

A credit course on the history and theology of Anabaptism will be taught at the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad, Thursday evening, 6-9 p.m., beginning Sept. 17, 2009.

The course is open to auditors from the Saskatoon church community

Taught by Walter Klaassen, Adjunct Professor

Title - THE FOURTH REFORMATION (ANABAPTISM) 1525-1561

The course will describe and engage the Anabaptist reformation of the church in the German lands, still referred to generally as the Radical Reformation. The title The Fourth Reformation is chosen here to emphasize *reformation* rather than *radical*. It is a fourth reform movement contemporary with the German (Martin Luther), the Swiss (Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin) and the English (Thomas Cranmer). These last three had some basic similarities such as close co-operation between church and government in carrying out reform. The fourth reform movement rejected that co-operation, especially the role of government as church disciplinarian, and opted for a form of congregational church government with the baptism of believing adults.

The Fourth Reformation was an integral part of the great religious, political and social upheaval of 16th century Europe and will be studied as such. Its roots are to be found in the early popular stages of both the German and the Swiss reforms. Part of that early popular reform was the peasant uprising of 1524-1525, when people in village and town called for choosing their own priests and judging their teaching. They responded enthusiastically to the Reformation call to locate the church's authority in the Bible rather than in popes and councils, and seized for themselves the church's prerogative to interpret Scripture.

In contrast to the centralising approach to reform which characterised the German, Swiss, and English reformations, Anabaptism was decentralised, resulting in a variety of Anabaptisms. However, after a decade of trial and error most Anabaptists agreed on the baptism of professed believers, on the rejection of all violence, and on a disciplined church order. Refusal to accept the protection of governments made them vulnerable. Their views about the role of government, and their doctrine of the church with its rejection of the baptism of infants were considered subversive. They were persecuted by the Catholics and the defenders of the other three reformations for the next century. Despite this, the Anabaptist churches, later called Mennonite, survived.

The course will consist of lectures and seminars, with student papers forming the basis of the seminar sessions. Both lectures and seminars will deal with the origins, teachings, and survival techniques of Anabaptists in the religious-political storms of the 16th and 17th centuries. There will be discussion on why they were then perceived to be socially, politically and religiously subversive and of the draconian measures used against them. There will be an attempt to describe the nature of the fourth reform in its 16th century context, comparing it with the other three, and identifying its strengths and weaknesses.

For further inquiries call registrar Colleen Walker at 975-1558
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