



Several people have challenged us over organising **Reformation Conferences** and claimed that the Reformers persecuted the Anabaptists just because they *“were not willing to baptise babies.”*

One correspondent wrote that rather than celebrate the Reformation *“would it not be preferable to study the Scriptures...”*

Back to the Bible

Here is our response:

Of course, our highest priority is to *“study the Scriptures daily to see if these things be true”*. In fact that is the heritage of the Reformation. The Reformation gave us back the Bible freely available, translated into our own languages, and the Reformers championed ***“Scripture alone is our final authority”***.

The Reformation succeeded in bringing about greater freedoms than had ever been experienced before in human history.

Understand the Times



We would encourage you to read [How the Reformation Changed the World](#) , and [How the Reformation Changed the Church](#) , both available on our www.ReformationSA.org website.

Violent Revolutionaries

Those who accuse the Reformers of persecuting Anabaptists are being unfair and selective in not reporting the whole context. Anabaptists were not so much opposed and convicted for not being willing to baptise babies, but because the Anabaptists in the 1520's and 1530's were

radical, violent revolutionaries.

Radical Extremists

While the Anabaptists claimed to be the only true Christians, they denied many key elements of the Faith. They rejected Biblical Law, Christian ministry, worship and sacraments. Anabaptists in the 16th century proclaimed socialism, egalitarianism and revolution. They claimed *“it is impossible to be Christian and wealthy at the same time”*; *“all authorities, secular and clerical, must be deprived of their offices once and for all, or be killed by the sword...”*

Death Threats

Igor Shafarevich, in his book *The Socialist Phenomenon*, documents the teachings and activities of two important Anabaptist leaders, Thomas Muntzer and John of Leyden. Muntzer, an itinerant preacher and organiser of rebellions, established his revolutionary base in Muhlhausen from where he issued proclamations damning landowners, magistrates and Reformers.

*“I would like to smell your
frying carcass”*

Professor Martin Luther.

*“I would like to smell your
frying carcass”*
he wrote to

Peasants Revolt

In 1524, Muntzer was successful in rousing up many of the peasants of central Germany in the bloody, so called Peasants Revolt, which it should be noted attracted several nobles to his side. *“Let your swords be ever-warm with blood!”* Muntzer exhorted his faithful followers. Muntzer’s army of Anabaptists struck terror throughout the countryside, robbing, burning and destroying the property of the faithful, killing many thousands.

Socialist Utopia

Frederick Engels praised Muntzer’s *“robust vandalism”* and explained *“by the Kingdom of God Muntzer meant a society without class differences, private property and the state authority.... All the existing authorities...were to be overthrown, all work and property shared in common and complete equality introduced.”*

Atheism in Religious Disguise

Engels praised Muntzer’s doctrines in this way: *“Under the cloak of Christianity he preached a kind of pantheism, which curiously resembled modern speculative contemplation and at times even approached atheism. He repudiated the Bible both as the only and as the infallible revelation. The real and living revelation, he said, was reason, a revelation which existed and always exists amongst all people at all times. To hold up the Bible against reason, he maintained, was to kill the spirit with the letter, ...faith is nothing but reason come alive in man, and pagans could therefore also have faith...just as there is no heaven in the beyond, there is no hell and no damnation. Similarly, there is no devil...Christ was a man, as we are, a prophet and a teacher...”*

Brutal Oppression of the *Liberators*

In 1534, Anabaptist leader Jan Matthijs seized the town of Munster. *“Armed Anabaptists broke into houses and drove out everyone who was unwilling to accept second baptism. Winter was drawing to a close; it was a stormy day and wet snow was falling. An eyewitness account describes crowds of* *expelle*
d citizens walking through the knee-deep snow. They had not been allowed even to take warm clothing with them. Women carrying children in their arms, old men leaning on staffs. At the city gate they were robbed once more.”

(The Socialist Phenomenon – Shafarevich)

Reign of Terror

Jan Matthijs and Johan Bokelson then instituted a reign of terror in Munster, ordering the socialisation of all property, ordaining *apostles of revolution* to preach throughout Europe. The communist paradise of Munster attracted thousands of Anabaptists from throughout Germany and Holland. Matthijs was killed in one of the early battles. Johan Bokelson took command and established a dictatorship in Munster. He then issued the order for holding everything in common, including wives.

Violating Every Law

As Frederick Engels observed: *“It is a curious fact that in every large revolutionary movement the question of free-love comes to the foreground”*. No woman
was allowed to be exempt – there was a law against being unmarried, which meant that every girl was forced to be passed around amongst the men. Every woman in Munster became fair game for the lusts of these Anabaptist males. Rapes, suicides, severe punishments and mass executions took place almost every day. On one notable occasion, Bokelson himself beheaded

a virtuous woman who had refused his sexual advances. As he ceremoniously chopped her head off in the public square, a choir of his

wives

sang

“Glory to God in the Highest”!

(

Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators

by David Chilton).

You Reap What You Sow

This reign of terror continued for a year and a half until the city was freed by Protestant forces who put Bokelson and his lieutenants to death for their crimes – crimes committed in the name of *love, equality and spirituality*.

Suppressing Violent Revolution

We have left out most of the sordid and horrifying details of the 1524-1525 Peasants Revolt and the 1534 Anabaptist *“Kingdom of God”* established in Munster. But these few examples should be sufficient to explain why Anabaptists were opposed. It was not that they were being persecuted for taking the Scriptures seriously, but because they were violent revolutionaries subverting the entire social order and guilty of the deaths of many thousands of innocent people.

Do Not Bear False Witness

Those who would claim that Anabaptists have changed dramatically since that time, should recognise that it is for that very reason therefore unfair to portray the Reformers as supporting the persecution of poor innocent Anabaptist pacifists, as that is plainly not the case. Yes, the Anabaptists have changed since. So we should not continue to propagate the false accusation that Reformers were persecuting pacifist Anabaptists who were seeking to mind their own business. The Anabaptists that were opposed by the Reformers in the 1520's and 1530's were violent revolutionaries guilty of abominable atrocities and abuses.

Further Reading

For further reading, I would encourage you to read our articles: [*When All Men Speak Well of You*](#) and [*Why Is There So Much Hostility To the Bible and Christianity?*](#)

on our

www.frontline.org.za

website and obtain these outstanding books

:

[*What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*](#)

by Dr. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe,

[*How Christianity Transformed Civilisation*](#)

by Dr. Alvin Schmidt, and

[*The Great Christian Revolution*](#)

by Otto Scott. We all owe a tremendous debt to the Reformation in so many different ways. The Reformation was the greatest movement for Faith and freedom that the world has ever seen.

Dr. Peter Hammond

Reformation Society
P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725
Cape Town South Africa
Tel: 021-689-4480

Email: mission@frontline.org.za "> mission@frontline.org.za
Website: www.ReformationSA.org

This article has been adapted from [***The Greatest Century of Reformation***](#) book by Dr. Peter Hammond. Available from: Christian Liberty Books, PO Box 358, Howard Place 7450, Cape Town, South Africa, Tel: 021-689-7478, Fax: 086-551-7490, Email: admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za
">
admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za
and Website:
www.christianlibertybooks.co.za