

CLASSICS
OF THE
RADICAL
REFORMATION

Anabaptism in Outline

Selected Primary Sources



Anabaptism in Outline

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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.

1. *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*. Trans., ed. John Howard Yoder.
2. *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*. Trans., ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen.
3. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*. Trans., ed. Walter Klaassen.
4. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*. Ed. Leland Harder.
5. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder.
6. *The Writings of Dirk Philips*. Ed. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy.
7. *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris: 1535–1543*. Ed. Gary K. Waite.
8. *The Essential Carlstadt: Fifteen Tracts by Andreas Bodenstein*. Trans., ed. E. J. Furcha.
9. *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith*. Ed. John J. Friesen.
10. *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*. Ed. C. Arnold Snyder, trans. Walter Klaassen, Frank Friesen, and Werner O. Packull.
11. *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition: 1527–1660*. Ed. Karl Koop.
12. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*. Ed. John D. Rempel.
13. *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists: 1529–1592*. Ed. C. Arnold Snyder.

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Anabaptism in Outline

Selected Primary Sources

Edited by
Walter Klaassen



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To Ruth

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Preface to the New Edition

When this remarkable compilation of Anabaptist sources first appeared in 1981, the world of Anabaptist-Mennonite studies looked very different than it does today. The historiography of Anabaptism was in the midst of a dynamic, sometimes contentious transformation. Although it was no great feat of scholarship in itself, Harold S. Bender's "Anabaptist Vision," published in 1944, had symbolized the emergence of a new confidence in Anabaptist studies that rescued the Radical Reformers from the margins of the Reformation and made them worthy subjects of historical research.¹ With the support of significant publications in the 1950s and 1960s by renowned historians such as George Williams, Roland Bainton, and Franklin Littell, interest in the Radical Reformation became increasingly mainstream.²

Within the Mennonite community in North America, this renaissance of Anabaptist studies shaped a generation of seminary-trained pastors who, in turn, helped to popularize the Anabaptists as heroic figures who followed the teachings of Jesus, even at great cost. For a generation of Mennonites still trying to explain to their Protestant and Catholic neighbors why they did not support the Great War, it came as an enormous relief to learn that their spiritual forebears were part of a coherent theological tradition – possibly even the fountainhead of such American ideals as religious voluntarism and the separation of church and state. The suffering – and in many instances, martyrdom – of the Anabaptists only served to vindicate the authenticity of their theological convictions.

By the early 1970s, however, this “recovery of the Anabaptist Vision” began to face a backlash.³ In 1972, two books appeared that signaled a decisive break with the narrative that had coalesced around the “Anabaptist Vision.” Claus-Peter Clasen’s *Anabaptism: A Social History* framed Anabaptism within the social context of the sixteenth century—ignoring theology in favor of categories of analysis such as occupation, class, age, and residence.⁴ Clasen’s resolutely quantitative approach led him to the conclusion that the Anabaptist movement was little more than a “minor episode” in the larger Reformation story. That same year, James Stayer’s *Anabaptism and the Sword* painstakingly mapped a wide range of Anabaptist understandings regarding civil government and the sword, arguing that the pacifist position expressed in the Schleitheim Confession was only one voice among many, with no particular claim to normativity.⁵ Three years later, Stayer collaborated with Werner Packull and Klaus Deppermann in a landmark essay titled “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins,” which further complicated the story of Anabaptist origins.⁶ Anabaptism, they argued, emerged almost simultaneously in Switzerland, South Germany, and the Low Countries—each with a different set of emphases and none with a legitimate claim to precedence. Also appearing in 1975 was an influential collection of essays edited by Hans-Jürgen Goertz called *Umstrittenes Täufertum [Contesting Anabaptism]* that underscored once more the inherent diversity of the Anabaptist movement and blurred the lines separating the violence of the Peasants’ War of 1525 from the early Anabaptist movement.⁷

Thus, when Walter Klaassen published this compilation of Anabaptist theological writings in 1981 under the title *Anabaptism in Outline*, he was wading into highly contested historiographical waters. He did so with his eyes wide open.

Although he was raised in a devout family of Mennonite ministers, Klaassen’s primary training was as an academic historian. His 1960 doctoral dissertation at Oxford, titled “Word, Spirit, and Scripture in Early Anabaptist Thought,” was deeply anchored in the primary sources he had gathered during a year of archival research in Zurich, where he studied with the well-known Reformation

historian Fritz Blanke. After a teaching stint at Bethel College, Kansas (1960–1964), Klaassen went on to spend the majority of his academic career at Conrad Grebel University College (1965–1991), where he quickly made a name for himself as a gifted lecturer and careful historian.

On the one hand, Klaassen was clearly sympathetic to the so-called Bender School. His highly popular book, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, was an apology for Anabaptist theology and ethics as a coherent alternative to the dominant streams of the Reformation and as a “third way” in the contemporary debate between Fundamentalism and Liberalism.⁸ When Klaassen first arrived at Grebel, he served as the college chaplain; he frequently accepted invitations to preach; and, for a time, he was part of a house church that sought to embody ecclesiological principles gleaned from his study of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists.

Yet Klaassen also knew that Anabaptism could not and should not be protected from the critical analysis of social or secular historians. In 1978, Klaassen drew on the themes of revisionist Anabaptist scholarship for his carefully researched social history of a leader in the peasant uprising – *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer*.⁹ A later book on apocalyptic thought in the sixteenth century – *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* – clearly acknowledged the diversity of theological understandings among the Radical Reformers.¹⁰

Thus, in 1981, when Klaassen prepared to publish *Anabaptism in Outline*, he was fully aware of the limitations of previous Mennonite interpretations of Anabaptism. He knew that Anabaptism was not a monolithic movement; not all Anabaptists were theologically orthodox, nor were all pacifist. Yet despite all of these caveats, he remained convinced that Anabaptism marked a vital recovery of biblical Christianity and could be understood as a distinctive and identifiable theological tradition.

Within the Classics of the Radical Reformation series, *Anabaptism in Outline* quickly became a classic of its own. It appeared at a time when public interest in Anabaptism was still vibrant, all the more so in light of the vigorous debate that was unfolding about its origins and character. For pastors who were eager to appeal to the

authority of the Anabaptist witness for a sermon, *Anabaptism in Outline* was the perfect handbook. Scholars who wanted to locate an Anabaptist quote quickly for use in an essay could turn to the table of contents with the assurance that they would find a range of helpful options. Klaassen's succinct introductions to each of the seventeen theological categories capture both the range of Anabaptist perspectives on a given theme and the distinctively Anabaptist contribution to the larger theological conversation. Not least, Klaassen was a gifted translator, who turned complex sixteenth-century German into clear English prose. The short biographical descriptions for each of the Anabaptists cited, along with recommendations for additional reading, further enhanced the utility of the volume.

Part of the book's popularity also derived, no doubt, from its implicit rejoinder to the revisionist historians that theology matters – the Anabaptist movement could not be reduced to social or economic interests. Beyond that, *Anabaptism in Outline* also assumed that, within the undeniable diversity of early Anabaptism, a theological coherence persisted nonetheless. The selections in each of the seventeen topics represent a wide range of voices – including Dutch, Hutterite, South German, and Swiss sources. Clearly, on many topics, those voices are not in full agreement with each other. Yet that variety in *Anabaptism in Outline* also has its limits: the collection includes excerpts from Spiritualists like Leonard Schiemer and Hans Schlaffer but not Caspar Schwenckfeld; Balthasar Hubmaier is represented but not Thomas Müntzer; Bernhard Rothmann shows up, despite his close associations with Münster, but not David Joris. In the preface to each section, Klaassen acknowledges internal differences while also making it clear that these arguments unfold within a distinctly Anabaptist set of interests and concerns.

Anabaptism in Outline is also a quiet rebuttal to the argument that the Anabaptists were only ad hoc theologians, lay preachers who defended their cause with wooden appeals to biblical literalism. Klaassen's selection of thematic categories makes it clear that the Anabaptists thought deeply about the classical questions of Christian theology. Even as they are making distinctive arguments on topics like baptism, the oath, economics, or nonresistance, the excerpts Klaassen selected demonstrate that the Anabaptists

understood their positions as expressions of Christian faithfulness, consistent with the deeper tradition of the church.

Today, four decades after the publication of *Anabaptism in Outline*, some of the limitations of the book are also evident. Contemporary readers will find it striking that no Anabaptist women appear in the volume and may wince at the gendered language Klaassen uses in his prefaces. Since 1981, historians have uncovered additional sources – especially among the Swiss Brethren – that could have added another layer of richness to the selection. The most significant issue with the volume, however, is the shadow side of its strength: accessibility comes at the price of brevity. The excerpts from Anabaptist writings are often quite short, excised from the larger context of their original argument. They can easily appear in the text like diamonds removed from the mine, extracted from their historical setting in ways that artificially collapse the distance between the sixteenth century and our own times. By presenting excerpts that float free of their original context, *Anabaptism in Outline* opens itself to potential misuse by impatient readers in search of a quote – any quote – that will support the argument they happen to be making.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons why the book has sold so well and why it will remain a classic within the Classics of the Radical Reformation. Klaassen has made a host of scattered sources – hitherto available only in sixteenth-century German – accessible to contemporary readers in modern English. He has brought the impenetrable world of the archives into the pastor’s study, the academic’s office, and the layperson’s living room. His introductions to theological themes are models of clarity – succinct and precise. And his thoughtful selection of excerpts enables vibrant voices from the past to speak into pastoral questions of the church today, thereby enabling contemporary readers to lend their own voices to the ongoing conversation.

John D. Roth

Notes

1. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Church History* 13 (March 1944): 3–24; reprinted in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944): 67–88.
2. See, e.g., George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962); Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1952); Franklin H. Littell, *The Free Church: The Significance of the Left Wing of the Reformation for Modern American Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King, 1957).
3. This phrase is drawn from Guy F. Hershberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1957).
4. Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618; Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972).
5. James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1976).
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7. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, ed., *Umstrittenes Täuferturn, 1525–1975* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975).
8. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad, 1973; 3rd ed., Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2001).
9. Walter Klaassen, *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).
10. Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992).

General Editors' Preface

For many years a committee of German and North American historians known as the *Täuferaktenkommission* (TAK) has published source materials of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement under the title *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer* (QGT). More recently a similar organization has begun work in the Netherlands with Dutch source materials. It is known as the *Commissie tot de uitgave van Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica* (CUDAN). These developments have, obviously, been deeply rewarding to scholars and others as the multitude of articles and books using these documents amply verifies.

There are, however, still relatively few sixteenth-century Anabaptist materials available in the English language, though their number is increasing. It is to meet this need that the *Classics of the Radical Reformation* (CRR) series was begun some years ago with the aim of making available in the English language a scholarly and critical edition of the primary works of major Anabaptist and Free Church writers of the late fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries. The first volume in this series, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* by John H. Yoder, appeared in 1973, and *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, appeared in 1978. Other volumes are in preparation.

In preparing these translations it has not been considered essential to the purposes of the series to include every known document of the writers under translation and, unless some contribution can be made to a fuller understanding of the text, it has not been considered essential to pursue at length critical textual issues. Those scholars interested in the details will, in any case, turn to the original

language text. Where a choice had to be made between clarity and awkward literalism, the translators were encouraged to favor readability but without compromising the text.

Most of the volumes being included in CRR include the writings of one author only. The present volume, however, is an exception, bringing together the key comments of many Anabaptists under seventeen theological categories. It is hoped and believed that this will facilitate specific theological study of issues which it might be impossible for the uninitiated reader to find in the wealth of materials available in Anabaptist writings. The limitations and dangers of compiling short selections which may, by the necessity of brevity, lose their full contextual meaning are recognized. However, every effort has been made by the translator-editor to prevent this, both in the translations he himself has made and in the adaptation of the translations of others.

It is appropriate to express appreciation to the translator-editor for his "labor of love," as well as to those translators whose works have been used and acknowledged for permission granted. The North American Committee for the Documentation of Free Church Origins (NACDFCO), of which Professor George H. Williams, Harvard Divinity School, serves as chairman and Walter Klaassen as secretary, was helpful with its encouragement and counsel during the initial stages of the launching of the CRR series. Finally, without the commitment to the work of the church on the part of Mennonite Publishing House and its willingness to include the series in its responsibility to society and the church, this venture could not have been undertaken.

Cornelius J. Dyck, Editor, CRR
Institute of Mennonite Studies
Elkhart, Indiana

Introduction

I have felt for a long time the need for a compendium of Anabaptist source materials which would give an overview of their positions on basic Christian affirmations. This volume is an attempt to provide such a tool. It grew out of my experience of teaching undergraduates. Frequently I had to translate sections from sources unavailable to students because they did not have the language skills to use even sources already published.

This collection will illustrate the variety and colour of the Anabaptist movement. There are expressions from academics, artisans, and peasants, from leaders and followers. They will show that even on what are normally considered basic issues in Anabaptism, such as nonresistance, there was no unanimity.

I have tried faithfully to represent all major points of view on the various subjects. The categories used will have excluded one point or another. That is the problem with artificial categories. Moreover there is a limit to the size of the volume. The sources represent the views of the bulk of the Anabaptist movement. Only the Italian and the English Anabaptists are not represented.

Some parts of the movement are not as extensively represented as some others. This is especially true of Swiss Anabaptism. The reason for this is that there was simply not as much written material available. Apart from Hubmaier, who is extensively represented, the Swiss Brethren had no Peter Riedeman, no Pilgram Marpeck, no Bernhard Rothmann, no Menno Simons, and no Dirk Philips. With the exception of the small group of Sattler writings, and a few other documents, the Swiss Brethren produced virtually no written monuments to their faith. Even the Swiss Täuferakten have remarkably lit-

tle of direct theological interest. All the material available was mined for relevant statements.

The sources are arranged in chronological order in each section. This is partly an arbitrarily chosen sequence, but it may also, here and there, suggest lines of influence and dependence. Each selection is identified by author, title, date, and source. If one of these is missing the reader may conclude that it was not available. This is true especially with regard to dates. There are, for example, no precise dates available for a number of the works of Dirk Philips.

Wherever possible I have used existing translations. In the cases of Balthasar Hubmaier and Dirk Philips I revised, sometimes extensively, the existing translations of Davidson and Kolb respectively. Where no modern author is given it may be assumed that I have done the translation myself. In the translation of Peter Riedeman's *Account of Our Religion*, I have, with permission, modernized the archaic English, but have otherwise left the translation intact.

The time span represented in these sources is 1524-1560, that is, the formative period of Anabaptism ending with the death of Menno Simons.

The list of secondary literature in English on the various subjects is designed to aid the reader and researcher to interpret the primary documents. The lists are, of course, not exhaustive, and important contributions will have been omitted inadvertently.

I am pleased to acknowledge the many helpful suggestions made by the many persons who read the first draft of the manuscript. I mention especially John H. Yoder, John S. Oyer, John C. Wenger, and Cornelius J. Dyck. They alerted me to weaknesses and omissions. For any that remain I am responsible.

I am grateful to the Institute of Mennonite Studies for taking this volume into the series, *Classics of the Radical Reformation*.

I hope that readers in college, university, church, and home will enjoy the use of this volume as much as I enjoyed assembling it. Special thanks to Mrs. Pauline Bauman for carefully and painstakingly typing this manuscript more than once and to Michael Klaassen for preparing the index.

Walter Klaassen
Conrad Grebel College
Waterloo, Ontario

Sources and Abbreviations

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Jesus Christ: God's Revelation

For Anabaptists, as for other Christians, Jesus constituted the heart of Christian faith. Most statements about Jesus made by Anabaptists are orthodox in nature, that is, they accept the traditional creedal statements. Beyond that, however, the unanimity ends.

A major feature of Anabaptist Christology was the weight placed on the function of Jesus as model and example. That involved an emphasis on his human life with his actions and words as described in the Gospels. But it did not lead to a denial or even an underemphasis on the divine nature of Jesus. With a few exceptions (Italian Anabaptism, for example, which, after 1550 was unitarian) it was strongly asserted that, in order to be the Saviour, Jesus had to be divine, a member of the Trinity (see Hubmaier, Riedeman, Marpeck).

Pilgram Marpeck's view of the humanity of Jesus is unique in Anabaptism. Jesus had to be a human, material being, since God makes his spiritual reality known to man only through physical media. The humanity of Jesus is therefore not simply the basis for ethics but is also an important philosophical principle. For Marpeck, as indeed for all Anabaptists, Jesus is the revelation of God as loving and gracious.

The Dutch Anabaptist writers would have agreed totally with emphasizing both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Nevertheless, beginning with Hoffman, and continuing with Rothmann, Menno Simons, and Dirk Philips, we encounter a docetic¹ Christology, which, while it used traditionally orthodox words, moved in a monophysite² direction. All these writers emphasized that Jesus did

not receive his flesh from Mary but rather came with heavenly flesh, since a body made impure by sin could not be a perfect sacrifice for sins. The balance then is that with these writers Jesus was more divine than human, the human characteristics being gradually swallowed up in the divine. This doctrine of the heavenly flesh, which they shared with Caspar Schwenckfeld, had important implications for their doctrine of the church as the body of Christ. It led to an almost impulsive concern for the purity of the church and directly into the harsh church discipline of early Dutch Anabaptism. See selections on the ban by Menno and Dirk 10.13-10.15.

There was also a third view represented by Hans Denck and Hans Hut, and his followers. Denck especially worked with a Logos-Christology. He could say, for example, that the Lamb that had suffered from the beginning of the world had now suffered in Jesus. While the humanity of Jesus remains unquestionably important in this part of the movement, the historical particular is universalized so that the danger exists that the historical basis will be abandoned. It is the road of the mystics.

All Anabaptists are united in emphasizing that the confession of Jesus as Lord must be combined with obedience to his words. If obedience is not there, the faith is, by definition, counterfeit.

1.1 Hans Schlaffer, "A Comforting Letter," 1527, Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, 108

I do not quite know what to say to the [charge made against us] that Christ is not true God and man but only a prophet. I am afraid that in some it is more impertinence than love. However, I wish to judge no one; it is difficult and dangerous to speak about it. It should be more thought about with fear than talked about. It is true that there is only one God as Moses says: Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord, etc. This scandalizes both Jews and Christians. The Jews are ready to suffer anything, but to accept Christ as God is their greatest stumbling block. Man's reason simply cannot grasp that a thing could be at the same time one and three.

.....

Concerning this I choose to remain with the Scriptures. The Word

which was with God from the beginning, has become flesh. That is Christ, who says himself: the Father is in me and I am in the Father. I and the Father are one. Christ, who was born from the Jews according to the flesh is God. There is one God and one mediator, God and man, Jesus Christ. Summa summarum briefly: I confess with Thomas the holy apostle and say to my Lord and Saviour Christ: my Lord and my God.

1.2 Balthasar Hubmaier, “The Twelve Articles,” 1526-7, Davidson/Klaassen, *Hubmaier*, 212-214

I believe also in Jesus Christ, your only Son, our Lord. I believe that he has made atonement to you, my Father, for the fall; that he has made peace between you and me, who am a poor sinner, and has won, through his obedience, an inheritance for me. He has now given me strength through the Holy Word which he has sent, so that I may become your child through faith. I hope and trust in him entirely. He will not allow the healing and comforting name of Jesus to be lost to me, a miserable sinner, but rather will save me from all my sins. For I believe that he is Christ, true God and true man.

Also I believe and confess, my Lord Jesus Christ, that you were conceived through the Holy Spirit without human seed, and born of Mary, a pure and eternally chaste virgin. This was to redeem me and all believing men and to obtain from your heavenly Father the grace of the Holy Spirit, which had been withdrawn from me on account of my sins. I believe and trust that the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in me, and that the power of almighty God has overshadowed my soul like Mary's, and that I was conceived a new man, and born again of your living immortal Word, and in the Spirit. I believe that I shall behold the kingdom of God. You are the Son of the living God, and have become man, that we poor mortals might through you become the children of God.

I believe and confess that you suffered under the judge Pontius Pilate, that you were crucified, dead, and buried. All this you did on account of my sins in order that you might save me from eternal suffering, torment and death, by your cross, anguish, torment, and bit-

ter death. Through your rose-coloured blood shed for me you purchased my redemption.

Your great love for us poor men can be seen in this: that you have given us, instead of a heavy cross, a light yoke; instead of your bitter sorrow, indestructible joy; instead of your awful death, eternal life. Therefore, I praise and thank my kind Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

1.3 Hans Denck, “The Order of God,” 1527, Fellmann, *Denck I*, 94-95

Thus God tolerated the sin of the evil world in man at the time of Noah until the Flood (Gen. 6), but began to produce righteousness in those in whom he had before tolerated sin until the time of the death of Jesus Christ. Through his suffering he became one with God and his Word (Lk. 24, Acts 17, Ps. 18), descended into hell in the spirit to preach to those unbelieving spirits (1 Pet. 3), to complete the work of faith begun in those who believed (1 Pet. 4). Yes, the same Lamb that suffered in Christ has suffered from the beginning of the world (Rev. 13) and suffers until the end of the world (Mt. 25). And the lion from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49) who was victorious in Christ (Rev. 5) has been victorious in all the elect from the beginning (Num. 23, 24) and will be victorious until the last enemy is overcome (Is. 30, 1 Cor. 15). The lion and the lamb are the one Word of God which fills the whole world (Jer. 23, Wis. 1), and which is even in our hearts (Deut. 30, Rom. 10), not idle but doing the will of the Father (Jn. 4). As long as we seek only ourselves and do not esteem him it suffers in us as it is said, but to our condemnation (Jn. 3) which this Word works in us although we do not know it (Jn. 9).

1.4 Leonhard Schiemer, “Letter to the Church at Rattenberg,” 1527, Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, 50

If one asks a heathen how a Christian ought to live his answer is: our lords have forbidden it. But when I ask: who are your lords that forbid you to believe they answer: this or that sovereign. Christians obey the sovereigns of this world with body and goods.³ But they are

obedient to the Sovereign of heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ with the soul and everything that pertains and belongs to faith. For in him dwells the fullness of deity. He alone is the Lord of all lords and the King of all kings, a Healer and Saviour of the human race. To him is given all authority in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Therefore we are properly subject to him, give him our obedience, and honour, fear, and love him above all creatures.

1.5 Melchior Hoffman, “Truthful Witness,” 1533, *Zur Linden*, 441-443

No flesh can become good through any work except through an innocent death, that is through a pure flesh without spot that was not from the cursed seed. For through the cursed seed nothing could be accomplished as it is written.

And I saw a strong angel preaching with a clear voice: who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals? And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the book nor look at it.

Here we see that no angel above in heaven in the height could accomplish the opening, nor anyone in hell or in the depth of the earth, nor any man on earth, but only the eternal Word and paschal Lamb.

We have now heard enough that the whole seed of Adam, be it of man, woman, or virgin, is cursed and delivered to eternal death. Now if the body of Jesus Christ was also such flesh and of this seed, that is of Adam’s flesh and blood as is openly affirmed, it follows that the redemption has not yet happened. For the seed of Adam belongs to Satan and is the property of the devil. Satan cannot be paid in his own coin. . . .

Since Christ is of this seed after the flesh he cannot introduce grace since Adam’s seed was cursed and has died (Rom. 5, 1 Cor. 13). It is certain that death cannot produce life, nor the curse a blessing. Since this seed is caught in lies and is the lie itself it cannot erect the truth. This is shown by the prophet Ecclesiasticus 34 when he says: who can be cleansed by one who is unclean or get truth from a liar? And if it should be established that Christ’s flesh was Mary’s

natural flesh and blood, we would all have to wait for another redeemer, for in such a one we could get no righteousness.

And it is certain that all who put their trust in Adam's flesh will never by such faith be able to inherit eternal blessedness. Rather the wrath of God remains on such. For those who seek their sanctification in Adam's seed as well as their blessing, cleansing, justification, redemption and coming to life, they cast away the true foundation stone, the eternal Word, and thrust the Lamb of God away. They make God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and all the witnesses of God into liars. Through this accursed seed nothing can be made better. If salvation was to be established it would have to be a different seed through which the whole seed of Adam could again be liberated and set free, namely the seed of the heavenly Father Abraham (Gal. 3), which Mary received from the Holy Spirit. It is the eternal Word and the Son of the most High himself who was not of this world (Jn. 8), and did not come out of this world (Jn. 16). Rather he came into the world. He is the one through whom everything was made in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (Col. 1, Heb. 1, Eph. 2, 3, Jn. 1). He also had the power to give his life, surrender it, and take it again (Jn. 10). For if he had been the seed of the first Adam he would have had to die for himself as all other men, that is certain. Yes, he would have had to die for his own inherited guilt and be cursed as all other men.

1.6 Peter Riedeman, *Account*, 1542, 22-26

WE ACKNOWLEDGE ALSO JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

We have said and acknowledge that God is one, and apart from him there is none that remains of himself unchanging in his clarity and who lives for ever; for he is truth, and that is his name in all eternity. Therefore we acknowledge also his Son, who was in the Father before the world was made, and in whom it was prepared; who modelled all things together with the Father—that is the Word that in the beginning was with God, through whom all things were

created, are maintained, and shall be completed. Thus, we have the Father and the Son—not, however, two, but one God, for the Son is not without the Father nor is the Father without the Son, for they are not two but one, the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son.

JESUS

This Word proceeded from the Father that the harm brought by the transgression of Adam might be healed, and the fall restored; he took upon himself human nature and character, became man, became flesh, that even as through a man death came, even so resurrection from the dead and salvation might come through a man.

Now since in him and in none other is salvation, he brought his true name with him: the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in his mother's womb—"Jesus," that is Saviour. He is the Saviour who has robbed death of its power, torn its bond and snare asunder and set us, his people, free.

CHRIST

Now, since death, which could be crushed and overpowered by the strength of no hero or giant, nor by any human strength, held such sway over us that we were not able to be free, a power other than human strength was necessary. Therefore the Word, that is God himself, although he took upon himself human nature, lost nothing of his strength, through which all things were created, that death might thereby be overwhelmed and overcome.

For although the Word put on human nature and became flesh, yet the divine nature remains completely in the same, as Paul testifies, "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and in essence." Hence is he also named "Christ" or the anointed of God, as is written of him, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me and sent me to preach the gospel." Thus he alone has the power to overcome death, and to quicken whom he will and to give of his fullness to whomsoever and in what abundance he will. And those who take from and receive of him become through him likewise "God's anointed" or Christians—failing this, they have the name in vain.

ONLY BEGOTTEN

That is the only begotten Son of the Father, come as a light into the world that he might lighten and make bright the darkness in which we were bound and by which we were encompassed, as it is written, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death a great light is sprung up." And he also himself testifies, "I am the light of the world; he that believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

He is the only begotten in that he proceeded in a unique way from the Father, being quite different from all other created things, in that he has inherited a better name than the angels. For he is the unique power of God by means of which all his holy angels and all other created things were formed, moulded and given shape, therefore he has from the Father the birthright of the first-born, that every knee should bow and confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.

SON

Now, since the Word proceeded forth from Truth and was spoken by Truth it is named the Son, but the Truth which spoke is named the Father, as that from which the Word came. Now it came from God, yet it remained in him, for he is everywhere and in all places, filling the earth with his breadth and with his height reaching unto heaven. A word which proceeds from a man breaks away from him because he is weak, but the word that proceeds from God because of his strength, greatness, and power remains for ever and ever in him, and can in no way break away from him. Thus are the Word and Truth, or the Son and Father, one; yea, one strength and one nature (although there are two names) which upholds all things, in which also we live and move and are, and without his strength can no one have being; and it is the Son, the brightness of the glory of the Father and the likeness of his nature, who has now taken us captive into his obedience and leads us in his way, teaches us his character, ways, and goodness that he may thereby become more and more known to the children of men.

WE CONFESS CHRIST TO BE LORD

As we know right well that no one can call Jesus Lord except in the Holy Spirit, and that all those who confess him in truth to be Lord must be children of his Spirit or have the same, and since we are not unaware of his grace which has been given us by God through him and experienced by us, we likewise confess him to be Lord; as, indeed, he truly is, for all power is given him by the Father, not only in heaven but also on earth and in the abyss. For this reason also all unclean spirits fear and tremble before him, for he has overcome and bound them, and taken from them their power and delivered and set free the prey, namely us, whom they had held captive in death.

But none may in truth give or ascribe to him such glory and honour except he experience such a victory in himself, namely that Christ has overcome the devil in him also, and rent and removed his snare, that is sin; delivered him, set him free, and reconciled him with God. For whosoever else may do so, speaks not from truth but out of delusion and from an improvised faith, or because others say so, therefore is Christ not confessed to be Lord as is said above by Paul, no man can say that Christ is Lord but by the Holy Spirit. For he in whom Christ is thus to overcome must surrender himself wholeheartedly to him, and endure and suffer his work. Since, however, this is not so, Christ works not in the same; therefore he remains forever in his sins.

1.7 Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning the Love of God in Christ," *The Writings*. 529-530; 534-536

Love is all power, authority, strength, might, wisdom, reason, skill, understanding, truth, righteousness, mercy, forbearance, patience, meekness in all humility and lowliness. She is fully God in all, in, with, and through her summation Jesus Christ our Healer. He is the complete, whole, eternally coming true love of the Father, and the Father himself is the true love of the Son, one Spirit, God, and Lord forever, not mixed but One from eternity to eternity, not separated into two or three but three in One eternally.

Only what God himself is from eternity in and of himself is everlasting (understand: not “in” but “from” eternity), and remains eternally, God the Word and Spirit. The incarnate Word is taken into the unity, and, according to the measure of time, one in and with God. He is two natures, one Man, two natures, one God, divine and human in one.

.....

No creature has been found to express, teach, and to witness and state with power what love is, along with its virtues and powers except the Man Jesus, Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The same was brought forth, glorified, and revealed by the Father with that glory which he as the incarnate Word had before the Father from eternity, as he also with love declares himself to be the true Son of God commissioned even to the death of condemnation, and has achieved the fullest, greatest, exalted love in that he gives his life for his friends. For no one has greater love than he who gives his life for his friends.

To this Christ has witnessed and in love declared himself, with the incarnate Word, deed, and power. This is the Lamb that was found worthy to open the sealed and closed book, that is the hiddenness of all the virtue, power, and effulgence of love and himself to reveal before the Father the glory of love in himself, according to his Holy Manhood. He declares that the Father himself has glorified him with that glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. And as he was glorified in love in and before the Father, before the beginning of the world, so he also glorified himself before men and angels, and so the Father will glorify him again. In him virtue, such as the power of love, is completed and revealed before time, in the time of his flesh, as well as after this time to eternity. As this [power of love] is declared and witnessed to in that manner before the Father, so the Father will fully glorify the Son in the fulfillment of time in all of Christ's elect, and they will be as he is and he as his own in God and God in them eternally. It is not as though he had just become love, but this shows that he is from eternity. Thus, the incarnate Word is God and Man, Man and God, two natures, one God, and also two natures, one Man, the beginning of time, the center, and end of all things, A and O. For his sake are

all things. He is the breaking in of time out of eternity and into eternity.

Thus for the sake of love the lamb of God, which has taken away the sin of the world, was slain in love from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:[8]). He, without guilt and sin, was sacrificed in history for the guilt and sin of man in order to restore the fall of man from the original love and raise him up into the blissful, joyful, eternally enduring love out of grace and more grace and be made worthy to be to the glory, praise, and honor of God as an eternal thanksgiving.

1.8 Pilgram Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” 1543 *The Writings*, 314-315

Conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, Jesus Christ is the Son of God according to Spirit, Word, and power. The Father has certified God in him, through the power of his divine essence, with all powers, works, and miracles. He has also shown and certified his true humanity. As the Lord says in John 14 [10]: “Philip, do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? If not, why do you not believe for the sake of the works that I do?” Thus, the Father is certified in the Son as true God and the Son in the Father, one God, manner, nature, and divine essence, all in the Son of Man. Brought forth from the seed and line of David, he was shown to be, in his weakness, a natural, earthly, true man. He was born of the race of man, but without the seed of man or sin. He was born of Mary, the spotless virgin in flesh and blood, in the manner of the human race; he grew and was brought up by earthly creatures as a truly earthly man. His physical life was sustained by eating and drinking and he died a natural death. Like those who also died a natural death, or who will yet die, he rose again from among the dead through the nature of God, Spirit, and Word, which is the resurrection and the life (as he said to Martha). He was taken up into heaven and seated himself at the right hand of his heavenly Father. We wait for his return and for our resurrection from the dead according to the flesh, to be received through him. Forgiveness and remission of sins come alone through the Lord Jesus Christ. That, briefly, is the testimony

concerning the true divinity and true humanity of Christ. The divinity is testified to and known through power, and the humanity through weakness in death, for death does not come from heaven. I write on this matter because many Antichrists have now appeared who deny both the divinity and humanity of Christ.⁴

1.9 Pilgram Marpeck, “Defence,” Loserth, *Marbeck*, 298

It must now therefore be quite clear what we mean when we talk about the Word through which the children of God are born. We mean one single Word of the Father which is brought to us in the Gospel through the hominized⁵ Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, by himself and his apostles like a flowing stream coming from the fountain or eternal⁶ Son (the stream and the fountain and Son are one). Even today [this Word] speaks in the hearts of the believers through his Holy Spirit as a living Word or speech of God as also Peter testifies when he says: And this is the Word by which the gospel is preached to you, namely none other than the only Word of the Father, for that is God and Jesus Christ himself. . . .

That true gospel and Word of the Father (by which one becomes a Christian or born again) was preached and proclaimed to human persons by the human person⁷ Jesus Christ, himself the Word, through himself and his apostles, but only with the human and physical voice and not by means of angels. He adhered to that order (as a God of order) that the physical must preach to the physical. . . .

1.10 Bernhard Rothmann, “Restitution,” 1534, *SBR*, 237

Whenever we thus earnestly present the teaching of Christ to men we teach that one must remain constant in it otherwise the end would be worse than the beginning. To which some are accustomed to answer and say: Since it is so strict with you it would be better for us to stay away from it. To this we reply: Man is by nature in death, and if he is not redeemed by Christ he remains in death. There is no other way to life but the narrow, strait way through Christ. If now

you are set upon this way and ready to walk on it but decide not to, you remain in death. If however you enter upon it you are on the way and have a hope of arriving at blessedness provided you continue and do not wantonly fall away. For Christ desires to help you. Therefore do not be discouraged to start on the way of righteousness, for while we do not have in us the ability to carry it out we are all able in him who strengthens us, even Christ. Without him we can do nothing.

1.11 Bernhard Rothmann, “Confession of Faith,” 1534, SBR, 197

We also believe that almighty God allowed the eternal Word, his Son, through whom he made man and all things, Col. 1, [16], to become flesh, Jn. 3, [16]. This happened after man fell into death⁹ out of that Word through the poison of wickedness⁹ of the old serpent so that death embraced the whole human race through one man. The Son was given for man into death in order that those who believe on the Son should not perish but have eternal life, Jn. 3, [16]. Thus we believe in Jesus Christ the Son of the living God who for us poor sinners became man and suffered death on the tree of the cross for us and the whole world, in order that we, free from sin, should henceforth walk in purity and without spot as befits our calling.

1.12 Bernhard Rothmann, “Confession of Faith,” 1534, SBR, 199

It is enough that we confess our faith in simplicity and leave the judgment to pious and good-hearted people. We believe that there is one Christ, not born of Mary’s flesh and blood, but rather as the article of faith says, he was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born from Mary, the Virgin. Mary did not receive it from her own flesh and blood but she conceived the living Word of God by the Holy Ghost. This Word of God, as John says in chapter one, became flesh and dwelt among us. The Holy Ghost did not find that from which Christ was conceived and born, in Mary. Rather, the Son of Man descended from heaven as Paul says in Cor. 10: the first man was an

earthly man from the earth, but the second is a heavenly man from heaven. In summary, the Son and the Word of God has become man and Mary conceived him by the Holy Ghost. This is what the Scripture as well as the creed says and so we believe. We know that the gates of hell have no power against such belief. Mt. 16 [16]. For since God's Son became man and was for us surrendered to death by the Father, even so, without a doubt, he will give us all things with him. Rom. 8 [32], Jn. 3 [16]. However if it had been Mary's flesh that died for us, my God, what comfort and courage could we derive from that? That would be like paying for one sin with another and to wash and cleanse one uncleanness with another. Only mistrust and contempt could follow from this in the long run, indeed mockery against the love and mercy which God has shown toward us sinners.

1.13 Dirk Philips, "The Incarnation of Jesus Christ," 1557, "The True Knowledge of Jesus Christ," 1558, Kolb/Klaassen, *Philips*, 97-100, 109, 136-137

We believe and confess that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour (Jn. 1:13, 14; 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9), the first-born and only begotten Son of the eternal and almighty Father and of the living God (Mt. 16:16), the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his essence (Heb. 1:2, 3); divine from the beginning of the world and from eternity, and inexpressibly born of the Father, and one Being with the Father, in such manner that they are one God and Lord, having equal power, might, love, glory, work, and will together eternally (Mic. 5:2-4; Is. 53:12; Jn. 5:19-27; 8:14-19; 9:4; 10:15-18; 13:3; 14:6-10; 15:1; 17:3-22).

But because the Son of God is called the Word (Greek, Logos; Latin, Sermo or Verbum), it is by no means to be understood that every word that God utters is his Son (Jn. 1:1). Oh, no! For the Son is not a spoken word, but an existent Word (1 Jn. 1:1), of whom all the words by God (which is the Holy Scripture) bear testimony (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16). The Son of God is called the Word for the following reason (according to the understanding of many learned men), and has this significance (so far as we can comprehend the Scriptures): that the Son is the express image of the nature of the

Father (Heb. 1:3), proceeding out of the mouth of the Most High (Mt. 4:4). We maintain, that he proceeded as material Word, and as a natural Son of God, one in essence, kind, and nature with the Father (Jn. 10:35; 13:3). Indeed, into the same the Father poured his essence and reflected it in him in a visible way. That is why the apostle says that God who in time past spoke by the prophets, afterward spoke to us by his Son, the incarnated Word (Heb. 1:13, 2: Col. 1:15). Thus the Son is not a spoken, but a speaking Word. By this Word, that is, by the Son's word of power, all things are upheld (Heb. 1:3) and have their being. Therefore John declares that the Son is the Word of life, from whom the apostles saw and heard all the things which they have proclaimed to us (1 Jn. 1:1-3).

.....

Therefore we believe and confess that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, Saviour, and Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Gal. 1:4), truly God and man. He is truly God from everlasting, and born of the Father before the foundation of the world (Mic. 5:1, 2). But he became truly man in these last days. How his incarnation was brought about the evangelists and apostles describe to us in clear and express language... [he cites a number of Scripture passages].

Now if the body of Christ had been formed by Mary (as the world thinks and says with such want of understanding), there would be no difference between the body of Christ and that of Adam, because as Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost in Mary (Lk. 1:31, 35; Mt. 1:20), so also Adam was made by God, and had no other father than God. What difference would there be, then, between the body of Christ and the body of Adam, if the body of Christ had been made of the earth, the same as the body of Adam (Gen. 1:27)? The body of Christ would necessarily have been made of the earth if it had been formed of human seed, for because of the body all men are dust and earth (Gen. 2:7). It should, however, be remembered that Adam was made of pure earth by God. But after that the earth was made unclean by sin, and all men were laid under the curse and became corrupt in their nature (Rom. 3:10; Gal. 3:10). How, then, should Christ have a pure body, if he had been formed of human seed which is unclean (Jn. 14:4)? Far from it! God, the heavenly Father, prepared a body for Jesus Christ, his only begotten son (Heb.

10:5), not of unclean human seed, with which he impregnated Mary, the pure virgin, through the power of his Holy Spirit, to which the aforementioned statements of the evangelists and apostles clearly testify (Mt. 1:20; Lk. 1:31).

.....
Since then these brothers and sisters¹⁰—children of Christ—have flesh and blood, Christ also partook of the same in the same way, that is, he became man, even as his brothers, sisters, and children are (Heb. 2:14). But the apostle does not say—nor does he mean—that he became man of our human flesh and blood, and it cannot be truthfully proven from his words. For Christ is the spotless Lamb of God (Jn. 1:36; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6), and without sin. But his brothers, sisters, and children are, according to the flesh, sinful by nature. What dwells in their flesh Paul clearly shows in his epistle to the Romans when he says: “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). Hence the holy flesh of Christ, which is meat indeed (Jn. 6:55) and makes alive, did not originally come from our flesh and blood, but he, Christ, was graciously given to us and begotten by God, our heavenly Father, as a gift and proof of his everlasting love and unfathomable mercy, and was made man (Is. 7:14) like as we are. How, by what means, and whence this came to pass has been sufficiently stated and declared above.

.....
The doctrine of Jesus Christ is the word of the heavenly Father (Jn. 7:16; 3:11; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24). The teaching of the Son and the testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to all the teachings of the prophets, and it contains all that serves and promotes godliness. Nor can the will of the heavenly Father be found and confessed anywhere so clearly as in the words of Jesus Christ, by whom the Father has in these last days spoken, made known his will, and fully expressed it (Heb. 1:2). Hence all that is contrary and not conformable to the words of Christ, is not God’s word or will: for no other foundation can be laid, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

.....
Hence no doctrine has any status that does not harmonize with the teaching of Christ and his apostles. Man does not live by other

words which proceed from the will of man, but alone by the words of God (Mt. 4:4), which have been made known to us by Jesus Christ and his apostles. Here is the bread of heaven; here is the water of life.

1.14 Menno Simons, “Triune God,” 1550, CWMS, 492-493

Dear brethren in the Lord, we believe and confess that this same eternal, wise, almighty, holy, true, living, and incomprehensible Word, Christ Jesus, which was in the beginning with God and which was God, incomprehensible—born of the incomprehensible Father, before every creature—did in the fullness of time become, according to the unchangeable purpose and faithful promise of the Father, a true, visible, suffering, hungry, thirsty, and mortal man in Mary, the pure virgin, through the operation and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and so was born of her. We confess that he was like unto us in all things, sin excepted; that he grew up as do other men; that at the appointed time he was baptized and entered upon his preaching task, and office of grace and love which was enjoined upon him from the Father, and which he obediently fulfilled. He erased the handwriting, that is, the law, which was against us; and has at last, through the eternal Spirit of his heavenly Father, offered himself in this human flesh, nature, and weakness, in which he sighed, wept, and prayed unto the Father, and sweat water and blood, and thus purified our hearts of dead works that we should serve the true and living God. All who believe on him and through him received grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, and that by means of his crimson blood which he has in his great love sacrificed and shed on the cross for us poor sinners, according to the good pleasure of the Father. And so he has become our only and eternal High Priest, Atoner, Mercy Seat, Mediator, and Advocate with God his Father.

For even as God, the Almighty Father, through his Almighty Word, Christ Jesus, had created Adam and Eve, so also when they and their descendants were seduced by the serpent he restored them so that we should give no one the praise for our salvation, neither in

heaven nor on earth, but the only and eternal Father through Christ Jesus, and that through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This is enough of the incarnation.

For further reading:

Beachy, *Grace* 79-86, 208-213.

Cornelius J. Dyck, "The Christology of Dirk Philips," *MQR* XXXI (July 1957), 147-155.

Estep, *Anabaptist Story*, 133-140.

Friedmann, *Theology*, 53-56.

Keeney, *Dutch Anabaptist*, 89-99.

William E. Keeney, "The Incarnation, a Central Theological Concept,"
Dyck, *Legacy*, 55-68.

Walter Klaassen, "The Bern Debate of 1538: Christ the Center of Scripture," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XL (April 1966), 148-156.

Klassen, *Covenant Community*, 61-66, 130-135.

Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism*, 196-198.

