THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Heritage Topic: Reforming the Reformation (1525-1689) Spring 2024 Introduction The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topic this week is Reforming the Reformation, which covers the years 1525 to 1689. The Anabaptists By 1524, some of Ulrich Zwingli's disciples were frustrated that the reformation in Zurich was not proceeding fast enough. A group of pastors led by Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and Felix Mantz tried to convince the Zurich city council to reject the mass, icons, and infant baptism, but they were unsuccessful. On January 21, 1525, these men and a small group of their followers were meeting at the Mantz's home. They embraced believer's baptism by pouring. They called themselves the Swiss Brethren, but Zwingli, Luther, and Catholics called them Anabaptists ("re-baptizers"). Eventually, the magisterial reformers and Catholics applied the Anabaptist label to anyone who wasn't Reformed or Lutheran. The Anabaptists were more radical than the Lutherans and Reformed because they sought to bypass all human traditions and restore pure apostolic Christianity. They rejected both the Catholic Church and the magisterial reformers because these movements continued to embrace practices that the Anabaptists believed were based upon unbiblical traditions. Other leading Anabaptists included Michael Sattler, Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Menno Simons. Anabaptists rejected the territorial church and argued for congregational freedom, religious liberty, and regenerate church membership. They rejected infant baptism in favor of various forms of believer's baptism. Most were pacifists, refused to take oaths, and argued



that Christians couldn't serve in government positions. Anabaptists were very diverse theologically. They were all over the map on justification. Some were legalistic. A few became violent revolutionaries. Most held to what would eventually be called an Arminian view of salvation.

Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists relentlessly persecuted the Anabaptists. Zwingli had Mantz drowned, Sattler burned at the stake, and Hubmaier tortured on the rack. Hubmaier was eventually burned at the stake by Catholics. Most Anabaptists who weren't killed were forced into exile. Marpeck was expelled from the Reformed city of Strasbourg. Even Anabaptists who managed to die of old age, such as Simons, were forced to spend their lives on the run from magisterial Protestants, Catholics, and the secular authorities with whom they collaborated. Despite the persecution, Anabaptists were the Reformation movement that most emphasized evangelism and church planting.

Puritans and Separatists

When Mary Tudor was queen of England from 1553–1558, she exiled many Protestant pastors to the Continent. Many of those pastors moved to Reformed cities such as Geneva and Strasbourg, where they were mentored by leading reformers. They adopted strong convictions about Calvinism, the regulative principle of worship, and presbyterian polity. When Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558 and the exiles returned to England, they were ready to see the Church of England become a Reformed national church. However, the Elizabethan Religious Settlement was too moderate in its Calvinism, resembled Catholicism in its worship, and retained bishops. Before long, the exiles and other like-minded Reformed Protestants became known as Puritans because of their desire to purify the Church of England.

For two generations, the English crown stifled and sometimes suppressed Puritanism. Puritans were coerced to conform to the *Book of Common Prayer*, were removed from teaching posts at Oxford and Cambridge, and were expelled from their pulpits. In response to the Puritans, most Anglican leaders moved toward Arminianism, embraced semi-Catholic rituals and sacramentalism, and remained vigorously committed to the rule of bishops. Yet, Puritanism became increasingly popular through an emphasis on doctrine, discipleship, and electoral politics. The leading early Puritans were Thomas Cartwright, William Perkins, and William Ames. In Scotland, John Knox and his followers advocated similar reforms against Mary Queen of Scots.

Some Puritans became even more radical, arguing that the Church of England was apostate and that the way

forward was to emphasize congregational freedom and regenerate church membership. They were called **Separatists** because, unlike the mainstream Puritans, they rejected the Anglican Church completely, much as the Anabaptists had rejected the Reformed and Lutheran churches on the Continent. In 1580, **Robert Browne** formed an independent church in Norwich, which relocated to Holland in 1581 to escape persecution. In 1582, he wrote *A Treatise on Reformation without Tarrying for Anie*, which was a tract calling upon true reformers to leave the Church of England.

John Greenwood and Henry Barrow established a Separatist church in London in the early 1580s; both were arrested and imprisoned. In 1583, the new pastor of the church, Francis Johnson, relocated the entire congregation to Amsterdam, renaming it the Ancient Church. Other Separatists followed this pattern and moved to Holland. In 1607, John Robinson led the Pilgrim Church to Leiden. In the 1620, this group secured a royal charter to relocate to New England, where they founded the Plymouth Colony. After 1620, most Separatists relocated to New England rather than Holland.

Though their respective strategies were different, the Puritans and Separatists shared many common emphases. Both groups were Calvinists, advocated the regulative principle of worship, rejected the *Book of Common Prayer*, affirmed infant baptism, and emphasized church discipline. Both also rejected episcopalianism, though they disagreed over whether presbyterianism or congregationalism was the most biblical alternative. Both Puritans and Separatists are normally just considered different types of Puritans by modern Christians.

The Baptists

In 1608, **John Smyth** led his Separatist church to relocate to Amsterdam. The following year, Smyth and his church rejected infant baptism in favor of believer's baptism by pouring. They had become convinced that infant baptism was a Catholic practice that was one of the last unreformed aspects of Separatism. Smyth was friends with some Mennonites in Amsterdam, and by 1610 he had rejected Calvinism and applied to have his church join the Mennonites, which led to a church split. In 1612, **Thomas Helwys** led the faction that didn't want to join the Mennonites back to London, where they planted the first Baptist church in England and the first permanent Baptist

church. Helwys also rejected Calvinism, so his movement came to be called the **General Baptists** because they believed in a general atonement.

In 1616, Henry Jacob planted a Separatist church in London, called the J-L-J Church after the initials of its first three pastors. Between 1630 and 1639, the church split numerous times. In 1639, John Splisbury, the pastor of one of those splits, led his congregation to embrace believer's baptism by pouring. Spilsbury's church is probably the first Particular Baptist church; they were Calvinists who embraced particular (limited) atonement. In 1642, the J-L-J Church itself embraced Baptist convictions, opting for immersion over pouring. By 1650, both General and Particular Baptists had embraced immersion as their standard baptismal practice.

In 1630, Separatists established the Massachusetts Bay colony in New England. One of the early pastors to settle there was Roger Williams. In 1636, Williams fled the colony after being convicted of heresy and sentenced to return to England. His heresies consisted of arguing for freedom of religion and advocating Native American land rights. Later that year, he founded Providence Plantation (Rhode Island). In 1638, Williams rejected infant baptism, embraced believer's baptism by pouring, and founded the First Baptist Church of Providence, RI. He soon rejected his Baptist views, but the Providence church continued to be Baptist. In 1643, John Clarke founded the First Baptist Church of Newport, RI, which became the first known church in America to practice baptism by immersion.

Like the Separatists, Baptists advocated congregational freedom, regenerate church membership, and religious liberty. Through the Separatists, Baptists also inherited mainstream Protestant convictions about the supreme authority of Scripture, justification by faith alone, and penal substitutionary atonement. But they combined these emphases with a couple of views championed by the Anabaptists: believer's baptism and an emphasis on intentional evangelism and church planting. Baptists were a new group that was similar in various ways to both Separatists and Anabaptists, but Baptists weren't identified completely with either of those movements.

Civil War, Restoration, and Religious Toleration

Puritans finally gained control of Parliament in 1642, resulting in the English Civil War between Parliament and

the crown. The Puritans won the war, beheaded Charles I in 1649, and exiled his son, Charles II, to the Continent. Between 1649 and 1653, Parliament remade the Church of England into a Presbyterian state church, though they granted toleration to Independents, Baptists, and Quakers. In 1653, Oliver Cromwell dissolved Parliament and declared himself the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England. During this time, several well-known Puritans were at the height of their careers, including John Owen, Richard Baxter, and John Bunyan.

After Cromwell's death in 1659, his son Richard briefly ruled, though he was removed by a group of generals for ineptitude. The exiled Charles II was invited to return to England in 1661. Before being crowned, Charles promised that the religious changes of the Commonwealth would continue under his rule. However, the new Parliament was fiercely anti-Puritan and passed a series of restrictive laws that reversed the changes of the previous decade. Thousands of pastors lost their pulpits and hundreds were imprisoned. Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists began to emphasize their commonalities more than their differences. Collectively, they became known as **nonconformists** or **dissenters**.

Charles supported Parliament, though he shocked everyone when he converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed in 1685. In 1688, the wife of James II became pregnant. A group of Protestant nobles encouraged William of Orange, a Dutch nobleman and the king's son-in-law, to invade England and overthrow James. When William's forces landed in England, James refused to fight and fled the country. William asked Parliament to determine how the nation should be ruled. It was decided that James had abdicated the throne when he fled and William and his wife Mary (James's daughter) were the rightful joint rulers of England.

The ascension of William and Mary has been called the Glorious Revolution because it ended a century and a half of political turmoil without any bloodshed. In 1689, Parliament passed a new English Bill of Rights that included an Act of Toleration, which granted religious freedom to most nonconformists who agreed to take an oath of allegiance to the crown and pay tithes to the Church of England. Though Puritans had lost the battle for the Church of England, those who held to Puritan beliefs (and many others) were now more or less free to practice their dissenting faith.