak and he could be heard praying for his persecutors. Then he was bound to a ladder and pushed into the fire.

Sattler: Almighty God, eternal God, you are the way and the truth. Because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with your help this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood.

Narrator: When the ropes on his wrists burned through, Sattler raised the two forefingers of his hands, giving the promised signal to the brethren that a martyr’s death was bearable. Then the crowd heard him say through seared lips:

Sattler: Father, I commend my spirit into your hands.

Sources: 16th century court records in *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 416-418; supplemented with documents in John H. Yoder, ed., *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 69-80. Stuart Murray (alt); <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/sattler.html>

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An Anabaptist Teacher on the Road: Hans Nadler, 1529

Background: In the early years after Anabaptism began in 1525, the Anabaptist message was spread by countless ordinary people going about their daily crafts or business. Some of these, such as cloth-sellers or the needle-sellers traveled in the course of their daily work and shared their message as they traveled. Not all of them were literate, but they often had memorized substantial portions of the Bible which they used as basis for their evangelism.

Requirements: Six persons

* * * * *

Narrator: Meet Hans Nadler. Hans was a needle-seller; he ran a successful business. Who needed needles? In the time of no sewing machines, everyone who crafted in cloth and leather needed needles. Hans sold his needles throughout South Germany. Though he was unable to read or write, Hans knew his Bible well. In fact he knew much of it by heart. When he was at home, people met in Hans' house for Bible study and prayer. And when he was on the road Hans talked to people about finding new life in Jesus. His fearless conversations about his faith got him into trouble with the authorities. We meet Hans in Erlangen in January 1529 where he has been arrested on charges of being an Anabaptist. He is in prison; the church authorities are questioning him.

Questioner 1: So, Hans Nadler, you've been rebaptized.

Nadler: Yes, God's Word forced me to do it. The Lord Christ clearly says in Mark 16, "Go into all the world, proclaim the gospel of all creatures. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Hans Hut helped me see this. I held off as long as I could because of the weakness of my flesh; I was afraid of suffering, especially torture. But I'm confident that God's Word is true. It's not heresy. As Christ has spoken and commanded, so I have done and taught. Because, look, this is what Christ himself did and had himself baptized in his thirtieth year.

Questioner 2: You've been traveling constantly, all around the country. But you've been doing more than just selling needles. Tell us about it; what else were you up to as you traveled?

Nadler: Yes, I sell needles to earn a living. I went here and there along the Rhine river and other places in the land, dealing with cobblers and tailors, all common folk. And if people came to me I taught them.

Questioner 1: You taught them. You, a teacher? You can't even read or write yourself. So what did you teach them?

Nadler: I said, "My brother or sister, a Christian must suffer much. Are you prepared, for the sake of truth, to suffer persecution, contempt, scorn, the forsaking of house, yard, wife and child, all for the sake of the Lord? If God gives you the grace so that the Word of God is opened to you, you must abstain from all the joys of the world which the flesh desires. If you do not have confidence to do this with the help of God, you can go your way. It is written, the Lord desires no enforced service."

Questioner 2: ... abstain from the joys of the world ... That's a pretty heavy message. But apparently some people were not put off by this.

Nadler: That’s right. I told them: “My brother or sister, you must receive the Word of God like a child and must be born anew. You will receive the Word of God and never live according to the pleasure of the world, and will from now on live according to the will of God, giving your body as a willing sacrifice which is good and holy and pleasing to God.” I warned them: the world will hate you; and you’ll have to suffer this patiently. Then I began teaching.

Questioner 1: So I ask you again, what did you teach them?

Nadler: Well, I started with the Lord’s Prayer: Everyone knows the Lord’s Prayer. We all know it by heart. So I said to them, “You say, ‘Our Father in heaven.’ So you must learn, my brother or sister, and consider that you will now be a *child of God* when you say, ‘Father.’ So you’ve got to live according to his divine will and do as the Word of God and the Holy Gospel teaches.”

I then went on to the second clause: “May your name be made holy.” And I proceeded like that, phrase by phrase through the entire Lord’s Prayer. For example, I said to them, “You pray ‘Forgive us our sins.’” And I reminded them, “In the same way that God forgives us, we also must forgive and pardon all those who act against us. We ordinarily ask vengeance for ourselves. But now the word must become deed.” The Lord’s Prayer—yes, this is the way I taught people to pray.

Questioner 2: (*disrespectful tone*) So you taught your version of faith by using the Lord’s Prayer? You call that teaching?

Nadler: Oh yes, and I also used something else that people know—the Creed. Everyone knows the Creed by heart. I said to them, “We are to believe in one God, creator of heaven and the earth.” And I told them, “Now since you believe in a God of heaven and of the earth, you are not to have any other god made for yourself, whether it be of stone, wood, silver or gold, nor of bread or cheese.” And I went on to all the articles of the Creed having to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the rest. That’s how I taught them.

Questioner 1: Humph.... Did you baptize?

Nadler: Oh, no, I didn’t baptize. I have not been commanded to do it, nor was I ordained to do it. But I myself was baptized.

Questioner 2: Why on earth? You were already baptized as a child.

Nadler: So my parents told me. I was present. But I don’t have knowledge of it for I was a child and had no understanding. Nor did I know of any faith for myself. But the man who was my godfather spoke for me, saying “I believe.” It was about 40 years ago that this happened.

(*turns aside*) You know, these days all things are becoming perverse so maybe the women are beginning to bear children who have faith. I don’t know. But I think we should first ask the children about it. If they have faith, they will confess it.

(*turns back to the questioner*) People all speak of faith but don’t very much do the works of faith. Of course they try to marshal the Scriptures to maintain infant baptism. But there is not a single letter about it in the Bible that I know of. They want to baptize children and do baptize them even though children are pure already and are a creation of God, good and well-made. My godfather won’t be *saved* for me, nor will he be *damned* for me. I must be saved or damned for myself. I have examined this in my heart, and I believe that my own infant baptism has never helped me.

Narrator: The church authorities quizzed Hans closely about the sacraments. Hans quoted the Gospels in which “Jesus never said the bread was his body. When Jesus said ‘This is my body’ he was referring to his disciples who ate with him.” Hans insisted, “Jesus never said, ‘My blood is in the cup.’ The cup indicated Jesus’ suffering and that we are to follow him through suffering, too.” The City Councilors considered all of the evidence against Hans Nadler, the prisoner. What should they do with him?

Councilor 1: Well, it’s absolutely clear that Hans Nadler is wrong. He’s wrong about the innocence of children. We heard him. He claims that children don’t have sin because, he says, they are born pure and good. He doesn’t believe in Original Sin.

Councilor 2: Not only that, he’s wrong about the sacraments. He speaks falsely about the body and blood of Christ and he speaks falsely about baptism.

Councilor 1: But aside from these errors, I can’t sense from any of his answers that he and his friends might undertake any evil deeds against the government.

Councilor 2: No, we heard nothing of insurrection. Still, what if such a faction would grow and gather strength? The devil might easily seduce and deceive them.

Councilor 1: What if such factions would disrupt the general peace and make a separation from our common Christendom? Maybe in the future, insurrection might come about under the pretense of destroying the godless.

Councilor 2: Well, I say, since there is no evidence of actual deeds—apart from the penalties about rebaptism—let’s send one or two scholars to the poor prisoner so that they may turn him from error by proper use of the divine Scriptures. He could then most mercifully be allowed to return to his wife and child.

Councilor 1: But what if he persists and does not pay attention to the instruction? What if he does not stop teaching other people in the future and causes them to err? He might poison them with his false teaching.

Councilor 2: We must consider common Christendom and other people to be more important than the person of Hans Nadler.

Councilor 1: Yes, it is clear to all of us that Nadler and people like him should be exiled from the land. And so our gracious lord’s principality can be kept clean of error and mischief.

Source: Hans Nadler, “Declaration of the Needle Merchant Hans at Erlangen and the Refutation of the Articles of the Needle Merchant Hans (1529),” in C. Arnold Snyder, ed., *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 136-154.

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Medicine for Christ's Body?: Pilgram Marpeck, 1531

Background: Before his days as an Anabaptist, Pilgram Marpeck was a wealthy and highly respected citizen of Rattenberg. He was a mining engineer and even served on Rattenberg's inner and outer councils. It is believed that he lost his mining position in 1528 because he refused to aid authorities in capturing the Anabaptists. Then Marpeck lived in Strasbourg and worked as a timber supervisor until he , was expelled from the city two years later because of his Anabaptist activities. For the next 12 years, he established Anabaptist congregations in Switzerland, Tyrol, Moravia, South Germany and Alsace.

Requirements: Three persons

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Narrator: In 1530 being an Anabaptist was dangerous and could get one killed. Groups emerged who held that a more spiritual and a less physical approach could save one's integrity while at the same time saving one's skin. So they emphasized not using outward ceremonies such as baptism, the Lord's Supper and the ban (church discipline), but rather practicing these inwardly, spiritually. They did not attend meetings of illegal Anabaptist groups but instead attended the local state church services despite their mental reservations about what went on there. In this way, they could stay on the right side of the law. These groups have come to be called "Spiritualists." This reading is based on a document written by Anabaptist engineer-theologian Pilgram Marpeck who was in dialogue with a Spiritualist, probably Christian Entfelder.

Spiritualist: We're sympathetic to you, Pilgram Marpeck, and to the other Anabaptists. But we have serious reservations. We think that at this point nobody, including you, has the right to employ the ceremonies of Christ. You should not practice baptism, the Lord's Supper, teaching, the ban, and the laying on of hands. Instead you should be in a state of stillness, praying and waiting for a new commission from Christ. When Christ gives a new command, accompanied by power and signs as in the time of the apostles, then you can practice these ceremonies. But until then, you should only pray.

Marpeck: You're so high-minded and rational! By your sophisticated arguments you're causing confusion to believers who are pupils of Christ. You're shortening God's gracious arm. Is prayer the only way Christ's disciples receive grace and power? Christ has commanded us to practice the work of faith—for example, instruction, baptism, the Lord's Supper, laying on of hands, and discipline—as well as prayer. How can believers do wrong if they practice these things? These are gifts of God, which graciously build up the members of Christ's body

Spiritualist: But the members of Christ's body are weak and deficient. These are dangerous times, and we know that some people have stopped attending your meetings with your ceremonies.

Marpeck: Of course, we are weak and deficient; and we know that, because of persecution, some people are leaving us. But the Spirit of God is in our midst. The Spirit would have remained an eternal secret were it not for the humanity of Christ and his physical voice. The Spirit of Christ possesses all power and authority, even to the end of the world. That's why we, who are deficient servants, act in accordance with the gift and the measure of faith which is given to each. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:29, not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all perform miracles, not all are teachers; but no gift will be lacking to the believers in their need.

Spiritualist: But the voice of Christ is most clearly heard through the properly trained preachers.

Marpeck: Yes, I thought you'd say that. You don't believe that God's truth can come through any of the ordinary believers. You don't believe that Christ can be incarnated in people the world considers filth and rubbish (1 Corinthians 4:9-13). If the faith and teaching of Christ truly moved you, you would never try to get people to stand still or to discontinue in the teaching of Christ. I'm concerned that you emphasize the inward condition of the heart more than the outward confession of the mouth. Without the outward testimony, no inward revelation can be made known to us humans.

The way to recognize an inward testimony is by its outward expression—by teaching, deeds, commands, and ceremonies of Christ. We must receive these things in a physical manner before we can recognize them inwardly. Think of Peter. He wanted to be wiser than the other disciples, and so he wouldn't permit the Lord Christ to wash his feet. Peter assumed that he was being humble, but he was thinking with sheer pride according to human reason. Christ wished to break Peter's pride so he harnessed Peter's salvation to the outward act of washing his feet.

Spiritualist: So you're saying that for Peter the outward ceremony had to go before the inward understanding. But why? Why didn't Christ permit the inward to precede the outward?

Marpeck: You are impatient with ceremonies, aren't you?! You dismiss water in baptism and you dismiss the Lord's Supper. You ask, "What good to me is water, bread or wine? It's enough if I inwardly believe." Your argument is so rational. You seem to despise the humanity of Christ, to discount the physical and the material realities. We humans are glorious, immortal creatures, but we find it hard through our reason to see the incarnation of Christ changing humans so we can accept his teaching and manner of life. Christ frees us from sin and human reason by means of physical ceremonies such as water baptism and the flesh and blood of Christ. In order for Christ to make us alive and set us right, we must first submit ourselves to his physical works.

Spiritualist: Oh, this annoys me. I get irritated when you say that the Son of Man is present on earth in a physical way in people who are humble, insignificant, simple and foolish. When you call these people the very members of Christ's body, even his flesh and bone, I get very uncomfortable.

Marpeck: I recognize this. And I get uncomfortable when you claim to discover the secrets of God without the outward, the exterior or visible. Because then you disregard the very means by which God teaches us the divine secrets. It is the incarnation, the humanity of Christ, which is our mediator before God. We throw ourselves at Christ's feet and testify through the witness of baptism that, as Christ died, we also die in Him and are buried by baptism into his death. That's how we are made alive in faith and trust in Christ.

Spiritualist: But how about communion? Don't your simple and humble people make it less significant?

Marpeck: Not at all. To eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ means that my spirit is freed in the pure flesh and blood of Christ. In communion, a transfer from matter to spirit occurs through faith; then the spirit of Christ, clothed in flesh, reaches my spirit through matter and faith. Then Christ lives and not I.

Spiritualist: You take the outward things too seriously. But the Spirit matters more than these. I think you're too committed to Christ's humanity, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the church.

Marpeck: You're right. We do take these things seriously. The entire physical life of Christ is a servant to the true believers, and his Spirit is their Lord. As to taking the physical ceremonies seriously, we don't regard them as God, as we did in past. But we also avoid the opposite extreme—the extreme that we see in you. You completely cast the ceremonies aside and regard them as unnecessary. We know that even today the physical Christ serves us in his members, and he will serve us until the end of the world so that we may be able, by his Spirit, to pray, "Abba, Father." You see, the ceremonies of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not duties for us. They are medicine—medicine for Christ's body. We recognize weaknesses and deficiencies in our members, and we know that the ceremonies are healing remedies for us.

Spiritualist: Well, I disagree. I think that you make baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the ban too physical. You take them too seriously!

Marpeck: But we know how much we need them. Look, we know that we're weak and ill, and we employ the Great Physician's medicine. We extend it to one another, to those who are hungry. We know that by this medicine we have life and become healthy.

Spiritualist: But your physical approach to ceremonies and the church is unwise. If you allow yourselves to be baptized in illegal groups, you're taking a risk—an unnecessary risk. Associating with groups that are outlawed can cost you your lives. It's more sensible to have a spiritual approach—to be spiritually baptized, and to belong to a mystical communion while attending services in the local state church and appearing like everyone else.

Marpeck: I know, I know. My answer is partly one of obedience: I have been baptized partly because it is written that one should do so. And also, I have been baptized because, according to the Scriptures, our Lord Christ died for our sakes. Therefore, I allowed myself to be buried, by baptism, into the death of Christ on the foundation of the strong belief and trust in the resurrection. This faith is a living letter in my heart. Similarly, we also employ the other ceremonies by the authority of faith according to the Scriptures. And this is why we meet together: as disciples of Jesus we are immature. We're like children learning to walk, holding on to a bench. And we won't learn to walk as Christians without the support of the humanity of Christ. It is in the body of Christ that our defects and infirmities are revealed and recognized. It is in the body of Christ that we learn to pray in Spirit and truth. It is in the body of Christ that we encounter the ceremonies of Christ as a medicine and a means to our salvation. Thanks be to the Lord Christ who consoles us by his Word when he says, "Whoever is willing, let them drink freely and without cost."

Sources: Pilgram Marpeck, "A Clear and Useful Instruction" (1531), in William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 2 (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1978), 69-106; Neal Blough, *Christ in Our Midst: Incarnation, Church and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck*, Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies 8 (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 33-46; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgram_Marpeck

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Prisoners Can Sing: The Origins of the *Ausbund*, 1535

Background: This is the story of the origin of *Ausbund*, the hymnbook first published in 1564 and the oldest Anabaptist hymnal and the oldest Christian song book in continuous use. The core of the *Ausbund* is based on 51 songs written by Anabaptists from Passau. The hymns were composed in the dungeon of Passau Castle where the Anabaptists were imprisoned between 1535 and 1540, many of whom were martyred. Terms in the story include:

Definitions:

- Münster:** Name of a German city which a group of Anabaptists had ruled for a year in 1534-1535 and which became an all-embracing byword for fanaticism and disorder.
- Turks** Islamic forces (the Ottoman Turks) from the east who in the 1520s and 1530s threatened to invade central Europe with invasion. In 1529 and 1532 they mounted major assaults on Vienna, a major Danube River city 50 miles downstream from Passau. European Christians were understandably terrified of possible Turkish Muslim invasions.
- Recant:** To say one no longer holds a belief considered to be heretical.

Requirements: Four parts—male or female.

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Narrator 1: The story begins. Today, in 1535, noise and confusion swirl around the courtyards of the Passau city prison. Border police have just hauled in 50 suspects, captured at the riverside. Passau dominates commercial river traffic at the confluence of three rivers forming boundaries between South Germany, Austria and Moravia. Fortress Passau, overlooking the great Danube River, is the scene of dismay and panic among the captured travelers. These 50 prisoners have been intercepted on their way home, up the Danube, to South Germany. Who are they? What is their story?

Narrator 2: A few years earlier, a number of Anabaptists had left their homes in South Germany and gone down river to Moravia where they settled in farm-colonies—families living in extended communities of 200 to 300. They lived peaceably for a few years, but in 1535 the imperial authorities began forcing them to leave their houses and lands. Now on their way back to their places of origin in South Germany, the authorities in Passau stopped, arrested, imprisoned and sternly interrogated them.

Interrogator: What is your contact with the events at Münster?

Prisoner: (*Indignantly*) None whatsoever! Genuine Christians would rather suffer than ever use brute force.

Interrogator: So you say! What about the Turks? Do you support the Turks? Have any of your number ever joined the Turks?

Prisoner: Absolutely not. Your question shows that you totally misunderstand our intentions. We have simply been living in farm-colonies in Moravia as pious Christians.

Narrator 1: Suspicious, unsure what to do with these people, the guards threw them into the prison in the Passau castle. The authorities brought them to trial but did not sentence any of them to death. Yet the authorities imprisoned the Anabaptists for many years, sometimes in dungeons. Some they released. Although a few recanted, most eventually died in prison.

Narrator 2: The Passau prisoners passed their days in keeping each other's spirits up. They quoted the Scriptures they knew by heart, they prayed, and they sang. Several of them composed new hymns and songs. It was much safer to sing out loud in prison than anywhere else where people who were heard singing might be arrested. During the first five years, from 1535-1540, this group of prisoners produced a collection of 51 hymns. These hymns formed the nucleus of the hymnbook which came to be called *Ausbund* meaning "selection."

Narrator 1: The *Ausbund* hymns soon became known outside the prison and were circulated widely in handwritten copies. The first of many published editions appeared in 1564. The hymns served many Anabaptists in worship among small groups or clusters who met in secret—in homes, barns, caves, under bridges or in forests. They also prepared Anabaptists for persecution and interrogation by the authorities.

Narrator 2: Twenty years after the appearance of this initial cluster of hymns and songs, an enlarged collection was published in 1575, including 80 additional hymns drawn from a wider geographical area—Holland, North Germany and Bohemia. By this time the *Ausbund* as we know it today was virtually complete. *Ausbund*, the hymnal of the Amish, is the oldest Christian hymnal in continuous use from the 16th century to the present day.

Narrator 1: Some of the *Ausbund* hymns, though apparently none of those written in Passau, have been translated into English and used in current Mennonite hymnbooks. See *Hymnal Worship Book* 32, 33, 407, 438 and 535. Let's look at 535, "Who now would follow Christ," and 32, "Our Father God, thy name we praise." These reveal the characteristic spirituality of early Anabaptists. As you hear them, note the biblical frame of thought. Consider these questions:

- What are the attitudes toward suffering of individuals and communities?
- What emotions do they express—explicitly or as undertones?
- What attitudes do they express toward enemies?
- What or whom do they cling to for security?

Narrator 2: Look at the small print lines under each hymn. Notice that although hymn 535 was translated by an American Mennonite, hymn 32 was translated by an English Baptist leader. This hymn appears in some Baptist hymnals. This reminds us that the 16th-century Anabaptists are a source of inspiration for Christians in many traditions today in many parts of the world.

Sources: *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, s.v. "Ausbund," (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1955), 191-192.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ausbund>.

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Multi-voiced Worship: The Anabaptist Perspective, 1536

Background: The Anabaptists, especially in the Swiss and South German traditions, believed that the worship of Christian congregations should involve the participation of many members. They based this on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which chapter 14 envisages worship that is multi-voiced: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (verse 26). This chapter had largely lain dormant since the fourth century when, with the reign of Constantine and the advent of a society-encompassing Christendom Church, congregations became large and were often led by one priest or pastor. The Anabaptists rediscovered this neglected part of the New Testament and attempted to act in light of it. This caused consternation in both Catholic and Protestant circles. In the document on which this dialogue is based, the Swiss Anabaptists are in debate with a Reformed church leader.

Requirements: Three persons

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Narrator: In the year 1532, Anabaptists were challenged to answer the question, "Why do they not attend worship in the Reformed state churches that have broken with Catholicism?" Tim is an Anabaptist leader; Matt is a Swiss Reformed pastor.

Tim and Matt stand opposite of each other.

Matt: You must explain this. Why, when the law clearly requires that you attend church on Sunday, why do you not attend the church? What is your defense?

Tim: We live by the Scriptures. And there we read—in 1 Corinthians 14—that Paul says to the church of God that they are to pursue love and to strive for the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. Now, prophesying is receiving understanding from God and sharing it with others, encouraging them and consoling them.

Matt: But surely that is what the preachers do in our churches!

Tim: Perhaps, but Paul said that all Christians, when something is revealed to them that will edify others, are bound by Christian love to speak of it in the congregation. And only then they should be silent again, according to 1 Corinthians 14, verse 26, which says, "When you come together, each one [note, *each* one] has a hymn, or a word of instruction, or a prophecy. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."

Matt: Ah ha! (*points his finger*) But Paul says at the end of the same chapter, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Your actions are anything but decent and orderly. Anything but! None of you have proper evangelical order for worship. You have not been trained or ordained. So none of you should open your mouths in worship.

Tim: So you think that, after you have preached, we should remain silent, regardless of what we may have been given to say for edification. But according to 1 Corinthians 14, the listeners must judge the preacher's doctrine. In your churches all judgment is suspended and everything that the preacher teaches—whether good or evil—has to be swallowed by the listener.

Matt: That is because we regard Paul's words that "all may prophesy" to refer only to the ministers. Only the preachers are prophets.

Tim: Even if that were so, there would always be more than one person, more than one voice, in the congregation. But anyway, it seems clear to us that Paul's teaching applies to the whole congregation. It applies to all the members of Christ's body so that when we come together, each one has a gift given by the Spirit. We worship according to what Paul says. Why don't you?

Source: Shem Peachey, ed., "Answer of Some who are called Anabaptists – Why they do not attend the churches (1532)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 45 (1971), 11-14.

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Why Princes Must Punish the Anabaptists: Philip Melancthon, 1536

Background: Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) was a close associate of Martin Luther, a brilliant theologian and one of the architects of Lutheran theology. In 1536 he wrote a short treatise that provided justification for the civil authorities to execute Anabaptists; this was soon published as a pamphlet. Melancthon is convinced that in the recent uproar in Münster, the Anabaptists showed their true character that destroys social order as well as the people's eternal souls. Inwardly individuals may believe what they want, but outwardly they must conform to the religion established by law. It is the duty of the "magistracy," the civil government, to enforce the one true religion with the "sword" (capital punishment). The Anabaptists are dangerous because they divide society, disregard God's grace and overemphasize human works. Melancthon calls them "new monks." The questioner's words have been invented here, but Melancthon's words are his own.

Requirements: Two persons

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Questioner: Master Philip, I know that the Anabaptists are an unchristian sect. But I'm troubled by the executions. Do Christian princes have to apply such severe physical punishment and even the sword of death against them?

Melancthon: Well, to begin with, let's remember that we're not talking about preachers. This is about the magistrates. Preachers are servants of the gospel so they don't wield the sword. They fight against error solely through correct teaching and preaching. Punishment is a matter for the civil magistrates. Now remember, before people who are misled are punished, they must be presented with clear Christian instruction to get them to renounce their errors. If they renounce their errors, it's the Christian thing to show them mercy. If they remain obstinate, however, then it's necessary to punish them.

Questioner: All right, punish them. But why is it necessary to use the sword against them?

Melancthon: It's absolutely clear: the magistrates have to protect their people against sedition and to punish with the sword those who would destroy civil government. Paul says it in Romans 13, "Whoever opposes the magistracy is to be punished." You see, the Anabaptists hold incorrect views in two areas. One of these has to do with outward, civil government. They maintain that Christians should not hold an office which wields the sword, that the only office that Christians should hold is the servant of the gospel, and they also teach that Christians are not to swear oaths. They even claim that Christians shouldn't own property and that if their wives don't embrace Anabaptism, they may forsake them. It's obvious: these articles directly undermine the outward, civil government: the magistracy, the oath, personal possessions, marriage, etc. If people throughout the land would hold to such teachings, just think what destruction, murder and robbery would follow!

Questioner: But the Anabaptists say, "We desire to harm no one."

Melancthon: I know, I know. But if the Anabaptists' teachings were to be generally accepted, then the magistracy, the oath, personal possessions, etc. would all be abolished. So the magistracy has got to counter such false teachings and, in keeping with its authority, to apply punishment, mild or severe, as it sees fit. It's not a matter of punishing people on account of the views that they hold in their hearts but on account of outward wrongful speech through which they lead others astray and incite rebellion. The Anabaptists want to eliminate the magistracy, the oath and personal possessions.

Questioner: But the Anabaptists say, "We wouldn't hurt anybody!"

Melancthon: Maybe. But we've got to look at the clear foundations of their ideas as found in their teachings and not just at the way they live. Paul clearly teaches that people who hold to such false ideas concerning civil government and present them as examples of a new holiness—such people are from the devil. Therefore the Christian magistrates must not be frightened by these people's make-believe holiness and hypocritical patience, but rather consider what they teach. And that shows that they are obstinate people in a devilish sect. The kingdom at Münster showed what Anabaptist teachings lead to. They even practiced polygamy!

Questioner: I can see that the Anabaptists' views on government are dangerous. But let's go on. You said that there's another area in which they hold incorrect views.

Melancthon: Yes, the Anabaptists are also wrong on spiritual matters. For example, on infant baptism and original sin they hold positions that are contrary to God's word. The magistrates are required to restrain their people from false teachings, improper worship services and heretical acts. The second of the ten commandments says: "Whoever dishonors God's name shall not remain unpunished" (Exodus 20:7). So the magistrates have power not only to deter blasphemy and to silence false teaching but also to punish the obstinate. Listen to Leviticus 24:16: "Whoever blasphemes God is to be killed."

Questioner: But how do the Anabaptists blaspheme God?

Melancthon: Take their refusal to baptize children. What if everybody refused? What would the end result of this be? An obviously heathen spirit! I know that they say children don't need forgiveness of sin and that original sin doesn't apply to them, but these are dangerous and public errors. And besides refusing to baptize their children, the Anabaptists separate themselves from the church, even from those churches where pure Christian teaching is given and where abuses and idolatry have been eliminated. These Anabaptist errors are terrible. It's no small matter to cast children out of Christendom by withholding baptism and to put them into an uncertain situation, indeed, to bring them into damnation. Unneeded separation establishes two different peoples: the baptized and the unbaptized.

Questioner: So what is the proper Christian response to the Anabaptists?

Melancthon: It's important to act with moderation. First we must instruct the Anabaptists and admonish them to renounce their errors. And we must always differentiate among different classes of Anabaptists. Some Anabaptists are simpleminded and not obstinate. We should give these a lighter punishment, like expulsion from the land or imprisonment so they don't harm other people. But where the Anabaptists are obstinate, especially on both civil and spiritual matters, the judges must punish them in all severity. We've got to take preventive measures, so that the Anabaptists don't spread blasphemy and damaging errors far and wide. What's most important is this: we mustn't be distracted by their good appearance but keep our focus on the clear teachings in which the sect is in gross error. To sum it up: the Anabaptists divide our Christian world in two. They are a Manichaeian sect and a new monasticism.

Source: Leonard Gross, ed., "Philip Melancthon, *Whether Christian Princes Are Obligated to Apply Physical Punishment and the Sword against the Unchristian Sect of the Anabaptists (1536)*," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76.3 (2002), 314-34.

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Ursula's Song: Ursula Hellrigel, 1538

Background: In 1538, Ursula Hellrigel was captured and imprisoned at the age of 17. While in prison, she wrote a hymn—unusual for a young woman at that time—that spoke to how she endured the hardships of prison. After repeated postponements, she was finally released five years later on the condition that she leave her home and never return.

Requirements: 7 persons

* * * * *

Narrator 1: Ursula Hellrigel's [*Hel-reegel*] story took place in the district of Tirol, the beautiful, mountainous region of the Austrian Alps. For a number of years the authorities had been trying to clear the region of Anabaptists, but circles of Anabaptists persisted in the valleys among peasant farming families.

Narrator 2: Using both persuasive and bloody means, these efforts had mixed results. Ursula's own mother had died in prison, an unrepentant Anabaptist, although her brother Oswald recanted and returned home. In the mid-1530s persecution of Anabaptists peaked in the region of Tirol.

Narrator 1: Whole families as well as young individuals tried to flee their homes and escape along the rivers to safety in Moravia where the rulers were more tolerant. Ursula, a 17-year-old farm girl from one of the valleys, joined a group of ten Anabaptists attempting this perilous journey. They had just set off when, not far from their home, the authorities seized them.

Narrator 2: May 1538. Here is Ursula, now one of only eight Anabaptist prisoners, in the prison at Saint Petersburg castle.

Ursula: Oh, I get so *tired* listening to the prison guards' useless chatter!

Prison guard 1: Well, they've had success with one of them prisoners. That young fellow—he's already decided to give it up. Good thinking on his part. Nineteen years old. He's better off admitting his mistakes, doing his penance. His family will pay his fine, and he's going home to his farm—where he belongs.

Prison guard 2: Did you hear what they've done with that scoundrel priest they had with them? Sent him off to Brixen. Ha. They'll do a good job on him there. Serves him right, leading all those folks down the wrong path. Good riddance.

Prison guard 1: Now we're stuck with these stupid folks. Got to watch 'em till Dr. Müller gets here. They say he's pretty good at convincing them to change their minds. He's going to teach them the truth and make them recant.

Prison guard 2: I say, good luck to him. They're stubborn all right. But then, what else could you expect from folks from the Otz valley. They're an ignorant lot up there.

Narrator 1: Dr. Müller was not successful so the authorities put the prisoners on a meager diet for six and a half months, a full half year. What next? The local authorities saw that starving the Anabaptists made no difference to their beliefs. What should they do? They asked the King, and the King said,

King: Do whatever is necessary. You must persuade those stubborn Anabaptists. Make them recant. They must renounce their beliefs to save their souls.

Narrator 2: Sept 1539. Ursula languishes in the Petersburg castle prison. There have been repeated postponements of hearings of her case. By now the prison authorities are concerned that the costs of keeping her in prison were rising too high so they try to draw on her inheritance. But they find that the family had dispersed the property among her married brothers and sisters. The authorities order them to pay off the hefty amount—equivalent to eight months' pay for a working carpenter at that time.

Narrator 1: 1541. It's early in the year, and Ursula is still in prison, but she's now been transferred over high mountains to Sigmundskron Castle. The authorities hope that costs of her upkeep in prison will now be paid by the treasury of the district of Tirol. It's deep winter, and Ursula is given only minimal food and minimal clothing.

Ursula's Song

1. Eternal Father in heaven
 I call to you from deep within
 Do not let me turn from you
 Hold me in your eternal truth
 Until I reach my end

2. O God, keep my heart and mouth
 Watch over me, Lord, always
 Do not let me part from you
 Whether in anguish, fear or need
 Keep me pure in joy

3. My eternal Lord and father
 I am your poor unworthy child
 Teach me and make me know
 So that I can observe your ways
 That is my truest desire

4. To walk in your strength in death
 Through tribulation, fear and need
 Keep me in your strength
 That I may never again be separated
 From your love, O God

5. There are many who travel this path
On which stands the cup of suffering
And also much false doctrine
With which they try to turn us away
From Christ our Lord
6. I lift up my soul to you, Lord
I hope in you in times of danger
Let me not become a disgrace
So that my enemies have the victory
Over me on this earth
7. They have me here locked up
I wait, O God, from my heart
With great desire
If you would only stir
And save your ones in prison
8. O God Father, for your kingdom
Makes us like the five wise virgins
Who were alert
In waiting for the bridegroom to come
With his chosen band
9. Eternal king of heaven
Give us eternal food and drink
Feed us with your truth
Which never spoils
For it is of spiritual nature
10. If you hold back your food from us
Then all is lost and for nothing
We can accomplish nothing without you
We hope in you through your grace
That we have not been mistaken
11. I do not doubt the power of God
Truthful is his judgment
He will forsake no one
Who is firm in faith
And remains in truth
12. Be comforted, you Christians
And always be joyous through Jesus Christ
He gives us love and faith
God comforts through his holy word
And we must trust in it

13. I bid God and his church
That he be today my guardian
For his name's sake
My Father, let it be so
Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Narrator 2: December 1542. Ursula, transported again over the mountain passes, has now landed in the prison of the city of Innsbruck. They tell her she is to remain there “until further notice.” She is given no explanations.

Narrator 1: October 1543. Ursula has now been imprisoned for five years, no longer a young girl, but a 22-year-old Christian tested to the extreme for her faith. She is frail in health, and her family back home is concerned for her. Others have pleaded for her release.

Narrator 2: King Ferdinand’s government decides it is time to release Ursula but with strict conditions.

Judge: Ursula Hellrigel, you are to be pardoned and released on the following conditions: You will leave this territory immediately. You will swear never to return to this your homeland, on penalty of losing your life. Your relatives are to pay for all the expenses of your imprisonment these past five years.

Ursula: I cannot swear an oath. But I can promise to leave the territory as you ask.

Judge: I warn you. If you attempt to return to this country, we will treat you like anyone else.

Narrator 1: Ursula did in fact leave Tirol. She spent the rest of her life among the Hutterite Anabaptists in Moravia. The Hutterite Chronicle records that after she “obtained release, unharmed in her faith and conscience, she returned to the church and there fell asleep in the Lord.”

Sources: Snyder and Huebert Hecht, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, 196-201; Daniel Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 56-58. Ursula’s Song was copied by hand into Hutterite documents under her name, but it was published in the *Ausbund* as Song 36, mistakenly attributed to Annelein of Freiburg.

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We Live the Bible, We Pray the Bible: The Anabaptist Concordance, 1540

Background: Ordinary Anabaptists were known for the astonishing knowledge of the Bible they demonstrated when they were interrogated about their faith. How did they learn the Bible? And how did the Anabaptists worship? This imaginative reconstruction of a secret meeting in 1542 may help answer these questions.

Requirements: Eight persons—three male parts, three female parts, and two narrators (male or female)

* * * * *

Narrator 1: It's getting dark here in the barn. The animals on the floor below have settled down for the night. Peter and Elisabeth, standing in the shadow of an inner doorway, hear the creak of the barn door. They feel a draft from the open door as feet come shuffling in. It's Hans and Maria, who've walked half an hour through the forest behind the farm. All is quiet as they sigh with relief and sit down to rest on a hay bale and a stool.

Elisabeth: Where is Jacob? And why hasn't Magda got here yet? They would have to pass through the village, perhaps observed by unfriendly eyes. Magda, a village midwife, would have a good reason to be out at night; one of the farm families might have called for her. But Jacob would have to be careful; he has no pretext or good explanation for a night time walk.

Narrator 1: In 1542 it was not safe for Anabaptists to gather openly here in south Germany. The members of this little cell group were all Catholics, baptized and brought up in the local parish. They had learned the Lord's Prayer and the Creed like all ordinary Christians. But they wanted more. They wanted to learn the Bible, to hear it read, to memorize the verses, and to pray together with others of similar spirit.

Narrator 2: Unlike the others in the group, Jacob could read in German. In their meetings he would always read to them—usually Gospel stories and the teachings of Jesus. Sometimes at Mass the priest used to read from the Bible, but it was in Latin. No one could understand a word of it, and the priest never explained it. Jacob's reading was wonderful! They could almost see and hear Jesus right there with them.

Narrator 1: Ah, here they are ... Magda and Jacob have made it safely. The six people pull up small stools, huddled closely together. Peter is the host so he speaks first:

Peter: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Thanks be to the Lord for bringing us safely together. Thanks be to the Lord for bread and all provision of our lives. Thanks be to the Lord for the words of Jesus. We pray for the safety and peace of our neighbors in this night. Amen

Maria: I'll light the candle for Jacob so he can read.

Jacob: Just wait with the candle, Maria. Last time we met I read from Matthew, the Lord's Beatitudes, and we all learned them by heart. We want to live by these words. Let's start off tonight saying them. I'll begin each time and you can repeat after me. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

All: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jacob: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

All: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Narrator 2: When they finished the Beatitudes, Jacob leaned back with a big smile on his face.

Jacob: May the Lord Jesus make these words live in us, day by day. Now, Maria, light the candle. I've got a great surprise for you. Look at this! (*He pulls a tiny book out of his boot.*) It's called a Concordance of the Bible.

Hans: How can it be a Bible? It's so small.

Maria: Jacob, where did you get it?

Magda: What's it for? Let me see it.

Jacob: Whoa. Hold on. I got this from a brother up Stuttgart way. We did some business and then he pulled this out of his pocket and put it in my hand. It's just a new thing, only two years since it got printed. He said they use it in the group he meets with. It has whole verses from the Bible written out, from all different parts of the Bible. And then references to other verses that you'd have to look up in a big Bible. But who can afford to have a big Bible? How I'd love to get my hands on one. But in the meantime, isn't this a treasure! Let me show you.

Maria: Jacob, let me hold it. I can't read the words, but I want to see it close up. Maybe sometime I can learn to read it, too. Here Magda, see how tiny the writing is!

Magda: Come on, Jacob, read us something out of it. Just open it up. What does it say?

Jacob: Well, here is a page called, "Be not afraid." There are lots of references from the Old Testament: Exodus, Joshua and Chronicles. I'd have to look those up. But here is Psalm 27: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" And see this from Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a help in the great needs that have met us. Therefore we are not afraid."

Narrator 1: Jacob continues to show and explain the Concordance with its multiple references and written-out verses. He flips the little pages to show the sequence of topics. The subjects come in order: repentance, discipleship, rebirth, service of God, faith, baptism

Peter: This is wonderful. The topics show the path of discipleship; don't they? How many are there? Jacob, when does prayer come in? And purity of heart? And humility? Are those in the list?

Jacob: Take it easy, Peter. Yes, those are all in here, and many others besides. There are 66 different topics, and every one of them has lots of verses to memorize. Tell you what, let's begin at the beginning. I'll read out a verse and you can repeat it back. We can learn a few of the verses tonight, and then next time we meet we'll learn some more.

Hans: I heard there's a brother over in Esslingen [*S-lingen*] who actually owns a Bible. We can't afford that, but what a great thing it is, to have this Concordance. We can learn the Bible verses by heart, and then we can teach our children, too.

Maria: Oh, Hans, if only you and I had a little Concordance of our own. We could learn to read, maybe Jacob could teach us. And then we could have the Bible and pray the words every day at home.

Peter: Before we finish our meeting, let's say together: "This is my commandment ..."

All: "This is my commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, than that he lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." (John 15:9)

Peter: May we live the truth of this verse. If we're arrested we won't report on the others; we won't say their names. We will support one another when we get in trouble: with food, money or clothing and with the care of the children. This is what love means in practical ways. Jesus asks us to lay down our lives as he did. What is our reward? If we do what he says, we will be Jesus' friends, just as he said. God our Father, purify our hearts in love, and grant us courage always to tell the truth and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Protect us now as we go out into the night. We give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Source: *Biblical Concordance of the Swiss Brethren, 1540*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001); for comment see C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 119-126.

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On Hasty Judgments: Pilgram Marpeck, 1542

Background: Most leaders in the Anabaptist tradition were concerned about the practice of church discipline, and they took Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-20 very seriously. Some leaders, reacting to the loose behavior of members in the established churches, went to considerable lengths to foster a pure church "without spot and wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:27). This search for purity at times led to a severe application of "the ban" with frequent excommunications.

Pilgram Marpeck was a civil engineer. He was also an Anabaptist leader and theologian who was deeply troubled by the way some Anabaptist leaders used church discipline. We have taken one of Marpeck's writings on the subject, *Concerning Hasty Judgments and Verdicts* (1542-1543), and have fashioned a conversation between him and a rigorous Anabaptist from Appenzell in Switzerland, whose words we have been invented. The severity that Marpeck protests against has, at times, continued in the Mennonite traditions and has made it difficult for many Mennonites today to practice church discipline.

Requirements: Two persons

* * * * *

Swiss Brother: The churches that look to you for inspiration are too lax, Pilgram. Their members' behavior is not always beyond criticism, and outsiders look at them and wonder. And what are you doing about it? Your approach is too flexible. We take the Bible's vision of the church seriously—a church "without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish" from Ephesians 5:27. Why don't you? How do you defend your approach?

Marpeck: We have to be patient. True believers are forbidden to condemn all these people before the right time, that is, until their fruit, which is open vice, appears. Christ says: "By their fruits you shall know them." He does not say, "by the blossoms or the foliage you shall know them" in Matthew 7:16. For the day of the Lord will reveal everything.

Swiss Brother: But in the meantime, before the day of the Lord, your members don't agree on doctrine and their behavior is worldly.

Marpeck: That's so, I guess. Even if one is concerned about a lapse or burdened with worry and sees the leaves and blossoms of evil appearance, one ought only to warn and admonish but not judge before the time of the fruit (1 Corinthians 4:5)... For love also covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) and judges all things in the best light.

Swiss Brother: But is it loving to have churches that are chaotic in their belief and behavior? We practice excommunication which Jesus gave us to protect the community and to draw the erring brother back into fellowship (Matthew 18:18). Why are you so slow to do this? You say you take the body of Christ seriously; you view it as "a prolongation of the incarnation." What will people think of Christ if his body is in a mess?

Marpeck: Well, we try to take the long view; and we count on the grace of Christ. Even though love is concerned about evil appearance and evil fruit, it nevertheless always hopes for the best (1 Corinthians 13:7). In the same way Christ covers our sin and shame in the love and grace which leads to improvement.

Swiss Brother: Well, I can't believe that Christ is pleased with you. You are unfaithful to the plain teaching of Scripture in your caution about excommunicating sinners!

Marpeck: It is my fervent prayer that, for the sake of Christ, you get your judgments from Christ and learn long-suffering, forbearance and meekness from him. May the merciful Father forgive me my failures and shortcomings which I find in myself every day. I also pray for all others who, like me, desire forgiveness in and through Christ.

Swiss Brother: You're too forbearing, Pilgram. You're too soft. Our churches would excommunicate you.

Marpeck: I fear that they would. My greatest contention with you in my conscience is that nowhere do I find such precipitate, superficial judgments and verdicts on every little matter in Christ and his apostolic church as I find with you. All your hasty actions make me feel somewhat distant from you. In my conscience I am not sure that I should have any part or fellowship in such hasty judgments and verdicts.

Source: Pilgram Marpeck, *Concerning Hasty Judgments and Verdicts*, in *Jörg Mäler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 152-4, 190-1. This is the first of four letters Marpeck wrote to the Swiss Brethren.

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The Interrogation: Elisabeth Dirks, 1549

Background: Elisabeth Dirks was born into an aristocratic family in East Friesland, Netherlands, in the early 16th century. She was educated in a convent school where she learned to read Dutch and Latin, and came to own a Latin New Testament. She joined an Anabaptist group in Leeuwarden [*lay-oo-var-den*] and was appointed to serve it as the first known Anabaptist deaconess. Elisabeth was arrested on January 15, 1549. Leeuwarden City officials were trying to discover the connections that made up the network of Anabaptist subversives. The officers found a Latin Testament in Elisabeth's house.

Requirements: Six (or seven) persons, at least one female to be Elisabeth. The interrogator role could be split into two between the two interrogation sessions.

* * * * *

Policeman: We've got her! We've got the teacher. (*to Elisabeth*) Where is your husband, Menno Simons, the teacher?

Narrator: Elisabeth remained silent. The following day two policemen took her to prison. She was called up before the city council.

Interrogator: Elisabeth Dirks, I ask you solemnly to take the oath for testimony.

Elisabeth: We ought not to swear an oath, but our words should be "Yes, yes" and "No, no."

Interrogator: Elisabeth Dirks, do you have a husband?

Elisabeth: The truth is, I have no husband.

Interrogator: We say that you are a teacher and that you seduce many. We have been told this, and we want to know who your friends are.

Elisabeth: My God has commanded me to love my Lord and my God, and to honor my parents so I will not tell you who my parents are. What I suffer for the name of Christ is a reproach to my friends.

Interrogator: All right, we will leave this subject alone, but we want to know who you have taught.

Elisabeth: Oh, no, my lords, leave me in peace about this too. Interrogate me about my faith which I will gladly tell you about.

Interrogator: We shall make you so afraid that you will tell us what we ask.

Elisabeth: I hope through the grace of God that he will keep my tongue so that I shall not become a traitor and deliver my brothers to death.

Interrogator: What persons were present when you were baptized?

Elisabeth: Christ said, “Ask those that were present or who heard it.” See John 18:21.

Interrogator: Now we perceive that you are a teacher for you compare yourself to Christ.

Elisabeth: No, my lords, far be it from me; for I do not esteem myself above even the rubbish which is swept out from the house of the Lord.

Interrogator: What do you believe concerning the house of God? Do you not regard our church as the house of God?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, for it is written: “*You* are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” See 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Interrogator: What do you believe concerning our Mass?

Elisabeth: My lords, of your Mass I think nothing at all, but I highly esteem all that accords with the Word of God.

Interrogator: What are your views with regard to the most awesome Holy Sacrament?

Elisabeth: I have never in my life read in the holy Scriptures of a holy sacrament, but of the Lord’s Supper. Let me show you from the Scriptures

Interrogator: Be silent, for the devil speaks through your mouth.

Elisabeth: My lords, this is a small matter because the servant is not better than her lord.

Interrogator: You speak from a spirit of pride.

Elisabeth: No, my lords, I speak with frankness.

Interrogator: What did the Lord say when he gave his disciples the Supper?

Elisabeth: What did he give them, flesh or bread?

Interrogator: He gave them bread.

Elisabeth: Didn’t the Lord remain sitting there? How then could they eat the flesh of the Lord?

Interrogator: What are your views concerning infant baptism, seeing that you have been rebaptized?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, I have not been rebaptized. I have been baptized once upon my faith. It is written that baptism belongs to believers.

Interrogator: Are our children damned then because they are baptized?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. God forbid that I should judge the children.

Interrogator: Do you not seek your salvation in baptism?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, all the water in the sea could not save me, but salvation is in Christ, and he has commanded me to love God my Lord above all things and my neighbor as myself.

Interrogator: Have the priests power to forgive sins?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. How can I believe this? Christ is the only priest through whom sins are forgiven. See Hebrews 7:21.

Interrogator: You say that you believe everything that accords with the holy Scriptures. Do you not believe the words of James?

Elisabeth: Yes, my lords. Why should I not believe them?

Interrogator: Doesn't he say in James 5:14: "Go to the elder of the church that he may anoint you and pray over you?"

Elisabeth: Yes, my lords, but do you mean to say that you belong to this church?

Interrogator: Are you claiming that the Holy Ghost has saved you already so that you need neither confession nor sacrament?

Elisabeth: No, my lords. I acknowledge that I have transgressed the ordinance of the Pope which the Emperor has confirmed by decrees. But prove to me that I have transgressed in any article against my Lord and my God, and I will cry woe over me, miserable being.

Narrator: That was the end of the first session. Later, Elizabeth was again brought before the council and led into the torture chamber. Hans the executioner was present. The officials warned her, "We have so far dealt with you in kindness, but if you will not confess, we will resort to severity." The Procurator General then spoke:

Procurator General: Master Hans, seize her.

Hans: Oh, no, my lords; she will voluntarily confess.

Narrator: But she would not voluntarily confess, and so he applied the thumbscrews to her thumbs and forefingers so that the blood squirted out at the nails.

Elisabeth: Oh, I cannot endure it any longer.

Interrogator: Confess, and we will relieve your pain.

Elisabeth: Help me, O Lord, your poor handmaiden! For you are a helper in time of need.

Interrogator: Confess, and we will relieve your pain. We told you to confess, not to cry to God the Lord!

Narrator: But she steadfastly adhered to God her Lord, and the Lord took away her pain so that she said to the lords:

Elisabeth: Ask me anything, and I shall answer you for I no longer feel the least pain in my flesh as I did before.

Interrogator: Will you not yet confess?

Elisabeth: No, my lords.

Narrator: They then applied the screws to her shins, one on each shin.

Elisabeth: O, my lords, do not put me to shame; a man has never touched my bare body.

Procurator General: Miss Elisabeth, we shall not treat you dishonorably.

Narrator: She then fainted. They said to one another: “Perhaps she is dead.” But waking up, she said:

Elisabeth: I am alive. I am not dead.

Narrator: They then took off all the screws and pleaded with her.

Elisabeth: Why do you plead with me like this? This is the way to deal with children.

Narrator: So they obtained not one word from her that was detrimental to her brothers and sisters in the Lord or to any other person.

Interrogator: Will you revoke all that you have previously confessed here?

Elisabeth: No, my lords, but I will seal it with my death.

Interrogator: We will try you no more. Will you voluntarily tell us who baptized you?

Elisabeth: No, my lords; I have told you that I will not confess this.

Narrator: Sentence was then passed on Elisabeth on March 27, 1549. She was condemned to death. After five and a half months of imprisonment, she was drowned in a bag on May 29, 1549, and thus she offered up her body to God.

Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 481-482. Comment: C.J. Dyck, “Elisabeth and Hadewijk of Friesland,” in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Studies in Women and Religion/Études sur les femmes et la religion 3. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996, 359-364.

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Is Menno in the Coach? A Mennonite Myth, ca. 1550

Background: In the mid-16th century, it was illegal to be an Anabaptist in the Netherlands. Menno Simons, a Dutch Anabaptist pastor, was a traveling teacher and networker among hidden groups. Because Menno was influential, political leaders wanted to silence him and offered a substantial reward to anyone who would arrest him. The following story about the itinerant Menno circulated widely and was retold repeatedly even though it may only be a legend. That the Anabaptists retold this story so frequently may point to their discomfort with the idea of telling a half-truth. In the contemporary Dutch language dictionaries an idiomatic expression for half-truth is “Menist leugen” (Mennonite lie).

Requirements: Five persons. Set up an arrangement so that Menno and the driver are a level above where the passenger is. Driver has no lines.

* * * * *

Narrator: One day Menno was riding on a stagecoach. Instead of getting into the coach, he was riding in the high seat, up front with the driver. Suddenly, policemen searching for Menno dashed up on horses. One of the policemen shouted,

Policeman: (*directs question to Menno and the driver*) Is Menno Simons in the coach?

Narrator: Menno leaned down:

Menno: Is Menno in there?

Narrator: Someone from inside the coach replied,

Passenger: No, he’s not in here.

Narrator: So Menno told the police,

Menno: They say Menno’s not in the coach.

Narrator: Foiled, the horsemen rode away. (*As the policeman leaves, Menno and the driver exchange a glance.*)

Source: Based on C.J. Dyck, “Menno Simons and the White Lie,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 555.

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Economics, A Hot Topic: Menno Simons (1552)

Background: Menno Simons (1496-1561) was a Dutch Catholic priest from Friesland, Netherlands, who in 1536 joined the Anabaptist movement in which he served as an itinerant pastor and evangelist. His leadership and writings helped give the Anabaptist movement a sense of coherence and peaceful identity in the years after the collapse of the Anabaptist kingdom in Münster. Although danger of arrest and execution forced Menno to move about, he managed to write prolifically, including controversial pieces such as his *Reply to False Accusations* in which he debates with the Anabaptists' Calvinist Reformed critics. The criticisms that the Anabaptists held property in common were based on reports of the Münster Anabaptists and of Moravian Hutterian Anabaptist communities. In response, Menno argues for radical sharing without a community of goods.

Requirements: Seven (or four) persons—reader parts could be reduced from five to two.

* * * * *

Critic: We lay serious charges against you, Menno. You and your people have your property in common!

Menno: This is false. It's absolutely not true. Our people do not hold property in common. What you call "owning" is not the point. Of course, it is reasonable that Christians should love one another and be solicitous for each other's welfare and share what we have. It is only natural that we should do so. More important, the Bible teaches that we are bonded together. We have one Lord, one God, one baptism, one bread. We are truly one body, and that is why we care for one another.

Critic: That all sounds very pious. But my question is talking about real life—material things, property. Who owns things? Who is responsible for them?

Menno: Please, allow me to explain the logic of our position. Any intelligent person cares for his whole body. He doesn't just clothe one part—say his lower body—and leave the rest naked. No, all parts of the body are important. And so it is with us. We care for the whole body of Christ, his church, those who are gifted with the Spirit of the Lord.

Critic: So you take responsibility for the needs of everyone in your group. Is that what you mean? You call that intelligent. I say it is careless. Someone could take advantage of you; that's for sure.

Menno: You see, we live according to the Bible. And according to Jesus Christ, our love must go even beyond our own circles. We must be prepared to love and serve our neighbors. Not only with money and goods, but we must learn to love and serve them after the example of our Lord.

Critic: Your neighbors? You mean people not in your own group? And what does Jesus Christ have to do with it?

Menno: We are to show mercy and love as much as possible. Yes, we, first of all, take to heart the needs of the saints; no one has to beg. But beyond that, we are to entertain those in distress and to take strangers into our own houses. Jesus teaches us these things: we are not to turn away from our own families; we are to comfort the afflicted, assist the needy, feed the hungry and never turn our faces from the poor. This is the kind of community life that we teach.

Critic: That's all very well, and probably not illegal. But it is known that you advocate taking and possessing the land and property of other people!

Menno: Friend, this is another false charge. You keep talking about property and goods. We are concerned for the welfare of all people, especially the poor and needy among us. In this we obey the Scriptures. Listen to what the Bible says:

Reader 1: Moses says, "If there is a poor person among you, of one of your brothers, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God gives you, thou shall not harden your heart or shut your hand from your poor brother."

Reader 2: Tobit says, "Give your bread to the hungry, and your garments to those that are naked."

Reader 3: Christ himself says, "Be therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Reader 4: Paul says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy; etc. For whoever has showed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment."

Reader 5: John says, Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up compassion for him, how does the love of God dwell in him?

Menno: Friend, mercy, love, and community—this is what we teach and practice. We have done so for the past 17 years. Let me tell you. We thank God that, in spite of terrible hardships, none of those who have joined us nor any of their orphaned children have been forced to beg.

Critic: You almost make me envy you in this. But I must say it again. These are the charges before you. Not only do you teach community of goods, you'd like to reach into the chests and pockets of others! We must warn people to beware of you.

Menno: You speak of money and of property. Ownership is not the point. In fact, our property has to a great extent been taken away from us and is still daily taken. Many godly fathers and mothers are put to the sword or burned with fire. And although we are not allowed the free enjoyment of our homes in these hard times, we thank God. Why? Because the precious, merciful life of a saint is not a fantasy and a dream. God is love, and all who dwell in love, dwell in God and God in them. This is Christian practice. If it were not so, then we might as well abandon the whole Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and never use the very name "Christian."

Source: Menno Simons, "Reply to False Accusations" (1552), in J.C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Works of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 558-560.

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Peace, Peace: Menno Simons, 1552

Background: Menno Simons needed to defend the Anabaptist movement against critics who pointed to violent behavior by Anabaptists in the 1530s—in Münster but also in Amsterdam and elsewhere in the Netherlands. By 1552 these violent groups had withered, but they had contributed to a widespread impression that the Anabaptists were violent revolutionaries. In response, Menno spoke of the church that he encouraged as he traveled, in which the peace of Christ reigns. He critiques all use of violence.

Requirements: Two persons

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Pastor: Menno, you Anabaptists are disgusting. You are revolutionaries, against all order. If you had the chance you'd seize power and use force just like anyone else.

Menno: Not so. Let me remind you. The Scriptures teach that there are two opposing princes. The one is the Prince of peace; the other the prince of strife. The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; his kingdom is the kingdom of peace which is his church. His messengers are messengers of peace; his Word is the word of peace; his body is the body of peace; his children are the seed of peace; and his inheritance is the inheritance of peace.

Pastor: Peace, peace ... why do you talk about peace all the time?

Menno: Because of our King. With our King and in his Kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace. Everything that is seen, heard and done is peace.

Pastor: But aren't Christians supposed to use the sword for the sake of justice?

Menno: Well, what did Christ say? He commanded Peter to sheathe his sword. All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good to those who abuse and persecute them; to give their coat when their cloak is taken; to turn the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me. How can a Christian use the Bible to defend retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, killing, torturing, stealing, robbing, plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?

Pastor: Well, I disagree. I think that in the Bible, God calls Christians to fight for what is right.

Menno: But how? What methods does the Bible tell us to use when we fight? Our weapons are not swords and spears, but patience, silence, hope, and the Word of God. With these we fight our battle. Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." With these we intend to storm the kingdom of the devil and not with sword, spears and cannon. We want to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. True Christians do not know vengeance, no matter how they are treated.

Pastor: But surely when they suffer injustice and wrong Christians have to retaliate.

Menno: No, no. True Christians don't break their peace—even if they should be tempted to do so by bondage, torture, poverty, fire and the sword. True Christians don't cry, "Vengeance, vengeance!" as the world does, but with Christ they pray, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Source: Menno Simons, "Reply to False Accusations" (1552), in Wenger, ed., *Complete Works*, 554-557.

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Dirk Turns Back: Dirk Willems, 1569

Background: In 1569 Dirk Willems turned back. Jan Luyken's [*Yon Lau-ken*] engraving from *Martyrs Mirror* catches and freezes the moment of his turning.

Requirements: Two (or four) persons. Two additional persons can pantomime Dirk saving the guard.

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Reader 1: Dirk Willems was a young man who lived in the Netherlands, in the town of Asperen. As a teenager he met some Anabaptists. Their vision of Christian discipleship gripped Dirk's imagination, and he was baptized in the neighboring city of Rotterdam.

Reader 2: According to legal documents, after returning to his home town "in his house he held secret meetings and taught prohibited doctrines." That is, Dirk took part in an illegal house church where he and others taught a way of being Christian that was unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church, the official church of the region.

Reader 1: Dirk was arrested and imprisoned. But he managed to escape from the prison.

(Optional pantomime begins.) He climbed out a window and clambered down a rope made of knotted cloths. Because it was early spring, the pond was still frozen. He ran for his life, pursued closely by a prison guard. Dirk made it across the cracking ice, but the guard broke through. The guard cried out in terror, "Save me!"

Reader 2: Hearing the guard's desperate plea, Dirk turned back. He reached across the ice and rescued his pursuer. The guard, dripping wet and freezing cold, promptly arrested Dirk. *(Optional pantomime ends.)*

Officials saw to his re-imprisonment in a more secure prison, the tower of the Asperen parish church.

Reader 1: This time there was no escape. Dirk was tried for heresy and condemned to be burned to death. As he was being burned, the wind blew the fire away from his upper body so he died in excruciating pain. People in the neighboring town heard him cry out as he died. Seventy times they heard him cry, "O Lord, my God."

Reader 2: Dirk's execution was to be a deterrent—to serve as "an example to others." Luyken's engraving of the decisive moment in Dirk's story, the moment of his turning back to save his enemy, has appeared in more than 250 publications. Dirk's executioners meant his death to be an example to others. But in a way unimagined by his enemies, Dirk's life and his death have truly served as an "example to others."

Reader 1: Dirk's story poses the questions of costly enemy-love. Why did Dirk turn back? Was it right for him to turn back? Would I have turned back?

Source: T.J. Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians* (Haarlem, 1685; ET Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1960), 741-742 (the Jan Luyken engraving of Dirk's turning is on p 741 check).

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The Candlemaker and the Inquisitor: Jacob De Roore, 1569

Background: Jacob de Roore (the Chandler/Candlemaker) was an Anabaptist leader in Flanders who was arrested in Bruges in 1569 and charged with heresy. While in prison Jacob was interrogated by the Franciscan Friar Cornelis in the presence of witnesses and stenographers. In this reading, Jacob argues in typical Anabaptist fashion that the Bible's meaning can be clear to ordinary Christians and that powerful, well-educated Christians can get it wrong. The Bible can be understood from the bottom up. Cornelis is amazed by the Anabaptists' knowledge of the Bible but is convinced that the Bible must be read top down in light of the Christian tradition. The dialogue recorded here is a small part of the entire interrogation which occupies 24 pages of the *Martyrs Mirror*. Jacob also wrote 19 (surviving) letters to his family, friends, congregations and another prisoner. St. John's Apocalypse is the Book of Revelation.

Requirements: Two persons

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Friar Cornelis: Ah bah! What do you understand about St. John's Apocalypse? At what university did you study? At the loom, I suppose; for I understand that you were nothing but a poor weaver and candlemaker before you went around preaching and rebaptizing. I have attended the university at Louvain and studied divinity a long time, and yet I do not understand anything at all about St. John's Apocalypse. This is a fact.

Jacob: Therefore Christ thanked his heavenly Father that he had revealed and made it known to babes and hid it from the wise of this world, as is written in Matthew 11:25.

Friar Cornelis: Exactly. God has revealed it to the weavers at the loom, to the cobblers on their bench, and to bellows-menders, lantern-tinkers, scissors-grinders, broom makers, thatchers, and all sorts of riff-raff, and poor, filthy and lousy beggars. And to us church leaders who have studied from our youth, night and day, he has concealed it. Just see how we are tormented.

You Anabaptists are certainly fine fellows to understand the holy Scriptures. Before you are rebaptized, you can't tell A from B, but as soon as you are baptized, you can read and write. If the devil and his mother do not have a hand in this, I do not understand anything about you people.

Source: *Martyrs' Mirror*, 775; on the same page there is a Jan Luyken engraving of this interrogation.

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An Anabaptist Artist: Jan Wouters Van Kuyk, 1572

Background: Jan Wouters van Kuyk, an Anabaptist artist and church leader in the city of Dordrecht, the Netherlands, was executed in 1572, leaving a legacy of 11 letters and a confession of faith that were published in 1579 and later incorporated into the *Martyrs Mirror*.

Requirements: Five persons

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Narrator: Jan Wouters van Kuyck [*Yaan Wouters fon Kowk*] was a citizen of the city of Dordrecht in Holland. According to a historian of the time, he was “a man of blameless life and conversation, a skillful painter and stained glass artist.” Jan Wouters was also an Anabaptist.

Early in 1572 there was a crackdown on Anabaptists in Dordrecht. Jan frequently moved from house to house so that he would not be easily recognized. But the bailiff learned where he was staying and came with his officers. Unexpectedly, without asking anything, the bailiff and his officers came up the stairs to Jan’s door. Responding to their knocks, Jan Wouters opened the door.

Bailiff: Does Jan Wouters live here?

Narrator: Jan Wouters was not willing to speak a lie even to the bailiff.

Jan: (*very loudly*) Yes, it’s me. I’m Jan Wouters van Kuyck.

Narrator: He spoke these words very loudly so that his wife, who was in the back room, could hear him and make her escape, which she did. But their only daughter, a child of seven, remained in the front room and saw her father arrested. The police ignored her. They immediately laid their hands upon Jan and forcibly tied him up.

Jan: O, my lords, you are binding me as if I were a wicked man. However, you are binding not me, but yourselves.

Narrator: Jan spent many weeks in the filthy Dordrecht jail. At times the officials treated him decently. One day the bailiff, who was still young and beardless, came up to Jan.

Bailiff: Jan, I’d like you to paint a portrait of me.

Jan: Oh?

Bailiff: I’d like you to paint me as if I were King Solomon where he pronounces his first sentence. You know the scene from 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Jan: All right, all right. You get me the brushes and paint.

Narrator: The clergy were angry at this. It was delaying things.

Priest: Isn't he disgusting, that bailiff? He's got that prisoner—that heretic—painting his portrait as *Solomon*. I think he arrested Jan only to have this portrait of himself painted.

Narrator: But sometimes Jan also received brutal treatment. He was placed on the rack and tortured terribly. The pain in his whole body was intense and especially in his hands. He struggled to use his hands—his painter's hands—to write a letter to his wife.

Jan: I wrote the first page just after I had been tortured so it is somewhat badly written. Now my hand is a little better, but I still have the marks of the sufferings of Christ. His name be praised forever.

Narrator: The officers racked him some more and beat him on his back. He was in great pain.

Torturer: How does this suit you? Who are your friends? Unless you tell us about your network, I will tear open your old wounds again.

Jan: Dear wife, it is hard to write this to you. After further threats, the torturer then let me down again and placed me before the lords upon the rack with my eyes blindfolded. You know the *Ecce Homo*, the work of art in which Christ is depicted appearing before Pilate? That's how I must have looked. And the officials asked me whether I would now tell them about my Anabaptist contacts. I said that I couldn't do it so he racked me again which caused me incredible pain. When he shook me and jerked the rope, the pain got even worse. When they could obtain nothing from me, they let me down.

Bailiff: Jan Wouters, your face is as sweet as that of an angel, but your heart is harder than Pharaoh's heart.

Jan: No, you know that this is not so. The Lord will make it clear to you all. I have simply sought my salvation.

Narrator: From prison Jan wrote letters not only to his wife but to his daughter.

Jan: Dear daughter, Jesus said, "If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23). Remember, dear daughter, that he also said "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). My beloved, I urge you to join the people who carry their crosses. That's the way to come to Christ. He bore the cross for us. We must follow in his footsteps and be like our Lord—the disciple like his master—and as we suffer with him so we shall forever rejoice with him.

Narrator: Jan then told his daughter what were the signs of the true, cross-bearing Christian.

Jan: They are not conformed to the world. They crucify their sinful flesh more and more every day. They strive after things that are honest and good. They do evil to no one. They pray for their enemies and do not resist them. Their word is their seal—their yes is yes and their no is no.

Narrator: On Palm Sunday in 1572, Jan and Adriaenken Jans [*Adri-en-ken Yans*], an Anabaptist woman leader, were gagged and led out to be executed. But Jan got the piece of wood out of his mouth.

Jan: (*loudly*) O Lord, strengthen your feeble servant and your poor handmaiden. It is for your name's sake that we have come to this for which we have willingly prepared ourselves.

Narrator: The hangman then strangled Adriaenken before burning her. Before Jan was burned, he saw in the crowd some fellow believers. He called out to them.

Jan: (*loudly*) Adieu, goodbye and farewell, my dear brothers and sisters. I commend you to the Lord—to the Lord who shed his blood for us.

Narrator: Then the fire was lit, and the Anabaptist artist was burned alive.

Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 897-926. See the Jan Luyken engraving, *Martyrs Mirror*, 898.

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Refugees Arrested: Anabaptists in England, 1575

Background: This reading dramatizes the short history of the first Anabaptist church in England. It tells the story of obscure Anabaptist refugees who came to England to escape severe persecution in the Netherlands and found themselves arrested, attracting the interest of bishops and Queen Elizabeth I herself. Some Anabaptists recanted; others were deported by the English authorities who also burned two of them for heresy.

Requirements: 33 persons (11 speaking parts)—out of the 33, at least 15 are women and at least 11 are men; a flip chart on which the authorities' four requirements are written in bold: Renounce Anabaptism, Agree with infant baptism, Magistracy, Oaths

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Ask 15 women and 11 men to come to the front, standing to one side. A flip chart stands center stage.

Reader: It was Easter morning, April 3, 1575. About two dozen people—15 women, ten men and a young lad—gathered in a house near Aldgate in London. They were foreigners, refugees from Flanders, and had come together to hear the Word of God and to pray. At nine o'clock that Easter morning, there was a loud knocking at the door.

Constable: Open up! Open up! I'm the constable here. Something funny is going on; so your neighbors tell us. Devils, then, are you? Here, you beadles, take down their names. Arrest them. We're taking them in.

Reader: So the constable and his men took the Flemish refugees into custody. Over the next three months these obscure aliens, were held in prison, and became a preoccupation of the most notable figures in the realm. The prisoners set to work immediately and composed a submission to the Bishop of London. In 13 articles studded with biblical references, they stated their faith in a humble and non-provocative fashion. Several days later, they came face-to-face with the Bishop of London, two aldermen, three English preachers and one French preacher. They discovered that the bishop was not interested in their attempt to set the agenda. Instead he confronted them with four articles which they must sign or be burnt alive. This was no time for discussion.

Bishop: *(reveals the charges on the flip chart)* You must desist from, renounce and forsake all errors, sects and heresies of the accursed sect of the Anabaptists and confess that they had been seduced thereto by the devil. You must agree that infants ought to be baptized, that a Christian might administer the office of a magistrate and that a Christian might swear an oath. Say yes or no.

Reader: To the Anabaptists' replies that they could not find this in the Scripture, or that their consciences would not allow that, the bishop replied:

Bishop: Your crimes are very great. You shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Reader: From prison, the Anabaptists continued their attempt to explain themselves. They wrote a general letter giving a reasoned defense of their position and of their social vision. They also appealed to the consciences of their readers, writing:

Prisoner: God commands us to love the stranger as one's own self. Christ and his own persecuted no one, but in his true Gospel taught the contrary when he says: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you."

Reader: And the prisoners pointed out that they were, after all, refugee.:

Prisoner: There is nowhere a place for us. Hence we must go to bloody countries whence we fled, partly because of the great tyranny where the blood of saints is poured out like water.

Reader: The prisoners were assisted to reflect on their errors by three weeks of solitary confinement with chains on their legs. The Bishop of London sent a message:

Bishop: I promise that if the prisoners will adhere to the church, I will release them and free them from their bonds.

Reader: Five of the prisoners, all men, gave in to pressure. On June 25, at Paul's Cross outside the Cathedral in the presence of thousands of Englishmen and directly in front of the pulpit, these five men carried firewood symbolic of their deserving of death while the bishop announced:

Bishop: These men, who had been seduced, will now be joining the Dutch Reformed Church and will thus become brethren in the true church. (*ushers five of the men to sit down*)

Reader: On May 21, seven weeks after their arrest, the remaining prisoners were called in, two by two, before the commissioners who urged them to sign to the four questions. When the prisoners refused, all 14 women and a young lad were tied hand to hand and sent to Newgate, the prison of those confined for capital crimes.

Bishop moves the women and one man to the other side of the stage.

Reader: The women imagined that they would be the first to be burnt because day by day, officials came to visit them, holding up death before their eyes unless they should sign. But instead, the 14 women and the lad were carted to a ship at St. Katherine's Dock and deported to Holland. The cover letter to the captain stated: "These people were not worthy to come among Christians." Tied to the front of the cart and whipped as he went along was the young lad who blurted out:

Young lad: This is for the name of Christ.

Bishop ushers the 14 women and one man to sit down.

Reader: Meanwhile, attempts were being made to forestall the execution of the rest of the prisoners. Perhaps the most impassioned intervention came in a letter to Queen Elizabeth from the martyrologist and divine, John Foxe. He wrote that a rumor had come to his ears.

Foxe: There are one or two concerning whom a decision will shortly be made (unless your compassion comes to their rescue) about the penalty of death by burning.

Reader: This Foxe opposed—not because he favored Anabaptism which he termed “this madness”—but simply because he was revolted by burning. In spite of these appeals, the process against the heretics continued. On June 2, the Bishop of London called the five prisoners before his Episcopal court at St Paul’s. Once again he confronted them with the four articles and threatened that unless they signed, they were to be burned at Smithfield. There followed an exchange between the prisoners and the bishop:

Bishop moves alternately between the prisoners and somewhere near the flip chart.

Prisoner: We will be burned? This is but a small matter.

Bishop: Heretics such as you should be shunned. *(gestures)* I hereby expel you from my church as bad members.

Prisoner: How can you expel us from your church when we have never yet been one with you?

Bishop: In England there is no one that is not a member of God’s church. I condemn you all to death.

Reader: The five Anabaptist prisoners were now moved to the Newgate prison from which the women had recently been deported.

Bishop moves the five men across the stage.

Reader: They were confined among thieves and criminals who themselves had been warned by the bishop to take care lest they be seduced by the Anabaptists. Their imprisonment was severe, confined in cages in a deep dungeon so that they could not converse with their neighbors. They were threatened day after day with death by hanging, burning and otherwise. In this desperate situation, the prisoners somehow engaged in more writing. They wrote to John Foxe who they hoped would again write on their behalf to Queen Elizabeth. They also wrote directly to the Queen. But they were wasting their time. When some maids of honor attempted to present the Anabaptists’ appeals to the Queen, she reprimanded the women and refused even to touch the tainted papers. Meanwhile, in prison, one of the five prisoners died through the hardship of his confinement.

Bishop ushers one man to sit down.

Reader: The four remaining Anabaptists attempted to contact friends outside. They were visited by ministers who in various ways did their best to get them to save their lives by recanting. One minister laid his hands upon them, then fell on his knees and cried out:

Bishop approaches prisoners.

Minister: Lord, convert their heart! Depart from them, thou wicked one!

Reader: On July 17, it was announced that the eldest two prisoners should be executed.

Bishop moves two men center stage.

Reader: On July 22, in front of a varied audience of dignitaries and common people, Jan Pieterss [*Yon Peters*], a poor man aged 50, and Hendrick Terwoort [*Hen-drick Tear-vort*], a goldsmith aged 35, were burned at Smithfield, a place where 20 years earlier Catholics had burned many Protestants. On his way to the stake, Terwoort asserted to the crowds:

Terwoort: This is the way that all the prophets went, also Christ our Savior.

Reader: At the stake, the prisoners were given a final opportunity to assent to the four articles. They refused and were executed in the slowest way possible without any strangling or gunpowder. In dying, Terwoort left his wife of just six months while Pieterss left nine children. He also left a hymn, written in prison:

Pietererss: We are, O Lord, now in the battle.
Oh! keep us safe
From our enemies, now
Who encircle us on all sides.
Oh Lord! Free us!
So that we will persevere.
O God, you are a great God,
Strengthening us always in our need.

Bishop ushers the two executed men to sit down.

Reader: Two prisoners remained in Newgate prison. During the daytime they whiled the time away writing the most accommodating confession so far, but it was still too nuanced for the bishop who continued to insist on an unequivocal assent to the four articles. At night they worked on another project—filing off an iron bar from a prison window in the hope of a break-out. But in this they were foiled and so were fettered much more heavily than ever before. But as they languished in Newgate, Queen Elizabeth and her Councilors evidently felt that the two executions had made their point, so just less than a year after their original arrest, the two remaining prisoners were taken out and sent back to the Netherlands.

Bishop ushers remaining two to sit down.

Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 1008-1024. For comment and reflection, see Alan Kreider, "When Anabaptists were last in the British Isles," in Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray, eds., *Coming Home: Stories of Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), 176-191.

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Refugees Arrested: Anabaptists in England, 1575 (full drama)

Background: This drama is about the short history of the first Mennonite church in England. It tells the story of obscure Anabaptist refugees who came to England to escape severe persecution in the Netherlands and found themselves arrested, attracting the interest of bishops and Queen Elizabeth I herself. Some Anabaptists recanted; others were deported by the English authorities, who also burned two of them for heresy.

Props: a scroll with the bishop's four requirements are written in bold: Renounce Anabaptism, Agree with infant baptism, Magistracy, Oaths

Characters: (41 roles)

15 female and 11 male Anabaptists including:	Constable
Anabaptist 1	Guards - 3
Anabaptist 2	Bishop of London
Anabaptist 3	Aldermen - 2
Anabaptist 4 (female)	Preachers - 4
Young lad	Commissioners - 2
Reader	John Foxe

* * * * *

PART 1

*(15 female and 11 male Anabaptists stand in a circle downstage right and sing the end of a hymn. After the hymn **Anabaptist 1** speaks.)*

Anabaptist 1 Let us pray.

*(The **Anabaptists** bow their heads and freeze. **Reader** walks from upstage right to downstage right.)*

Reader Easter morning, April 3, 1575. About two dozen people—15 women, ten men and a young lad—gathered in a house near Aldgate in London. They were foreigners, refugees from Flanders, and had come together to hear the Word of God and to pray. At nine o'clock that Easter morning there was a loud knocking ... (**Constable** interrupts here as he mimes knocking at door while stomping a foot at stage left) at the door.

Constable Open up! Open up! I'm the constable here. *(He bursts through the "door" followed by three of his guards.)* Something funny is going on; so your neighbors tell us. Devils, then, are you? Here, you beadles, take down their names. Arrest them. We're taking them in. *(Guards roughly make those in the circle group together. The **Constable** and **Guards** stand at the right and the left of the group and usher them in a large circle around the perimeter of the stage as if leading them on a journey.)*

Reader So the constable and his men took the Flemish refugees into custody.

*(**Anabaptists** sit bunched together downstage left. One of them pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and mimes writing while the others mime giving animated input.)*

Reader Over the next three months these obscure aliens were held in prison and became a preoccupation of the most notable figures in the realm.

*(The **Bishop, Aldermen and Preachers** walk behind the Anabaptist prisoners and peer at the group in a concerned manner. They end up stage right.)*

Reader The prisoners set to work immediately and composed a submission to the Bishop of London. In 13 articles filled with biblical references, they stated their faith in a humble fashion. Several days later they came face-to-face with the Bishop of London, two aldermen, three English preachers and one French preacher.

*(The **Anabaptists** freeze while two of them stand and cross stage right to the **Bishop, Aldermen and Preachers**, who come forward. The **Anabaptists** hold out their paper to the **Bishop**, who holds out his hand in rejection.)*

Bishop I am not interested in your agenda. You must renounce all heresies of the accursed sect of the Anabaptists and confess that you have been seduced by the devil. You must agree that infants ought to be baptized, that a Christian might administer the office of a magistrate and that a Christian might swear an oath. Say yes and sign these articles (*points to the scroll, which one of the **Preachers** opens and holds up*) and you will live. Say no and be burned alive.

Anabaptist 1 But we cannot find any of this in the Scripture.

Anabaptist 2 Our conscience will not allow us to sign your articles.

Bishop Your crimes are very great. You shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

*(**Bishop, Aldermen and Preachers** turn and walk back upstage and freeze with backs to audience. **Anabaptist 1** and **Anabaptist 2** return to the group. The **Anabaptists** unfreeze and continue miming talking and writing.)*

Reader From prison the Anabaptists continued to write letters to the authorities.

*(When **Anabaptist 1, Anabaptist 2** and **Anabaptist 3** stand, all freeze.)*

Anabaptist 1 (*Standing to face front*) God commands us to love the stranger as one's own self.

Anabaptist 2 (*Standing*) Christ and his followers persecuted no one, but in his true Gospel taught the contrary when he says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you."

Anabaptist 3 (*Standing*) We are persecuted in our own land, and there is nowhere a place for us.

Anabaptist 1 Hence, we must return to bloody countries, from whence we fled and where the blood of saints is (*the following words are spoken closely together by **Anabaptist 1** and **Anabaptist 2***) poured out like water.

Anabaptist 2 Poured out like water.

Anabaptist 3 Poured out like water.

*(Could use a rain stick here followed by a loud foot stomp. On the stomp, the **Anabaptists** turn to sit facing away from the circle, heads bowed and feet together in front of them.)*

Reader The prisoners were assisted to reflect on their errors by three weeks of solitary confinement with chains on their legs. The Bishop of London sent a message:

*(**Bishop** walks downstage right.)*

Bishop I promise that if the prisoners will adhere to the church, I will release them and free them from their bonds.

Reader Five of the Anabaptist prisoners, all men, gave in to pressure. *(Five **Anabaptists** stand and walk downstage. During the following sentences they turn stage right to face the **Bishop** in a line across the stage. The five cross their arms in front of them making an upright cross.)*

On June 25, at Paul's Cross outside the Cathedral in the presence of thousands of Englishmen and directly in front of the pulpit, these five men carried wooden crosses symbolic of their deserving of death while the bishop announced:

Bishop *(Turning to face line of men)* These men, who had been seduced, will now be joining the Dutch Reformed Church and will thus become brethren in the true church. **(Bishop ushers the five men to cross in front of him and sit downstage right.)**

*(As the following is read, the **Anabaptists** walk in pairs to the **Bishop** and **Commissioners** who hold up the scroll. As the pairs come up, the **Bishop** points to the scroll and mimes asking if they will recant. When the **Anabaptists** shake their heads "no," they have their hands "tied" behind their backs by the **Guards** and are pushed into a small cluster center stage.)*

Reader On May 21, seven weeks after their arrest, the remaining prisoners were called in, two by two, before the commissioners who urged them to sign up to the four questions. When the prisoners refused, all 14 women and a young lad were tied hand to hand and sent to Newgate, the prison of those confined for capital crimes.

*(**Anabaptist 4** stands and walks downstage center. Behind her the others stand two by two in a line running up to downstage as though in a boat. Hands are still tied behind them. **Young lad** stands at the very front.)*

Anabaptist 4 We women imagined we would be the first to be burnt, because day by day officials came to visit us, holding up death before our eyes unless we should sign. But instead, we 14 women and the lad were carted to a ship at St. Katherine's Dock and deported to Holland. *(returns and joins the group.)*

Reader The cover letter to the captain stated: "These people were not worthy to come among Christians." Tied to the front of the cart and whipped as he went along was the young lad who blurted out:

Young lad This is for the name of Christ! *(The group walks together off stage left still in boat formation.)*

PART 2

(John Foxe paces back and forth across the stage and mutters to himself as though composing a letter in his head. He quickly discards each idea almost as soon as he thinks of it.)

Reader While Anabaptist prisoners were suffering on the boat to Holland, attempts were being made to forestall the execution of the rest of the prisoners in England. The most impassioned intervention came in a letter to Queen Elizabeth from the martyrologist and divine, John Foxe. He wrote that a rumor had come to his ears that:

Foxe *(Stepping downstage to audience)* There are one or two concerning whom a decision will shortly be made (unless your compassion comes to their rescue) about the penalty of death by burning.

Reader This Foxe opposed, not because he favored Anabaptism, which he termed ...

Foxe This madness!

Reader ... but simply because he was revolted by burning. (**Foxe** *looks as though he is about to be sick and quickly walks offstage with a hand over his mouth*) In spite of these appeals, the process against the heretics continued. On June 2, the Bishop of London called the five prisoners before his episcopal court at St. Paul's.

(Bishop stands on a cube stage right and a Guard holds the scroll. Five prisoners walk and stand in a line downstage and facing front. They speak out to the audience, as does the Bishop.)

Reader Once again he confronted them with the four articles and threatened that unless they signed, they were to be burned at Smithfield.

Prisoner We will be burned? This is but a small matter.

Bishop: Heretics such as you should be shunned. *(gestures)* I hereby expel you from my church as bad members.

Prisoner: How can you expel us from your church when we have never yet been one with you?

Bishop: In England there is no one that is not a member of God's church. I condemn you all to death.

Reader: The five Anabaptist prisoners were now moved to the Newgate prison from which the women had recently been deported.

(Guard clusters the men center stage.)

Reader: They were confined among thieves and criminals who themselves had been warned by the bishop to take care lest they be seduced by the Anabaptists. Their imprisonment was severe, confined in cages in a deep dungeon so that they could not converse with their neighbors. They were threatened from day to day with death by hanging, burning and otherwise. In this desperate situation, the prisoners somehow engaged in more writing. They wrote to John Foxe who they hoped would again write on their behalf to Queen Elizabeth. They also wrote directly to the Queen. But they were wasting their time. When some maids of honor attempted to present the Anabaptists' appeals to the Queen, she reprimanded the women and refused even to touch the tainted papers. Meanwhile, in prison, one of the five prisoners died through the hardship of his confinement.

(Bishop ushers one man to sit down.)

Reader: The four remaining Anabaptists attempted to contact friends outside. They were visited by ministers, who in various ways did their best to get them to save their lives by recanting. One minister laid his hands upon them, and then fell on his knees, and cried out:

(Bishop approaches prisoners.)

Minister: Lord, convert their heart! Depart from them, thou wicked one!

Reader: On July 17, it was announced that the eldest two prisoners should be executed.

(Bishop moves two men center stage.)

Reader: On July 22, in front of a varied audience of dignitaries and common people, Jan Pieterss, a poor man aged 50, and Hendrick Terwoort, a goldsmith aged 35, were burned at Smithfield, a place where 20 years earlier Catholics had burned many Protestants. On his way to the stake, Terwoort asserted to the crowds:

Terwoort: This is the way that all the prophets went, also Christ our Savior.

Reader: At the stake, the prisoners were given a final opportunity to assent to the four articles. They refused and were executed in the slowest way possible without any strangling or gunpowder. In dying, Terwoort left his wife of just six months while Pieterss left nine children. He also left a hymn, written in prison:

Anabaptists We are, O Lord, now in the battle.
Oh! keep us safe
From our enemies, now
Who encircle us on all sides.
Oh Lord! Free us!
So that we will persevere.
O God, you are a great God,
Strengthening us always in our need.

(Bishop ushers the two executed men to sit down.)

Reader: Two prisoners remained in Newgate prison. During the daytime they whiled the time away writing the most accommodating confession so far, but it was still too nuanced for the bishop who continued to insist on an unequivocal assent to the four articles. At night they worked on another project—filing off an iron bar from a prison window in the hope of a break-out. But in this they were foiled, and so were fettered much more heavily than ever before. But as they languished in Newgate, Queen Elizabeth and her Councilors evidently felt that the two executions had made their point, so just less than a year after their original arrest, the two remaining prisoners were taken out and sent back to the Netherlands.

(Bishop ushers remaining two to sit down.)

Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 1008-1024. For comment and reflection, see Alan Kreider, "When Anabaptists were last in the British Isles," in Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray, eds., *Coming Home: Stories of Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), 176-191.

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Anabaptist Worship in the Forest: Magister Elias Schad, 1576

Background: In the 16th century, Strasbourg was an imperial city which gave it freedom to choose its own Christian tradition. It chose to provide a greater degree of liberty for non-conformist Christians than many other places. But within Strasbourg the Lutheran church was established by law. This meant that only Lutheran worship was allowed in the churches of the city. For this reason, Anabaptists gathered secretly several times a year in the nearby Eckbolsheim [*Ek-bols-hime*] forest. The two readers' voices represent one person, Elias Schad, a prominent Lutheran pastor in Strasbourg.

Requirements: Six persons

* * * * *

Reader 1: In 1576, I learned from trustworthy people that Anabaptists from many places were coming here under the pretext of attending the Strasbourg Fair and were going to have their meeting in a forest, as often happened ... So I and several others whom I invited to go with me, 13 in all, dressed in wanderers' clothing and left the town when the gates were about to be closed for the night.

Reader 2: One by one we followed some Anabaptists. We came upon two women, who assumed us to be visiting brothers, and helped us find the paths and byways. Their watchwords helped us to pass their guards posted at the entrance of Eckbolsheim Forest. By then it was growing dark especially in the forest, so we continued unhindered until we reached the assembled crowd a good distance within the forest ...

Reader 1: There a man stood with a flint and steel and a box of small candles and candlesticks. We lit the candles and assembled in a group like bees when they swarm and settle in one place. The many lighted candles looked like wolves' eyes shining among the trees and bushes on a dark night—and to tell the truth they looked fierce.

Reader 2: But we gathered our courage and followed along behind the approximately 200 men and women, mostly men. They had come from various places as we noticed by their conversations. From Switzerland, South Germany, Alsace—and perhaps even from Moravia because I learned later that some apostles of the Anabaptist brood in that land are sent annually to this area and to meetings like this.

Reader 1: When the crowd had gathered, the elders or leaders stepped to the center; there were five of them. One of them was Brother Peter, as they called him, an aged leader who by trade was a maker of weavers' looms. He opened the meeting, produced his soiled New Testament in the Swiss translation and print, and read a passage from an epistle.

Reader 2: The others did likewise. Although they all put on glasses, they still could not read well in that feeble light so it was a laborious and a not very edifying process. The sermons, each of which lasted about fifteen minutes, seemed to me to have as much power as if chopped straw had been sprinkled over them.

Reader 1: Nevertheless, to give some kind of report and the essence of the sermons, they had much to say about the Fall and that our fathers had eaten sour grapes that set the children's teeth on edge [Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2]. They also talked about the suffering of Christ who redeemed them. They emphasized especially that they should thank God for choosing them out of the world since they were not in the world. ... They were truly not in the world but in the forest!

Reader 2: They recounted the coarse sins that people commit here and there and thanked God that they were not like that. They sounded just like the pious Pharisee in Luke 18:11. During the preaching, some were standing, some were leaning against trees, many were seated or lay on their sides, some lay face down, some were dozing, and some even sleeping.

Reader 1: One man was appointed to walk constantly among them with a candle and shake the sleepers, saying,

Waker: Get up, Brother. Wake up, Sister, and hear the Word of the Lord!

Reader 2: He came to me too several times and spoke to me because I was pretending to be asleep.

Reader 1: After these sermons, which together lasted more than an hour, Brother Peter admonished the brotherhood to prayer, using more or less these words:

Brother Peter: Very well, dear brothers and sisters, now that we have heard the Word of God, let us call upon our Heavenly Father for grace, and when you pray let no one look into another's face!

Reader 1: Then they scattered. All knelt down—each usually before an oak tree as if he were worshipping it. The prayer lasted at least a good fifteen minutes, perhaps closer to thirty. There was a great audible murmuring as if a nest of hornets were swarming. They waved their arms and beat their breasts almost like priests when they read the mass. And although I managed to get close to some of them and listened intently beside or behind them, I was unable to make out a single word, much less a sentence because they never raised their heads and they sighed and groaned and moaned like a tired old horse pulling a cart or wagon.

Reader 2: When the praying was ended they gathered again and began to greet one another, sending greetings to those who were absent such as:

Sister Elisabeth: Sister Peternelle from south Germany said I should ask the brothers to excuse her since she is sick. She asks me to greet you all in the Lord.

Brother Hans: Let her also be greeted in the Lord!

Reader 1: After this greeting the elder called out in a loud voice:

Brother Peter: Now dear brothers, you have heard and understood the Word of God and have prayed earnestly. If there is anyone among you who has not quite understood, he should come here and we will instruct him! Or if the Spirit of God reveals anything to someone to edify the brethren, let him come here and we will hear him in a friendly manner.

Reader 2: When he said that I thought that my work was cut out for me. If sooner or later they found out that there had been clergymen among them, they might interpret our presence to mean that their doctrine was so praiseworthy and good that we accepted and sanctioned it silently because we said nothing against it. I therefore ventured in the name of God to preach a sermon.

Reader 1: Dear brothers and sisters! Although I really did not come here to preach but to listen, I like to be where God's Word is being proclaimed. But because Brother Peter has given me the opportunity I will, in the name of God as he grants me grace, also present something to you that is in accord with God's Word and will be edifying.

Reader 2: We continued in a long discussion on doctrine with Brother Peter and the elders, especially on infant baptism and excommunication. The crowd got angry at this and threatened to make a bad end of me and my companions. But Brother Peter urged the people to be peaceful, appealing to the Last Judgment for those who had left the true faith and those who were in error. He gave me and my friends a guide who led us safe and sound through the forest, around two in the morning.

Source: Magister Elias Schad, "True Account of an Anabaptist Meeting at Night in a Forest and a Debate Held There with Them," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58 (1984), 292-94.

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The Christian Community of Goods: Peter Walpot, 1577

Background: Hutterian Anabaptism began around 1530 and takes its name from an early leader, Jakob Hutter, who was executed in 1536. The Hutterians agreed with other Anabaptist groups on many points but were unique in their rejection of private ownership of property and their formation of intentional communities called “Bruderhofs.” They found relative tolerance in Moravia where their communities developed agricultural, technological and medical skills and from which they sent missionaries. Peter Walpot, leader of Hutterian communities in Moravia from 1556 until his death in 1578, was a major Hutterite writer. In the following dialogue, our invented, interested questioner inquires about yieldedness and community. Yieldedness (“Gelassenheit”) was an important spiritual term, used by late medieval Catholics as well as by Anabaptists. The readers may say either “yieldedness” or “Gelassenheit.”

Requirements: Two persons

* * * * *

Questioner: Tell me, Peter Walpot, why are you setting up communities in Moravia? Where do you get your ideas for this?

Peter: Well, remember how the Lord called his disciples Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; also James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. Remember what he said? “Follow me.” And what did they do? They left their nets, they left their boats, they left their father and they followed him. That’s how it is with us. Christ places demands on us—on our possessions and relationships. When we follow him, we have to leave our goods, our parents and friends. And he leads us in a path of yieldedness/Gelassenheit and community.

Questioner: Hmmm. Yieldedness/Gelassenheit and community. What do these mean?

Peter: Think about it. Think what Jesus said: “No one may serve two masters. For you will hate the one and love the other, or obey the one and despise the other.” You can’t serve two masters. One master says you can be selfish and possessive. The other says you should live in community. How can you bring these into agreement? Whoever is a servant of mammon is certainly no servant of Christ.

You can’t go in two directions at once. You can’t put your foot in two places at once. You can’t cook two stews in the same pot. A bird can sit only on one perch at a time. You’ve got to choose. To have one thing, you’ve got to let the other one go. And we’ve chosen, chosen not to cling to money and wealth but rather to give them to God’s poor.

Questioner: Am I getting you right? You think that our spirituality is linked with our attitudes to wealth? And you—and your community—say that we should leave personal possessions behind, share what we have and give to the poor. That’s pretty demanding, isn’t it?

Peter: Well, remember what Jesus said: “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is narrow and the way is small that leads to life. To life! A life of Christian community is the narrow gate. Indeed Christian community is an oven of yieldedness/Gelassenheit in which the person is tried like gold in the fire but finds life.

Questioner: Narrow gate, broad gate, oven of yieldedness/*Gelassenheit*— it's all very poetic. But what does it really mean ... in today's world?

Peter: Well, what did Jesus say? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," he said, "that is the first commandment. And the second is the same, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" This little word "yourself" contains within it the idea of true community—and all the works of love and mercy which one person can show to another. Indeed, to love your neighbor as yourself is the measure of true community.

Do you know what it's like in community? In true community no one seeks advantage over the neighbor but rather mutuality and common concern for each other. To love one's neighbor as yourself is not to have *part*, or even *half*, but the *whole* in common, and to give *all* things for the common use.

Questioner: But is this really required for Christians? I mean, most Christians share a common faith, and yet we never speak of sharing goods. Are you saying that community of goods is necessary for spiritual community?

Peter: Look, this is what I've observed. It's people whose love has grown cold who say what you're saying. They think that spiritual communion just means oneness in doctrine, oneness in faith. But this is what I've learned: Where there is true spiritual community there will also be a community of goods. And without economic sharing you won't have true spiritual community. You simply can't have the one without the other. You can't do it.

Source: Peter Walpot, *True Yieldedness and the Christian Community of Goods* (1577), chapters 21, 24, 29, 43, 137, in Daniel Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 138-196.

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A Kitchen Evangelist: Margaret Hellwart, 1610

Background: Margaret Hellwart lived in Beutelsbach [*boy-tuls-bock*], a small village in southwest Germany in the early 1600s. By this time the authorities in the area no longer executed the Anabaptists but restricted their activities and subjected them to various forms of discrimination. If the Anabaptists did not speak about their faith to others, the authorities generally left them alone. But at times the Anabaptists refused to be silent.

Requirements: Three persons, optional—something to use as chains

* * * * *

(Loud knocking at the door)

Margaret: Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, my. *(Mutters to herself)* Quick. Hurry. *(Puts on the chains)*

Constable: Open up. Now! Open up. We know you're in there.

(Margaret keeps working with the chains, stands up straight, opens the door.)

Constable: *(enters with an assistant)* So! Margaret Hellwart, we have come to check on you. Here, you, look at those chains. Are they strong? Are they locked up properly? I am suspicious of you, Margaret. You were so slow in opening the door and we heard the chain rattling. Tell us, now the truth. Did you pull the chains off? Did you just put them back on again when you heard us at the door? Well? Well?

Margaret: *(silent)*

Constable: Two years it's been. Two years. We've warned you repeatedly about missing church. You know the law. You have to attend the mass. You are so stiff-necked. You have refused to conform to the Lutheran faith. Why? Why?

Margaret: *(silent)*

Constable: So, you don't go to Mass. And now we hear reports that you've been running around the countryside, village to village, infecting all the women folk with your crazy ideas. *(makes noise of contempt)* You have been warned not to receive any visitors in this house. But we know you have paid no attention to that order. You have had a steady stream of women coming here. What are you talking about to them? Eh? *(sarcastic)* More of your "good news"? Eh?

Margaret: *(silent)*

Constable: Now about this chain. That's a good chain; I saw it properly fixed into the floor here last year. How are you getting it open? Eh? Oh, yes. I know! It's George, your husband. He's helping you.

Margaret: *(shakes head vigorously - it's not the husband)*

Constable: Well, who is it then? Some of those women who come here to listen to you? Are they helping you get out of this chain? Eh? No answer? Right, then. We'll strengthen the chain again, fix a better lock. And no more tampering with it! Do you hear me? Eh? Stupid woman!

Constable departs.

Narrator: Margaret was first chained to her kitchen floor in 1610. She seemed to slip out almost as quickly as the authorities had secured her. Margaret just carried on with her evangelizing among local women, persuading them of Anabaptist understandings of the Christian faith.

Margaret stands up, steps forward, speaks directly to the audience.

Margaret: God has called me to tell the good news to my neighbors. Nothing can stop me from doing that. You see, people should learn to love one another with God's love. The true church is made up of people who live lovingly, righteously. As I understand the Scripture, people can hear the Word of God at home when someone reads it out. We don't need to go to the village church.

Narrator: During the next 11 years the authorities had to chain her up in her kitchen 21 times. Fearless, Margaret compared her release from confinement to Peter's escape from prison in Acts 12:1-19.

Margaret: (*speaking to the audience again*) I finally told the authorities to give up. Look, I'm an old woman. I'm over 50 so I can't possibly learn anything new. Why don't they just leave me alone? I don't know any way other than what God has taught me, and I'd rather obey God than the authorities. All I want is to live according to God's will, do good and avoid evil. There's just no point trying to make me change my mind. I intend to remain an Anabaptist to my life's end.

Narrator: The last official reference to "stiff-necked" Margaret was when she was 53 years old. And now Margaret lies somewhere near her village of Beutelsbach, in an ordinary burial site unblest by the state church.

Sources: Text by Eleanor Kreider, drawing on Walter Klaassen, "Margaret Hellwart of Beutelsbach," in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Studies in Women and Religion/Études sur les femmes et la religion, 3. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996, 64-67; Gustav Bossert, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, I, *Herzogtum Württemberg*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1971, 887.

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