

Radical Reformation vs. Magisterial Reformation ©

David Bennett –January 2007

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During the Protestant Reformation there were different views on a number of doctrinal issues. Two of these views can be summed up in what are called the *Radical Reformation* and the *Magisterial Reformation*. These two views existed at the same time.

My purpose here is to dispel the notion that there was just the “*Protestant Reformation*” and that Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli (1484-1531), John Calvin (1509-1564) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) were the only reformers and that their doctrine was the *only* doctrine of the Reformation. I’m merely making the case that these men were not infallible.

Before I cover the differences between the Radical Reformation & the Magisterial Reformation let's look at their similarities. Both:

- Rejected sacramentalism (Observing only two: Baptism & the Lord’s Supper).
- Rejected distinction between clergy & laity.
- Rejected ritualism.
- Emphasis on grace in justification.
- Emphasis on priesthood of all believers.
- Rejected the selling of indulgences for forgiveness/pardon of sins for which people were allowed to pay for a particular sin, even before they committed it. ¹
- Rejected the selling and collecting of religious icons to include body parts.

The following only highlights some of the differences between *Radical Reformation* and *Magisterial Reformation*.

| Radical Reformation | Magisterial Reformation |
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| <p>Authority: Called <i>Radical</i> because they believed the life of believers had to be different or else the Reformation was just a farce. People had to live their convictions out. Also as citizens of the Kingdom of God they rejected the authority of the state.</p> <p><i>Generally</i> believed in: -Return to simplicity of the early church. -Opposed infant baptism. -Some practiced a radical egalitarianism – all are equal; poor & uneducated are equal to the rich & educated; women and men are equal. -Some called each other “brethren” to distinguish from others called <i>Christian</i> by being born in a Christian state. -Some called for common ownership of property. -Although they believed in justification by</p> | <p>Authority: Called <i>Magisterial</i> because they relied on the authority of the civil <i>magistrates</i> for enforcement & to further their agenda.</p> <p>It was largely supported by those in elite societies and the privileged classes such as nobility and others who had political power.</p> <p><i>Generally</i> believed in: -Infant Baptism over Believers Baptism -State controlled Church over independent churches -Eucharist: Real presence vs. symbolic, memorial. In this I refer to the common practices of the Reformers at the time. <i>For more see reference</i> ⁴ -The elite and privileged wanted to protect or justify their status while the peasants and underprivileged lived in deplorable</p> |

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| <p>faith alone, they had to demonstrate good works and live according to a high moral standard. Those who did not were often exiled from the community.</p> <p>-Pacifists.</p> <p>-Saw themselves as returning to New Testament Christianity.</p> <p>-Sects like the Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish, and Quakers are offshoots of this movement.</p> <p>Also see reference ² and <i>The Seven Theses of the Anabaptists</i> ³</p> | <p>conditions.</p> <p>-Oftentimes brutal to those who opposed their doctrine.</p> |
| <p>Scripture: Pressed for the Reformation doctrine of <i>sola Scriptura</i> (Latin "by scripture alone"). The assertion that the Bible as God's written word is self-authenticating, clear to the rational reader, its own interpreter ("Scripture interprets Scripture"), and sufficient of itself to be the only source of Christian doctrine. ⁵</p> | <p>Scripture: Was in principle content to allow practices not contrary to Scripture, even if not explicitly affirmed by Scripture.</p> |
| <p>Salvation: Free will to accept or reject Christ's gift of salvation.</p> | <p>Salvation: No choice to accept or reject Christ's gift of salvation. Salvation is predetermined.</p> |
| <p>Baptism: <i>Credobaptism</i> (from the Latin <i>credo</i> meaning "I believe") otherwise known as <i>Believers Baptism</i>.</p> <p>- Given to persons who have reached the age of accountability or reason who have made a declaration of their personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.</p> <p>-Conrad Grebel said baptism of infants and forced baptism of adults were both invalid; everyone who joined his church had to be re-baptised to make sure it was done right.</p> <p>- Huldrych Zwingli dubbed them "<i>Anabaptists</i>" (rebaptizers) because they insisted on the rebaptism of those baptized as infants.</p> <p>Interestingly enough "<i>Anabaptists</i>" never considered that any rebaptism took place since they refuted the entire concept of infant baptism to begin with. ⁶</p> | <p>Baptism: <i>Pedobaptism</i> (from the Greek <i>paido</i> meaning "child") otherwise known as <i>Infant Baptism</i>.</p> <p>For many in this camp infant baptism was tied to the doctrine of predestination. It was the belief of these reformers that to admit that one could not be baptized until they were old enough to make a choice on their own denied the doctrine of predestination and admitted that man indeed had free will and a decision to make, to either accept or reject God's gift of Salvation. Pedobaptism removed the decision from the equation.</p> <p>-John Calvin called pedobaptism "<i>a divine institution</i>."</p> <p>- Martin Luther said that infant baptism was justifiable because babies have "hidden faith," just as a believing adult is also a Christian even while he is asleep.</p> <p>-Around 1524 at the instigation of Zwingli</p> |

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Anabaptist: *A member of a radical movement of the 16th-century Reformation that viewed baptism solely as an external witness to a believer's conscious profession of faith, rejected infant baptism...* Merriam-Webster Dictionary

“As to baptism we say: Infant baptism is of no avail to salvation; for it is written that we live by faith alone. Again: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Peter likewise says: The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:17; Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:21.”
Michael Sattler (1495-1527) ⁷

The Schleithem Confession

“**I. Observe concerning baptism:** Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him and to all those who with this significance request it (baptism) of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the Pope. In this you have the foundation and testimony of the apostles. Matt. 28, Mark 16, Acts 2, 8, 16, 19. This we wish to hold simply, yet firmly and with assurance.”

(The Seven Articles of Schleithem, Canton Schaffhausen, Switzerland, February 24, 1527 were considered important enough to be refuted by both Zwingli and Calvin in separate works.)

Menno Simons (1496–1561)

Ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1524 he did not become acquainted with the bible until two years later. Around 1526 or 1527, questions surrounding the doctrine of transubstantiation caused Menno to begin a serious and in-depth search of the scriptures,

the Zürich council ordered all unbaptized babies to be baptized within eight days.

-March 7, 1526, the Zürich council again sided with Zwingli and passed an edict making adult baptism punishable by drowning.

- 1648 in Protestant England an Act of Parliament made a rejection on infant baptism punishable by death.

Cannons of Dort: Article 17- The Salvation of the Infants of Believers

“Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.” ⁸

[Apparently the children of the predestined are automatically predestined too...]

Belgic Confession of Faith: Article XXXIV-Holy Baptism

“...we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children...” ⁸

Heidelberg Catechism

“Question 74- Are infants also to be baptized?”

“Answer 74- Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; (Gen.17:7) and since redemption from sin (Matt.19:14) by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; (Luke 1:15; Ps.22:10;

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| <p>which he confessed he had not previously studied, even being a priest. Menno's first knowledge of the concept of "rebaptism", which he said "sounded very strange to me", came in 1531. This came through the means of hearing of the beheading of a Dutch tailor, Sicke Freerks Snijder for being "rebaptized". After searching the scriptures Menno Simons concluded that infant baptism is not in the Bible. Menno Simons left the priesthood in January of 1536, and having scoured the teaching of the Magisterial Reformers on infant baptism, he joined with the Anabaptists. "For the next 25 years he (like Luther before him) lived with a price on his head. While Luther at least could exercise a ministry in a friendly political environment, Menno's ministry had to be clandestine on account of political hostility. He and his people were harassed by Roman and Reformed authorities alike. He died of natural causes." ⁹</p> | <p>Isa.44:1-3; Acts 2:39) they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers (Acts 10:47) as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, (Gen.17:14) instead of which baptism is instituted (Col.2:11-13) in the new covenant." ⁸</p> <p>Westminster Catechism “Question 95- To whom is baptism to be administered?” “Answer 95- Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.” ⁸</p> <p>The Scottish Confession of Faith drawn up by John Knox in 1560 Chapter 23- To Whom the Sacraments Appertain: We confess and acknowledge that baptism appertains as well to the infants of the faithful, as unto those that be of age and discretion. And so we damn the error of the Anabaptists, who deny baptism to appertain to children before that they have faith and understanding.</p> <p>Modern Day Reformed Theology The grievous heresy of sacramentalism continues to seduce in various forms most “Reformed” churches. R.C. Sproul, for example, justifies infant baptism by likening it to circumcision: “The scriptural case for baptizing believers’ infants rests on the parallel between [O.T.] circumcision and N.T. baptism as signs and seals of the covenant of grace....The Old Testament precedent requires it” (Geneva Study Bible, p. 38).¹¹</p> |
| <p>Regarding the Treatment of Anabaptists:</p> <p>Conrad Grebel (1498-1526) Often called the "Father of Anabaptists." Early on an earnest supporter of the</p> | <p>Regarding the Treatment of Anabaptists:</p> <p>Huldrych Zwingli was the leader of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, and</p> |

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preaching and reforms of Zwingli but split over abolishing the Mass. Zwingli argued before the council for abolishing the Mass and removing images from the church. But when he saw that the city council was not ready for such radical changes, he chose not to break with the council, and even continued to officiate at the Mass until it was abolished in May of 1525. Grebel saw this as an issue of obeying God rather than men. In October of 1525 he was arrested and imprisoned. Through the help of some friends, he escaped in March of 1526 and died of the plague the same year.

Felix Manz (1498–1527) initially became a follower of Zwingli after he came to Zürich in 1519. On 5 January 1527, Manz became the first casualty of Zwingli's edict prohibiting adult baptism, and the first Swiss Anabaptist to be martyred. His hands were bound and pulled behind his knees and a pole was placed between them. He was thrown to his death in an icy baptism in the cold waters of Lake Zürich.

Michael Sattler (1495-1527)
Formerly a monk, he left the monastery in 1523. Michael Sattler was captured by Roman Catholic authorities and was burned at the stake on May 21, 1527. ⁷ *I guess the Catholics beat Calvinists to the punch.*

George Blaurock (1491-1529) became the pastor of the church in Adige Valley, after their former pastor, **Michael Kürschner**, was burned at the stake. Eventually he and **Hans Langegger** were arrested and on September 6, 1529, both were burned at the stake.

Jacob Hutter (? - 1536)
-Swiss pastor who fled to Moravia to join the Anabaptists and become the main leader of the Anabaptists. He was arrested on December 1, 1535 and taken to Innsbruck, where King Ferdinand had his government. There he was tortured and burned alive in February 1536.

founder of the Swiss Reformed Churches. Zwingli's Reformation movement was known for mercilessly persecuting Anabaptists and other followers of Christ who maintained a nonresistant stance.

From 1525 Zwingli persecuted Anabaptists mercilessly with imprisonment, torture, banishment and death. The Anabaptist leader, Felix Manz, was drowned. Under Zwingli's influence, penalties of drowning, burning or beheading were decreed by the Council.

'It is our will,' they proclaimed, 'that wherever they be found, whether singly or in companies, they shall be drowned to death, and that none of them shall be spared.'

John Calvin wrote to England's King Henry VIII recommending that Anabaptists be burned as an example to other Englishmen: 'It is far better that two or three be burned than thousands perish in Hell.' ¹⁰ *(Only it wasn't two or three. Calvin was instrumental in having other groups killed as well. See <http://www.freewill-predestination.com/golden.html>)*

Martin Luther (1483-1546) "...His attitude to Anabaptism was molded by a succession of unfortunate events, and he turned from toleration through banishment to the death penalty for sedition and for *blasphemy* (a term which in practice was largely equated with what previously had been called *heresy*.)"

Luther told the princes and the nobility (referring to peasants) that it was right and lawful to slay at the first opportunity a rebellious person, "just as one must slay a mad dog... Let all who are able, cut them down, slaughter and stab them, openly or in secret, and remember that there is nothing more poisonous, noxious and utterly devilish than a rebel... For we are come upon such strange times that a prince may

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| <p>Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) is sometimes considered an Anabaptist, since he rejected infant baptism. But because many Anabaptists were also pacifists, Müntzer was not typical.</p> <p>During his studies Müntzer was influenced by Martin Luther. By 1523 Müntzer's position had diverged considerably from Luther's, siding with the peasants and working classes whom he saw as the instruments of divine will. He promoted the establishment of a new egalitarian society which would practice the sharing of goods. After the Peasants' War (1524–25) broke out Müntzer and the radical priest Henry Pfaiffer succeeded in taking over the Mühlhausen town council and set up a communistic theocracy in its place. Upon the defeat of the peasant party, Müntzer was beheaded.</p> | <p>more easily win heaven by the shedding of blood than others by prayers."¹⁰</p> <p>The Peasants' War (1524–25) cannot be blamed totally on those in the Radical Reformation. It was in many ways a response to the preaching of Luther and others. Many peasants mistakenly believed that Luther's attack on the Church and the hierarchy meant that the reformers would support an attack on the social hierarchy as well, because of the close ties between the secular princes and the princes of the Church that Luther condemned.</p> |
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As I have demonstrated, there were competing doctrine during the Reformation. Calvin was not infallible and things he said and did bear scrutiny and criticism when warranted.

It is interesting that Calvinists say on one hand, *“God doesn't need our help to accomplish anything, especially regarding anyone's salvation as God has already determined it. When follow the Great Commission or do missions we don't really accomplish anything because the outcomes have already be determined, we're merely being obedient.”*

Then on the other hand these same people defend Calvin's dictatorial rule that included mandatory church attendance, infant baptism, and the taking of the sacraments and his general dictatorial rule that included torture and killings for Anabaptists and others who disagreed with John Calvin on doctrinal issues. These same defenders that say God doesn't need our help still defend John Calvin by saying what those like John Calvin did was *“necessary for protecting the faith from heresy...”*

Jesus said you will recognize people by their fruit (**Matt 7:20**) and no good tree bears bad fruit (Luke 6:23).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23

Calvin's decisions to have people burned at the stake are understandably viewed by Reformed Theology as an attempt “to confirm his image as an intolerant authoritarian” and they rationalize his actions this way:

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...Despite the fact that religious toleration did not become a popular conviction until at least two hundred years later, and that what was done in Geneva was done virtually everywhere else in Europe on a much grander scale...

Actually that defense is not a true statement, just look at how the early Christians operated.

Calvin said, "...God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as He will, whether to good for His mercy's sake or to evil according to their merits... Whatever things are done wrongly and unjustly by man, these very things are the right and just works of God." ¹⁰

That looks similar to how Islam has been spread from its beginning. However, the early Christian church was spread by love and example.

These examples just don't square with what is taught in the New Testament about the *Golden Rule* and how to deal with those whom we disagree with. The point in all of this is to show that Calvin and other reformers were wrong in much of their doctrine and their methods were far from those taught by Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church; therefore, it is right to question their position on doctrine on an individual basis.

REFERENCES:

1. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/gutenberg/indulgences.html>
2. Various: <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/schleith.html> , <http://www.eldrbarry.net/heidel/anabrsc.htm> , <http://history.hanover.edu/early/prot.html> , Estep, William R., *Renaissance & Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 241.; Littell, Franklin H., *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York: The Macmillan Company), 11 <http://www.baptistchristianworldview.com/bheritage/cumminswhitsitt.htm> and many others.
3. *The Seven Theses of the Anabaptists* <http://www.theblackboxspeaks.org/anabaptists-7-theses.html>
4. Eucharist
 - According to the Roman Catholic Church, when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist, they cease to be bread and wine, and become instead the body and blood of Christ. The empirical appearances are not changed, but the reality is.
 - Many Reformed Christians, particularly those who follow John Calvin, hold that Christ's body and blood do not come down to inhabit the elements, but that "the Spirit truly unites things separated in space" (Calvin).

By faith (not a mere mental apprehension), and in the Holy Spirit, the partaker beholds God incarnate, and in the same sense touches him with hands, so that by eating and drinking of bread and wine Christ's actual presence penetrates to the heart of the believer more nearly than food swallowed with the mouth can enter in.

Calvin specifically rejected adoration of the Eucharistic bread and wine as "idolatry", however. Leftover elements may be disposed of without ceremony (or reused in later services); they are unchanged, and as such the meal directs attention toward Christ's bodily resurrection and return.

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- Lutherans believe that the Body and Blood of Christ are "truly and substantially present in, with and under the forms" of the consecrated bread and wine (the elements), so that communicants eat and drink both the elements and the true Body and Blood of Christ Himself (cf. Augsburg Confession, Article 10) in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
- The Zwinglian view sees Communion (also called the Lord's Supper or the Lord's Table) as a symbolic meal, a memorial of the Last Supper and the Passion in which nothing miraculous occurs.
- The Radical view was the Lord's Supper was to just be an observance or remembrance. The wine remained wine and the bread remained bread and they had no transforming power.

5. <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/sola-scriptura-earlychurch.html> ,
<http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/sola-scriptura-bible.html>

6. Franklin Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the church*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. xvi. Hereafter referred to as Littell.
<http://www.anabaptists.org/history/sepamarg.html>

7. <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/sattler.html>

8. <http://www.biblehelp.org/appndx.htm>

9. <http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Heritage/menno.htm#Menno%20Simons>

10. Quotes from the publications of Martin Luther and John Calvin on Sacramental Salvation.
<http://www.asapnet.net/remnant/page14issacrament.htm>

11. <http://www.thebereancall.org/node/6342>