

The events at  
munster 1534-5 in  
causing the failure of  
the radical  
reformation es...



Munster played a big role in causing the failure of the Radical Reformation but was not the sole reason. Munster was an example of how a town could be overridden by a few people who preached what the authorities wanted to hear. It was the actions of the few involved that truly set off the destruction of the Radical Reformation. It was, however, not the only reason as the Radical Reformation and the Anabaptists were doomed from the start. It was in the very essence of Anabaptism that caused them to be persecuted and things were only made worse with their belief in 'nachfolge' (salvation through suffering). There were so many different groups that the only reason they were called the 'Anabaptists' was that they all loosely believed in adult baptism, with the rest of their beliefs varying. Also, they seemed so much of a threat that the Catholics and Protestants thought that they should band together to fight them off. Yes, the Anabaptists never had a chance.

So what happened at Munster? Well, in 1531 the Catholic Bishop had been run out of the town by Lutheran preachers who began to start reforming the town. Then in January 1534 Anabaptist missionaries visited and baptised many of the Lutheran Town Council. By February an Anabaptist council had been elected and when Matthys and Bockelson arrived they took control and proclaimed the town was a 'New Jerusalem'. By this time however the Bishop of Munster had organised the recapture of the town. The fact that it was the actions of a few individuals proves that the religion as a whole was not interested in conquest or battle. After Matthys died in an attempt to break the siege Bockelson took control and an extreme rise took place where he proclaimed himself a prophet and lived in luxury while the people starved. Churches were destroyed, punishments were given for the most trivial

reasons, men could take many wives and the tension rose in the town. After the Bishop's troops restored order many Anabaptists were executed.

The events at Mnster were down to the delusions of a few men and that resulted in the killing of many Anabaptists. The people as a whole were nothing like the extremists in Mnster, they were peaceful and respectful of other people's beliefs. However the rest of the population did not see the Anabaptists as peaceful, kind, loving people when there were incidents such as Mnster to hear about. A group of people is only as peaceful as its most extreme members. The deaths of thousands of people at Mnster could not be over looked by the masses, they had to do something to stop them from doing anything again. This was the view of many at the time and although was not correct, the Radical Reformation, from that point on would receive great opposition. Another example would be Mnzer and the Zwickau Prophets, " Thomas Mnzer...combined a mystical, spiritualist approach to faith with a radical activist streak, which turned him into a genuine revolutionary thinker" - Johnston and Scribner. Another branch of extremism going into a town, Wittenberg, and preaching apocalyptic messages that the world would end. This was one of the causes of the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 and all because of a few people going in with extreme views and giving the rest of the people a bad name.

It was in the very essence of Anabaptism however that was the prime reason for the failure of the Radical Reformation. They had the ability to split towns apart and cause great mayhem. There were many social and political threats from the Anabaptists, whether this was just speculation by secular

authorities or whether they actually wanted to cause harm was not the concern of these princes, they were to be stomped out as fast as possible.

The authorities did not like the diversity that the Anabaptists represented as they would not be able to control them efficiently. They did not like their semi communist style of living as this was a definite threat to the hierarchy. Also if they weren't a member of the Church in the way the rest of the Christians were, then they would not be paying tithes or anything towards the Church. The political side was no different, there was plenty of evidence to suggest that the Anabaptists were a liability and that they were a threat to the safety of the people. The Peasants War and the events at Mnster proved their danger sufficiently to any leader and so it didn't matter what the rest of the people were like as they knew what they were capable of. Also deeply embedded into their beliefs were that, the more they were persecuted the more chance they had of getting into salvation. So them being persecuted by all the many different groups only solidified their beliefs that what they were doing was the right course.

There were so many different sects of Anabaptism and their beliefs were so diffused that they would never have been able to pull off a successful takeover of any town, " By 1527 the radical wing of evangelical movement had grown more rapidly, and encompassed great diversity of belief" - Johnston and Scribner. Examples of the different scattered groups are The Huttites, The Melchiorites, The Mennonites, The Spirituals, The Moravian Brethren and The Hutterites. Each has a different belief other than adult baptism and each with a different leader and base location. It would have been impossible for any of them to have accomplished a huge amount as <https://assignbuster.com/the-events-at-munster-1534-5-in-causing-the-failure-of-the-radical-reformation-essay-sample/>

there were so few people in each sect compared to the group as a whole so is another reason for their failure. This was the reason why it was so easy for the Catholic and Protestant forces to take out each little part individually.

Following on from my last point, the Anabaptists were viewed as such a huge threat that the Catholic and Protestant forces teamed up to battle against them. The danger of other reforming groups were of less importance to worry about at this time i. e. Lutheran Princes. This can be explained as because they were on the home ground of the Catholic and Protestant armies so they were more important to get rid of first. The fact that these two sides would fight side by side in order to destroy the Radical Reformation just shows that they were doomed from the start. Also they had no real support from any princes and so had no secular authority behind them. They were all alone with no-one besides themselves to say what they were like or what their intentions were. " They were a religion of the poor and artisan class" - Stanton.

In conclusion the Radical Reformation was never going to work as the seeds had already been sowed in their own destruction. The events at Munster were an example of things that could come. After that, no-one would trust the Anabaptists and so would never be accepted. This was all down to the work of the few like Mnzer, the Zwickau Prophets and Bockelson. Their belief that when they were persecuted this was a sign of them getting closer to salvation did not help them one bit as when authorities would shoo them away they did not see the bad in this and so continued as they did before. The organisation of the man many different sections did not exist and the beliefs of the different groups were so varied that they would never have  
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been able to work together anyway. There was no support from princes and even if they did the with the Catholic and Protestant forces teaming up, they wouldn't have had a chance. The events at Mnster were important to showing other people the extreme side of Anabaptism but there was already too much in their beliefs that was not liked by many secular authorities and so their downfall was their beliefs themselves so basically whatever they did, they were doomed to fail.