CLASSICS OF THE RADICAL REFORMATION

Jakob Hutter

His Life and Letters

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Justine Maendel, *Jakob Hutter*, oil on canvas, 2022

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Translated and edited by
Emmy Barth Maendel
and Jonathan Seiling

Plough

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This is for you, Jake.
You would be so pleased.

Emmy

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Classics of the Radical Reformation

Classics of the Radical Reformation is an English-language series of Anabaptist and Free Church documents translated and annotated under the direction of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, which is the research agency of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and published by Plough Publishing House.

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Preface

In the summer of 2003, friends of mine returned from a trip to South Tyrol, where they had toured places where sixteenth-century Anabaptists had been imprisoned and executed. They reported in lively detail on the steadfast faith of these men and women in the face of intense persecution. The story that piqued my interest was that of Katharina Hutter, wife of Jakob Hutter, after whom the Hutterian Church is named – an account of conversion, recantation, torture, pregnancy, imprisonment, and death.

In the 1980s, I had been part of the team that prepared the English translation of *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren,* vol. 1. Since that time, I had worked in the Bruderhof Historical Archive and familiarized myself with its collection of Hutterite manuscripts and codices. But Katharina is not mentioned in Hutterite sources. I was determined to learn more about her.

I quickly discovered a series of German academic tomes, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer* [Sources for Anabaptist History], in which transcripts of Anabaptist interrogations and government communications regarding their capture and punishment have been reproduced in the original language. As I began translating some of these texts, the life of a persecuted underground church sprang to life in sharp focus: clandestine meetings, baptisms, celebratory conferences at which a steer would be slaughtered to feed up to a hundred participants, manhunts, escapes, tortures. And there I found a transcript of Katharina Hutter's December 1535 interrogation.

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In 2017 I traveled to Tyrol to look for additional information on Jakob and Katharina in the diocesan archive in Brixen (seat of the bishop in Hutter's time) and the Tiroler Landesarchiv in Innsbruck (seat of the provincial government). I hoped to find Jakob Hutter's interrogation transcript, but unfortunately it seems to have disappeared. I did find intriguing details – for instance, that Katharina's baby was probably born before her arrest, contrary to what had been assumed – but I was still looking for a description of her execution in 1538, or at least definitive confirmation of this event.

That search took me to the Styrian provincial archive to search through Johann Loserth's papers and, three years later, to Josef von Beck's papers in the Moravian state archive in Brno, Czechia. There I found the probable source: a copy of a list of martyrs (taken from a codex in Bratislava) that included her name.

The archives in Brno and Bratislava preserve a significant number of codices written by Hutterites in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These books contain copies of martyr epistles, small chronicles, sermons, doctrinal works, and song collections. I was interested in Jakob Hutter's letters and was able to make careful comparisons of the texts of his letters from various sources.

Plough had published a small book of Hutter's letters in 1979 as *Brotherly Faithfulness: Epistles from a Time of Persecution*. This book replaces that: the letters have been newly translated and differences between the various codex copies are noted. But it also goes far beyond that previous volume. Transcripts of interrogations of men and women whom Hutter had baptized, government and church correspondence concerning him and his followers, and new chronicle accounts from members of his fellowship in Moravia round out his story. In addition, a critique of Jakob Hutter by his rival Gabriel Ascherham and a description of the Hutterite communities by their opponent Christoph Andreas Fischer have been included, so that this book is a comprehensive collection of sixteenth-century texts concerning Jakob and Katharina Hutter. Apart from Hutter's letters and the excerpts from *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, vol. 1, most of this material has not been available in English before.

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My coauthor Jonathan Seiling helped organize and contextualize the material and also wrote the introduction, a noteworthy project on its own account.

It is my hope that through this book, the life and witness of Jakob Hutter and his fellow believers might be rediscovered today.

Emmy Barth Maendel
September 2023

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Abbreviations

ADS	Additional Documents. See chapter 6.
CHR	Chronicle Source. See chapter 2.
Chronicle	*The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren,* vol. 1. Rifton, NY: Plough, 1987.
COD. 1.	Codex 1: Rkp.zv.305 in the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. L-1, L-4, L-5, L-6, L-7, L-8.
COD. 2.	Codex 2: I 87.708 (Ms I 340) in the University Library in Vienna. L-3, L-4, L-6, L-8, CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.
COD. 3.	Codex 3: Rkp.zv.388 in the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. L-4.
COD. 4.	Codex 4: EAH 159 in Bruderhof Historical Archive, Walden, NY. L-3, L-5, L-6, L-7, L-8.
COD. 5.	Codex 5: EAH 80 in Bruderhof Historical Archive, Walden, NY. L-3, L-4, L-5.
COD. 6.	Codex 6: EAH 82 in Bruderhof Historical Archive, Walden, NY. L-3, L-4, L-7, L-8.
COD. 7.	Codex 7: HAB. 5 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-2, CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.
COD. 8.	Codex 8: HAB. 6 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-3.
COD. 9.	Codex 9: HAB. 13 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-3, L-5, L-6, L-7.
COD. 10.	Codex 10: HAB. 17 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-3, L-5, L-6, L-7, L-8.
COD. 11.	Codex 11: HAB. 9 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-4, L-5 (incomplete), L-6, L-8.
COD. 12.	Codex 12: HAB. 12 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. L-4, CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.
COD. 13:	Codex 13: HAB.16 in Štátny archív v Bratislave in Bratislava. CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.
COD. 14:	Codex 14: Ab 15 in Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Könyvtára in Budapest. CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.

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COD. 15:	Codex 15: "Caspar Breitmichel Codex," Estate of Reinhold Konrath, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario. CHR-10, CHR-11, CHR-12.
CRR	Classics of the Radical Reformation
GAMEO	*Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*
GOV	Governmental Correspondence. See chapter 5.
GZOT I	Müller, Lydia, *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*, vol. 1. Leipzig: Heinsius, 1938.
HEP	Hutterian Epistle. See chapter 4.
Hutt.Epist.	The Hutterite Brethren in America, eds., *Die Hutterischen Epistel 1527 bis 1767*, 4 vols. Elie, MB: James Valley Book Centre, 1986–1991.
L	Letter. See chapter 1.
MennLex	*Mennonitisches Lexikon*
MGBL	*Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*
MQR	*Mennonite Quarterly Review*
PUB. 1.	Hans Fischer, *Jakob Huter: Leben, Froemmigkeit, Briefe*. Newton, KS: Mennonite Publishing, 1956.
PUB. 2.	The Hutterite Brethren in America, eds., *Die Hutterischen Epistel 1527 bis 1767,* 4 vols. Elie, MB: James Valley Book Centre, 1986–1991.
PUB. 3.	Rudolf Wolkan, ed. *Das grosse Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder.* Standoff Colony, Macleod, AB., Canada, 1923.
PUB. 4.	Zieglschmid, A. J. F., ed. *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder*. Ithaca, NY: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Cayuga Press, 1943.
PUB. 5.	Müller, Lydia, *Glaubenszeugnisse Oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*, vol. 1. Leipzig: Heinsius, 1938.
PUB. 6.	Zieglschmid, A. J. F., "Unpublished Sixteenth Century Letters of the Hutterian Brethren," *MQR* 15 (1941): 5–25, 118–140.
QGT	*Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*
QGT XI	Mecenseffy, Grete, ed. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, XI Band. *Österreich I*. Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1964.

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QGT XIII	Mecenseffy, Grete, ed. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, XIII Band. *Österreich II*. Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1972.
QGT XIV	Mecenseffy, Grete, ed. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, XIV Band. *Österreich III*. Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1983.
TLA	Tiroler Landesarchiv
WIT	Witness. See chapter 3.

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Introduction

Jakob Hutter (ca. 1500–1536)

The writer of *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren,* vol. 1 (ca. 1550s), Kaspar Braitmichel (d. 1573), introduces Hutter by stating that around 1529, from Tyrol, "there came a man named Jakob, a hatter by trade. . . . He accepted the covenant of grace with a good conscience in Christian baptism, in true surrender, to follow the ways of God. When after a time it was abundantly clear that he had gifts from God, he was chosen for, and confirmed in, the service of the gospel."[1] This short paragraph aptly sums up his legacy within the Hutterite Anabaptist tradition: baptism, surrender, abundant gifts, chosen, and confirmed. It is a terse description, packed with meaning and helpful for understanding the life and legacy of this controversial figure in Anabaptist history.

Hutter's own self-assessment might best be encapsulated in a quote from his final letter in which he describes himself as

> a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, and a minister of all his chosen saints, here, there, and in all territories, up [in Tyrol] and down in Moravia, called by God in his boundless grace and unspeakable mercy. He has chosen and fitted me for this task in his grace and boundless mercy, though I have in no way earned it, but only because of his overflowing faithfulness and goodness, which has reckoned me as righteous and made me worthy to serve him in the everlasting and new covenant he established and made with Abraham and his seed for eternity. He has entrusted and placed his divine, eternal word into my heart and mouth, along with the heavenly properties of his Holy Spirit . . . blessed me with his eternal, heavenly blessing . . . made his divine and eternal word alive and active in me, and in many to whom I proclaimed it

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> . . . gave me this [blessing] as a sign through the dispensation and partnership of the Holy Spirit with every sort of mighty wonder and sign . . . made me a watchman, shepherd, and tender over his holy people, over his chosen, holy Christian fellowship. (L-8)

Yet some of his contemporaries disputed these claims, doubting Hutter's apostolic calling and sometimes making a caricature of him as a harsh, unwavering sectarian, like those seen elsewhere in different branches and eras of the Anabaptist movement or among other radicals.

It is not without reason that Hutter has been considered an uncompromisingly disciplined leader. The critical circumstances that confronted him did not lend themselves to a dithering guide who could not stomach controversy or the odium resulting from making unpopular decisions. He called other leaders to account in his attempt to ensure the survival of the fellowship, without abandoning authenticity or the public, missional dimension of his calling. His strict disciplinary approach clearly bore fruit in the stability and longevity of the Christian tradition that bears his name.

Hutter is a complex character whose significance for the history of Anabaptism cannot be underestimated, but given the paucity of documents and brevity of his career, sorting out the details of his life and thought remains a challenge. Gifted in many aspects of leadership, with widely recognized strengths as an orator, he apparently was envied by other "ministers of the Word," as they were called in the Hutterite tradition. In contrast to many first generation Anabaptist leaders, he had not had the benefit of higher education, but his devotion to internalizing the words of scripture is evident throughout his letters.

The conflicts into which he was drawn, as outlined in the documents in this collection, shaped the actions and decisions he believed necessary for the group's cohesion and fidelity to their calling as Christians. At times, Hutter tried desperately to mediate, a task that sometimes required a heavy hand when accusations of ministerial misconduct needed to be addressed.

Persecution in Hutter's Tyrolean context precluded the existence of a public Anabaptist movement, starting in the late 1520s. In contrast, Moravia provided a unique region for settlement of Anabaptist

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groups and the means to become established in a way that was nearly impossible elsewhere.

Refugees fled to Moravia from many parts of Europe as pastors could gather larger flocks there in relative security. The settlements grew rapidly and there was a constant need to manage ever-shifting leadership and group dynamics.

As a tailor of hats, Jakob was a member of the artisan-tradesman class, and although his birth date is unknown, based on the years of his professional development, it is assumed he was born around 1500. He was raised in an obscure hamlet in South Tyrol called Moos, near St. Lorenzen in present-day northern Italy, and presumably received a basic formal education.[2] In 1529, the same year he is said to have become a minister of the Word, he had become the most hunted Anabaptist leader under King Ferdinand's rule. Executed in 1536 in Innsbruck, he died as a criminal in the eyes of the state-church and as a martyr in the eyes of the Anabaptist tradition. He seemed fearless in the face of the king and bishop, eager to confront both collective and individual hypocrisy. He was indefatigable as an evangelist throughout the Tyrolean alpine regions, searching for those receptive to his interpretation of the gospel, repeatedly risking his life while spies and state officials pursued him, along with his loyal associates and their network of rebaptized followers. Unwavering under torture, he was reportedly gagged while being executed to stop him from preaching his last sermon during his execution (WIT-22). Ultimately Jakob Hutter was remembered by his tradition as one "made worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus." He was a simple man whom his followers believed was chosen by God to gather a people, to build a fellowship.

Another remarkable part of his life and legacy is the documentation concerning Hutter's wife, Katharina (née Prast). Although her interrogation records provide much detail, little is known about her personal biography. Yet her presence alongside Jakob in the years between 1533 and 1536 elucidates unique aspects of his journey as a married Anabaptist missionary who was expecting his first child when he set out on his final mission trip.

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Given the rather unique trajectory of both the Tyrolean and Moravian Anabaptist communities, our study of Hutter explores longer-term contextual factors, which indelibly shaped his formative years. The rise and implementation of the community of goods as seen in the Hutterite Bruderhof was an early attempt at creating an alternative economic community, in which a covenant of faith and finance afforded Anabaptists a means of resistance against the unjust demands of the broader society.

Anti-Imperial Reform, Protest, and Tribulation

The varieties of reform undertaken in Europe contested the sacral-economic ancient regime of throne-altar-nobility already in the mid-1400s and continued unabatedly through two centuries of development until the Enlightenment breakthroughs of the 1660s, after which the stability of church-state would be forever shaken.[3] In Tyrol as in other regions, there were both steady and abrupt impulses toward revolt and reform in political and religious life; these were proposed, debated, imposed, rejected, and in some measure eventually enacted over a long and tumultuous transition.[4]

Geopolitics

Tyrol is a beautiful alpine region of rugged peaks towering over sunlit valleys. The lower slopes are covered with pine and larch trees, and above these rise the bare rock cliffs of the Dolomites. Brixen (now Bressanone) lies about 250 kilometers north of Venice and, by comparison, about 550 kilometers west of Vienna. The landscape is a spectacle, but wresting a living from it demands hard work: farming in the valleys, grazing cows on the slopes, and mining ore from the depths of the mountains themselves are hard-won means of income. A lack of mobility in terms of both transporting goods and the socioeconomic benefits therein held most Tyrolean citizens at the lower rungs of society with little room for improvement, while nobles profited from new industrial and economic developments. The seat of the territorial government of Tyrol was to the north in Innsbruck (Austria), while the ecclesiastical government for much of the region was seated in Brixen to the south of the region (Italy), where a prince-bishop ruled. The three regional districts of South Tyrol relevant

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to Hutter's ministry are the Italian valleys of Puster, Wipp, and Eisack.[5] North Tyrol in present-day Austria includes several districts where Innsbruck is at the central point, with the cities of Schwaz and Rattenberg further east. This northern region is wedged between Switzerland and Liechtenstein to the west, Bavaria to the north-west, and Salzburg and Carinthia to the east. From there, Moravia was 600 kilometers north and east in today's Czechia.

King Ferdinand of Austria, whom Hutter called a "cruel tyrant and enemy of divine truth" (L-4), had grown up in Spain and was neither Austrian nor familiar with common life in Tyrol. In 1521, his brother, Emperor Charles V, granted the young Ferdinand the kingship over most of modern-day Austria and South Tyrol in Italy, yet he barely spoke German. The king was therefore profoundly out of touch with a territory that had proven challenging to control or administer throughout history. Most of his subjects resented him as a foreigner, but step by step he effectively subdued all opposition – in many cases executing administrators and leaders who resisted him.[6]

The Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire continued the struggle for a balance of political and spiritual authority up to and throughout the sixteenth century, with many financial and economic consequences for the common folk. Georg III, bishop at Brixen from 1525 to 1538, treated the bishopric as a source of personal income rather than a pastoral charge. As a young man with no religious training, Georg was granted the ranking clerical position as the illegitimate son of Maximillian I and enjoyed traveling often to various courts of Europe, leaving the administration to others. Meanwhile, many of the small villages and hamlets had no priest of their own but were served by roving priests or chaplains. This lack of clerical stability opened opportunities to would-be reformers for a wider sphere of influence than if parishes had retained local priests. Often lacking oversight or ethical accountability, priestly misconduct was widespread. Although priests were officially forbidden to marry, it was not unusual for a priest to live in a common-law relationship and raise a family.[7] Reformers of various stripes, including Anabaptists, spoke out against this hypocrisy, calling the priests "whore mongers" and "prophets of Baal." As a prince-bishop, Georg III had secular as well as

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religious authority over some towns in southern Tyrol. The contest for power that ensued between religious and political authorities as a result of the vacuum left by Georg during his frequent absences led to conflicts of interest between local jurisdictions.[8]

Socioeconomics

Life for the common people was very difficult in most regions of Europe, and the imperial taxation system was a major source of resentment toward the state and church. Taxes were owed to multiple authorities, including local townships and feudal lords, the Roman Church, and the territorial king. The imminent threat of war with the Ottoman Turks gave rise to a military tax as well. With the threat of excommunication for failure to pay the tithe, it was only a matter of time before the financial advantages of an alternative spiritual community outside the Roman Church became an attractive option for the peasants. Besides having to contend with natural disasters – avalanches, floods, and poor harvests – the peasants did not own the land they worked and lived on.

In the mid-1520s, at a time of widespread unrest and revolt among peasant groups in central Europe, Michael Gaismair (1490–1532) became leader of the peasant revolution in Tyrol.[9] By 1525 – the same year that the first Anabaptists performed rebaptisms as adults – peasants throughout Europe had broken into open rebellion against oppressive authorities. Some occasions involved organized peasant armies, while others involved minor acts of terrorism. In Tyrol this revolt reached a peak in summer 1525 with the plundering and burning of churches and the homes of the rich.[10] The mob attacked the bishop's palace in Brixen on May 10, a day when the prince-bishop was absent. To this day indentation marks from the attack can be seen on the palace door. A volunteer army of several thousand miners and peasants overran castles and cities. The shocked nobles, who until then had resisted their new king, now took Ferdinand's side, mustering their own troops for a counterattack. In July 1526, the rebels moved through the Puster Valley raiding parsonages.[11] Gaismair was the son of a miner, and in his role as secretary to the bishop in Brixen, he had tried at first to moderate between the bishop and the people. But the authorities were not open to dialogue: when he traveled to Innsbruck

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to discuss matters, he was arrested. He managed to escape, and that same winter he wrote his famous Tyroler Landesordnung, arguably an early political manifesto of anti-imperialism, which included a few key revisions to religious life as well. He envisioned a new society that recognized the equal economic and social rights of all people, removing institutional religion as a repressive force.[12] The government was to consist of educated people as well as miners and peasants. Mines and commerce were to be run by the state and the land divided among the peasants. He proposed a type of regional healthcare for the old and sick; a university in Brixen; cultivation of olives, spices, and new types of grapes and grains; and draining of swamps.[13] Similar to the Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier's revolutionary vision for the church and his support for southern German peasants' revolts, Gaismair sought to impact education, health, politics, religion, and economy. Some historians see in his communal vision a model for the later Hutterian communities.[14] After Gaismair's uprising failed, he eventually fled to Venice, where he was later assassinated on the morning of April 15, 1532. Some of his earlier supporters would become Anabaptists, drawing a direct line of influence from the Tyrolean social-revolutionary movement to the search for a radically alternative society.[15]

In addition to peasant revolutions, humanist reform (both Catholic and Protestant) was oriented toward rediscovering the sources of truth in printed form, and these ideas fluidly crossed barriers of language and national context. And while artisans rarely imbibed the Latin-lettered arguments among this class of scholars, a few key theological debates were translated into the vernacular, bridging the rural-urban cultural and class divide. These anti-imperialist theological impulses extended throughout Europe, flourishing particularly in these upland regions of the Alps, where protests against clerical wealth and privilege were clear examples of the widespread anti-clericalism described so aptly by Hans-Jürgen Goertz – namely, as the root impulse toward radical reform.[16] And while humanism generally looked to the distant past, leaning on classical sources as a means to discovering truth, Zwingli and other humanists also looked to the present, leaning toward a biblicist-spiritualist hermeneutic that sought to balance a recognition of the authority of the Holy Spirit with that of the learned intellect in the task of scriptural interpretation.

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Others yet would look to the future, placing their hope in apocalyptic events that would bring justice and reset the order of the world.[17] This combination of social-political radicalism with an insistence upon biblical correctives to doctrinal theology and church order may be called "Swiss-style reform," which broadly represents the initiatives of Zwingli in Zurich, along with others in the Swiss confederation; the spread of such biblical-political reformed radicalism encompassed much of the proto-Anabaptist, Anabaptist, and Swiss Reformed movements, along with other non-Lutheran reformers in Tyrol.

The key features of this radical spiritualist, anti-imperial profile thus included rejection of both clerical privilege and the feudal economic-industrial system involving the oppression of peasants by the noble class. Scripture was given priority and set up as authority over that of both the pope and ecclesiastical councils; moreover, the outer word, the Bible, was read by the faithful with guidance from the inner word, the Holy Spirit, which held priority over any other source of human authority. This quest for a future society, based on divine order rather than human tyranny or autocracy, led to attempts at enacting experimental models of communal society.

At the start of the 1520s, Dr. Jakob Strauss was another prominent early reformer active in Tyrol. He was in Innsbruck until 1521 and then gained popularity as a preacher in Hall. He appealed to miners and other citizens who rejected religious orders, the Mass, and confession and decried the exploitation of the poor.[18] The bishop of Brixen finally expelled him in May 1522, despite support for Strauss by the city council and citizens who opposed the bishop. He was forced to flee and sought refuge with Luther in Wittenberg. There he continued a prolific publishing campaign, but soon he discovered how little he held in common with the German reformer.[19] He wrote against infant baptism, veneration of saints and relics, purgatory, payment of onerous tithes and interest on debts, the accumulation of wealth in general, and the ecclesiastical ban; and he supported the marriage of priests. Strauss warned against the use of violence by peasants and urged the authorities to mitigate the situation leading to the tensions. His 1523 tract *On the Inner and Outer Baptism* requires faith as the precondition for baptism, arguing that "salvation

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does not depend upon the outer baptism but upon faith."[20] He died in 1532, but his whereabouts between 1527 and 1532 remain a mystery.

Following Strauss's departure from Tyrol in 1522, the drive toward social and religious reform there continued; resentment toward political and ecclesiastical authorities increased as waves of dissent passed over German territories to the northwest. After the failed peasants' revolt, Gaismair's withdrawal from the region opened a new landscape for reform leaders, some of whom came from much humbler origins.

Persecution

While the medieval Inquisition had not been officially abandoned in central Europe, there was great inconsistency as to how the church-state apparatus conducted heresy proceedings. Much of the system was being revamped in the 1520s, as Catholic humanists ridiculed inquisitors, and political resistance to Rome made the implementation of the Inquisition increasingly subject to the varied wishes of secular authorities. The emperor consorted with local ecclesiastical authorities to implement a new, more efficient means of conducting interrogations and justifying executions, based largely on civil charges rather than traditional charges of heresy. A civil proceeding was less encumbered by ecclesiastical process, and therefore, by attaching the civil charge of sedition to Anabaptism, executions became more streamlined for the state to conduct.[21] The emperor's approach to shifting the onus to civil proceedings required legislation, which he soon imposed on the entire Holy Roman Empire.[22]

On January 4, 1528, a general mandate broadly outlawed rebaptism in the Holy Roman Empire. In April 1529, the imperial estates met with a papal council at the Diet of Speyer; among other tasks relating to the suppression of internal revolt and the need for a combined strategy for defending Europe against the Ottoman Turks, the diet also mandated penalties for those who refused to present their children for baptism. That decree, the so-called *Wiedertäufermandat* issued on April 23, imposed the death penalty not only for the act of rebaptism but also for the act of refusing to present one's child for baptism – that is, rejecting or suspending the conventional practice of infant baptism. Even those who helped, abetted, or failed to report Anabaptists were subject to prosecution. In this

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sense, not only was the act of adult baptism as a second baptism outlawed, but the prospect that adult baptism might spread legitimately and legally through the cessation or suspension of infant baptism was effectively outlawed for all citizens of the Holy Roman Empire. Anyone who previously denounced their affiliation to Anabaptism and then returned to it would not have a second chance to denounce it but would be automatically executed as a *relapsus*. If any official was unwilling to fulfill this mandate, he would "face imperial disgrace and grave punishment."[23] Thus mandatory enforcement was introduced, and the previous requirements for an inquisitorial process for heresy were mitigated or even circumvented, using instead the more expedient and secular civil process to punish sedition.

After the vilified leader Balthasar Hubmaier was executed in Vienna on March 10, 1528, his interrogator Johann Fabri published a *Justification* document to delegitimize the entire movement. Fabri described Hubmaier's own position as advocating for a suspension of rebaptism until a time that such issues could be decided by a general council.[24] In Tyrol a secret council called the *Ketzercollegium* was also created in 1528, and local clergy were ordered to gather intelligence about those who did not participate in confession or Mass.[25] In that region there was a systematic practice of destroying the buildings where rebaptisms were conducted in an attempt to exorcise the physical spaces where Anabaptists had worshipped.

Hoping to quell the movement before it got out of hand, the authorities issued another mandate on April 1, 1528: Anyone who publicly renounced his error, performed whatever penance his priest demanded, and reported who had seduced him would receive a "light" punishment – one or two weeks imprisonment on bread and water. But those who persisted in their error would be condemned to death by fire; if they repented of their sin after being sentenced, their penalty could be reduced to death by sword; their property would be confiscated. Anyone who misled or baptized others was to be executed by fire, whether or not they recanted. All assets of an Anabaptist who was executed were taken over by the city, and the surviving family was thus deprived.[26]

But despite these threats, townspeople, farmers, miners, and even nobles continued to join the Anabaptist movement and filled the dungeons again and again, eager to "pluck the bloody rose which the faithful heart

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longed for."[27] Georg Kirchmayr, ecclesiastical chronicler under the bishop of Brixen, described the intensity of this time, showing great disfavor to Anabaptists, making clear the need for society to reject them (CHR-1). Although some estates in the empire argued for a mitigation of such harsh penalties, sympathy dwindled with the uprising that led to the short-lived Anabaptist kingdom of Münster in northern Germany during 1534–35.[28] That context led once again to attaching the label of sedition to Anabaptism in a new, concrete, and dramatic way, which itself led to justifying harsher persecution over the next decades in Tyrol, resulting in a disproportionately high rate of execution compared to the rest of Europe.

In response to persecution, Anabaptists developed several means to cope.[29] An alternative to becoming a martyr was the practice of "Nicodemism," whereby individuals or groups of Anabaptists would conceal their beliefs and practices, hoping that persecution would soon cease. They also used pseudonyms in some cases and often kept their identities secret from each other so that they would not be able to betray others under torture.[30] Forced underground, they would meet in secret locations for discussion and worship, such as in the forest. They developed special greetings that would reveal those who were genuine members. Perhaps the most successful safeguard against persecution was relocation or self-exile, resulting in the general exodus of Anabaptists from Tyrol to the tolerant regions of Moravia and neighboring regions.[31] Hutter wrote his followers: "We all urge you to come out of that accursed, sodomite, and murderous land. . . . Flee, flee away from those ungodly and wicked people!" (L-2).

Although Moravia became a haven for Anabaptists during the 1530s, it was not exempt from the imperial mandates. Three waves of persecution in Moravia, starting in 1528, severely compromised the initial appeal of the region; in the first phase of persecutions,[32] the optimistic climate of radical reform potential in urban settings soon fell under the shadow of repeated executions. By January 1534, Ferdinand I warned against the political dangers of the practice of community of goods, drawing comparisons between the violent revolts in Münster and communitarian settlements in Moravia.[33] In the second wave, 1535–36, the Anabaptist communities, including those under Hutter's leadership, were targeted;

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at this time Hutter himself fled Moravia, only to be captured in Tyrol. Herzog Ulrich von Württemberg issued an ordinance in 1536, suspecting collaboration between Anabaptists in Münster and Moravia.[34] The third wave (1547–1552), beginning over a decade after Hutter's death, severely repressed the Hutterite communities and decimated their population.[35]

In Moravia the strong tendency toward separatism and sectarianism, in large part a result of persecution, significantly reshaped the socio-economic character of these relocated Swiss, south German, Silesian, and Tyrolean communities. Composing hymns, memorizing biblical passages consoling the faithful to remain steadfast, and collecting martyr stories were the main means of both comforting the persecuted and constructing a tradition and identity forged in the tribulation of persecution.[36]

Anabaptists' rejection of the world and their eventual embrace of an ecclesiology of separatism also emerged as a response to persecution – and with it community of goods, rejection of political office and the civic oath, and the doctrine of nonresistance. The original intention of the earliest Anabaptists had been to participate in the general reform of the church, and the social dimension of the earliest movement, with its missionary zeal and insistence on engaging the general process of reform, was more anti-imperialist than isolationist in its intent. Estimates of the number of Anabaptists executed in the 1500s in central Europe run between 2,000 and 2,500, comprising almost half of the religious martyrs in this period of European history.[37] Most of these were divided equally between the North (Netherlands, northern Germany) and the South (Switzerland, southern Germany, Austria). Women composed about one third of the martyrs within Anabaptism, a high percentage in contrast to the small number of Protestant and Catholic women martyrs for the same period.[38] In Tyrol, at least two hundred men and women were executed as Anabaptists between 1527 and 1530, with the total in subsequent years reaching about six hundred,[39] indicating a disproportionately high rate of execution compared to the rest of Europe.

Once the more theoretical threat of persecution of the mid-1520s turned into the brutal reality of executions by the hundreds at the end of the decade, the motif of God's justice and the revolutionary moment

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shifted to the practicality of dealing with such widespread suffering. What the famous private letter by Conrad Grebel and his cohorts to Thomas Müntzer indicated about a rejection of violence and willingness to become "sheep for the slaughter" was lived by the fledgling Anabaptist conventicles in the Tyrolean Alps. Their missionary leader Jakob Hutter was forced to confront the reality that in baptizing someone he was sentencing him to death. The revolt to demand justice turned into a posture of patience in suffering. *Gelassenheit,* denoting yieldedness or surrender, became a hallmark of Anabaptism – not only in the face of persecution. It was also an attitude of submission to one another that enabled individuals to live in close proximity, sharing their possessions.[40]

Although some individuals succumbed to torture and recanted, vast numbers of Anabaptists in Tyrol were unwavering in their faith, using the occasion of their own execution as a chance to express their convictions and convince others. This provoked the bishop of Brixen to write a proposal to Innsbruck that executions no longer take place in public, as they had the effect not only of giving a forum for the spread of Anabaptist teachings but also of souring people's regard for authorities as sympathy for Anabaptists increased. But the government in Innsbruck held fast to the king's mandate to make public the pronouncement and execution of sentences and insisted it not be violated for any reason. The Innsbruck government suggested keeping the pronouncement very short, to be immediately followed by the execution, thus limiting the opportunity to gather in crowds and communicate with the condemned. In addition, soldiers were to shout commands to those gathered, to prevent the words and preaching of condemned Anabaptists from being heard.[41]

The 1530s brought a shift from the revolutionary hopes of the 1520s, in which apocalyptic expectations of God's kingdom were pursued with force, to a renewed social-political vision in which broad-scale "Swiss-style" reform (of the Zwinglian sort) narrowed to a more "Swiss-style" sectarianism,[42] where the responsibility for broad-scale social reform was abrogated, with the emphasis shifted to an internal process aimed at purifying the "elect" as a means of exemplifying God's justice and peace in the world.

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Rise of Anabaptism in Tyrol

From Zurich to Tyrol

The region was host to other key leaders in addition to the Tyrolean reformer Jakob Strauss. For example, in 1525 Andreas Karlstadt, while in Lüsen, South Tyrol, contributed significantly to the broader argument against infant baptism.[43]

The origins of the more specific practice and theology of rebaptizing, which they argued was not a rebaptism at all but the first true baptism, stem from Zurich and the consequences of the actions of Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and Georg Blaurock.[44]

In Zurich, Zwingli had gathered eager young students around him in the early 1520s, independently of Luther's reform movement. He urged them to read the Bible for themselves and not to accept anything unless it could be proved from scripture. The New Testament was becoming a practical guide to Christian life. But Zwingli soon found himself at odds with some of his more radical followers – Conrad Grebel and his associates Felix Mantz and Georg Blaurock – who decided to rebaptize one another as "brethren" in January 1525.[45] In doing so, they consciously placed themselves outside the canons of the Roman Catholic Church and in opposition to the Zurich city council's statutes. As well as rejecting the practice of baptizing infants, they tested many Catholic traditions against scripture: the veneration of the Virgin Mary, prayer to saints, fasting, and transubstantiation in the Lord's Supper.

After Blaurock had been banished from Zurich, he traveled southeast to Tyrol between May and September 1527, where he found fertile ground for the theology and practice of believers' baptism. He would return to Tyrol again in the spring of 1529, to the south of the Brenner Pass, near the Puster Valley where Hutter was then active.[46] At eight years of age, the young Peter Walpot, future leader of the Hutterites, was present to witness Blaurock's execution.[47] Hans Hut and Balthasar Hubmaier were already active in Vienna and Nikolsburg, but Blaurock's missions provide the clearest possible link to the first practice of adult rebaptism in Tyrol.[48] And while there is no clear evidence that Blaurock baptized Hutter, the dates of Blaurock's appearance in Tyrol – and the degree of Hutter's clarity of his own apostolicity as a baptizer-evangelist, along with the

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unqualified praise heaped on Blaurock by the *Chronicle* – would certainly point to Blaurock as a possible baptizer of Jakob Hutter in either 1527 or 1529. It is equally possible, however, that a follower of Hut, Wolfgang Brandhuber, was Hutter's baptizer, as discussed below.

Blaurock was arrested in mid-August 1529 in the village of Gufidaun, in the mountains above the Eisack River, along with his companion Hans Langegger. He was questioned under torture regarding his activities and burned at the stake in Klausen[49] on September 6, 1529. After Blaurock's death, Jakob Hutter emerged as the chief Anabaptist leader in South Tyrol – in the words of his enemies, the "principal leader" (*Vorsteher*).[50] The rebaptizing movement introduced by Blaurock spread rapidly, "facilitated by the preexisting evangelical network with links to the Gaismair rebellion. . . . As the desire to transform the entire society gave way in favor of building separate communities guided by New Testament principles, the borders between Anabaptists and the rest of society became unmistakable."[51]

Early evidence points not to a clear, coherent leadership system in Tyrol but rather to the progression of an Anabaptist cell movement impacted by several influences. Few details can be said for certain concerning the relative impact of such early leaders as Blaurock, Hut, Karlstadt, Strauss, and others. In December 1527, in Sterzing, a so-called "synagogue of Anabaptists" was held at the home of Johann Kessler, which included several foreigners, prompting the regional government to order the apprehension of those who were at the meeting; however, they all escaped without a trace.[52] Soon thereafter another meeting took place in Lüsen, and again on January 15, 1528, Sterzing was host to a larger gathering of Anabaptists. In the following week, the administrative authorities in the towns were required to capture, imprison, and torture suspects until the Anabaptist participants were identified.[53] While the exact details of the earliest progenitors of Anabaptism in Tyrol are unclear, by the late 1520s there was a robust following, which spread widely between larger towns.

Another leader in Tyrol was Georg Zaunring, who in June 1528 baptized Michael Kürschner, a court clerk at Völs. Zaunring evidently appointed Kürschner as leader of the Kitzbühel congregation, a position he held until May 1529, when his capture and execution led to Blaurock

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briefly taking over leadership. Already by Blaurock's execution in September, Hutter had allegedly taken over "the heritage of Blaurock" as the foremost Anabaptist leader in Tyrol.[54]

Zaunring himself became a close associate of Hutter. In 1530 Hutter sent him from Tyrol to Moravia to assist Jakob Wiedemann in the leadership there. Although Zaunring was implicated in later controversies and was excommunicated for failing to bring a serious matter into the public, he was reaccepted into the fellowship, died for his faith, and is recognized in Hutterite sources as a martyr.[55]

After Hans Hut

Hans Hut traveled from Augsburg to Vienna in 1527, where he impressed Leonhard Schiemer, the former monk who would participate in the so-called Martyrs Synod that same year. Shortly after Schiemer's arrest in Rattenberg, Tyrol, in late 1527, he was executed in January 1528.[56] Similarly, Hans Schlaffer, a former parish priest in Upper Austria, was baptized by Hut and became an Anabaptist martyr shortly after Schiemer's death.[57] Each of these figures who briefly appear in the Tyrolean Anabaptist story proffered Hut's apocalypticism as a theological explanation of persecution and their times of trial.[58] Exactly how Tyrolean Anabaptism inherited separatism remains unclear, although some combination of reference to the Schleitheim Articles (1527) may be warranted.[59] Apocalyptic motifs can be noted in Hutter's letters too (esp. L-7).

What is often deemed "sectarian" or "separatist" might best be described as the rejection of a violent revolutionary apocalypticism in favor of a dispensational expectation, turning from a program of general reform in which leaders would actively engage the "magisterial" governing structures and other church leaders attempting territorial reform, to acts of resistance of different forms, and finally retreating to a socioeconomic form of existence that is in many ways the most pragmatic option after the imperial mandates against Anabaptism, resulting in a time of widespread persecution. These developments led to the socioeconomic compromise of sectarianism, the need for greater solidarity and secrecy, a consequential rejection of the civic oath and military service, and the turn to inward administration of discipline in the form of the ban.[60]

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Christoph Freisleben, the schoolmaster at Wels in Upper Austria who joined Hut's rebaptizing movement in 1527, published a popular tract, *On the Genuine Baptism* (1528).[61] It has been described as "one of the more significant public statements coming out of early South German and Austrian Anabaptism."[62] Beginning with a catalog of Catholic errors concerning baptism, the argument moves from an explanation in fifteen points concerning the biblical legitimacy of the "outer baptism" to a refutation of the errors and abuses of baptismal practice. This treatise was used widely by the Hutterite tradition, as evidenced in the five handwritten copies that have survived.[63] They remain anonymous in Hutterite sources, probably because the author returned to Catholicism.

While scholars have sought to locate a linear connection of sectarian separatism from Swiss to Tyrolean Anabaptism, the clearest articulation of "evangelical sectarianism" on Tyrolean soil appears to stem from the Bavarian schoolmaster Wolfgang Brandhuber, a follower of Hans Hut and a colleague of Hans Schlaffer, Jakob Wiedemann, Peter Riedemann, and Gabriel Ascherham.[64] Previously he had been in Regensburg in 1527, where in the wake of persecution he encouraged steadfastness in the faith and labored to sustain communication between disparate Anabaptist cells. It is likely that he baptized Gabriel Ascherham, who would become a "senior leader" in Moravia and a challenge to Hutter.[65]

Originally from Burghausen (Bavaria), Brandhuber moved to Linz in 1528,[66] where other early Austrian Anabaptists promoted Hut's message of repentance and spiritual baptism.[67] In Linz, Brandhuber first established a single-household version of community of goods, and here he became a leading "re-organizer and propagator" of Anabaptism in Passau, Linz, Wels, and elsewhere, having a "tremendous" influence in Tyrol during 1528–29.[68] In addition to establishing community of goods, he emphasized modest clothing, nonresistance, and strong church discipline. Brandhuber's ideal of community of goods meant members of the fellowship who were not related would live "in a smaller single-family household," sharing property and income. A Bruderhof-style community of goods, with a single treasury and the role of treasurer for a large group of people, developed later, with the freedom to flourish in Moravia.[69]

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The only surviving letter by Brandhuber is considered the "first piece of Anabaptist literature that explicitly advocates a proto-Hutterite position of communalism in very empirical terms,"[70] including keeping a common purse, which would assist the poor, and the admonition for the household to share possessions with their servants, as he himself is reported to have done (ADS-1).[71] While the exact form of economic collectivity he advocated is unclear, the *Chronicle* attests that Brandhuber's version of community of goods was more robust than that of a single household: "In the fellowship no one should be the steward of his own purse. The property of poor and rich should be distributed by the one chosen by the fellowship and everything should be held in common to serve God's glory whenever and wherever God granted it."[72]

Brandhuber's rejection of the sword was unequivocal, a position that directly countered Hubmaier's *On the Sword* (1527).[73] Thus the concrete formulation of sectarian Anabaptism becomes clearer in this proto-Hutterite leader. In an era of increasing persecution, internal division, and confusion, his vision aimed at the fulfillment of the elect as a gathered, distinct, and pure fellowship that was visible and temporal.[74] In late 1529 Brandhuber was executed in Linz, as a martyr to the steadfastness he urged in all the faithful.[75]

There is no clear documentation of a direct connection between Hutter and Brandhuber, but Hutter's own ordination as leader in Tyrolean missions roughly coincided with the death of Brandhuber and Hans Niedermayer in 1529. Peter Riedemann writes that he had worked with Brandhuber, and he became Brandhuber's immediate successor in Linz. He would later rise as a central leader of the Hutterian fellowship after Hutter's death.[76] If Brandhuber did baptize Gabriel Ascherham,[77] and even prepared Hutter and others like Riedemann for a leadership role in Tyrol, the eventual conflict between Hutter and Ascherham in 1533 may be explained as a sort of rivalry between heirs of Brandhuber's mantle in Moravia.[78] The model of nonresistant spirituality that is generally indicated by Hutter's life and ministry was not a foregone conclusion; it continued to be debated within other communities and eras of Anabaptism.[79]

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