

The Dissent and Nonconformity Series

Number 13



# Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists

John S. Oyer



***Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem.***

The Latin, *Non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem*, translates, "... they loved not their lives unto the death." Revelation 12:11

**On The Cover:** *Massacres at Salzburg* took place in 1528 when Prince-Archbishop Cardinal Matthaus Lang of Salzburg issued mandates sending police in search of Anabaptists. Many were captured and killed. This engraving illustrates the sufferings and sacrifices these Dissenters endured when their government, in conjunction with established religion, attempted to coerce and impose uniformity of religious belief. Hence, this picture is a reminder of the cost of religious liberty and the ever-present need to maintain the separation of church and state. We use this art to represent our Dissent and Nonconformity Series.

LUTHERAN REFORMERS AGAINST  
ANABAPTISTS

“They [the Anabaptists] teach that a Christian should not use a sword, should not serve as a magistrate, should not swear or hold property ... These articles are seditious and holders of them may be punished with a sword ... If it be objected that the magistrate should not compel anyone to the faith the answer is that he punishes no one for his opinions in his heart, but only on account of the outward word and teaching ... What now would happen if children were not baptized, if not that our whole society would become openly heathen? It is a serious matter to cast children out of Christendom and to have two sets of people, the one baptized and the other unbaptized, because then the Anabaptists have some dreadful articles, we judge that in this case also the obstinate are to be put to death.”

Martin Luther; Philip Melanchthon; John Brenz;  
*Luther's Works* Weimar Edition. Vol. 50, Page 12.

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“From the point of view of freedom of thought, the Lutheran Reformation may easily be weighed in the balance and found wanting. It is to be regretted that its spirit was inclined to be so exclusively dogmatic ... so little inspired by a tolerant charity. It may indeed be described as a crusade in favor of liberty, but only as that age understood liberty. This, it may be said, was in natural order of things. Luther and his fellow-reformers, who only saw with the light of the sixteenth century, could not be expected to see with that of the twentieth. True, but we should all the more guard against applying the word ‘liberty’ to the Lutheran Reformation as if it meant what we today understand by it. This is a mistake into which many Protestant writers, who confuse the principle with the practice of the Reformation, have fallen.”

Dr. James Mackinnon  
*A History of Modern Liberty* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906)  
Vol. 2, Page 130.

# LUTHERAN REFORMERS AGAINST ANABAPTISTS

LUTHER, MELANCHTHON  
AND MENIUS AND THE ANABAPTISTS  
OF CENTRAL GERMANY

*by*

JOHN S. OYER

*Goshen College, Indiana*

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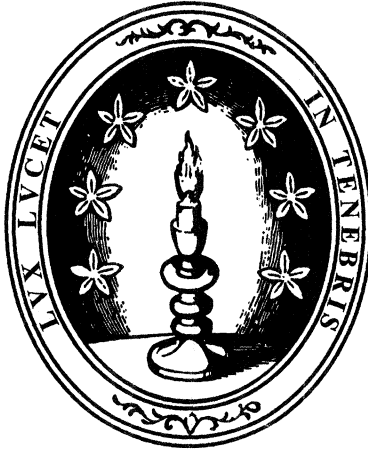
Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

-- *Psalms 60:4*

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**THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM**

*lux lucet in tenebris*

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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I owe my deepest thanks to each of the following persons: the late Dean Harold S. Bender of the Goshen College Biblical Seminary for his suggestion of the topic and his frequent helpful comments; Professor Wilhelm Pauck, earlier of the University of Chicago and now of Union Theological Seminary, for his initial encouragement and advice; Professors Jaroslav Pelikan and Donald Lach, both of the University of Chicago during my student days, for undertaking to guide the dissertation and for their numerous suggestions for its improvement; Professors Heinrich Bornkamm and Walter Peter Fuchs, both of Heidelberg University, for many critical comments given to one who was not their own *cand. phil.*; Nelson Springer, curator of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College, for bibliographical advice of the highest order; Frl. Fehring, Secretary of the *Historisches Seminar* at Heidelberg University, for help in locating a place in the *Kandidatenzimmer*; Mrs. Carol Oyer for frequent help in the tedious work of correcting copy, proofreading, and indexing; Professor John H. Yoder of the Goshen College Biblical Seminary for his helpful comments on the material of chapters II and III. To all of these mentors and friends I acknowledge my indebtedness. If they have given of themselves to make this book more meaningful and accurate, the obscurities and errors remaining are still my own.





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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ARG*      *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte.*  
*CR*        *Corpus Reformatorum*  
 DeWette    *Dr. Martin Luther's Briefe, Sendschreiben, und Bedenken.*  
              Edited by Wilhelm M. de Wette. 6 vols. Berlin, 1825–56.  
*EA*        *Dr. Martin Luther's sämtliche Werke.* 67 vols. Erlangen,  
              1826 ff.  
*ME*        *Mennonite Encyclopedia.* 4 vols.  
*ML*        *Mennonitisches Lexikon.* 3 vols.  
*MQR*      *Mennonite Quarterly Review.*  
*TA, Hesse* *Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte,*  
              Vol. IV. Edited by G. Franz, *et al.* Marburg, 1951.  
*WA*        *D. Martin Luther's Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Edited  
              by Knaake, Kawerau, *et al.* 57 vols. Weimar, 1883–1914.  
*WB*        *D. Martin Luther's Briefwechsel, D. Martin Luther's Werke,*  
              *kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Edited by Konrad Burdach, *et al.*  
              11 vols. Weimar, 1930 ff.  
*WT*        *Tischreden, D. Martin Luther's Werke, kritische Gesamtaus-*  
              *gabe.* Edited by Karl Drescher. 6 vols. Weimar, 1912 ff.  
 r.         *recto.*  
 v.         *verso.*  
              In the absence of pagination in the sixteenth century  
              brochures, I have used the signatures with the added  
              identification r. or v. for *recto* or *verso*.

The coalition of church and state (corpus Christianum) has continually had outspoken opponents since its inception in the 4th century under Constantine. All through the long medieval night of papal terror and up to the present day of accommodation and compromise, there has never been a time when the voice of dissent and nonconformity was not heard, protesting against established religion and coerced uniformity. The most prominent target of that protest has been the arrogant usurpation of Christ's Kingly Authority and Headship over His churches and the souls of men, whether that usurpation was Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or any other. As it has been, so shall it ever be. This enduring testimony of dissent, this genuine Christian nonconformity arises as the inevitable response of the Christian soul to the internal witness of the Spirit toward the truth and supreme authority of God's Word. Consequently, the origin, nature and history of Christ's churches can never be adequately discerned or explained apart from some grasp of the Biblical Truths advocated and defended throughout the history of genuine Christian Dissent and Nonconformity. As Dr. J. S. Whale, former Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Mansfield College, Oxford University and President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge University, said, "*Dissent, not only from the centralized absolutism of Rome, but also from the State establishments of Protestantism in the Old World is an historic fact of enduring influence. To account for the tradition of liberty in the 'free world' of today without reference to dissent would be to read modern history with one eye shut.*"

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