CHAPTER THREE

ANABAPTISTS: A SPECIAL CASE?

[Magdalena Wisingerin] was not ashamed of doing what honored God. She had given herself to the Lord. She would die in prison as gladly as anywhere else.¹

Sedelmairin told Magdalena Seizin, who had no more than one underskirt, that if she let herself be baptized, she would bring her a whole arm full of clothing.²

When speaking of their religious life, some Anabaptists revealed passionate commitments to their faith while others seem to have been inspired more by worldly concerns. Their statements hint at the wide variety of interests that might lead someone to follow a religious movement. As we will see, the numerous records collected on Anabaptists in Augsburg show that in this way, as in others, Anabaptists were not as different from other contemporary Christians as sometimes thought. They did not live in isolation from the rest of the city but intermingled with non-Anabaptists on a daily basis, and the record of their activities gives us a chance to see how religious communities form within a larger urban setting. The followers of the movement do not fall neatly into the categories of either theologians or martyrs, rather they were like Augsburgers, ordinary people living in extraordinary times.

Of the various religious movements that appeared in Augsburg in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists present a special case in some respects. Only they were systematically prosecuted for their faith. While a supporter of reform might get arrested for criticizing the city council or insulting the Catholic Church in public, he would not be arrested simply for supporting Luther or Zwingli. For a brief time, between 1537–1547, people could get into trouble for leaving the city to attend Catholic services, but there was no concerted effort to uncover circles of secret Catholics. The Anabaptists, on the other

¹ "...dann sy schem sich nit was got zu lob kom, sy hab sich dem herren ergeben, sy welle gleich als gern in der fengknus, als anderstwa sterben, es gelt ir alles gleich," StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528; March–April, Magdalena Wisingerin, 15 April 1528.

² "Die Sedelmairin hab der Magdalena Seitzin ir der Butzin haußfrauenn so nicht mer dan ein under rock gehabt sie soll sich tauffen lassen so welle sie ir ein ganzen arm vol claider bringen, was sie ertragen möhe," ibid., Anna Butzin, 16 April 1528.
hand, could be arrested merely for meeting with friends to read and discuss the Bible. In fact, an imperial mandate from February 1527 demanded that Anabaptism be banned and its followers punished; Augsburg’s council eventually followed up with its own prohibition on 11 October 1527.

Although each of the various Christian faiths growing in the early sixteenth century had its opponents, only the Anabaptists were universally condemned by all other faiths. In fact, it could be said that denouncing the Anabaptists was one of the few things on which Catholics and Protestants could agree. Up to 1537 Augsburg still tolerated Catholic worship in eight churches while supporting evangelical preachers in the churches’ preaching houses. In that atmosphere, people were exposed to a variety of religious messages which could lead people in many directions. The Anabaptist Agnes Vogel gives us an idea of how the confusion of religious messages in the early reformation could affect people.

She was moved to this baptism by the preachers [in Augsburg], because she attended their sermons here for a good four years. One preached this, the other that; one held the Sacrament for a symbol, the other for flesh and blood. So, they preached against one another and confused her so much that she didn’t know what she should believe, and, therefore, wished to hear the others as well.³

Vogel sought spiritual guidance from the preachers in Augsburg but wound up going elsewhere. Fortunately for us she speaks more directly than most about her own feelings regarding her spiritual life. She was disappointed by the officially accepted preachers and did not trust them. How could she know who was right when all the preachers claiming to know the true Gospel disagreed with each other so vehemently? When an Anabaptist minister read to her from the Bible, he persuaded her that the way to salvation lay in being baptized. Like others, Vogel sought out answers in a variety of places. In her case, it led to Anabaptism.

In this twilight state before abolishing the Mass in 1537, the city council expected citizens of different religious inclinations to live and let live. By its own prohibition, however, it would not tolerate Anabap-

³ "Zu solhem tauff haben sy bewegt die prediger allhie, dann sy sey wol vier jar an ir predig ganngen, hab ainer das, ain ander ain anders gepredigt, ainer im Sacrament ain zaichen, der ander flaisch un phut wellen haben, Also wider ain annder gepredigt, umd sy gantnz irr gemacht, da sy nüt gewüßt, was sy glauben solle, unnd deßhalben begert die annndern auch zuhoren," StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Urg. 14 May 1528, Agnes Vogel.
tists. From that perspective the situation of Anabaptists living in the religiously diverse city of Augsburg presents a unique and fascinating case for the study of relations between radical and more conventional Christians. A closer look at the Anabaptist community in Augsburg raises questions, however, about how special the Anabaptists were. In many ways they resembled their non-Anabaptist neighbors, both in religious and social practices.

In studies of the Anabaptist movement, the question of why this particular group was denounced by all other religious parties, all over the Holy Roman Empire, has often been posed and answered. The answers range from the theological to the political. First and most importantly, the Anabaptists’ rejection of infant baptism was considered heretical by the traditional Catholic Church and by virtually all evangelical reformers, and the Anabaptists’ refusal to allow their children to be baptized, in an age when infants were so vulnerable, was considered to be a reprehensible threat to their souls. Infant baptism was one of two Christian sacraments which other Protestants continued to practice. In contrast, Anabaptists discounted the baptism they had received in infancy as worthless. Considering only the baptism to which they were called as adults to be real, they also saw this baptism as bonding them in a special way with their fellow brethren, while setting them apart spiritually from the rest of society. Lee Palmer Wandel points out that it was the common bond of baptism which united Christians before the Reformation, so the rejection of that baptism and the undertaking of a new one could certainly be interpreted by contemporaries as a severing of ties with the rest of the Christian community. Second, the refusal to carry weapons, swear oaths, pay taxes, and otherwise fulfill the duties of an early modern citizen, was anti-social and threatening to society as a whole. Guderian argues that concerns about unrest and uprisings motivated Augsburg’s council to regulate Anabaptists more than concern over matters of faith. While not all Anabaptists subscribed to these

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5 Wandel, Eucharist, 46.
rules for behavior; it was common knowledge that many Anabaptist preachers promoted them, and some followers attempted to observe them. Furthermore, some Anabaptist ministers preached the holding of goods in common, with the implicit threat to redistribute wealth by force. They sanctioned it with Biblical promises of a reckoning at the coming of the Apocalypse, which was not so far off; some predicted it for Pentecost of 1528. The revolutionary implications of this message inspired among many authorities a deep and abiding distrust of Anabaptist activities.

The Anabaptist community in Augsburg subscribed to few of these doctrines which so alarmed the authorities. They disapproved of Hans Hut’s apocalyptic predictions and even forbade him to talk about it. They continued to carry weapons and pay taxes, as responsible citizens. According to one Augsburg Anabaptist, they had considered not carrying weapons as a sign of their faith, but nothing ever came of it. They cared for their poorer brethren; many testified to giving or receiving charity in the form of money, food, or work, but they made no attempt to communalize their property. Nonetheless, like other cities and princes, Augsburg proceeded to forbid Anabaptism beginning in late 1527 and to arrest and punish Anabaptists sporadically throughout the 1520s and 30s. Banned from public pulpits and meeting places, Anabaptists were then held suspect for meeting in secret. By the 1540s the furor had died down, and the council even employed a noted Anabaptist, Pilgram Marbeck, as a civil engineer, on the condition that he practice his faith privately and not preach or publish his beliefs.

The picture of the Anabaptist movement in the late 1520s and early 1530s, revealed in the interrogation records, shows a community that does not fit easily into typical descriptions of their activities and membership. Earlier examinations of the Anabaptist movement in southern Germany have focused on issues, such as its theological framework, the biographies of its leaders, the appeal of the movement for the lower classes, and its suppression by religious and political authorities. As a result, Anabaptists tend to be portrayed either as idealistic ministers or as pious and extremely zealous believers, ready for martyrdom if need

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8 “es sey wol davon geredt worden, dann die bruder die wöre hinder sich solten legen, damit man sy bei dem selben kennet, aber es sei nit bescheen,” ibid., Martin Schad, 14 April 1528.
9 See Note 4 above.
be. This has led to a glorification of individual cases of courageous defiance in the face of torture, exile, or execution. At the same time, there is also an understandable note of sympathy for a movement that, despite its good intentions, received nothing but condemnation and in some places disappeared under the pressure of persecution. As appealing as this picture may be—and anyone who reads the interrogation accounts today cannot help but be moved by the plight of those who were persecuted for their faith—it is not the whole picture.

This vision neglects the story of the ordinary follower for whom religious faith was only one facet of life, albeit an important one. In most studies of Anabaptism, the largest portion of the movement, the ordinary followers, remain frustratingly anonymous and one dimensional. This chapter offers a new perspective on the Anabaptists by re-locating the movement in the setting of the early Reformation city and shifting the focus to other aspects of the movement, such as how people came to join the Anabaptists and how they interacted with others. A study of Anabaptists not in isolation but in the urban setting in which they really lived has much to teach us about communal interactions in a time of religious upheaval. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the members themselves, their relations with each other and with other citizens, and gives a sense of how religious communities form and how individual members interact with each other and with non-members. Some aspects of their behavior might be comparable to the situation of the more popular traditional and evangelical religious groups in places where they were illegal.

Three observations become clear. First, people associated with or disassociated themselves from Anabaptists to varying degrees. All was not as black and white as it has usually been portrayed. Rather there was a whole range of degrees to which people could be connected with Anabaptism. Second, the social networks of the early modern city shaped and nourished the Anabaptist movement. The movement relied on interaction with others not isolation from them and grew out of ordinary daily activities. Third, the relationship between the city government and the movement reveals the former’s surprising hesitancy to condemn despite the apparent harshness of its prosecution in 1528. It seems that the Anabaptists and the city council generally preferred to ignore each other whenever possible.
Degrees of Association

Identifying a person’s religious affiliation was not always a simple matter during the early Reformation, either for the believer himself or for his family and neighbors. The ambiguity of distinctions between faiths, the overlapping of doctrines, the ambivalence of policy-makers, the sheer novelty of it all, are all probable explanations for this phenomenon. The Anabaptists, for all the often-proclaimed uniqueness of their case, fit quite well into this picture. They shared the evangelical reformers’ universal emphasis on reading the Bible. The movement seems to have begun in the early to mid-1520s with people meeting in small groups to read the Bible aloud and discuss their interpretations. Some of whom came to feel the need to pursue a Christian life more closely in tune with the Bible than even Luther or Zwingli proclaimed. At that time, they had much in common with Zwinglian theology and united with Zwinglians in the latter’s dispute with Lutherans about the Eucharist. Somewhat like Zwingli, they believed that Christ was not physically present in the Eucharist, and they believed that sharing bread and wine together had symbolic meaning only. In the early years, many Anabaptist ministers came from similar backgrounds to the leaders of other movements. Like many evangelical ministers, the Anabaptist preacher Jacob Dachser began his spiritual career as a Catholic priest. He became an Anabaptist, later reconciled with the Zwinglians, and eventually became a minister at St. Georg in Augsburg. Other ministers, such as Bonafacius Wolfart, attempted to convert arrested Anabaptists in prison, believing that they were not beyond persuasion. In addition, it has sometimes been asserted that Anabaptism had the greatest appeal for the disenfranchised, the poorer classes, and women. Hans Guderian, however, has shown that Anabaptists closely mirrored the stratification of society as a whole. In fact, according to his study of Augsburg’s tax records, the property-less class was slightly under-represented in comparison to their numbers in the city, while the portion of small- to middling-property holders were over-represented among Anabaptists. In addition, Augsburg’s interrogation records contain equal numbers of men and women Anabaptists.

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10 See discussions of the Germair household in Chapter One or the Zeindelweber-Meckenloher case in Chapter Two for examples.
The largest volume of legal records on Anabaptists in Augsburg comes from a raid on Easter Sunday, 12 April 1528, at the home of Susanna Taucher, wife of the famous Augsburg sculptor, Adolf Taucher (or Daucher). This investigation led to over one hundred arrests beginning that day and lasting into the following weeks. After overlooking many smaller gatherings, the council finally responded to the large gathering of Anabaptists on Easter Sunday, arresting those who could or would not flee in time and rounding up additional suspects as interrogations revealed other names. Other interrogations of Anabaptists exist from the previous summer and following years, but none of them rival the extensiveness and thoroughness of the investigations from April to May of 1528. The testimonies preserved in the 1528 transcripts have several significant features. For one, they were all recorded by the same scribe. Secondly, they were all guided by the same set of questions, yet each person answered those questions differently. In spite or because of using identical questions, it becomes clear that each interrogation record reflects a unique perspective, that of the defendant. The transcripts reveal differences between male and female speakers, those who co-operated and those who resisted, those who were fearful and those who were bold, those who gave simple answers and those who show more sophisticated thinking. Variations in attitude and behavior appear, and it becomes clear that there is no predictable reaction to interrogation. While we must take into account the agendas of both the interrogators and the interrogated, the diversity of responses to identical questions indicates the potential for recognizing individuals from among the data.

Perhaps the single most important observation to make from reading the transcripts is that people had a great variety of types of relationships with and degrees of involvement in the Anabaptist movement. This is an important point to keep in mind when considering what it means to be identified as a member of a particular religious group. Two general types appear, which will be referred to as the associates and the members. Associates were not baptized and could be either hostile or sympathetic to the movement. Members, who were baptized, could be passive or active participants. Hostile associates are easy to identify but difficult to evaluate. They found themselves connected to the Anabaptist world against their will.

12 Adolf Daucher, *Augsburger Stadtlexicon*.
through the participation of their relatives, neighbors, or servants. While some family members might turn a blind eye to their activities, others disapproved vocally and even violently. Most of those who disapproved remain enigmas. Since hostile associates were not Anabaptists, they were not arrested and interrogated, leaving behind no testimony in their own words. It is difficult to assess their beliefs and opinions beyond the references made to them by their Anabaptist relatives. What we know about them comes second-hand and may have been intended to protect them. Several women testified that their husbands had forbidden them to be baptized or threatened them with violence if they were baptized\textsuperscript{13}—important to note is that the threats failed to dissuade in their cases. Agnes Vogel’s husband did not like the Anabaptists and had not approved of visits from their landlady, who was an Anabaptist. According to Agnes, her husband would have thrown the Anabaptist minister down the steps if he had found him in the house. She, like other women, avoided a confrontation by simply not telling her husband she had been baptized. In Barbara Näßlin’s case,\textsuperscript{14} her husband had beaten her first but then accompanied her to meetings and even let her host them in their home in an effort to keep her from leaving him, which she later did anyway.

In other cases, defendants acknowledged that a spouse, parent, or sibling disapproved of their joining the movement. Anna Gablerin, for example, testified that her mother was very unhappy when she and her brother became involved with the Anabaptists. Her sister-in-law, who was not baptized, claimed that although she witnessed her husband’s baptism, she had very little understanding of the matter.\textsuperscript{15} One man who had attended meetings mentioned that his wife had not wanted him to go. Another woman mentioned that her husband wanted her to recant. In these cases we do not know on what grounds or how strongly their family members objected. Did they disagree with Anabaptist theology or did they fear repercussions from the authorities? Matheis Hieber told the councilors about conversations he had had with a friend, Hans Bollinger. Bollinger was not a “brother” and had often told Hieber that he would like to understand why so many people were drawn to Anabaptism. Bollinger also advised him more

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., March–April, Anna Malchingerin, 14 April 1528.
\textsuperscript{14} Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., May, Afra Gablerin, 12 May 1528.
than once to abandon the business, and Hieber now regretted not listening to him. Similarly, a number of Anabaptists mentioned that their landlords would not allow them to hold meetings in their houses. So, their landlords knew they were Anabaptists and, although they did not want them to hold illegal meetings on the premises, they apparently did not object to having them as tenants. This leads us to the issue of more sympathetic associates.

Sympathetic associates include both people who supported the Anabaptist movement through various forms of assistance or tolerance and people who attended meetings without committing themselves through baptism. The first type of sympathizer knew about members and their meetings, although they apparently did not attend or participate in them. Defendants alluded to the distinction between sympathizers and true Anabaptists in their testimony. For example, Anna Kochin had learned about a meeting from a woman who knew she would be interested, yet Kochin did not know if the woman was a “sister” or not. Another woman testified that “Clement Kicklingerin” had attended a meeting in her home, “but was not a sister.” Nonetheless, Kicklingerin provided vital support for people who were interested in or intimately involved in Anabaptism. At least one of her tenants had also attended meetings without being baptized, and Kicklingerin had provided employment for an Anabaptist woman by letting her do some sewing in her home. People such as Kicklingerin aided the Anabaptist movement by supporting individual members without making a spiritual commitment themselves. Elizabeth Hegenmillerin’s husband was not an Anabaptist, but he knew that she was and apparently supported her acts of charity to other Anabaptists. An outspoken woman, Elizabeth declared to the interrogators that if her husband had followed her, he would have become a brother and been baptized as well.

Many family members and neighbors knew of the meetings their relatives and friends attended, despite the supposed secretiveness of the assemblies. People came to know of the meetings through routine daily contact. The council asked Anabaptists how they communicated

16 “Clement Kicklingerin sei aber kein schwester,” StadtAA, Reichstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, Dorothea Frolichin, 15 April 1528.
17 Ibid., Elisabeth Hegenmillerin, 16 April 1528, f. 326–39. She was exiled from Augsburg after having her tongue cut out for blasphemy against the Eucharist. She had repeated what a minister had told her, that the Eucharist was “gotzenbrot,” or idol’s bread.
with each other about their meetings. They wondered if there was a special sign or greeting, like a secret handshake, or if they used a special messenger to notify all the members. The evidence shows that the news actually spread very casually. Sometimes the same person always made sure to let his or her neighbors know, in other cases it was a different person every time. A maid might overhear someone telling her mistress about a meeting, a person might come to someone’s shop to invite him or coax him into coming, or someone would seek out a friend to ask if she knew when and where the next meeting would take place. Given the informal means of communicating among interested parties, it should come as no surprise that many non-members knew about the Anabaptists’ activities. What may be more surprising is that it does not seem to have created problems outside of the immediate family, if then. It should be noted that there is not a single case in Augsburg’s records from the first half of the sixteenth century of an Anabaptist ever coming into conflict with a neighbor about religion. Many people seemed to sympathize with or simply not care about Anabaptists meeting to read and discuss the Bible, even if they did not share their beliefs or their level of enthusiasm. This finding agrees with Guderian’s claim that some people rejected the more popular evangelical movements but did not necessarily join the Anabaptists. Quite a few Anabaptists mentioned that they participated in Bible reading groups that included both baptized members and non-baptized friends.

The painter Hans Beck, son of painter Leonhard Beck, provides an example of the other type of sympathetic associate, the curious. He had not been baptized, but he had attended two meetings before the prohibition against Anabaptism was published. After that he stopped going to meetings until the one on Easter Sunday. As he stated, “he wasn’t even thinking about the prohibition at the time.” He was soon released after swearing an oath not to attend any Anabaptist assemblies in the future. Of the eighty-eight people arrested on April 12, he was one of four whom the council described as having been there in innocence or naiveté (“auß ainfalt”). The council’s decision to release or retain prisoners provides an indication of the validity of their

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18 The fact that he attended meetings before the decree and not after was very important, because it meant he had not broken the law, since one cannot violate a law not yet enacted.
19 StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, Hans Beck, 13 April 1528.
20 StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Ratsbuch 1520–1529, 16 April 1528.
testimony. In that period of anxiety, the council only dismissed those who it was sure did not pose a threat. They could confirm a prisoner’s testimony by comparing it with statements from others; that was part of the reason why the councilors asked them for the names of people who attended meetings with them.

One of the others quickly released for having become innocently involved in Anabaptism was Dorothea Duchschererin. She gave the following explanation for her presence at the Easter Sunday gathering.

On Easter Sunday she wanted to go to the service at Holy Cross. On her way there she ran into the maid of Widenman the shoemaker. [The maid] asked her where she was going, and she told her. The maid informed her that there would be an assembly, and she should go with her, she would hear some really neat stuff (sy wurde gar hupsch ding horen). As a result, the maid talked her into it, so that she went with her and left her prayer stool in the Widenman’s store.21

Dorothea Duchschererin informed the interrogators that she had neither been rebaptized, nor had she ever attended another Anabaptist meeting before. She added that, “she didn’t think she was doing anything wrong or that it was forbidden.” The interrogators, members of the city council, who typically showed tenacity in their prosecution of suspected Anabaptists, released her without further questioning. They were convinced of her innocence or at least satisfied with her demonstration of indifference towards Anabaptism, and no one else mentioned seeing her at meetings before. Several people testified that they were persuaded to attend meetings by friends. Before running into Dorothea Duchschererin, the Widenman’s maid had already persuaded her master’s daughter to go with, and on the way there they ran into Dorothea, on her way to church, and convinced her to come with them too. After all, the maid promised they would hear “some really neat stuff.”

Martin Erhart, a glazier, had attended one meeting during Pentecost in 1527 but no other gatherings until Easter Sunday in 1528.22 He explained to the interrogators that he had gone there with some good

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21 “Am Ostertag waren sy des willens gewesen, gem Heiligen Creutz an die predig zu gehen, waren sy unnder wegen, zu des Widenmans schuchters magt kommen, die hette sy gefragt, wa sy hinwolt, das sy ir gesagt, hette ir die magt anzaigt, es wurde ain versamblung, unnd sy solt mit ir gehen, sy wurde gar hupsch ding horen, Also hette sy die magt uberredt, das sy mit ir were gangen, und hette iren predig stul in des Widenmans laden gelassen, Aber sy sei somnst nye bey kainer versamblung gewesen, hab auch nit vermaint, das sy an solhen unrecht thue, oder das solhs auch verpoten sei,” StadtAA, Lit. 1528, March–April, Dorothea Duchschererin.

22 Martin Erhart was one of Clement Kicklingerin’s tenants.
friends, “without thinking much about it.”23 According to Erhart, one of his companions, Leonhart Bienz, was also no longer interested in Anabaptism. Like Dorothea Duchschererin, Erhart claimed that he had been on his way to Holy Cross on Easter Sunday, when he ran into a friend, a fellow glazier from Aalen. Erhart claimed that this friend had convinced him to the meeting by grabbing some of his things so that he had to go after him.24 According to his story, it was just bad luck that he was arrested half an hour after arriving at Susanna Taucher’s house for the fateful meeting. The council must have found Erhart convincing, because they released him without further questioning. The council had the discernment to recognize that not all persons attending Anabaptist meetings were necessarily baptized members, though they might one day have reached that step if they had continued. The council was interested solely in baptized followers, but taking a look at various associates who did not receive baptism adds greatly to our understanding of how religious movements grow and how people became involved in them. Despite the apparently conclusive litmus test of what makes one an Anabaptist—adult baptism—there do not seem to have any boundaries between members and non-members. Even among the baptized there was great variety in the degrees to which they committed themselves to the faith.

Of the baptized followers, the term passive denotes members who did not participate actively in meetings or otherwise support the community after their baptism. Martha Beckin, for example, was baptized in late September of 1527, around the traditional Christian holiday of Michaelmas, and attended no other meeting until Easter Sunday 1528. A friend brought her there but then left.25 Even after torture with thumbscrews she swore that she knew nothing else to tell them. She could name no other members, because she had not associated with them. She had neither housed nor fed anyone, had neither held nor attended any other assemblies. A few days later Martha Beckin “obediently” took the oath to leave the city, unlike three other women.

23 StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, Martin Erhart, 12 April 1528.
24 “Jetzt am Ostertag seie der glaser von Alenn...Alls er gem Hailigen Creutz zur predig wollen geen, zu ime komen und gesagt lieber laßt uns mit ein ander guen, man hat mir zu einer versamlung gesagt wol auß mit mir, inn dem er mit ime gangen zu der versamlung,...er seye der sach nit nach-gangen der Glaser hab allerlay zeug von ime genomen und also uberreit, mit ime zu geen” StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, Martin Erhart, 12 April 1528.
25 StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, 13 and 15 April 1528.
who were beaten out when they refused to go voluntarily.\footnote{Ibid., Ratsbuch, 16 April 1528.} Similarly, Anna Graber attended only one meeting after her baptism in August of 1527. No one came to her house and she never went to meetings at other houses. She testified that she had held herself back after the council prohibited Anabaptist activities, because she did not want to get in trouble. One man had forbidden his wife to have Anabaptists in the house, yet he had been baptized, while she had not.\footnote{Ibid., Lit. 1528, March–April, Affra Gablerin, 12 April 1528.} In such cases, the council could corroborate the defendant’s testimony by comparing them with evidence from other defendants who gave names of people who attended or hosted meetings. Naturally, it is difficult to know whether a lack of involvement after baptism indicates a lack of devotion or a just fear of getting in trouble, as Graber admitted. One suspects that their more enthusiastic brethren would have considered it one and the same. A number of Anabaptists who avoided large gatherings testified that they were not only invited but pressured to attend meetings by others.\footnote{Ibid., Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April 1528, Simprecht Widenman, 20 and 28 April 1528.}

Some members, who allowed themselves to be baptized, showed doubts about their choice afterwards. For example, Apollonia Thomas told her interrogators what she had done with a letter placed in her keeping by an Anabaptist minister, a former priest of the Teutonic Order, who had been executed in Rothenburg. Although Apollonia could not read, she knew the letter had to do with baptism, because a fellow Anabaptist had read it out-loud. Several prominent women Anabaptists wanted to have the letter from her for their own edification, but Apollonia Thomas held onto to it as long as she could. She took it to her cousin, the wife of Peter Hainzlin, because she trusted her and always went to her when she needed advice. Hainzlinin told Apollonia that she liked what was in the letter, except for the part about baptism, which she said was not right. When Apollonia asked if she had done right by joining the Anabaptists, her cousin laughed and asked why she had not come to her sooner.\footnote{Ibid., Apollonia Thomas, 28 April 1528.} In the interrogation record for Apollonia’s husband, the scribe noted that “he does nothing but cry.” Hans Gabler, who had forbidden his un-baptized wife to
host meetings, also paints a picture of regret in his testimony. A friend had talked him into being baptized, and he did not want to be a follower anymore. He actually claimed that he was drunk when he was baptized.\footnote{Ibid., March–April, Hans Gabler, 24 April 1528.} Whether this was just an excuse for the council or not, he clearly was not willing to stand by his “faith.”

In contrast, there were also many active members who attended meetings whenever they could or held them in their own homes, encouraged others to join them, housed and fed travelling Anabaptists, both ministers and followers, and were not ashamed to admit it. For example, when asked how many meetings she had attended, Margaretha Berchtold, wife of a weaver, responded matter-of-factly that, “she couldn’t say how many meetings she had attended; when she knew of one, she went.”\footnote{“Sie konnde nit sagen wie oft sie bei den versamblungen gewesen sei, wa sy aine gewist sei sy darzu gangen,” ibid., Margaretha Berchtold, 13 April 1528.} Dorothea Frolichin said virtually the same, having attended as many meetings as she could, so that she could no longer count them.\footnote{“Sie wiß nit wie oft sie bei der versamblungen gewesen sei, so oft sy die erfaren sei sy darzu gangen,” ibid., Dorothea Frolichin, 13 April 1528.} Many people who were arrested identified Dorothea Frolichin as the person who told them about the meetings. She seems to have been very active in the role of communicating the meetings to interested members. In addition, she held two meetings in her home, with eighteen and ten people respectively. Beyond that she contributed to the movement by hosting at least two Anabaptist women who needed places to stay in town, Scholastica Stierpaurin who was a relative,\footnote{She also stayed with Clement Kicklingerin.} and Veronica Gross, the wife of an Anabaptist minister. She, like many others, refused to recant even after undergoing several interrogations and suffering torture to extract more information from her.

Many apparently wished to participate actively but proceed cautiously to avoid putting themselves in a dangerous situation. They never attended large meetings, held meetings in their own homes, or housed anyone, however, they would continue to meet in small groups (which was permissible), give traveling Anabaptists work to do, or perhaps gave a few pennies to a poorer brother or sister. For example, the Widenman family provided a haven for Anabaptists to meet informally and in small groups on a daily basis. Travelling Anabaptists would stop to buy shoes from Simprecht Widenman and would read with a minister while they...
waited. Anabaptist women would meet with Katharina Widenman to sew and listen while someone read aloud to them. The Widenmans, carefully avoided hosting or attending meetings with more than a few people. On a smaller scale, Anna Malchingerin also tried to contribute prudently. She hosted no meetings and attended only meetings held outside the city limits in the woods near St. Radegunda. Her husband, a launderer, had forbidden her to hold meetings, but she washed shirts for some of the brethren without his knowledge. She added that she could not go to many meetings because she had too much work to do, by which she inadvertently implied that she might have attended more, if she had been able.

Many active members changed their behavior substantially after a brush with the law. The lacemaker Conrad Huber testified that he had frequently held meetings in his home and attended them in other houses until August 1527. After that, he stopped going to meetings and holding them, but he gave food and drink to those who stopped in his house, if God instructed him to do so. Although Conrad had not been arrested in the summer of 1527, his wife Felicitas had, along with many other Anabaptists, who had participated in the large gathering known as the Martyrs’ Synod. On 17 September 1527, Felicitas had taken an oath not to attend any more Anabaptist sermons and to confine her activities to reading in small groups of two or three. From that time on, she and her husband restricted their activities.

One of the most eloquent testimonies evoked by the 1528 investigations captures the essence of the conflict faced by Anabaptists who wished to follow their faith and yet remain at peace with their city. Ulrich Rot, a grocer, was one of many devout followers who tailored his religious activities to satisfy the council. In the more than one hundred hearings from the spring of 1528, no one described his case as articulately and explicitly as Rot. First, he readily acknowledged that he had broken the law by being baptized after the city’s prohibition was declared. Then, even though he was frequently invited to attend meetings, he had attended none of them, because he knew that they

34 Ibid., Anna Malchingerin, 14 April 1528.
35 Ibid., Conrad Huber, 24 April 1528.
36 A large gathering of Anabaptists from southern Germany and Switzerland took place on St. Bartholomew’s Day in 1527. It became known as the Martyrs’ Synod because so many of the leaders who attended the meeting were later executed in other places.
37 Ibid., Ratsbuch 1520–29, 17 September 1527.
were illegal. Instead, he maintained his faith by reading on his own and keeping his affairs to himself. As a result of his lack of participation, he knew very little about the Anabaptists’ business, but steadfastly rejected any notion of seditious behavior. He declared that if he had known of any plan to act against the government, he would have come and told the council himself, rather than waiting to be arrested. He testified to this “as a citizen, because he was an Augsburger and a child of the city.”38 Throughout his interrogation, Rot conveys a deferential attitude and shows respect for the concerns of the authorities. Nevertheless, in the final statement of his testimony, Rot declared that he did not consider himself to have acted against the council by allowing himself to be baptized, even after the council prohibited it. Rot’s sensitive statements highlight the complexity and difficulty of his situation. Rot distinguished between his devotion to his faith and his obligation to his city while denying any contradiction between them. Although Ulrich Rot wished to obey the council and serve his city, he drew the line at sacrificing his soul.

The variety of association and commitment seen in the examples above highlights several important points. First, these diverse cases reflect the various influences at work in the religious movements, loosely grouped together under the name Anabaptist. The openness and fluidity allowed for many people to be exposed to or involved in similar Bible reading groups with or without committing themselves through baptism. The wide range of kinds and degrees of participation in the movement also confirms the porous structure of the organization and its peripatetic followers. Their experiences were shared by many people in the first half of the sixteenth century, who were trying to find their place in the midst of sometimes inspiring and sometimes bewildering changes. In an attempt to make sense of it all, many people attended sermons by different preachers with different religious beliefs, leading their listeners in various directions. Their listeners’ decisions about whom to follow, what to believe, or where to attend services were based on all kinds of factors, many of which are not predictable and cannot be accounted for automatically by arguments of appeal by economic status, occupation, geography, or gender. Naturally, factors which encouraged one’s exposure to religious ideas were crucial, but, ultimately, one’s faith remained a very personal and inscrutable matter.

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38 Ibid., Lit. 1528, March–April, Ulrich Rot, 14 May 1528, f. 83–7.
Social Networks

The intricate overlapping of social and religious life in the early modern city made possible the varied constellation of association within the Anabaptist movement. People came into contact with the Anabaptist message through friends or relatives who shared what they had learned and invited them to go with them to gatherings. In turn, people responded in a variety of degrees of interest, approval, and rejection. In these interrogation records we see the close interaction between the social and religious worlds of the Anabaptists. Many people became involved in the movement through the influence of household members or neighbors. Parents and children, spouses, siblings and in-laws, masters, servants and apprentices would encourage each other to be baptized and attend gatherings. Sometimes the support took the form of active persuasion, and sometimes it was merely the passing on of information, when and where the next meeting would take place. The following example shows how easily everyday social interaction could assist the growth of the Anabaptist community.

Apollonia Widholzin was the wife of Andreas Widholz, a master of the grocers’ guild, who had already been exiled for Anabaptism in late summer 1527. Her sister and brother-in-law, Felicitas and Hans Lauterwein, were also Anabaptists. Apollonia was arrested in the fall 1527, along with her husband and two maids. Unlike her husband, Apollonia and her maids avoided exile by swearing to shun all Anabaptist activities. They also had to recant officially and admit that they had erred. In that same oath, she agreed to confine her religious activities to meeting in small groups of no more than two or three people. Although she did not attend the Easter meeting in April 1528, she was arrested afterwards as part of the subsequent investigation into Anabaptist activities and membership in Augsburg.

In her interrogation on 18 May 1528, Apollonia Widholzin described an impromptu Anabaptist encounter which took place in her home.39 One day not long before her second arrest, while she was still lying in childbirth from the recent birth of a daughter, her sister Felicitas Lauterwein paid her a visit. Apollonia’s son Berchtold, who was also an Anabaptist, happened to be meeting with the Anabaptist minister Georg von Passau at the same time. Her sister, finding the minister in

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39 Ibid., May, Apollonia Widholzin, 18 May 1528.
the house, asked Georg to read her “something good” from the Bible. He and Felicitas sat together and read, while Apollonia rested in a separate room set aside for her lying-in period. Later, another visitor, Magdalena Merzin, came to visit her and then joined Felicitas and Georg in the other room. Felicitas told her afterwards that Magdalena wanted very much to be baptized, and when she saw Georg there she pleaded with him until he baptized her right then and there. Without being asked, Apollonia also told her interrogators that her mother had had the new baby baptized at the Cathedral (as a Catholic?).

This case shows how casually contacts among Anabaptists could take place. The essence of their faith was coming together to read, to discuss and teach, and to baptize new brethren. They were forbidden to hold church services, but they did not need them. It was as easy as visiting a sister or a neighbor. Despite their casual nature, the encounters had significance for the people involved. The example also shows how Anabaptism added a new spiritual bond of brother- or sisterhood to people who were already related through marriage, blood, or service.

As Georg Mair revealed in his testimony, many Anabaptist activities occurred on a small and informal basis rather than on the large, organized level feared by the authorities. He had been baptized before the decree in October 1527, attended several meetings up until then, after which he stopped going to them. He explained that, since then he often read out-loud from the Bible to visitors who came to see him. He also read to his own household and in the houses of friends. Caspar Schlosser also read frequently for his neighbors, and the son of one of his neighbors also read for visitors, not all of whom were Anabaptists.40 In addition, many women gathered in sewing groups at which someone might read aloud or a minister might stop by to talk with them for a while. Felicitas Hüberin testified that she met a couple of times with other women to sew. Once the minister Hans Leupold came to teach them, and the other time they were alone, at the Widenman’s house.41 Katherina Widenman, wife of Simprecht, told of another gathering at Anna Voglin’s house. She and several other women Anabaptists came not to read but to bake and drink together. Each brought a contribution, such as eggs or lard.42 One cannot tell whether a shared social life

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40 Ibid., March–April, Caspar Schlosser, 16 April 1528.
41 Ibid., May, Felicitas Hieberin.
42 Ibid., March–April, Katherina Widenman, 19 April 1528.
led people to become Anabaptists, or whether being Anabaptists then brought them together socially, probably some of each.

Various types of networks which connected Anabaptists to each other, professional, neighborly, and familial, often overlapped. They provided each other with financial and emotional support and encouragement. For example, the shoemaker Simprecht Widenman made shoes for visiting Anabaptists who passed through his house. Most were Anabaptists traveling through Augsburg on their way to another destination, looking for a safe haven after exile elsewhere. Visitors might stay for a day or two with the Widenman family, meet with fellow Anabaptists or even a minister, and Simprecht would make them shoes. Having shoes made may have been a convenient cover to explain their presence there, but it was also a practical way of taking care of necessary business (getting new shoes for a long journey) while receiving spiritual solace and companionship all at once. It is very telling that travelling Anabaptists knew which shoemaker to visit in Augsburg. Clearly a network of communication existed that let them know which houses and businesses were safe and would welcome them for a short time. Local people also passed through the Widenmans’ house, including the minister Hans Leupold, whose younger brother Leonhart was one of Simprecht’s apprentices. Incidentally, it was the Widenman’s maid, Barbara Tetzin, who had encouraged Dorothea Duchschererin to attend the Easter Sunday meeting. Anna Malchingerin sometimes did laundry for Anabaptists, in lieu of actual financial support. She may have done this for Anabaptists who were passing through and had no settled household to carry out such tasks for them.

The Anabaptist dyers Joseph and Apollonia Thomas also received appeals from Anabaptists in need. Anabaptists looking for work sought them out. An older man, a “brother,” was sent to them by a woman named Scheuchlerin to do some work, because he was in need of money. As Apollonia reported, they tried to give him some work to do, but he was incapable of it because of some infirmity in his hands, so they eventually had to send him on his way. Apollonia informed the interrogators that they had not hosted any Anabaptists, because their house was so small that the maid had to sleep in the main room. She may have included these details to add verisimilitude, but she also left open the possibility that they might have hosted Anabaptists if their

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43 Ibid., Simprecht Widenman, 29 April 1528.
house was larger. The Thomases definitely made an effort to help out Anabaptists who came to them in need of work. In this way, they provided practical economic support to the movement’s followers, whom they considered to be their brethren.

The Thomases had also employed two foreign Anabaptists as maids, one of whom came from the Bavarian village of Hirbe. Anna Schuchster had come to Augsburg after she was banished from her home for being an Anabaptist. Possessing the traditional allure of all big cities, Augsburg attracted displaced persons looking for a fresh start. Anna sought an Anabaptist employer who would approve of her beliefs and not turn her in to the authorities. We do not know how she found the family, but she probably learned of them through contacts she had with the extended Anabaptist circle. The Anabaptist community easily bridged the border between town and country, and their interdependence suggests that those borders were tenuous. The Anabaptists seem to have crossed the boundaries easily and frequently in both directions. City-dwelling Anabaptists would often gather in gardens outside the city walls, in a small community, such as St. Radegunda, or even out in the woods, hence the common appellation of garden-brother or garden-sister. They were joined by villagers or peasants of similar sympathies, which is probably how foreigners would know whom to turn to in Augsburg in times of need.

Connections which spanned town and country also spilled over into households within Augsburg and further supported the spread of Anabaptism. Margareta Widenman, the daughter of a baker, learned about the Easter meeting from the family’s maid, Lucy. As Margareta told her interrogators, Lucy had already been baptized, arrested, and banished from some other place before, although Margareta did not know where. Lucy had been with them about three weeks and worked for Margareta’s father to earn bread. According to Margareta, it was Lucy who talked her into going to the meeting on Easter Sunday. On their way, they stopped at the house of Lucas Fischer, master of the Potters’ Guild, to ask his maid, Radigunda Raiserin for directions. Radigunda Raiserin came from Veyenhofen but was no transient, like Lucy of unknown origins; she claimed that Lucas Fischer had practically raised her. Radigunda and her surrogate family, the Fischers, were Anabaptists and had connections to other Anabaptist families.44

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44 Agnes Vogel was the Fischers’ tenant.
Radigunda’s mistress, Anna Fischer, was sister-in-law to the shoemaker, Simprecht Widenman, which means that she and Katharina Widenman were probably sisters. It is possible that Margareta Widenman’s father was also related to Simprecht.

Many examples show the significance of familial connections in the spread and practice of Anabaptism. Although some families experienced differences of opinion between spouses or between parents and children, most of the defendants interrogated were related to other Anabaptists, as spouses, parents, children, siblings, in-laws, servants, or tenants. The Widenman-Fischer-Widenman circle includes all of those. The Widholzes provide another excellent example of people who made joining Anabaptism a family venture. In the Widholz family alone we know that the guildmaster Andreas and his wife Apollonia both joined, along with at least one grown son, Berchtold, and two maids, Apollonia and Katherina. Moreover, Apollonia’s sister Felicitas and her husband Hans Lauterwein were also Anabaptists.

A few more examples illustrate how common it was for people to become Anabaptists as part of a family; in the Heises family the mother and both grown sons became Anabaptists. The brothers Hans and Ulrich Awrbach were Anabaptists, along with Ulrich’s wife and her mother Elisabeth Knollin. Anna Gabler and her brother Hans were baptized together. Two pairs of sisters, Elisabeth Hegenmillerin and Regina Weißhaupt, and Susanna Taucher and Maxencia Wisingerin, followed Anabaptism and often attended meetings together. Hans Butz was baptized in his mother’s house. Caspar Schlosser, his mother, his stepfather, his sister, and his brother-in-law were all members. The Schleiffer family also included several members and sympathizers, including the mother Barbara, her sons Georg and Gall, her daughter Ursula, and Ursula’s husband. Lastly, Thomas Paur was brother-in-law to three different Anabaptist ministers.

In the Spring of 1528, Anabaptism was still a relatively new movement in Augsburg, only a few years old, which means that most of these family ties had existed before the development of the sect. Anabaptists

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45 Hostess of the 1528 Easter Sunday gathering.
46 Ursula stated that her brother Georg worked for “seiner Meisterin der Schmidin Schlayrwirckerin,” who may be Anna Schlayrwirckerin or her mother Anna Bawmenin, who was a veilmaker. Both of them were Anabaptists, which would extend the Schleiffer-Anabaptist connection one step further. StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March–April, Ursula Schleiffer, 22 April 1528.
only began appearing around 1524, so we can assume that common religious interests had not created most of these family relationships, but rather the other way around. Testimonies also illustrate that Anabaptists’ family connections extended to servants, employees, and neighbors as well. The interaction of families and neighbors was critical to the fostering of Anabaptism. Anna Berchtoldmairin was baptized in the house of her neighbors Crispin and Scolastica Stierpaur. As she testified, “Stierpaur was her closest neighbor.” Family connections may have fostered the growth of Anabaptism in a variety of ways. To some extent the support was probably indirect or incidental, through the simple sharing of ideas and conversations. Their daily interaction would have encouraged common experiences. Children and live-in servants or apprentices could hardly help but be present (at least aware) if their parents or masters invited an Anabaptist minister to read in the house. Likewise, siblings and neighbors might be among the first to be invited to join them.

Support could be direct as well, when family members encouraged each other not only to attend meetings together but to take the crucial step of baptism. Anna Schleichin describes such a connection explicitly. She was a servant in the house of her brother Simprecht Schleichen, a baker. Although her brother was not an Anabaptist, she was baptized in his house while he was away. According to Anna, it was her sister-in-law, Afra, who was home because of an illness, who told her she should let herself be baptized. Also, as the opening quote to this chapter indicates, friends could be very persuasive. According to Anna Bützin, her neighbor Magdalena Seizin was encouraged to join by another woman who offered to give her clothing, if she would be baptized. While the offer has the ring of a bribe, it may have represented the Anabaptists’ commitment to caring for each other, indicating the sort of welcome Seizin would receive from her new brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, it certainly introduces a motive for joining other than the purely spiritual.

47 “Der Stierpaur seie ir nechster nachpaur gewesen,” ibid., Anna Berchtoldmairin, 12 April 1528.
48 Ibid., Anna Schleichin, 12 April 1528.
Historians of the Anabaptist movement and of Augsburg generally agree that local authorities were relatively tolerant of Anabaptist activities in comparison with other cities. Although an Imperial decree from Ferdinand had made Anabaptism illegal throughout the Holy Roman Empire in February 1527, Augsburg’s council did not issue its own decree outlawing Anabaptism until October. This decree came only after an unusually large gathering, including many ministers, had met just outside Augsburg in August 1527, leading to the council’s first arrests of Anabaptists. The meeting in late August became known as the “Martyrs’ Synod” because so many of the people involved, especially leaders, were executed in other places after leaving Augsburg. This meeting drew hundreds of people, including many ministers, from all over southern Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, for the purpose of organizing themselves. It was an event which Augsburg’s government could not ignore. With the decree, the city council made it illegal to withhold one’s child from baptism, to attend Anabaptist sermons, to feed or house Anabaptist leaders, or to have anything at all to do with Anabaptism. Although Augsburg was a major center of Anabaptist activity in southern Germany, only two Anabaptists died in the custody of Augsburg’s government; both men were ministers (Vorsteher) or leaders of the movement. Hans Hut, a promoter of the Apocalyptic predictions, was an active writer and preacher, who died during a fire in the prison before his scheduled execution, perhaps as part of an escape attempt. Hans Leupold was a minister who had baptized many people. Since he had been arrested once before in Augsburg and recanted, the council considered him to be beyond redemption. He was publicly beheaded after being arrested again on Easter Sunday 1528. Unlike authorities elsewhere who executed people just for having been re-baptized, Augsburg’s city council targeted the leaders of the movement, those people who aggravated their offenses by encouraging others to transgress the law. It never imposed corporal or capital punishments on people simply for being followers. On the other hand, the council did use torture routinely to extract information from Anabaptists about meetings and other members, though not to force recantations. It also

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49 See, for example, Hans Guderian, *Die Täufer in Augsburg*, 87.
50 StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Anschläge und Dekrete, 11 October 1527
exiled foreigners and citizens who would not recant and occasionally administered corporal punishment for people who were guilty of additional infractions.

Augsburg’s council used the interrogations to find out how deeply involved an Anabaptist was in the movement and to assess how seriously they had violated the law. The questions asked by the interrogators were intended to establish several things about their subjects. In a typical hearing, the interrogators first sought information about the defendant’s status in the movement: whether or not he or she had been baptized, when, where, by whom, and in whose company. Then there were questions about how many meetings he or she had attended, where they were, and who else had attended them. This was the point at which many interrogations stalled, because defendants did not want to give incriminating information about other members. The council pursued these questions to discover missing suspects (those Anabaptists who had not attended the Easter Sunday meeting or who had fled the meeting before being arrested) and to identify the leaders among the group. If the interrogation continued, questions then turned to assess the nature of the defendant’s involvement, in particular questions about hosting meetings, housing ministers, feeding or giving drink to Anabaptists, giving them financial aid, or otherwise supporting the movement. These questions helped to establish the degree of a person’s guilt regarding violations of city statutes. The date when a person had been baptized, therefore, indicated whether or not they had broken the decree against baptism. Those who were baptized before 11 October 1527 were treated more leniently. On the other hand, those who had held meetings in their homes, or housed and fed Anabaptists, were punished more severely than those who had merely attended one or two meetings.

The council made a further distinction between citizens and foreigners. Foreign Anabaptists were often banished without being interrogated or otherwise punished. For example, when the large 1528 Easter gathering was arrested, officials wrote down the names and places of origin of the foreign Anabaptists on a sheet of paper and then escorted them out of town soon afterwards. Several important ministers, such as Georg von Passau, escaped prosecution in this way. Most of the foreigners were only recent arrivals in Augsburg, after being banished from their own villages, or came solely for the Easter meeting and planned to go home afterwards. Citizens of Augsburg who were baptized and attended a few meetings were given a chance to recant, which meant that they would not be exiled. They might then be penalized with
temporary restrictions on their civic privileges, such as voting, or with loss of government employment but otherwise were untouched. Citizens who refused to recant would be banished, though not usually for life. This would explain why people who might sympathize with Anabaptist ideas would try to prevent their spouses or other relatives from joining, because they feared the consequences from civic authorities. Those who had eagerly and unrepentantly supported the movement by hosting meetings and providing other crucial assistance would not only be banished but could suffer additional punishment such as being whipped or branded before being escorted out of town. While exile could place a great strain on individuals and their families, especially if it interfered with their ability to support themselves financially, the council’s policy was remarkably lenient for the times.

Ministers were targeted, naturally, because they spread the Anabaptist message and encouraged people to join the movement and performed the baptisms. When Hans Leupold was arrested in April of 1528, not only was he an active preacher and baptizer, but he had broken an earlier oath to recant and abstain from Anabaptist involvement which he made in August of 1527. In addition, the ministers were usually foreigners and, therefore, not as deeply rooted in the community. It was a common practice for Anabaptists periodically to elect new leaders and then send them away to other places. Perhaps, like prophets in their own land, they were expected to be more effective elsewhere.

Augsburg, like other communities, seemed to fear the anti-social and anti-authoritarian message of the Anabaptist movement more than the religious aspects. The council’s reasoning appears very clear in the decree which states that the Anabaptist sect

\[\text{against God, Christian order, good customs, honorable policy and favors division, schism, dissension, uprising, the downfall of authority (which is instituted by God), also disruption and destruction of brotherly love, and basically leads to nothing good.}\]

As hostile as this statement is, the council’s description of Catholicism issued about a decade later, when it declared Catholicism illegal in Augsburg, would be much harsher. This October 1527 decree briefly refers to unchristian behavior, while the rest focuses on the social and political dangers which authorities feared from Anabaptists.

\[\text{51 Ibid.}\]
From this decree and the legal records of interrogations and sentencing, we know that Augsburg’s council forbade Anabaptism and periodically arrested and punished Anabaptists. Some followers were beaten or whipped while others suffered permanent physical disfigurement, such as branding through the cheeks. One woman had her tongue cut out for the additional crime of having blasphemed against the Eucharist. Many households were split up when family members were banished from the city for an indeterminate time. Yet, despite this record of persecution, Augsburg’s government retains a reputation with historians for tolerance towards Anabaptists. This reputation must be understood in comparison with other authorities. A most immediate and glaring contrast can be made with the methods of the Swabian League which controlled most of the territory surrounding the city of Augsburg. The Swabian League actively pursued the capture and destruction of Anabaptists as a central goal. The league’s provost, Peter Aichellin, became infamous as an executioner of Anabaptists. In 1528, the Swabian League declared that Anabaptists who did not recant would be burned, while those who recanted would receive mercy: men who recanted would be beheaded, and women who recanted would be drowned. This policy applied to anyone associated with the Anabaptist movement, not just the leaders. Eitelhans Langenmantel, an Augsburg patrician who was banished from the city because he refused to recant, took up residence outside the city, where he occasionally met with sympathetic friends. When he was arrested by the Swabian League, he and his servants were executed.

In contrast to the Swabian League, not only did Augsburg actually allow former Anabaptists (who had recanted) to live and remain in the city, they permitted them to continue to meet in small groups to read or talk about the Bible. According to Anna Fischer, the council made this concession in 1527 when Anna Regel, a wealthy citizen, refused to take an oath not to meet with anyone at all. In fact, the council agreed to permit small gatherings of a few people; Anna Fischer claimed that they were allowed to meet with six or eight, but the council records

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52 See Chapter Two, in the Zeindelweber-Meckenloher case.
53 Clasen, 380.
54 “…hab vermaint solhs sei nit unrecht noch wider einen Erbern Rat, dann als sy von einem Erbern Rat abgeschiden were men irs enthalts anzaigt worden, sie sollen der grossen versamblungen muessig steen, Aber wa 6 oder 8 personen zusamen giengen, wurde es kain irung haben, dann die Regln hette nit welchen schworen, gar jedermann muessig zusteet,” StadtAA, Reichsstadt, Lit. 1528, March-April, Anna Fischer (aka. Hafnerin) fol. 88–99.
from 17 September 1527 actually stated that two or three could read and discuss the Bible together. As a result, defendants in later cases often claimed that they were not breaking the law, because they only met in a small group. Ursula Germainin used this defense to no avail during her interrogation in 1533, but then, she was a foreigner who refused to recant.

Although the Anabaptists present a special case in Augsburg’s legal history by being the only group to be systematically prosecuted for religious activities, they had more in common with the experiences of other religious groups in the city than usually assumed. People learned about various reform movements through reading or listening to ministers or lay readers, talking with friends, family, and work associates, and perhaps, like Peter Hainzlin’s wife, approving the messages they received selectively. The most significant differences stem from the degree of prosecution the Anabaptists faced. At the same time, they shared much with other groups, in terms of their religious beliefs, such as their views on the Eucharist. The government’s interest in their movement reflected the same kinds of concerns they expressed about Catholics and evangelical reformers in the 1520s, mainly a fear of the impact that dissent would have on the community and the possibility of rebellion. Despite those concerns, women such as Anna Regel managed to gain concessions from the city council to preserve the right of people to meet privately to read and discuss the Bible on their own. In addition, the social networks that played such an important role in the Anabaptist movement indicate that Anabaptists were not nearly as isolated as their history might suggest. Rather they were very much a part of the urban community. Finally, just like other Augsburgers, they reveal a wide variety of influences which encouraged the development of their convictions. They provide a perfect example of religious beliefs developing under circumstances independent of the auspices of secular or spiritual authorities. They may serve as a model for how confessional groups might develop later without official involvement or despite official opposition.