

Munster Madness

Melchior Hofmann

- A furrier from Schwabisch in South Germany
- Preached in Estonia, Latvia, Russia and Scandinavia.
- Was expelled from many cities for exciting iconoclastic riots
- Held to a symbolic and allegorical interpretation of scripture.
- Saw himself as a messenger of the end times and his role should be respected
- In Strasbourg became leader of growing refugee Anabaptists;
- Hoffman was no longer tolerated after he called the Emperor the dragon in revelations
- He traveled to the low countries and in Emden baptized 300
- But when 10 converts were killed he banned adult baptism (still preached for it)

Hoffman's Eschatology

- There would be times of trial and great challenge but then Christ would come.
- Strasbourg would be the protectors of the elect until the time of Christ's return
- Strasbourg and other holy cities would protect the elect from the unholy trinity of the emperor pope and false teachers like Luther and Zwingli
- Turks were the arm of God sent to exterminate the godless; the elect were to pray and build safe havens like Strasbourg.
- At the collapse of the enemy the elect (144 000 of Revelation) led by the two witnesses (Hoffman as one) would march across the face of the earth proclaiming the joyous, universal message of divine grace and dispensing the baptism of faith.
- This was a new age begun by God, not man.
- However new forces, particularly in the city of Munster switched the focus from God initiated to man initiated.

Death of Hoffmann

- An old man predicted that Hoffmann, as the new Elijah, would undergo only a figurative death – that is 6 months in prison – just before Christ's return
- So when he went back to Strasbourg in 1533 he did not resist arrest
- He spent the next ten years of his life in prison and died an ailing individual, an object of pity and scorn.

Munster Madness 1534-1535

Low Countries

- Reform messages were used as a political tool to get out from under the domination of Catholic Spain.
- Generally more tolerant of religious differences
- Hoffman's message took hold quickly.

Jan Matthijs

- A baker from Haarlem
- Hoffman converted and baptized Matthijs in 1531
- Matthijs assumed leadership of Melchiorites after Hoffman's imprisonment
- Matthijs claimed to be the witness in Rev 11:3 just like Hoffman had
- He persuaded Amsterdam Melchiorites to accept his leadership through threats of damnation and acts of love
- Both Matthijs and Hoffman believed that a radical change in the world was on the point of appearing through the mission of the apostolic messengers and destruction of the godless.
- These events would immediately precede the appearance of Jesus
- They expected an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would protect the faithful and stimulate the cooperation of governments to fight against the antichrist

Munster

- In the city of Munster, Bernhard Rothmann was leading a reformed movement
- Catholics, Protestants and Melchiorites fought it out for control
- By January 1534 Rothmann controlled the city – supported by guilds, merchants and common people – the magistrates were powerless
- Matthijs and van Leiden arrived and convinced Rothman to make a break with the old order.
- Rothmann was convinced and wrote that the people of God were called not only to defend themselves but also to help God to punish the wicked
- January 1534 the Catholic Bishop of Munster, Bishop Waldeck and others withdrew from the city and set up a military siege that stopped followers and foodstuffs coming into the city
- In February Matthijs announced that all who refused to accept the covenant of baptism should be killed

End for Matthijs

- April 4 1534 only six weeks after taking control of the city, he led a small expedition of thirty men against Bishop Waldeck's army
- He was killed, head severed and placed on a pole for all in the city to see.

Jan Van Leiden

- Leiden immediately took control of the city
- Abolished city council and created a messianic OT kingdom, proclaiming himself the new King David.
- Influenced by visions and dreams – had divine inspiration
- Introduced capital punishment
- Instated two things not unique to Ana
 - Common property (people were impoverished anyway)

- Polygamy, - married Matthijs widow – women outnumbered man three to one. He had 16 wives
- Due to lack of supplies, on June 1535 he sent the women, children and old men from the city right into the hands of the waiting army. Most were killed
- June 23 1535, 800 men remained in the city – attacked by 3000 soldiers
- City captured June 25, 1535
- Leiden, Bernard Knipperdolling (mayor) and Bernhard Kretching, (member of council) were captured
- Next three months were put on public spectacle
- January 20th 1536 , tortured, flesh was torn and tongues ripped out with hot pincers and executed by piercing the heart with a hot dagger
- Bodies hung in cages for all to see in St Lambert's church.
- Replicas of cages still there today

The Tragedy

- History afterwards connected Munster to Anabaptists
- It seemed as though Munster was the origins of the Anabaptists and then there was a reaction to the violence
- It was not until Bender and others that we began to see the true history and origins

After Munster

- Many people became disillusioned
- Anabaptism given a bad name
- Persecution of Anabaptists seemed justified