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(Review) The Anabaptists

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Comments

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Anabaptists. By Hans-Jürgen Goertz. London and New York: Routledge. 1996. Pp. xviii + 215. \$65.00 ISBN 0-415-08238-2.

Hans-Jürgen Goertz's important study of German and Swiss Anabaptism was originally published in German in 1980. This translation is based on the second revised edition published in 1988 and includes a number of significant revisions made for the English edition. The heart of Goertz's argument, however, has not changed since the original edition. He argues that Anabaptism arose out of the powerful anticlerical impulse of the early Reformation and that the historical experience of the different groups of Anabaptists, rather than their theological differences, led to the great variety of Anabaptist experience by the late sixteenth century. Goertz's most important contribution is consistently and effectively to link Anabaptism and anticlericalism, reminding scholars, as he did in his *Pfaffenhass und gross Geschrei*, of the importance of popular anticlericalism for the success of the Protestant Reformation.

Although Goertz has written a new introduction and updated the bibliography, the first four (essentially unchanged) chapters remain the heart of the book. Chapter one gives a clear and concise overview of the early history of Anabaptism, emphasizing the diversity of this movement. Goertz does concede that there were a number of "common distinguishing features" of Anabaptism. All Anabaptists rejected infant baptism and practiced an adult "baptism of faith," and almost all Anabaptists inspired both social unrest and persecution wherever they appeared. These common features were far from sufficient to create unity, however, and Goertz goes on to trace the development of the varieties of Anabaptism in the sixteenth century. Goertz begins with the early links between Anabaptism, anticlerical impulses, and the Zwinglian Reformation in the region around Zurich in the 1520s. He then follows the development of separatist forms of "free church" Anabaptism, which gradually came to dominate Anabaptist ecclesiology as well as the day-to-day experience of most Anabaptists.

Goertz's discussion of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster (1534) provides a telling example of the links between social and political experience and the development of Anabaptist theology. Goertz does not follow the tendency of many scholars of Anabaptism, who argue that this militant and violently apocalyptic moment was an aberration from mainstream Anabaptism. He argues instead that both leaders and the rank and file of the Münster Anabaptists had close links to Dutch and north German Anabaptism. Rather than a bizarre side road, Münster represented a version of the apocalyptic tendency found elsewhere in Anabaptism, and developed in a particular direction due to the combination of militant communalist and anticlerical elements found throughout the early

Reformation, all exacerbated by the experience of the siege of Münster by the forces of authority.

For Goertz, then, "Münster provides another example of the intimate correspondence between Anabaptist thought and political experience" and he returns to this point regularly in chapters two, three, and four. In other ways, however, these chapters are very much in the mainstream of Anabaptist scholarship. In chapter two, on moral improvement, chapter three, on baptism, and chapter four on the Anabaptist view of the relationship between church (or congregation) and the state, Goertz carefully and clearly explains the nature and development of the central aspects of Anabaptist theology. Chapters three and four, in particular, follow the pattern of discussing the views of leading Anabaptist theologians, like Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Hut, Pilgram Marpeck, and Menno Simons. Goertz's presentations of these thinkers is always lively and articulate, but he moves at times away from his insistence on the link between experience and theology.

Goertz has written a new, albeit brief, chapter on the role of women and "simple" Anabaptists for the English version, which in some ways complements the last chapter, entitled "Heretics, Rebels, and Martyrs." These chapters open up a number of important questions about the everyday experience of Anabaptism, but do not take this discussion very far. Goertz suggests, for example, that the "expression" of Anabaptism by "simple" believers was quite homogeneous, despite the heterogeneity of Anabaptist theology. He also argues, in a brief three page discussion, that women played a very important role in Anabaptism. Both these ideas need further development, as Goertz himself recognizes. The book also contains an extensive and very useful appendix of sources illustrating important issues covered in the main text.

Despite its many virtues, this book has become somewhat dated since its original publication more than fifteen years ago. It remains, however, important for anyone interested in religious developments in sixteenth-century Germany, especially since it remains one of the best efforts to link the social and political experience of Anabaptists with theological developments within Anabaptism.

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Ritual in Early Modern Europe. By Edward Muir. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997. Pp. xii + 291. \$54.95. ISBN 0-521-40169-0.

This book represents the eleventh and most recent publication in the excellent series "New Approaches to European History." Meant to introduce undergraduates to major themes and problems of European history