Anabaptists

* The Anabaptists were a radical religious group that developed from the teachings of [Ulrich Zwingli](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ulrich_zwingli.htm) and [Martin Luther](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/Martin_Luther0.htm).
* Zwingli and Luther rejected the Anabaptists because they deemed them to be too radical.
* Though the Anabaptists had some support in various parts of Western Europe, they were rejected by Protestants and Catholics alike and all but hunted down.

What did the Anabaptists believe in? In general they believed in:

* Adult baptism (learned repentance)
* Mass to be a memorial service for the baptised
* Free will
* Pacifism; Anabaptists refused to do military service
* Secular laws and oaths were not recognised
* Pastors supported by their congregation
* Tendency towards equality

* Anabaptists had no generally accepted doctrine as each group adopted their own specific beliefs and there was no central organisation.
* The Anabaptists also had no overall leader so there was no [John Calvin](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/John_Calvin.htm) or Luther-like figure.
* The influence of the Anabaptists was never extreme because its origins were far from precise.
* Whereas Luther, Calvin and Zwingli could be specifically associated with a geographic area, the Anabaptists could not.
* There is some evidence that the Anabaptists developed in Zurich after 1523.
* Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz were the early ‘leaders’ of the movement.
* They had discussed with Zwingli child baptism. By 1525, adults in Zurich were being baptised in rivers.
* This was bitterly opposed by Zwingli and Zwingli agreed that Anabaptists should be drowned in a decree of 1526. This destroyed the group and they survived in a few isolated areas of Switzerland or moved to other areas.
* Small groups of Anabaptists cropped up throughout Western Europe. Poorer people and peasants tended to gravitate towards the Anabaptists but its success in any small area was the result of what locals did as opposed to what any general leader could organise. With no central leader, the group had no central organisation and suffered accordingly.
* Though there was no Anabaptist ‘leader’ the likes of Hans Huth, Balthasar Hubmaier and Jacob Hutter might be considered to be the more famous ‘leaders’.
  + Hans Huth was a wandering bookseller. He was active in South German villages until he was caught by the authorities in Augsburg, tortured and killed.
  + Hubmaier was active in Moravia when he won over a number of converts. He was arrested in 1528 and burned. His wife was drowned in the River Danube.
  + Hutter set up eighty Anabaptist settlements in Moravia. Despite the respect they gained for hard work and sobriety, Hutter was arrested in 1536 and many of his followers fled to Poland or went to what was to become the United States of America.

* The Anabaptists found a base in the Germany at Munster in 1534. The community brought in the death sentence for disobedience and adultery but allowed polygamy.
  + In 1535, Munster was taken over by the authorities and the leaders of the community were killed. By 1566, there were in the region of 3,000 deaths of Anabaptists in the Netherlands alone.

* A few Anabaptists appeared in England. They were usually those who fled the Netherlands because of the persecution they faced. However, if they were caught they suffered the same fate as those in Europe.
  + Between 1530 and 1535, a number of Anabaptists were burned at the stake. As late as 1575, two Anabaptists were burned in London.

Why did the Anabaptists arouse so much hostility and fear especially as they were small in number and disorganised on a European scale? There are three main reasons.

* They held beliefs that were unacceptable to the majority, be they Catholic or Protestant. Some beliefs were offensive in a religiously sensitive era and certain behaviour, such as polygamy, was frowned upon.

* Anabaptists also seemed to threaten social stability. If it is true that the Anabaptists came out of the [Peasants’ Revolt of 1525](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/social_consequences_of_martin_luther.htm), this event was linked to social upheaval and to the demand for social equality. It was an event that was also linked to Luther’s comment that “you can be a slave and a Christian”.

* The Anabaptists also held views that were a challenge to other Protestant beliefs. If the Anabaptists were allowed to spread it would have almost certainly been at the expense of Protestant faiths as opposed to Catholicism. Therefore the Anabaptists could be seen more as a threat to the Protestants and this resulted in them not being tolerated wherever they went.

The term *anabaptist* was used to describe and define certain Reformation-era Christians who rejected [infant baptism](http://www.amazon.com/Infant-Baptism-Horsch/dp/B009UH01SA/?tag=markroth-a-20) in favor of **believer's baptism**.

Since many of them had been baptized in their infancy, they chose to be **rebaptized as believing adults**. Hence, their enemies called them *anabaptists* -- "re-baptizers."

Being labeled *anabaptist* was neither complimentary nor safe. In fact, for a time it was a sure death sentence.

Even though we now embrace that term as part of our identity, it really is an **inaccurate term** to describe the original Anabaptists. **They never considered that any rebaptism took place** -- they outright rejected and refuted the entire concept of infant baptism. To them, *infant baptism* would have been an oxymoron. They would have considered *infant* and *baptism* mutually exclusive.

The differences between the Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformers lay much deeper than any outward sign, including that of baptism. The Anabaptists were earnestly concerned with the **restitution of the true church on an Apostolic model**. The Anabaptists considered the state churches beyond reformation.

Here are a few additional tidbits about the Anabaptists:

* The era of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation in Europe spawned a number of radical reform groups, among them the Anabaptists. These Christians regarded **the Bible as their only rule for faith and life**. Because of their radical beliefs, the Anabaptists were [persecuted](http://www.anabaptists.org/writings/excerpts/mirror1.html) by Protestants as well as by Roman Catholics.
* The evangelical and non-revolutionary Anabaptists of Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, were a trial to the leading reformers because of their **radical views** on the nature of the church and of the Christian ethic.
* There is **no single defining set** of [beliefs, doctrines, and practices](http://www.anabaptists.org/doctrine.html) that characterizes all Anabaptists.
* Contemporary groups with **early Anabaptist roots** include the [Mennonites](http://www.anabaptists.org/history/who-are-the-mennonites.html), [Amish](http://www.anabaptists.org/amish.html), Dunkards, Landmark Baptists, Hutterites, and various Beachy and Brethren groups.
* Anabaptists have been characterized historically by a **love for the Word of God**, and by a strict demand for **holiness of life**.
* The Anabaptists of central Europe evolved in a time of social and religious chaos, developed unique ideas concerning the church and state, and retained a wildly radical view of society.
* The teachings and way of life of the Anabaptists, according to the Anabaptists themselves, were merely ways of trying to reinstate the true church, a church of true believers. It did not seem this way to the Magisterial Reformers or to the Roman Church, however. It was those very teachings and acts that made the Anabaptists into the object of numerous persecutions at the hands of both church and state.
* The historiography of the Anabaptists...is largely hostile to them and their teachings. It remains one of the largest problems in modern scholarship to separate the hostility of their biographers from the circumstances of Anabaptist existence.
* The impulse to join and remain within a society of martyrs is certainly hard to pinpoint.
* In their earliest years, many of the Anabaptists were followers of Zwingli in Zurich.
* Their unique model of what Church and society could become, if politics and fear were placed as subservient to love and community, stand as witness to the possibilities of a voluntary church, and the possibilities of a free society.
* During the 16th-century Reformation in Europe, the Protestant Anabaptist, or Christian Brethren, movement flourished in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and other countries.
* The basic belief of the Anabaptists was in adult baptism, but they also supported the separation of church and state and voluntary church membership.
* While there was no direct development from the Anabaptists to the growth of the Baptist churches in England, it is very likely that the latter were influenced in their beliefs and attitudes by the continental Brethren.