

Dear Brothers and Sisters, as I promised last week, there is the study on the Anabaptists and Marriage and Divorce from the 1500s. The source for this study is William's great work, *The Radical Reformation of the 1500s*, which brother Royce Smith obtained for me to review. This work is very large and well documented. Brother Robert Lackey can supply this work.; Debtor.

**ANABAPTIST STUDIES A REVIEW
OF
THE RADICAL REFORMATION
Chapter 20
By George H. Williams**

In this Review I hope to demonstrate the various concepts about marriage, divorce and remarriage during the late 1,400s and early and mid 1,500s. I hope to investigate the earlier origins about the concepts of Marriages and how they became a part of the lives of the Papists, Protestants and Anabaptists. Each of these three groups held to differing ideas about this subject. It seems to me that each of these three concepts had a much earlier origin than the late 1,400s or the early 1,500s.

I will identify each group with their respective views. I will try to hold forth the various ideas among the Anabaptists, show the reasons for their ideas, and give some brief history surrounding the different groupings of the Anabaptists during these times.

Questionable Witnesses and Testimony

Much of what we consider is from hostile witnesses and is therefore questionable at best. Many of these witnesses against the Anabaptists gave their statements either under torture or in the face of torture. I feel most of us know that such testimony is worthless. The Anabaptists' direct statements are the only safe testimony about their respective beliefs. Others may give truthful accounts about their practices merely from observation, but we should never take as reliable any testimony given under torture or the fear of torture.

The Three Different Views of Marriage

Here are the three differing concepts about Marriage:

1. The Papal Concept, One Marriage for all time. The Papists held to Canon Law Marriages. They considered marriage to be for a lifetime with no exceptions. However, under the right conditions some Catholics could secure an annulment. There were no divorces allowed.

2. The Protestant Concepts, the Anglicans excepted. The Protestants maintained that Marriages should be for life but allowed the innocent party to secure a divorce for adultery and desertion. The Anglicans opposed this and held manly to the Papal concept in the main.

3. The Anabaptists in the main held to Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage not only for the innocent part, but also this additional reason. If both marriage partners were members of an Anabaptist church, and the church excluded and banned one of the partners, the other one was to separate in board and bed from the banned one. If, in due time, the banned member did not repent and become restored to the church, then the innocent partner was expected to divorce the banned member and only remarry in the Lord. The Anabaptists held this so strongly that if the innocent

party did not divorce the banned member, then the innocent party would also become excluded and banned.

The Anabaptists considered these as just grounds for divorce and remarriage:

1. Adultery;
2. The believer leaving the unbeliever, or the unbeliever leaving the believer, either way;
3. Separation and eventual divorce from the Banned mate.

Some of the Papists and the Anglicans allowed for separation, but not for divorce and remarriage. Some of the Protestants allowed for both. Yet they did require nor expect one partner to separate from and divorce the other one simply over unbelief or church banning or exclusion. The Anabaptists did. In this, they were unique. These three concepts of Marriage and divorce can therefore be summed up in this manner:

1. The Papal-Canon Idea, annulment but no divorces;
2. Renaissance-Protestant Ideas, allowed separation, marriage and divorce under certain conditions;
3. The Anabaptist idea demanded divorce and remarriage in the Lord under the Ban and other conditions.

The Medieval Antecedents of Marriage among the fifteenth century
Anabaptists, Protestants and Papists

The Papal Concept

The Papal Canon Law concept is founded upon the principal of strong central control, the Pope. From the Pope this control flowed down to various stages within the Papal Church. This included Princes, Kings and other Rulers and the various heads of families. Marriages under the conditions were never voluntary or grounded in love, unless in the cases of the lowly peasants and surfs and then only by securing the necessary permission from the powers that be.

The Papal concept maintained that a person did not have the power of self-choice or free will in his own baptism or in the Marriage State. Some men could chose properly in the Marriage State, but never women. Kings, Fathers and other rulers made the decisions regarding marriages. These decisions mostly depended on financial and land power considerations. Young women had to choice in this matter and often went into marriages only for making their father stronger in his land claims or richer in his treasury.

Secret or candelstine marriages were allowed, but only if they finalized in the church under its blessings. Families could arrange marriages but only if they also finalized in the church and under its blessings. The Papal Church elevated what was natural, found in it the dignity of a Sacrament, so subjected Marriage to Ecclestical Law, and therefore established its marriage courts, pages 765, 766. The Papal Church, in its Canon Laws provided for marriage under Canonical Law and control, and allowed for secret marriages so long as they would later be solemnized in the Church. However, the Canons had no place for martial breakdown and divorces, allowing only for annulments, page 766. The Papal Church's marriage laws allowed for separation, but no divorce, but, as stated before, did allow for annulments of marriage, page 766.

By the late 1,400s, the papal Church's marriage laws became increasingly in conflict with Social advancement. Many writers began to attack the Papal Canon Laws of Marriage in the 1,400s:

- a. Cinco Rinucini of Florentine;

- b. Coluccio Salutati-Chancellor of Florence, died in 1406;
- c. Francesco Barbaro, Venice, 1415;
- d. Leonard Bruni, Dante's biographer, 1435;
- e. Lorenzo Valla, d. 1457; page 767.

The Papal Concept is grounded on Canon Law. Its roots go back into the origin of Canon Law. This began during the sixth and seventh centuries after the establishment of Popery. Certain parts of this concept are much older and go beyond Papal countries. Under this concept Marriage is a church sacrament. To violate this church sacrament would bring damnation without the proper forgiveness and restoration.

The Renaissance-Magisterial Protestant Concepts of Marriage

As certain Papal Priests and Nuns withdrew from the Papal Church, they started questioning their former vows about celibacy. In due time many of them married. As the Protestant ideas about marriage developed, taking it from the Church and allowing the Civil Magistrate to perform it, also concepts governing divorces grew. The Protestants and others grounded these concepts in the older Medieval and Renaissance ideas that separated Marriage from a Church Sacrament and placed it under the concept of a voluntary mutual consent or contract. They differed from the Anabaptists on this point in that the Anabaptists did not allow for any Papal or Protestant Magistrates to have any more say over Marriages or any other things involving their life and service to Christ, than the Papal Church did.

Erasmus and Cornelius

Erasmus and Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettersheim, d. 1530, carried the Renaissance approach to marriage even further. An Englishman translated Agrippa's *The Commendation of Marriage* into English in 1540; p. 767. Erasmus' great work, *Encomium Matrimonii*, first was published in 1497 and later from Basel in 1518, p. 767. In Erasmus the purpose for marriage is love and companionship. His foundation was in equality and humanity in the common life, pages 767-768. After Erasmus noted the sexual problems of his days, caused by the canonically celebrate clergy, he noted that chaste married couples fully merited the honor given to ascetic virginity, page 768. He argued against loveless marriages and legitimated divorces for unhappy couples, page 768.

Erasmus and Divorce

When Erasmus allowed for divorce, he used an much older argument which many before him had used, going back to Origen in the third century, which was, Christ divorced the Synagogue to become the Bridegroom of the Church, page 768.

Juan Luis Vives, 1492-1540, accompanied Catherine to the Court and Marriage Bed of Henry the VIII. Page 768. Vives wrote *The Office and Duties of a Husband*, published in London in 1550, after his death.

Luther and Concubines

Luther and many other Protestants broke the bonds of Canonical Marriages and priestly Celibacy further in several writings, ps. 767-771. Canon or Papal marriages forced and maintained the practice of creating many, many concubines, page 769. In his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther sought to correct the practice of Canon Marriage and Priestly Celibacy, both of which created a society abundant with concubines and bastards, page 769.

The Nationalist Protestants

The Nationalist Protestants broke from the older Monasteries, celibacy, married and became active members of their local civil communities and civil life, page 755. After they married they often led in initiating municipal suspension of brothels and in turning over the Convents of Celibates into the places for rearing of orphans and the bastards of priestly concubines, page 756. There existed some differences between the Church of England and Scotland and the Continental Reformers, page 756, ft. I have already discussed this.

The Anabaptist-Christian Concept of Marriage

In the Radical Reformation, that of the Anabaptists, there existed a much wider range of martial ideas and practices than in the Magisterial (Protestant) Reformation, page 757. Among many of the Anabaptists the ecclesiastical dimension of marriage was exalted above its civil and temporal functions, page 758. This did not mean that the church performed the marriage, but rather, that it concerned marriages in the church.

The concept of marriage by the mutual consent of the partners, rather than as dictated by social or economic considerations of the two families, which was so central to radical ideas concerning covenant marriages, had already developed as an impact during the Middle Ages, page 765. The Gregorian Reform of the late 11th century had begun to systematize laws and the persuasive Christian and Pagan customs in order to constitute marriage as alike a natural, spiritual and contractual state, page 766. The Anabaptists took marriage into a much higher state than either the Papists or the Protestants. I will now turn my attention toward some of their writers and their concepts.

In the course of reading this chapter, 20th, I came across several Anabaptist writers. I will briefly note them and some of their main works and points as well.

- 1) Dirk Philips-Enchiridino, 1569, this is his Systematic Theology, 650, and it contained most of his known works.
- 2) He held three main points:
 - a. believer's baptism as a sign of marriage between the believer and Christ;
 - b. The Lord's Supper Banquet with the Risen Christ;
 - c. The stern and swift executed BAN.
- 3) In addition Dirk Philips issued this work, On Christian Marriage, in 1568. His views of the church and the Marriage State came from his views of the heavenly humanity of Jesus Christ, pages 750-753.
- 4) There were some differences between Philips and Meno Simons.
- 5) Dirk extended the Paradisaic idea to marriage. The Paradisaic character of Christian monogamy, propounded in his earlier work on The Spiritual Restitution, was amplified in Christian matrimony.
- 6) He closely related marriage between two partners to the relationship of the Second Adam, Christ, to the Second Eve, the Church.
- 7) The Reborn, those who partake of the Divine Nature of Christ, can only truly be joined together in Holy Wedlock.
- 8) Separation, meaning divorce, is obligatory when one spouse is definitively banned, page 753.
- 9) He, and other Anabaptist leaders, stressed the Covenant of Marriage over the Sacrament of marriage.
- 10) Among these Anabaptists the BAN covered both the Bed and Board. The spouses of the banned were expected to separate, divorce fully in all things, including both bed and board.

- 11) Dirk Philips and the 7 Ordinances of the True Church:
 - a. The Pure and Unfalified doctrine of the Divine Word, with true and proper ministers, prophets (preachers) apostles (emissaries) and elders;
 - b. The Two Tokens, baptism and the Lord's Supper;
 - c. Footwashing, which is a new emphasis;
 - d. Evangelical separation from the world, including the ban;
 - e. The Commandment of love and a communal mutual care;
 - f. The Heavenly Philosophy, of keeping all Jesus' commandments;
 - g. All Christians must suffer and be persecuted, while the world has joy and the faithful have temporary tribulations in this world, pages 752-753.
- 12) Dirk Phillips published in work On Christian Marriage in 1658. There is also much on Christ's heavenly humanity from pages 750-753.
- 13) In addition Dirk published his The Sending of Preachers and Teachers.
- 14) Obbe Philips, Dirk's brother, Frank and Schwenckfeld were the leaders among the Spiritualists, page 752.
- 15) At this point in studies I am not able to distinguish the differences between the two groups.
- 16) Dirk seemed to emphasize the need of preaching the Law in order to prepare for preaching God's grace, perhaps the Spiritualists did not, page 752.
- 17) Dirk Meno, and Adam Pastor all received both reordination as well as rebaptism.
- 18) They maintained a spiritual succession in the Melchiorite sense of a line of rebaptized converts who were then in turn set aside by the leaders as elders or by the laying on of hands, page 752.
- 19) Dirk Philips in his The Church of God, translated in SAW, 226, footnote, set forth the Evangelical Anabaptist Concepts of the true church in the following:
 - a. first gathered among the angels in heaven;
 - b. reconstructed in Paradise;
 - c. suffered some defection and corruption from the fall of the angles and later Adam's fall;
 - d. nevertheless there had been one great succession of faithful men and women winding their way like a caravan through the centuries;
 - e. among the members of this band, the image of Christ has been restored;
 - f. Dirk held that the Apostolic Church had been truly restored.
- 20) Meno Simons' work, The Foundation Book issued in 1540.

In Conclusion to Review One

The Anabaptists and Protestants held many of the earlier concepts about Marriage and Divorce. As is true of most other concepts, one man is not the originator of any of these ideas. Men built upon men before them.

The Anabaptists took marriage higher than the natural Protestants and Papists by placing it into the heavenly order. True Holy Marriage only existed among the born again believers. Their marriages were mutual contracts. When the church banned one of the partners, the other was to divorce him or her if there was no restoration. They held that adultery, desertion and the ban constituted true reason for divorce and remarriage in the Lord. The main parts over which the Anabaptists differed about marriage were two fold:

1. Its being a heavenly part only true between two believers;
2. The ban being a just cause for divorce and remarriage.

There were other concepts among the Anabaptists that I hope to review later. These would be Familism, Polygamy, and the differences between the Radical Separatists

When we come to the 1600s, we are introduced to the Particular Baptists during the 1600s. There are three important works from which we can draw some conclusions:

1. John Milton's work on Marriage, Divorce and remarriage;
2. Robert Bailey, Anabaptism the True Foundation of Brownism;
3. Thomas Edward's Gangera.

John Milton was a Baptist of sorts, and a defender of the English and Welsh Particular Baptists. The other two were Presbyterians.

In Milton's work we find the some concept held which popularized the Anabaptists of the 1500s. When Robert Bailey wrote his work, he mentioned Milton as the standard Baptist defender on the issue of Marriage, divorce and remarriage. In Edward's Gangarea, he does makes fun of the Baptist concept of marriage as a mutual contract or agreement between the man and the woman.

Briefly we find that these Particular Baptists of the early and mid 1600s held that:

1. Marriage was a social contact, not a state or church ordinance;
2. It was an agreement between two consenting adults;
3. The ceremony usually happened in front of the church and/ or family;
4. The husband would make up a contract, sign it and present it to the wife and the family members and church elders would witness it;
5. When a divorce occurred, the husband would write up a bill of divorce and present it to the wife before the church and family.

If these old Baptists differed from the Anabaptists on these issues, they should have written out these differences. According to the Pedobaptists this was one of the same concepts which showed that the English and Welsh Baptists were one with the Anabaptists of the 1500s.

If the Baptists of the Second London era did not hold to the Anabaptist concepts and the concepts of the First London era, then it was simply another of their many departures from the earlier Particular Baptists.

I have read most, if not all, the Particular Baptist materials from the 1600s which is available from The Wing Collection. I have not found any definite work on this point other than John Milton's great work.

If these old and true Particular Baptists differed from Milton, and the Anabaptists of the 1500s, then it remains to be proven.