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The Beginning of Anabaptism in Southern Tyrol

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The Southern Tyrol belonged to one of few territories that proved particularly Anabaptist-friendly. Unlike other territories no major reformer or theologian emerged to dominate the evangelical reform movement. Michael Gaismair, who may have coveted such a role, was defeated with the peasants. After 1526 Anabaptism provided the major challenge and alternative to the religious social-political status quo. It produced an extraordinary number of local leaders and martyrs, among them Jacob Hutter, who bequeathed his name to the Hutterites who have survived against incredible odds to the present. He and his "communistic" followers enjoyed the reputation of being the most dedicated and disciplined of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. This paper reexamines the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in Southern Tyrol. It suggests that Anabaptism was brought to this area in the spring of 1527 by the Swiss veteran Jörg Blaurock and that it spread among radical evangelical sacramentists with previous connections to Gaismair's abortive attempt at revolution. This at least provides the best explanation for the rapid spread of Anabaptism and its initial popularity. Continuity with Gaismair's program it is argued, existed in terms of similar attitudes towards existing structures and perceived social wrongs, anticlericalism, and radical iconoclasm. There were, of course, discontinuities as well. Severe persecution meant that attempts at transforming Tyrol's society were given up. What remained were separated communities in exile.

SCHOLARS SEEM AGREED that Anabaptism in the Tyrol represented a popular grass-roots movement. Gretl Köfler claimed, "One can speak in good conscience of a mass movement."¹ Wolfgang Lassman wrote of "a regular people's heresy" that enjoyed the active interest and passive aid of a "large section of the population."² Eduard Widmoser was more cautious, suggesting that 5 percent of the population was directly implicated. He estimated that during

*I wish to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a larger project in progress. The assistance made it possible to spend some time in Austria and the Tyrol on research in 1988.

¹Gretl Köfler, "Taufertum in Tirol" in *Michael Gaismair und Seine Zeit*, ed. Christoph von Hartungen and Günther Pallaver (Bozen-Innsbruck, 1983), 112-22, esp. 116.

²Wolfgang Lassmann, "Möglichkeiten einer Modellbildung zur Verlaufsstruktur des tirolischen Anabaptismus," in *Anabaptistes et dissidents au XVI siècle*, ed. Jean-G. Rott and Simon Verheus, *Bibliotheca Dissidentum, scripta et studia*, no. 3 (Baden-Baden, 1987), 297ff.

one generation the total number of persons involved reached twenty thousand.³ Franz Kolb counted one hundred twenty-five communities affected in one way or another.⁴

The initial popularity of Anabaptism seems indirectly confirmed by clerical complaints about sagging church attendance,⁵ directly by the demonstrated sympathies of the populace. Even after ten years of vicious persecution, the Anabaptists enjoyed the aid and protection of the common people who refused to cooperate with the authorities in apprehending the hunted heretics. In 1539 the officials of the prince bishop of Brixen gave this graphic description of the situation:

The common man is inclined towards them, giving them support [*Unterhalt*], food and drink, permits them to come and go from his house. No one notifies the authorities [*Herrschaft*] and when the authorities learn of an [Anabaptist] meeting, they cannot expect the help or support of the subjects to raid the Anabaptists and imprison them. Even if they [commoners] go along, they give no hand [in apprehending them], but permit the Anabaptists to run to and fro beside them in the forests, claiming not to have seen any. They warn them of a possible raid. If this is how those act who are not in the sect, how must those act who belong to the sect?⁶

Curiously, the complaint came at a time when Anabaptist activity was already on the decline in most parts of the Tyrol.⁷

Some territories had proven especially Anabaptist-friendly. In the north, an estimated eight hundred out of twelve hundred inhabitants of the city of Schwaz were at one point suspected of Anabaptist sympathies.⁸ In the south, the Etsch-[Adige], Eisack, and Puster Valleys proved particularly hospitable, with the mining areas of Sterzing and Klausen-Gufidaun in the vanguard.

³Eduard Widmoser wrote: "Der Zahl nach zu urteilen, könnte man in der Tat von keiner allzu grossen Anhängerschaft sprechen." "Das Tiroler Täuferturn," *Tiroler Heimat. Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Volkskunde* 11, part 1 (1951): 45-89, esp. 84-85, and 16, part 2 (1952): 103-28.

⁴Franz Kolb, "Die Wiedertäufer im Wipptal," *Schlern, Monatsheft für Südtiroler Landeskunde*, 74 (1951): 1-103, esp. 10.

⁵Grete Mecenseffy, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, (hereafter QGT), vol. 13: *Oesterreich*, part 2 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972), 382.

⁶*Ibid.*, vol. 14: *Oesterreich*, part 3 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1983), 420-21, October 17, 1539.

⁷Widmoser distinguished several phases: (1) rise 1527-32; (2) peak 1533-39; (3) stagnation 1540-63; (4) decline 1563-1627. "Tiroler Täuferturn," part 1, 56. The best up-to-date bibliography since Widmoser is that by Josef Franz Enzenberger, "Das Oesterreichische Täuferturn im Spiegel der Modernen Historiographie" (Hausaufgabe für Prof. Dr. A. Wandruska, Geschichte, Universität Wien, 1979). I thank Magister Enzenberger for making his work available to me.

⁸See Johann Loserth and Robert Friedmann, "Tirol," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4: 724-28.

The district of St. Michelsburg in the Puster Valley seemed especially susceptible.⁹ Places like Lügen, St. Georgen, Pflaurentz, Welsberg, Niedervintl, and Tauffern were populated by high concentrations of Anabaptists or sympathizers.¹⁰

These areas produced an extraordinary number of martyrs and capable leaders,¹¹ not the least among them Jacob Hutter.¹² Hutter would bequeath his name to a group of “communistic Anabaptists” who have survived against incredible odds to the present. He and his fellow *Pusterers* (from the Puster Valley) enjoyed the reputation of being among the toughest, most dedicated, disciplined, and zealous of Anabaptists as evidenced in a letter by Peter Riedemann, the “second founder” of the Hutterites. Riedemann considered the *Pusterers* model members of the Anabaptist communities in Moravia and hoped to convert the Hessian Anabaptists into *Pusterers*, that is to say, into South Tyrolese.¹³

Recognizing the importance of the Tyrolese within the larger Anabaptist movement, this article proposes to reexamine the beginnings of the movement in the south. Such an attempt cannot avoid questions of relationship between Anabaptism and the uprising led by Michael Gaismair that preceded it. While this is not the only historically significant question to be asked, it is a current one.

There seems to be an emerging consensus that the Anabaptists “began within the radical currents of the early Reformation and the Peasants’ War.”¹⁴ The older, free-church historiography, which apologetically insisted on a

⁹Hartmann Ammann, “Die Wiedertäufer in Michelsburg im Pusterthale und deren Urgichten,” Programme des K. K. Gymnasiums zu Brixen 46, part 1 (1896): 1-52; 47, part 2 (1897): 1-124.

¹⁰Erika Prast considered St. Georgen and Pflaurentz as pro-Anabaptist. “Die Vier Pustertaler Herrschaften—St. Michelsburg, Schöneck, Uttenheim und Heunfels—Unter Brixen Pfandherrschaft 1500-1570” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Leopold-Frazer University, Innsbruck, 1975), 191, 194.

¹¹Of a total of 2,169 executions counted in Hutterite sources, 569 are listed as having taken place in Austrian territory, 349 of these in the Tyrol, with 35 in the Pustertal, 108 in the Etschtal, and 206 in the Inntal. Cf. Josef Beck, *Die Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer in Oesterreich-Ungarn, 1526-1785* (Vienna, 1883), 277-80. But these figures seem conservative, since Hutterites tended to be selective in counting martyrs.

¹²Rudolf Palme lists Jörg Zauried [Zaurring], Hans Amon [Tuchscherer], Hans Kräl, Niclas Geyerspühler, Jacob Portzner, Hans Mändel, and Onofrius Griesinger. “Zur Täuferbewegung in Tirol,” *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 43/44 (1986/87): 47-61, esp. 52. To this list could be added Ulrich Stadler, Sigmund Schützinger, Pilgram Marpeck, Jeronimus Käls, and others.

¹³Peter Riedemann wrote: “. . . vermeine wol Pusterer zu haben . . .” *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder*, ed. A. J. F. Zieglschmid (Ithaca, NY, 1946), 197. The English translators missed the point with “I imagine some from the Puster Valley might even return.” *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, vol. 1 (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1987), 184-85. Because of its greater accessibility and extensive footnotes, the English edition will be cited hereafter.

¹⁴Adolf Laube, “Radicalism as a Research Problem in the History of Early Reformation” in *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives*, ed. Hans Hillerbrand (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1988) 9-33, esp. 22.

total separation between the Peasants' War and Anabaptism, has become untenable,¹⁵ but documentation of an actual connection between the peasant uprisings and Anabaptist origins remains problematic. James Stayer, in a recent study, investigated the overlap in personnel with interesting results. He concluded that "the Peasants' War was significantly connected with the beginnings of Anabaptism," but that the surviving sources appear to reveal only "the tip of an iceberg."¹⁶

The suggestion of a link is, of course, not new. It has been made repeatedly in the past.¹⁷ More than a century ago, the conservative Austrian historian, Josef Jäkel, who considered Anabaptism a social disease, argued specifically for a direct link between Anabaptism in the Tyrol and the rebellion led by Michael Gaismair.¹⁸ He pointed to geographic overlap for evidence. Areas of Anabaptist concentrations corresponded with areas that had previously supported Gaismair's revolt. Further evidence was provided by the official reaction. Government officials surmised a causal connection between peasant insurrection and Anabaptism. According to Ferdinand I's mandate of August 20, 1527, "deceitful teachings and heretical sects" were spread by some evil, capricious persons, who did not get their fill from that immense and wretched bloodletting of the past years, but sought to revive new disobedience, insurrection, and rebellion out of which nothing good could come, but only evil such as fire, murder, robbery, and the destruction of all authority and lordship.¹⁹

The same mandate blamed the previous rebellion on false teachings of Christian freedom and on the subversive notion of community of goods. "All things should be held in common and there should no longer be any authority [*Obrigkeit*]."

The first recorded government response to Anabaptism in the Tyrol came in conjunction with reports that former supporters of Gaismair had been dispatched as provocateurs to the mining areas.²⁰ The authorities feared a new "insurrection and rebellion." Since they saw in Anabaptism a

¹⁵Representing the old point of view were Harold Bender, "Die Zwickauer Propheten, Thomas Müntzer und die Täufer," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 8 (1952): 262-78, and idem, "The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 27 (1953): 3-16; also the articles by Robert Friedmann, "Hut, Hans," *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 2, 846-50 and "Müntzer, Thomas," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 3, 785-89.

¹⁶James M. Stayer, "Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants' War," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 42 (1988): 99-139, esp. 130, 137.

¹⁷Last by Köfler, "Täuferturn in Tirol," 112-28, and by Aldo Stella, "Il 'Sozialevangelismus' di Michael Gaismayr e le Origini dell'Anabattismo Hutterita" in *J. Valdesi e l'Europa* (Torre Pellice, 1982) (edition Claudiana, Torino), 245-63; also *Rivolte Contadine Trentino-Tirolesi e Genesi del Comunismo Evangelico Dei Fratelli Hutterite* (Padeva, 1982).

¹⁸Josef Jäkel, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberösterreich und speziell in Freistadt," 47. *Bericht über das Museum Fancisco-Carolinum* (1889), 1-82.

¹⁹Mecenseffy, *QGT* (1964), 11: Oesterreich, 1), 9.

²⁰Prast, "Die Vier Pustertaler Herrschaften," 189.

“disparagement of all authority and lordship,” they charged Anabaptists not only with heresy but also with insurrection.²¹

But were these charges justified? The answer depends in part on the interpretation of Anabaptism. Was it a purely religious or also a social-political movement? Most scholars active in the field are now agreed that it was not “either-or.” However, the older, liberal Austrian historiography, represented by scholars such as Johann Loserth²² and Edward Widmoser, in their struggle against centuries of prejudicial official historiography tended to emphasize the peaceful, purely religious intentions of the Anabaptists and hence their unjustified persecution. They did not find it very useful to agree with Jäkel and others of his ilk who stressed continuity with Gaismair’s program. The relationship between the peaceful, sectarian Anabaptists and the peasants, who, led by Gaismair, attempted to transform the whole society by force if need be, seemed not at all obvious. Unlike the peasants, Anabaptists seemed primarily religiously motivated. Their persecution, as that of later religious dissenters, seemed entirely unjustified.

Compared with the liberal, religious interpretation, Marxists tended to be unencumbered by apologetic sensitivities toward the peaceful nature of Anabaptism. They agreed with conservatives like Jäkel on the radical nature of Anabaptism. The Czech historian Josef Macek saw in the Anabaptist religious protest a continuation of a defiant assault on decaying feudal structures, an assault that under the changed circumstances of failed revolution continued parts of Gaismair’s program.²³ He wrote that “it is wrong and superficial to overemphasize a peaceful character of the Anabaptist movement, for by doing so one blurs its revolutionary effect.”²⁴ Unfortunately, Macek failed to make a convincing empirical case for his claims.

Attempts to find empirical evidence for a Gaismair connection by my colleague Walter Klaassen, who accepted Macek’s major thesis as “quite likely correct,” proved disappointing.²⁵ A list of 113 Gaismair supporters yielded only two future Anabaptist names. Stayer’s preliminary search for Tyrolean Anabaptists along the same lines of personnel overlap fared little better. Stayer raised the known number of Anabaptists who had participated in the Gaismair affair to a mere six.²⁶ Yet, both Klaassen and Stayer, after

²¹A point made by Köfler, “Täufertum in Tirol,” 114, about Leonard Schiemer’s death.

²²Johann Loserth, “Der Anabaptismus in Tirol von seinen Anfängen bis zum Tode Jacob Hutters, 1526-1536, aus hinterlassenen Papieren des Hofrates Dr. Josef R. V. Beck,” *Archiv für Oesterreichische Geschichte* 79 (1892), 407-604.

²³Josef Macek, *Der Tiroler Bauernkrieg und Michael Gaismair* (Berlin, 1965), 468-73.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 471, n. 217.

²⁵Walter Klaassen, *Michael Gaismair: Revolutionary and Reformer* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 115.

²⁶They were Friedrich Brandenburger and Hans Gasser. Klaassen, *Gaismair*, 114-16. Stayer has since increased that number in *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 87-88.

working carefully with the sources, were inclined to believe that the peasant uprising created “the indispensable preconditions” for Tyrolean Anabaptism. I have come to similar conclusions although my own investigation pursued a different track. In a larger work I was primarily interested in pinpointing the time and place of Tyrolean Anabaptist beginnings, in identifying its initial propagators, and narrating the fate of the movement. It was in this context that I reopened the question of generic relationship to Gaismair’s program.

Briefly, what were my findings?²⁷ First, I was able to establish that Anabaptism was brought into Southern Tyrol by the Swiss veteran, Jörg Blaurock, during the spring of 1527, that is, during his first missionary journey down the Adige Valley. Blaurock was arrested and executed during his second journey in 1529. These findings clear up some of the confusion in Hutterite sources and previous literature as to the time of Blaurock’s presence and death in the Southern Tyrol. More importantly for this article, I was able to establish that among the first converts in the Bozen-Klausen area were two former confidants of Gaismair, Ulrich Kobl and Hans Gasser. Both were implicated in an alleged plot to assassinate one of Ferdinand’s administrators. While the relationship to Gaismair is not explicitly documented for others of the original Anabaptist group, indirect evidence points in that direction. Prior to their acceptance of Anabaptism, members of the original group belonged to a radical evangelical-sacramentist party whose network reached from Bozen to Klausen to Gufidaun to the Puster and its side valleys. This network of acquaintances, which predated Anabaptism, helps to explain the latter’s rapid spread and makes it tempting to infer acquaintances that went back to shared experiences during the Gaismair rebellion. The pre-Anabaptist sacramentists certainly shared part of Gaismair’s program, and their activity continued after the failed revolution. These sacramentists were not quietistic pacifists but boisterous radicals, who, in Klausen for example, attained notoriety already during Lent, 1526. Not only did they flaunt church regulations concerning the eating of meats but also nailed a threatening letter against the local priest to the door of the parish church. Later, with the help of local miners, they pledged to “defend and protect” the Gospel and its lay propagator Wölfl, a goatherder. Given these attitudes, it is almost inconceivable that the sacramentists, who a few months later turned Anabaptist, had not been Gaismair’s well-wishers. Nor is it surprising that the Anabaptist message, in turn, shows continuity with both the sacramentist and Gaismair program.

The presence of former supporters of Gaismair among the earliest Anabaptists of Southern Tyrol does not surprise. Blaurock, the Swiss advocate of Anabaptism in the region, was hardly a shining example of the *Stillen im Lande*. An impetuous provocateur, a disrupter of church services and a veteran of many

²⁷The greater details are spelled out in my essay, “Die Anfänge des Täufertums im Tirol” in *Alternatives Denken im Zeichen der Reformation*, ed. Günter Vogler (Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1991).

disputations, Blaurock unfolded a particularly fruitful ministry among Zurich's rebellious subjects.²⁸ There is no reason to believe that his mission to the Tyrol was of a different nature. It appealed presumably to members of the local population, alienated from or at odds with the Court at Innsbruck. Some of the alienation must have gone back to the suppression of Gaismair's movement only a few months earlier.

Gaismair's religious orientation had been proto-Zwinglian or Swiss. He and his spiritual advisors considered mass "an abomination before God and utterly unchristian."²⁹ The clergy were to be deprived of any claims to sacerdotal powers. Preaching was to replace mass as the center of worship. The church was to come under local control, stripped of its material wealth and power; its monasteries were to be dissolved, its hierarchy abolished, and its clergy made subject to common law. Local parishes were to choose and support their own pastors. Surplus funds from the local tithe were to be designated for the care of the sick and poor.

One of the most striking features of Gaismair's program was its iconoclasm. His *Landesordnung* (Article 6) cited Deut. 7:5, 25 as a divine mandate for the destruction, the hacking down, and the burning of idols. Images, shrines, and crucifixes were to be removed, chalices and precious metals to be collected, and minted into coins for the benefit of a stable currency.³⁰

When viewed against the above background, Anabaptism reveals striking continuities. Among early Anabaptists, Vintzentz Puchler had "broken a crucifix." Hans Grembsler had been guilty of kicking a statue he found "lying" by the road.³¹ Balthasar Schneider and a certain Cristan were responsible for the destruction of a painting.³² Hans Hueber engaged in "unbecoming talk" to the effect that the local church bell should be thrown from the tower.³³ Valentin Schneider interrupted a procession with shouts that everything the priest said about the eucharist "stinks and is a lie." While he was in the churchyard, Jörg Parugkher uttered invectives against "murder dens in which no Christian order prevailed."³⁴ And Jacob Gasser, possibly the brother of the former peasant leader Hans Gasser, was questioned about a statue that had been "shot and hacked" to pieces!³⁵ There were good reasons for questioning

²⁸Mathias Hui, "Vom Bauernaufstand zur Täuferbewegung. Entwicklung in der ländlichen Reformation am Beispiel des zürcherischen Grüninger Amtes," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 46 (1989): 113-44.

²⁹Klaassen, *Gaismair*, 33, 131.

³⁰The above comes from Gaismair's *Landesordnung*. *Ibid.*, 131-36.

³¹QGT, 14: *Oesterreich*, 3, 136-37.

³²Cristan had been executed at Rodeneck. The painting is described as the "Bild bei dem Vichter." *Ibid.*, 93.

³³*Ibid.*, March 31, 1534, 237-38.

³⁴*Ibid.*, June 1534, 258.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 31.

Gasser about such a symbolic act of violence. He had been guilty of one of the more spectacular sacrilegious acts associated with Anabaptists in the Tyrol.³⁶

On Saturday, January 27, 1532, stories spread in St. Andreasberg (Gericht Rodeneck) that something extraordinary would happen in church. On Sunday, Jacob Gasser interrupted mass, tore the plate with the wafers from the priest's hand, threw the wafers to the ground, stamped on them, then took the chalice from the altar and threw it against the church door. According to a report sent to Innsbruck, only the two priests and some of the women present seemed shocked. Two men escorted Gasser outside, facilitating his escape through the crowd that had gathered. One local supporter hailed Gasser's act as "a great miracle" and hoped that more would follow.³⁷

Gasser's action was, no doubt, an unusually bold demonstration of how far lay "enlightenment" or disrespect for the established church and its clergy had advanced among Anabaptists. By this time the main leader in the region was Jacob Hutter. Like Gaismair, Hutter rejected mass and images as an "abomination before God." He obviously condoned Gasser's action, baptizing Mrs. Gasser while she and her husband were on the run following the incident in Andreasberg. Of course, not every Anabaptist gave expression to his or her feelings as did Gasser. His attitude, if not his action, was nevertheless typical of Tyrolean Anabaptism. A few statements coming from other members of Hutter's circle should amplify this point. Katharina Tagwericher, a seventeen-year-old woman, declared, "The churches are a damned temple of idols, a whorehouse and a murderer's den in which the priests [*Pfaffen*] murder souls." She told her interrogators that, according to Jacob Hutter, they were "being persecuted because emperor, king, and lords feared that if one permitted the [true] Christians to continue, then their [the lords'] glory would diminish more and more." Asked about the sacrament of the altar, Katharina replied: "It is a damned, no good idol, invented by the priests," as was pedobaptism, "for the sake of money."³⁸

Many similar statements could be cited to demonstrate the utter alienation from and animosity toward the established religion. Church buildings were considered stone piles (*Steinhauffen*), murderers' dens (*Mördergruben*), temples of idols (*Götzentempl*). "Only whores and pimps enter the stone piles." Mass and the sacred eucharist were considered "an abomination and a stench before God," pedobaptism "a dirty wash" (*ain Sudlwesch*).³⁹ "The priest attempted to drive devils out of the child that is pure, while he, the priest himself, is

³⁶Was Jacob Gasser the brother of Hans Gasser? The government ordered that his *Urgichten* be obtained from Gufidaun, meaning that Jacob must have been previously imprisoned in Gufidaun. *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 14-15, 49-50.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 288-89.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

full of devils.”⁴⁰ In summary, the priests knew nothing of the Gospel and dealt in lies. They were selling the Lord by means of sacramental wafers in order to support their whores and unchristian lifestyle. The host was nothing but ordinary bread; traditional worship, a matter of the blind leading the blind. True followers of Christ could not participate, attend, or condone such ceremonies. “It was all against God and it was idolatry.”⁴¹ Anabaptists thought nothing of extreme unction. It was more important to die in the true faith than to be buried in consecrated soil. The corpse could just as well decompose on a gravel heap.⁴² Contrary to its claim, the traditional church had no powers over life in the next world and should have none in the present. The salvific role of intermediaries was rejected; “God the Almighty in heaven” alone was to be worshipped.⁴³ The church calendar with its saint days and holidays, as well as the rules and regulations concerning Lent, were mere human inventions. Oral confession to priests seemed not only unnecessary, but evil. No priestly sanctions were needed for marriage, the sacramental nature of which was rejected.⁴⁴

The statements above reveal that the break with church and tradition was drastic. Anabaptists refused to recognize any guides or spiritual authorities except their own.⁴⁵ They reorganized themselves into the true community of Christ without the aid of religious or secular authority. Yes, they were determined to work out their own salvation against the opposition of both. It should be obvious that given the intertwined nature of the two swords in the Tyrol, the Anabaptist position was bound to provoke persecution. Eventually this left only the alternative of sectarian exile.

Within their communities the Tyrolean Anabaptists attempted to live out a vision of Christian behavior and relationships patterned on the norms of the Gospel. Distinctions between laity and clergy were abolished. Laymen, usually literate artisans, assumed leadership roles; even women read the scriptures in meetings.⁴⁶ Such readings and discussions dwelt not only on criticisms of the established order, but addressed concerns of everyday living in neighborly love, justice, mutual aid, and fraternal discipline. True, compared

⁴⁰Ibid., 126, 151, 287-89.

⁴¹Hutter had taught “Es seien die bildnus in der kirchen lautter götznwerich. Das sacrament des altars sey ain teufl.” Ibid., 20, 21; cf. 72, 92, 151.

⁴²Ibid., 92.

⁴³Yet all answered with the highest respect for Mary, the “mother of God,” believing her to have been holy and undefiled before and after Jesus’ birth. Ibid., 92, 126-27; 135-37.

⁴⁴Ibid., 101-2.

⁴⁵Compare the statements of Valentein Fell [Föll] and Oswald Spiess, July 1532. Ibid., 72-73. Spiess related that before the meeting broke up, the Vorsteher told them “sie sollten untereinander gleich sein, auch keiner anderen geistlichen oder weltlichen Obrigkeit gehorchen, sondern nur den Vorstehern. . . .”

⁴⁶The principle prevailed, “sie sollen gleich sein.” QGT, 14: *Oesterreich*, 3: 25, 73.

with Gaismair's aims, the scale had been reduced. A clear distinction between insiders and outsiders came to mark the threshold between earlier populist programs and the Anabaptist community. Relations with the outside world were kept to a minimum but even then were governed by a new found dignity: "One should give rent (*Zins*) to the authority and to the nobles, but one should not give them reverence and not consider them higher than any other simple lay person."⁴⁷ Outsiders, whether king or emperor, should be considered Gentiles.

By way of summary, it may be argued that the either-or approach to Anabaptist continuity or discontinuity with the Gaismair rebellion must be discarded in favor of a more dialectical approach. Continuity can be argued in terms of similar attitudes towards existing structures and perceived social wrongs. The two movements shared similar anticlerical and iconoclastic attitudes.⁴⁸ Anabaptists rejected the hierarchical, sacramental, sacerdotal power structure of the Catholic church. There were, of course, discontinuities with Gaismair's program as well. Driven out of their homeland by severe persecution,⁴⁹ Anabaptists reorganized into separated, self-regulated communities. But while this meant giving up the transformation of the whole society it would be wrong to underestimate the social critical thrust represented even by this sectarian form of Anabaptism. In their attempt to reestablish ideal apostolic communities of uncoerced equality and fraternity without the aid of and even against the emerging early modern state, they provided not only an alternative vision but also an alternative model of social organization that remains provocative into the present.

⁴⁷Ibid., 92.

⁴⁸Ibid., 556-57. Although I here emphasize the radical-social profile of Anabaptism in order to illustrate continuity with the Gaismair project, I should also note other features. Anabaptists were recognized for their moral earnestness. One woman, under suspicion of Anabaptist sympathies, defended herself against the charges by claiming she and her husband drank and engaged in profanities, something Anabaptists did not do! While this statement comes from 1545, the noted tendencies were present or latent from the beginning. Anabaptists distinguished themselves by their upright, moral living. Many examples could be cited. Paul Rumer, who wore fancy clothes in order to impress, was asked by his potential mother-in-law, an Anabaptist, "whether he did not want to become morally upright and give up his pride." Ibid., 157. Ruprecht Hueber was asked whether he did not want to repent of his sinful and unrighteous living. Ibid., 176.

⁴⁹I have described in detail the vicious trial, torture, and execution of one of the Anabaptist leaders in "The Trial and Martyrdom of the Hutterite Hans Pürchner," *Fides et Historia* 22 (1990): 18-24.