

24

A Bull in the China Shop

Clustered around its Benedictine monastery, Mönchen-Gladbach on the plains of the lower Rhein in Germany, was a city of song. Its monks sang. Choral groups of nuns from the convent of Neuwerk sang. The music of the great organ in the bishop's church broke into thousands of crystal echoes among the vaulted arches and gothic stonework high above those who came for morning mass.

But in the 1530s other songs began to stir the hearts of the people of Mönchen-Gladbach. Anabaptist believers, gathered secretly in city homes at night, sang to Christ and loved him. They sang about giving up all they had to follow him, and it wasn't long until the whole city discovered the truth of what they sang.

In the winter of 1537 they caught one of the Anabaptists, Vit Pilgrams, and tortured him on the rack. Failing, after months of barbarous cruelty to make him recant, they burned him at the stake on May 26, with a bag of gunpowder pulled up to his chin. Then they caught Theunisz van Hastenrath, the first Anabaptist messenger in Mönchen-Gladbach, and killed him too. The man who took his place was a bagmaker named Lambert Kramer.

Lambert loved Christ and spoke of him on every opportunity. He held secret meetings in his home,¹ and provided Menno Simons with a place to stay when he came through the area. On one occasion the authorities tore his house down and took his possessions because of his Anabaptist activities.

A close companion of Lambert Kramer was a charcoal maker named Zelis Jacobs. Zelis spoke bravely of Christ. They chose him to be a servant of the Word, and in the 1560s he ordained two young men, Matthias Servaes and Heinrich von Krufft, to help him. Under the direction of Zelis and these young men the believers met at night to sing and pray in a stone quarry between Mönchen-Gladbach and the village of Viersen.

The songs of the Anabaptists lifted their spirits to God. They did not stop singing when Matthias Servaes and 56 others fell into the hands of the authorities in 1565. But their songs took on a sorrowful note when the news of something much worse than that came to their ears.

Disagreement in the Church Community

Little by little the believers of Mönchen-Gladbach became aware of strange things happening among the Anabaptists of the Netherlands. Reports came of sudden excommunications and harsh shunnings—husbands refusing to eat or sleep with their wives, and many put out of fellowship for trivial reasons. The Dutch Anabaptists, it seemed, no longer used excommunication to deal with clearly evident sins but as a quick fix for any disagreement among the brothers. Anyone who questioned what the church (that is, the most widely respected elders like Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, and Leenaerdt Bouwens) decided was in danger of getting “delivered unto Satan.” Then, in 1555, things came to a head in the Dutch town of Franeker.

¹ Lambert Kramer, after joining the Anabaptists, lived for some time in the village of Visschersweert.



Prosperity and material peace, who should wish for anything less? As the Frisian Mennonites became ever more deeply involved in the fast-growing economy of the Netherlands (many of them buying land and milking cows) they left their “martyr complex” behind and became well-liked respectable citizens, willing to serve God in private and become “the quiet in the land.”

The tradesmen and merchants of Franeker, on the flat land only ten miles from Leeuwarden in Friesland, were not poor. They lived in cosy rooms above their shops that lined the city’s cobble stoned streets. The farmers around Franeker, who tended cows and gathered hay for the winter, were not poor either. But they were hungry—hungry for the truth first preached by Anabaptist messengers in the 1530s.

Within a few years after the first Anabaptists passed through Franeker, a large congregation of believers gathered there behind closed doors, watchmen peering out of candlelit rooms to advise of danger on the street. Two hundred and fifty, three hundred, five hundred, and eventually more than six hundred baptised members took communion there. With the children, the group numbered well over one thousand souls, but Satan was not pleased and did all in his power to make trouble.

After several harsh and sudden excommunications (to which many brothers and sisters objected), the elders at Franeker excommunicated a teacher of the Word, Hendrik Naeldeman, and all those who like him failed to support what they had done.² The news of this reached the lower Rhein area. Then, while Matthias Servaes was still in prison, Lambert Kramer, Herman van Tielt, and Hans Sikkens travelled to Wüstenfelde, the little village on the plains of Schleswig-Holstein, 300 miles north, to find out what was going on.

The men stayed in Menno Simons' home. Lambert and Menno had been good friends from years earlier, and they had a pleasant visit. For two days they discussed the matter of the ban (excommunication)—when to use it and when not. Other leaders from the area came, and many shared their views. Then Herman and Hans left and Lambert stayed for two more days, visiting with the Simons family.

On his trip north Lambert was impressed with Menno Simons and the positions the Dutch leaders were taking. But in thinking about it on the way back, and after speaking with the believers in his home congregation, something did not seem right. How could excommunication be used so freely? Was it right to “deliver unto Satan” where there was no clearly committed sin, and in cases when the transgressor was already repentant? Was it right to demand such drastic separations from those within and those who had been put out of the congregation?

Caught between the Dutch Anabaptists and their hardline position on one hand and the more moderate brothers of Switzerland and southern Germany on the other, the believers on the lower Rhein became steadily more uncomfortable.

² Hendrik Naeldeman and those who believed like him were put out of the Franeker congregation in the first mass excommunication that took place among the Anabaptists.

In the spring of 1557 Menno Simons and Leenaerdt Bouwens called a meeting (at Köln am Rhein) to discuss things. They invited Lambert, Zelis, and other Anabaptist leaders of the surrounding towns. Matthias Servaes could not come. But writing from his cell in the Bayen tower prison within easy walking distance of where the meeting took place, he admonished the believers to take a cautious and moderate position in the spirit of Christ. Then, several months later, Lambert and Zelis travelled south—this time to meet with Anabaptist leaders in the city of Strasbourg.

The Breakdown

From all over southern Germany, Switzerland, and the German regions of France, the brothers came. In Strasbourg they met in a believer's house and read a letter Menno Simons had written asking the South German believers to accept his position on excommunication. Menno Simons called on the Swiss and South Germans to draw stricter fellowship lines and to separate themselves from all those who did not. But they prayed about the letter and discussed it at length until they decided to kindly but firmly reject it. They wrote up a letter in answer, asking Menno and the Dutch Anabaptists to reconsider, and to handle church discipline in the spirit of Christ, not in a rash authoritarian way. In the letter, the South German and Swiss brothers stated their hope that this issue would not divide them, but that they could keep on following Christ together.

Their hopes met disappointment.

Lambert and Zelis, travelling north to Mönchen-Gladbach, carried the letter to believers in the Netherlands who reacted strongly to it. The Dutch believers called it false doctrine, an accommodation to the world, and other uncomplimentary things. Menno Simons replied with a strong letter, which he called a

*Thorough Explanation and Account of Excommunication.*³ He sent it to Lambert and Zelis. After thinking about it for some time they wrote back.

Neither Lambert the bagmaker nor Zelis the charcoal seller could write like Menno Simons. Neither of them wanted a controversy. But they called Menno to reconsider and to return to the more moderate view on excommunication that he formerly held. They told Menno in this letter that they would rather be excommunicated themselves than go along with his extreme and un-Christlike way of putting people out of the church community.

Menno wrote a reply: *A Thorough Answer, Full of Instruction and Counsel, to Zelis and Lambert's Undeserved and Unjust Accusations, Their Slander and Bitter Name-Calling About Our Position Which Is, As We Believe, the True Teaching of the Holy Apostles in Regards to Excommunication and Shunning.*⁴ Soon afterward⁵ Dirk Philips and Leenaerdt Bouwens travelled south along the Rhein, through Köln and Viersen and Mönchengladbach, all the way down to southern Germany, on a terrible mission. Everywhere they went they read a letter, written by Menno Simons, excommunicating Lambert Kramer, Zelis Jacobs, and all the South German and Swiss Anabaptists with them.⁶

³ *Grondelijk Onderwijs ofte bericht van die excommunicatie*, 1558

⁴ *Antwoort aan Zylis und Lemmeken . . .* 1559

⁵ 1559 according to the Julian calendar

⁶ After the great excommunication of 1559, the Anabaptist movement was permanently divided into two camps—those who held the strict authoritarian view of the north, and those who took the more moderate position of the Swiss and South German believers. Seventy years later, in 1632, those of the north set down their views in the *Dordrecht Confession of Faith*. This confession (which teaches the rigid view) was adopted by Jakob Amman and his followers (the Amish) in France and Switzerland in 1660. In 1725 it was also adopted by the Swiss and South German brothers who had settled in Pennsylvania. About that time, the Swiss and South German Anabaptists in America became known as *Mennonites*.

More Trouble in Franeker

No sooner did Dirk Philips and Leenaerdt Bouwens get back from their trip south than they had serious matters to take care of in Friesland. Menno Simons died shortly after their return and Leenaerdt Bouwens became the leader of the Anabaptists in the region. But not everyone was happy.

Many brothers in Friesland felt that Leenaerdt “lorded it over the flock,” and they questioned his taking of money for preaching. They also wondered about his drinking of wine (it seemed like he drank too much). Finally, in 1566, under Dirk Philips’ direction, Leenaerdt lost his responsibility as an elder in the church community.

Then came the question of how to replace him. The ordination (to take place in Franeker) brought to light a longstanding difference between the native Frisian brothers and the Flemish families who had moved in from Belgium to escape persecution.

The Frisians thought the Flemish dressed in fancy clothes. The Flemish, in turn, thought the Frisians lived in houses that were too fancy. When a Flemish brother, Jeroen Tinnegieter, was ordained by the elders at Franeker, the congregation divided at once. Leenaerdt Bouwens sided with the Frisians (and took up his responsibility again). Dirk Philips sided with the Flemish, and the two men who had worked closely together, sharing many dangers, joys, and sorrows in the Lord’s work for many years ended up excommunicating each other. With that, they excommunicated en masse all those who supported each other, and the two groups—Flemish and Frisian—shunned one another completely.

In the early 1550s Menno Simons had written a compassionate letter to the congregation at Franeker imploring the brothers there “for God’s sake to pursue peace. And if you have with words collided too roughly against each other, then purify your hearts and be reconciled in Christ Jesus. . . . If you are baptised

into one Spirit, then fulfill my joy and be of one mind with me in Christ. Build up and destroy not. Let one instruct the other in love, and do not disrupt, so that blessed peace may be with all the children of God and remain with us unbroken and unto eternal life.” But as a result of his own teaching on excommunication, Menno’s good desires came to nothing, and the bull of authoritarian church leadership began its rampage in the china shop of the Anabaptist movement.

The Exaltation of Brotherhood Authority

Not many years after he left the Roman Catholic church Menno Simons had written:

We counsel and admonish everyone to take good heed to the Word of God. . . . We have not directed you to men nor to the teachings of men, but to Jesus Christ alone and to his holy Word, preached and taught by the apostles. All teachings that do not agree with the teachings of Jesus Christ and of his apostles, no matter how holy they may appear, are accursed.⁷

Christ commands all true messengers and preachers to preach the gospel. He does not say, “Preach the doctrines and commands of men, preach councils and customs, preach interpretations and scholarly opinions.” He says, “Preach the Gospel! Teach them to observe all things that *I* have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).⁸

We look not to lords or princes, to doctors and educators. We look not to the councils of the fathers nor to customs of long standing. For no emperor, king, doctor, educator, council or decree can stand against the Word of God. We dare not be bound by men. We are bound by the commands of Christ, by the pure teachings and practice of the apostles. . . . Doing this, we shall neither deceive nor be deceived.⁹

⁷ *Van die gheestelicke verrysenisse* . . . ca. 1558

⁸ *Dat Fundament des Christelycken leers* . . . 1539

⁹ *ibid.*

With a clear vision of Christ's authority, Menno Simons rejected the belief that the church stands between God and man and stepped out of Roman Catholicism. But toward the end of his life his vision got blurred and his teaching changed.

In the end, Menno submitted to the authority of a new "mediatorial church"—that of the Anabaptist church he had helped to establish. His earlier love for Christ gave way to an inordinate affection for the church.¹⁰ And, thanks to the writings of his old age and of the Dutch and Alsatian (Amish) Anabaptists who followed him, his later position prevailed.¹¹

Four hundred thirty five years after Menno Simons died, I listened to a Mennonite bishop preaching on "The Anabaptist Key to Sound Doctrine." He said:

The Anabaptists discovered the key to defining and maintaining sound doctrine. They discovered the "filter of the brotherhood." No doctrine can be known to be Biblical unless it passes through this filter of the Biblical brotherhood. Therefore, all personal convictions must be presented to the brotherhood, where sound doctrine is defined, the Scriptures are properly interpreted, and the truth is discovered.

¹⁰ In 1558, two years after he excommunicated Hendrik Naeldeman and a large part of the Franeker congregation, and the year before he excommunicated all the south German and Swiss Anabaptists, Menno Simons wrote to his brother-in-law Reyn Edes: "Oh my brother Reyn! If I could only be with you even a half day and tell you something of my sorrow, my grief and heartache, and of the heavy burden that I carry for the future of the church. . . . If the mighty God had not strengthened me in the past year, as he is now doing also, I would have lost my reason. There is nothing on earth that I love so much as the church yet just in this respect to her must I suffer this great sorrow."

¹¹ J.C. Wenger, speaking of Menno Simons in the introduction to his complete works (Scottsdale, 1955), exclaims: "It is right that the church he served should be called *Mennonite*!" Considering the disastrous effects of Menno's later position on the Anabaptist movement, that observation may (ironically) be only too correct.

It is in submission to this Biblical brotherhood that we find doctrinal stability. . . . God has charged the Biblical brotherhood to bring the Bible to the people. . . . So may God help us to reconfirm our commitment to the brotherhood—the basis of our faith, our source of stability, and the place from which we may go out to evangelise the world.

The bishop’s sermon was well presented, and it expressed what Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, and Leenaerdt Bouwens no doubt believed by about the 1550s. But it was not the teaching that gave birth to the Anabaptist movement. And it certainly was not what many Anabaptists of Switzerland and southern Germany believed.

The Anabaptist movement began with the belief that the church was *not* called by God to “bring the Bible to the people,” the truth is *not* found in consensus, and church councils do *not* have the right to define or interpret the teachings of Christ. Menno Simons, in the earlier years of his ministry, wrote, “Our *concilium* (council) is what was written in the Scriptures. . . . Nothing may be preached in Christ’s kingdom but the King’s commands. Nothing may be taught in Christ’s house and church but Christ the husband’s own words. The entire household must govern itself according to him.”¹²

Once this changed it did not take long until they had. . .

Still More Trouble in Franeker

After the tragic division of 1566, that divided most Dutch Anabaptists into *Frisian* and *Flemish* congregations, the Flemish group in Franeker needed a new meetinghouse. Their elder, Thomas Bintgens, entrusted with the church’s money, was happy to find a bargain. A poor man of the city (a drunkard) had been forced by his creditors to sell his house to the highest bidder. The drunkard knew Thomas Bintgens. He offered to sell

¹² *Dat Fundament des Christelycken leers* . . . 1539

him the house for 700 florins, but to avoid the possibility of higher bids, he falsely made the receipt to read 800 florins.

Thomas Bintgens did not think much about this insignificant detail. He gave his report to the other ministers, not sparing any information, and expected them to be pleased.

They were not pleased.

In fact, Jacob Keest, Joos Jans, and Jacob Berends were horrified. “You mean you bought the house from that drunkard without talking to his creditors!” they exclaimed. “How could you do such a thing as accept a false receipt!”

No sooner was Thomas confronted with his error than he repented heartily. “I would rather pay for the house two times with my own money than offend someone,” he declared. But his fellow ministers were not satisfied.

“Thomas needs to be silenced,” they decided. “Such a major lack of judgement shows that he is not qualified to serve in the ministry.” But many in the congregation did not agree.

“Thomas is a good man,” they said. “In fact, he is more consistent in his daily life and deals more forthrightly with sin and worldliness than the other ministers.”

It was true. Thomas Bintgens had been the most “conservative” among the Flemish Mennonite ministers at Franeker. Before long the “conservative” members of the congregation rallied around him, while the “liberals” supported his opponents. On three occasions, committees of elders from other congregations—Haarlem, Amsterdam, Groningen, and elsewhere—were called in to settle the dispute. But they could not bring the conflict to a conclusion, and once more they resorted to excommunication to settle their differences.

Both groups excommunicated and began to shun each other. And the division spread throughout the Netherlands and northern Germany. Before many years had passed, practically all the Flemish Mennonite churches had divided into

conservative “House-buyer” and more liberal “Contra-House-buyer” groups.¹³

The Trouble Increases

As the Anabaptists of the Netherlands turned their energies to enforcing their authority and the rules they had made upon one another, those who once persecuted them relaxed. By the end of the sixteenth century the Roman Catholics and the Protestants no longer feared the Dutch Anabaptists. Instead of warning people against them, they joined in making fun of their many divisions and small-minded rules.

It was true. As their focus shifted from following Christ to submitting to brotherhood authority, the rules of the Dutch Anabaptists multiplied. Every area of life from the kind of tools and trades one used in making a living to the exact style of clothing, shoes, hats, and haircuts became important. In 1589 the Frisians (Leenaerdt Bouwens’ group) divided into *Harde Vriezen* and *Slappe Vriezen* (Hard Frisians and Slack Frisians). The Hard Frisians (who considered themselves the only church of Christ) soon divided into the *Jan Jacobsgezinden*,¹⁴ *Thijs-Gerritszvolk*, the *Pieter-Jeltjesvolk*, and dozens of other tiny groups and subgroups.¹⁵ Some of the Slack Frisians united with Hendrik Naeldeman’s group (the Waterlander Mennonites), and some joined the Anabaptist congregations of the lower Rhein. At the same time the Flemish Mennonites (Dirk Philips’ group) split into *Oude Vlamingen* and *Zachte Vlamingen* (Old Flemish

¹³ The unfortunate names, especially the former, remained in use for a long time. One hundred and fifty years after Thomas Bintgens, a Dutch catechism was still called *Mennonite Book of Questions . . . As Used in the Fellowship of Anabaptist Churches Called House-buyers*.

¹⁴ This group, the longest-lasting of all the little conservative groups, existed on the Dutch island of Ameland until 1855.

¹⁵ Historian and author Pieter Jansz Twisck was the leader of a “Hard Frisian” group called the *Jan-Pietersz-Twisckvolk*.

and Slow Flemish), and both of these groups broke up into many more: the *Vermeulensvolk*, the *Vincent de Hondvolk*, the *Thomas Snepvolk*, and the *Jan-Evertsvolk* to name a few.

Practically every group “delivered unto Satan” the group from which it came and got “delivered unto Satan” in return. Within thirty years of Menno Simons’ death, most Dutch Anabaptists had gotten excommunicated three or four times by other Anabaptists who claimed to have authority over them. Among the few exceptions were the *Bekommerde Vriezen* (Concerned Frisians), who refused to excommunicate the rest, and the *Stilstaanders* of Zeeland who did not take sides with any group but got “delivered unto Satan” and shunned by them all.

Then, as a final shattering of Dutch Anabaptism the *Lammerenkrijgh* (War of the Lambs) broke out in the 1650s. It started in the large Flemish congregation *bij ‘t Lam* (by the Lamb) in Amsterdam.

The War of the Lambs

The congregation by the Lamb chose Geleyn Abrahamsz, a 26-year-old medical doctor, to serve them as a teacher of the Word in 1648. Geleyn had grown up in a *Stilstaander* congregation on the island of Schouwen-Duiveland in the Dutch province of Zeeland. As a child he had been taught to speak sparingly and deliberately, to dress simply, and to live a modest life.¹⁶ He did

¹⁶ The *Stilstaanders* of Schouwen-Duiveland, who wrote a book against taking part in harsh judgements and divisions, tried to follow Christ in the way they lived. They lived in unadorned houses and shared what they had with the poor. Another young man of their congregation (a friend of Geleyn Abrahamsz and about the same age) was Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy. While Geleyn studied medicine in Leyden, Pieter travelled to England where he wrote *The Way to Peace* and *The Way to Happiness for the Poor*. In 1663 he and his wife set sail with 25 families to the New Netherlands where they settled at Horekill on the Delaware River. They lived in community of goods and concerned themselves with the spiritual and social needs of the Dutch

not learn much about the other Anabaptists in the Netherlands until he went to study medicine in the city of Leyden. Then he married a Mennonite girl from Amsterdam and settled there.

Geleyn's first goal as a teacher was to bring the Anabaptists of Amsterdam to unity. But many of them opposed him. They clung to the confessions of faith and their written lists of rules that divided them. This grieved Geleyn and raised questions in his mind. On January 11, 1657, he presented to the congregation by the Lamb a paper for them to consider. In his paper and in his conversations with the leaders, he asked these questions:

1. To what degree may leaders exercise authority over their congregations? May leaders ever decide what the members of their congregations should believe?
2. May a congregation or denomination claim to be the only church of Christ?
3. May the authority of human leaders ever override the authority of the conscience?
4. May statements of belief or interpretations of Scripture be considered infallible? Is there anything infallible outside of the Scriptures themselves?

Geleyn's questions struck the congregation by the Lamb to the heart. They all knew how Geleyn lived and what he taught. None of the other Anabaptist leaders in Amsterdam followed the example of Christ as he did. But a number of the older leaders saw his questions as a threat to the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement itself. They called a great meeting at Leyden, inviting leaders from all over the Netherlands and northern Germany to come and discuss Geleyn's questions. They chose Thieleman Jansz van Braght, the compiler of the *Martyrs Mirror*, to be their moderator.

colonists and their black slaves until the Anglo-Dutch war scattered them. Theirs was the first Anabaptist settlement in the New World.

At this meeting Geleyn explained his belief that the Scriptures are a sure guide and that every man needs to study and follow them in a personal way (not only in a way prescribed by the brotherhood). He believed that all truth can be understood by everyone who comes to know Christ and who learns from his words and example. Finally, he believed that God will judge us not so much by what we believed as by what we did, and that if we seriously follow Christ our common goals and lifestyle will bring us together in harmonious brotherhood.

At this, the Dutch Anabaptist leaders shook their heads. “The man is doing away with sound doctrine,” they said. “He is replacing the established positions of the church with a strange emphasis on lifestyle.”

When Geleyn challenged the infallibility of the Mennonite confessions of faith, many of those who had come for the meeting rose in their defence. “The confessions of faith have come down to us from the time of the martyrs. They present a Biblical view,” they insisted.

“But the martyrs did not all believe the same things,” Geleyn reminded them. “Even Menno Simons changed some of his beliefs along the way.”

At this, the Dutch leaders decided that Geleyn would either need to give up his views or be silenced. He responded with another question: “May a meeting of elders silence a man who was chosen by a congregation to lead them? Shouldn’t that silencing be done by the congregation itself?”

This last question fell on deaf ears.

Most of the members of the congregation by the Lamb could not go along with the silencing of Geleyn Abrahamsz. They knew that he was a godly man, blameless in his private life, and an example to the unbelievers. But some wealthy families who held fast to the old conservative position withdrew under the leadership of Samuel Apostool and founded yet another



While Dutch Anabaptists prospered in the north, the believers of Bavaria, Austria, and Switzerland continued to suffer constant harassment. In mountain villages like Trub, high above the Emmental in the Swiss Canton of Bern, some found a measure of security. Should the police come up the valley, secret trails into forested slopes behind them offered a means of escape. Kindly disposed Protestant neighbours further down the valley (the *Halbtäufer*—Half-way Anabaptists, as they came to be called) often served as informants and sent messages or supplies to those in hiding. But emigration, in the end, became the choice of nearly all that persisted in the faith—and even among the emigrants, sharp differences of opinion led to further isolation and partings of the way.

Mennonite group in Amsterdam—the one that met in a meeting house called *de Zon* (the Sun). Much to the distress of Geleyn Abrahamsz and the congregation by the Lamb, the division spread rapidly, and within a few years the Dutch Anabaptists had regrouped under the new names of *Lamisten* and *Zonisten* (those of the Lamb and those of the Sun).

Among those who sided with the Lamisten were the remnants of the once flourishing Anabaptist congregations of the lower Rhein. But . . .

Their Singing Died Away

After they beheaded Matthias Servaes on Saturday, June 30, 1565, his companion Heinrich von Krufft wrote a song:

My joy in this life is taken away. Into anxiety and grief have I come. Therefore, I sing with a sorrowful spirit, and if it doesn't sound nice, I ask you not to hold it against me.

Ezra says that there will be a great falling away. Oh God, the pain! . . . The righteous suffer persecution in every place. Wickedness is taking over. They kill those who teach the Word of God. Oh God, where shall I turn?

In the name of the Lord I lift my eyes to the hills from where my help comes.¹⁷

Persecution caused grief to the Anabaptists of the lower Rhein, but it was a small grief compared with the sadness of seeing the church disintegrate.

After Menno Simons excommunicated Lambert Kramer, Zelis Jacobs, and all the Swiss and south German brothers with them in 1559, the Anabaptist movement entered a time of confusion and distress. What Zwingli, Luther, and the Pope could not accomplish through force, the terrible abuse of brotherhood authority accomplished in the space of a few years.

In the north, the movement broke into dozens of quarrelling fragments. In the south, many got discouraged and fell away. Thousands of Anabaptists, including most of those in the lower Rhein area, gave up and joined the state churches. Among those who remained (mainly in out-of-the-way rural areas in France and Switzerland), Jakob Amman introduced the same disastrous teaching. Then the proud spirit of “we are the ones who own the truth” and “following Christ means submitting to us” was carried by what was left of the Mennonites, the Amish and the Hutterites to America to reproduce itself a hundredfold there.

Four hundred and fifty years later, Mönchen-Gladbach is still a city of song. But its music is *Rock and Roll* and *Reggae* . . . and the songs of those who follow Christ in that city are practically unknown.

The Anabaptist congregation at Mönchen-Gladbach died out in 1654.

¹⁷ *Ausbund*, 24