

Information About Anabaptism

Origins of Anabaptism

The first group of Anabaptists came together in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525. They rebelled against Zwingli's reforms because they wanted more radical reform of the Catholic Church. Anabaptists did not believe in baptizing (a ritual, or ceremony, to admit a person into the church community) children like the Calvinists and others did. They thought only adult believers could be baptized. "Anabaptist" means "baptizing anew" (again), an act that was a crime at the time. All Anabaptist adults had to be re-baptized when they joined the church. Because Anabaptists' beliefs were so radically different from the beliefs of all the other religions of the time, Anabaptists were often persecuted (harassed and killed) and driven out of towns. Their beliefs spread from Switzerland into Germany, Poland, France, Russia, Holland, and other countries, mainly in the lower peasant class.

Beliefs About Sin and Salvation

Anabaptists believed that sin was everywhere in the secular (nonreligious) world. Therefore, they believed that no one who lived in the world could go to heaven. Baptism could wash away the sin people were born with (original sin), but after baptism, people needed to avoid more sin. The only way to earn salvation was to stay away from the world. To stay away, Anabaptists lived secluded lives in small villages. There, they shunned the sinful world by avoiding involvement in government and wars, two of the most sinful aspects of the world.

Ultimate Source of Authority

Anabaptists believed the New Testament of the Bible was the source for all their rules for living. They believed in living a simple life, exactly as the people described in the Bible. If Anabaptists were called to testify in court, they didn't think they needed to swear on the Bible because it was already the strongest influence in their lives, in court or out of court. Anabaptists thought that no one could decide to live a serious committed life until they were mature adults. This is why Anabaptists believed only adults could make the decision to be baptized and join their church. They believed the Bible told them to overcome evil with good. By living simple, loving lives based on the Bible, they believed they would defeat the evil in the world. Anabaptism also taught that they didn't need priests to tell them what to do because every adult would know how to behave by reading the Bible.

Rituals and Worship

Just as Anabaptists avoided the world outside of their community, they also avoided the religious practices of that world. They did not meet in churches, but had meetings in homes. They did not allow religious statues, paintings, crucifixes (crosses with representations of Jesus), or other decorations in their homes that might distract them from the Bible and their faith in God. They believed that a religious community did not need priests or ministers to lead their group, so the groups led services themselves. Anabaptists believed in only two sacraments (formal holy rituals): baptism (for adults) and the Eucharist (communion). Though Anabaptists brought their children to meetings, they did not believe a person could really take part in ritual until, as an adult, that person clearly understood all the meaning in the ritual.

Community Life

Anabaptist communities were usually set apart from other people for two reasons. First, Anabaptists did not want to be part of the sinful world. Second, other religions attacked the Anabaptists for their beliefs. Because all Anabaptists were trying to live the same simple life, based on the Bible, all their communities followed the same rules. They did not get involved in the outside world, and they did not hold any government office. Most groups of Anabaptists did not use weapons or fight in wars, and they believed in freedom of religion for all people. They became known for being very tolerant of other religions, and their communities were often refuges (safe places) for people, such as the Jews, escaping religious persecution. Anabaptists believed in leading a simple life. Their homes were plain, not decorated, and they farmed using simple technology, no matter what new inventions came along.

Information About Lutheranism

Origins of Lutheranism

The Lutheran religion was founded by a Catholic Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, who was born in Saxony, Germany. In 1512 he became a lecturer in theology (the study of God and religion) at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. As Martin Luther studied the Bible and compared its message with some of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, he became very troubled. He was also opposed to the corruption (dishonesty) he saw in the Church, particularly the sale of indulgences, and wanted the Church to reform. In 1517, he decided to force churchmen to listen to him by posting his ideas for change, called the *Ninety-Five Theses*, on the door of the Wittenberg church. This was the beginning of many years of protest against the Church by those who worked with Martin Luther to reform it. Luther's ideas became the basis for a new Protestant religion known as Lutheranism.

Beliefs About Sin and Salvation

Lutherans believed people only has to have faith (belief) in God to earn salvation (be saved and enter heaven). Luther argued that salvation did not depend on doing good things for others. He based this belief on a passage he found in the New Testament of the Bible, in Paul's letters to the Romans. It said "The just shall live by faith". Lutherans called this "justification by faith". To Lutherans, this meant that praying, fasting, doing good works for others, and paying for a priest to say prayers were not the way to salvation, as the Catholic Church taught. Instead, Lutherans believed that people needed only to have sincere faith in Jesus Christ, have God's grace (love and mercy), be sorry for their sins, and accept the words of the Bible.

Ultimate Source of Authority

According to Lutherans, the Bible was the highest source of authority for all believers. To accept the Bible, people needed to read the Bible for themselves, so the Bible must be translated into common languages, not just Latin, which only the highly educated could understand. The Bible taught Lutherans exactly what they needed to know to live good lives, have faith in Jesus Christ and be sorry for their sins. No one needed to ask a minister what to believe or how to live, because everything could be found in the Bible. Lutheran ministers helped teach people about the Bible through their preaching, since they were specially trained. In all other ways, though, ministers were equal in status with everyone else in the community, and they could even marry.

Rituals and Worship

Lutheran church services were a combination of both old Catholic and new Lutheran rituals. Lutherans kept many of the outward appearances of the Catholic Mass. Services were held in former Catholic churches. There was an altar, with a crucifix (representation of Christ on the cross) and candles. Ministers dressed in traditional vestments led people through the services. Other parts of the ritual were different from Catholic traditions. All the prayers were written and said in German, not Latin, so that the people, especially the uneducated peasants, could participate. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. Services included Bible readings and a sermon. The sermon was to explain the Bible lesson of the day to everyone, since the word of God was the center of the religion. Everyone was incited to sing the hymns. During the sharing of bread and wine, everyone was given both bread and wine. Before, only a priest had received wine. And instead of the seven sacraments (formal holy rituals) of the Catholic Church, Lutherans practiced only two of the sacraments, the ones they believed were clearly named in the Bible: baptism and communion.

Community Life

To help his followers adjust to living with a new set of beliefs, Luther made some new rules for Lutherans to follow. Over time, he preached less about the Bible and more about strict discipline and strong families. Luther told his followers that fathers were responsible to teach their children religion by having them pray before each meal and before bed, "and unless they [pray], they should be given neither food nor drink". He also preached that women's work in life was to be married and give birth to as many children as possible. Luther thought these rules would help Lutheran communities to grow and be strong and unified.

Information About Calvinism

Origins of Calvinism

Calvinism was started in the 1530's by John Calvin, a young theologian (one who studies God and religion) living in Geneva, Switzerland. He was living in Switzerland, where his radical religious ideas were more accepted than in France. Calvin believed in "predestination". This was the idea that at the beginning of time, when God created the world and everything in it, God had already decided everyone who would ever be born and each person's destiny (whether or not people would be allowed into heaven). Therefore, faith (belief in God) was a gift from God and a person was either born with it or without it. Nothing a person could do would ever change that destiny. Calvin said, "Eternal life [in heaven] is ordained (decided) for some, eternal damnation [in hell] for others". Anyone could say "I believe in God", but a person could figure out who God's chosen people really were by looking for people's correct holy behavior. Between 1549 and 1559, over 5,000 foreigners moved to Geneva to join the Calvinist church.

Beliefs About Sin and Salvation

Calvinists' belief in predestination meant that everyone's salvation was already decided. No matter how many kind, holy things some people might do, they would not earn their way into heaven if they hadn't already been "chosen" by God before birth. Calvinists believed the world was full of opportunities for sin, but only those who were destined to go to hell would actually sin. To help people behave in a way that would show whether they were chosen or not, Calvin taught many rules to discipline people and keep them away from sin. Singing, dancing, card-playing, gambling, swearing, going to theaters, drinking alcohol, wearing jewelry, and extravagant clothing were not allowed. Many people followed these strict rules to show that they believed they were saved. Others, however, who weren't sure, tried to follow the rules to convince themselves that they, too, were saved.

Ultimate Source of Authority

Calvinists believed that the faithful could have a direct relationship with God and that the Bible taught them all the rules they needed to know to live holy, faithful lives. The Bible's teachings weren't just rules for the church. Calvinists believed the rulers should also be the laws of the government. According to Calvinists, committing sin was also committing a crime. Therefore, following God's wishes meant following the government's laws. Ministers were teachers who helped teach people correct behavior, and elders or deacons enforced the rules of the church and the town. Once the church punished a church member for breaking a rule, that member was handed over to the local court system for more punishment. Extremely harsh measures could be taken when a person did not go to church or committed blasphemy (showing disrespect for God).

Rituals and Worship

Calvinists met up to five times a week for church services, which included long sermons to teach people the proper way to behave according to the Bible. Church building reflected the Calvinist belief in simple surroundings: they were often paneled in plain wood, with long simple communion tables and benches for people to sit on. There were no stained-glass windows, gold altars, paintings and statues. At the center of the room was a large pulpit where the minister stood to preach. People sat around him, men (always wearing hats) on one side of the room, women and children on the other. As part of their religious training, children had to be prepared at any time to answer questions asked by the minister. Failing to know the answer would mean shame and even punishment. Preaching could go on for many hours. Calvinists celebrated two sacraments, baptism and communion, because they were the only two sacraments found in the Bible.

Community Life

Calvinist communities were ruled by religious laws based on the Bible. Babies born in the two could only be named Christian, Biblical names. No bars were allowed. Inns (small hotels) had to have a Bible available for all guests to read at any time and had to make sure all guests were in bed by nine. The owners of the inns were required to report any guest who broke the rules. Every home in the community could be inspected once each year by the church elders to make sure that everyone in the house was obeying Calvinism's strict regulations against alcohol, music, rich foods, cards and so on. Anyone found disobeying was punished. People being punished were not allowed to receive communion, though they were allowed to attend services and listen to sermons to help teach them the correct way to life. If after 6 months, they didn't improve their behavior, they were permanently banished from the town. Calvinists believed that correct behavior revealed who was destined to go to heaven.

Information About Anglicanism

Origins of Anglicanism

The Anglican Church was started by Henry VIII of England in 1534. His first wife, Catherine of Aragon, had failed to give birth to a son to carry on Henry's power. Henry, who was a Catholic, wanted to divorce her and marry another woman, but needed the pope's permission. Pope Clement VII refused. Henry became angry that he, as a king, still had to obey the pope. In 1529 he asked Parliament (the English lawmaking council) to proclaim him "Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England". Since the early 1520's, people in England had been influenced by the protestant teachings of Martin Luther of Germany, which encouraged them to break away from the Catholic Church. So the Parliament agreed with King Henry. Soon every church in England was required to own an English translation of the Bible and was holding church services in English, not Latin. All the English monasteries and their contents were sold to raise money for the king, and pilgrimage shrines (holy places) were destroyed. In 1534 King Henry established the Church of England, which later became known as the Anglican Church.

Beliefs About Sin and Salvation

Anglicans believed that all people were born sinful (with "original sin"), but that sin could be washed away through baptism. They believed in the "justification by faith" that Martin Luther taught to Lutherans. This idea was that people only had to have faith in God and have God's grace to earn salvation (be saved and enter heaven). They believed that salvation did not depend on doing good things for others. This meant that praying, fasting, and doing good works for others was not the way to salvation. Instead, people needed only to have faith in Jesus Christ, be sorry for any sins, and accept the word of the Bible.

Ultimate Source of Authority

The Anglicans based their beliefs on the Bible, but saw the King of England as the head of the Church, the person who should interpret what the Bible really meant. The King relied on the assistance of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the most important bishop (church official). Beneath him were bishops and priests to help pass on the King's words about religion. Because the teachings of the church filtered down through so many layers of people, local parish priests had many opportunities to teach their own versions of Anglican Christianity. As long as the priest and the members of his parish obeyed the laws of the land and were loyal to the King, they weren't held to a strict interpretation of Church beliefs.

Rituals and Worship

There were two versions of the Anglican church service: the "High Church" service, which closely followed the Roman Catholic Mass, and the "Low Church" service, centered on preaching from the Bible, like the Lutheran service. This varied from parish to parish, usually depending on the personal beliefs of the local pastor. Services were held in former Catholic churches and monasteries, but most of the statues, paintings, and interior decorations had been removed. Now the inside of the buildings were painted completely white, with the Ten Commandments painted on the plain walls. Services were held in English, rather than in Latin, so everyone could participate. Over time, a Book of Common Prayers was written for all church members. It was filled with English translations of prayers so everyone, not just priests, could say the prayers.

Community Life

Anglican communities were not all alike. High Church communities tended to be made up of the wealthy class, and some lived in large mansions that had once been monasteries. Low Church communities were more often made up of the middle and lower classes. The people in Anglican church communities were flexible and believed in giving privacy to each person's conscience (sense of obligation to do right), so all people could determine how best to live based on their religious beliefs. Queen Elizabeth I, in the 1560's, said that even though she was the head of the Church of England, she believed that no one's conscience should be forced to believe or practice a certain version of Anglicanism. As long as people were obedient to English law and loyal to their queen, they could believe as they wanted.

Information About Catholicism

Origins of the Counter Reformation

The spread of Protestant religions led the Roman Catholic Church to make significant reforms during a period called the Counter Reformation, or Catholic Reformation. The series of reforms began in 1534 when Pope Paul III was elected. Troubled by the corruption within the Church, Pope Paul led a simpler life than other popes in order to show people how to live. During his reign as pope, new religious orders started. One order of priests, called the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, was started by Ignatius of Loyola. These priests did not work secluded away in monasteries, but in towns, with the public. They ran schools, worked with the sick and the poor, and set up missions to spread the word of God. Priests and nuns were re-educated to be aware of the true message of the Church and to wipe out corruption. Through this work, the medieval Catholic Church was transformed into the modern Catholic Church.

Beliefs about Sin and Salvation

Pope Paul III called church leaders together in 1545 for the Council of Trent to clarify the beliefs of the Catholic Church. The Council reaffirmed the belief that all people were born sinful, with "original sin". It stated that it was sinful to live in a way that didn't follow the Bible's teachings, especially the Ten Commandments. Catholicism taught that the way to salvation (to be saved and enter heaven) was to have faith in God, shown by being obedient to the will of God, and to be of service to others, shown by doing good works. The Church showed the importance of good works by encouraging more priests and nuns to work with the sick and the poor.

Ultimate Source of Authority

Catholic beliefs were based on the Bible and Church traditions, and the pope was considered the authority best able to interpret the Bible for all Catholics. The Council of Trent not only wrote out a clear statement about what all Catholics should believe and how they should behave, it also stated that the pope was in charge of the whole Church. This idea was based on the belief that the pope is a direct descendant of Jesus Christ's apostle, Peter, and therefore, chosen by Jesus Christ, as Peter was chosen, to head the Church on earth. The pope was in charge of a large hierarchy (group divided into ranks), ruling over cardinals, who ruled over archbishops, who ruled over bishops, who rules over .nonsignors, who ruled over priests, who worked with church members. Through all these layers of the hierarchy, the Church emphasized that the message from the pope must stay the same and not be changed as it was delivered from person to person.

Rituals and Worship

The Catholic Church believed that rituals and the Mass (worship service) were outward signs of faith and good works. Priests celebrated Mass daily, in Latin, to reenact the Last Supper. During Mass there was a reading from the Bible, a sermon to teach people how to behave, and holy communion. Catholics practiced seven sacraments (baptism, communion, confession, confirmation, marriage, ordination of priests, and last rites for the dying). These traditions, along with the teachings of the Bible, were the basis of Catholic beliefs. Each time Catholics participated in any of these sacramental rituals, they believed they were receiving more grace (love and mercy) from God. All of these rituals were standardized. No matter where a Catholic went in the world, the rituals would be the same. Church buildings were often filled with religious art, such as gold and silver altars, statues, and paintings of religious scenes, all of which Catholics believed expressed the great glory of God. Luxurious ornamentation, richly clothed priests and altar boys, and large choirs led by booming organs were sometimes part of Masses conducted in larger churches or cathedrals.

Community Life

Catholic communities after the Counter Reformation were filled with a new spirit. A new emphasis was placed on the importance of priests and nuns working among common people, leading humble lives, doing good works, and educating people about Church teachings. Seminaries (schools that train priests) were established in every community to better educate priests and train them as religious persons. The Church faced its responsibility to lead its people, cut back on the extravagant lifestyle of some clergy, stopped paying armies to take over territory for the Church, and put an end to corruption, such as the selling of indulgences and Church offices. Worship services were standardized so that all over the world, all Catholics heard and spread the same teachings of Jesus Christ: to have faith in God and to do good works to earn salvation.