

The Anabaptists: neither Catholics nor Protestants

Briefly, the Anabaptists believed that the true church was:

1. A Church of disciples, obeying the LORD;
2. A Church of missionary-prophets, witnessing to all men;
3. A disciplined Church, holy and pure
4. A suffering, cross-bearing, non-resistant Church.

This was the faith of our fathers some four hundred years ago. What about today?

Twenty counts of abandoning the faith and vision of the Anabaptist reformation:

1. We have lost the prophetic zeal of the Anabaptists, and have turned to pietistic quietism – we no longer prophesy against sin in the nations and in the denominations.
2. Because we no longer vigorously testify of the world and worldly religions that the works thereof are evil, they no longer hate us, and we have become “respectable” at the price of polite silence on popular sins.
3. We have been too much ingrown and withdrawn to ourselves, almost content to be just a group of blood-relatives with familiar names.
4. We are succumbing to the idol of prosperity, hypnotized by shiny machines, big houses, luxuries, comforts, and economic insurance and securities. No covetous man shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.
5. We are becoming practical relativists; we believe that Christ’s commandments are relevant and binding only for those with a Mennonite background – we believe that nonresistance and nonconformity are “Mennonite doctrines,” that God therefore does not require them of other Bible-professing Christians; unlike the Anabaptists, we seem to have no message for the denominations, no concern for the millions of lost church members who are not disciples of Christ. If nonresistance is only a “Mennonite doctrine,” abandon it! If it is Bible doctrine, let us get a deep burden and a bold testimony to those professing Christians in government and in the military services. Either we love our neighbor and refuse to execute carnal judgment on him (whether he be a friend, criminal, or enemy), or we are breaking the second of the two Great Commandments, and cannot be saved until we repent and come out!
6. We apparently believe today more and more that the Protestants were right in the first place – after all, the “simple gospel” is “only believe,” a man need only make “a decision” to be saved once and for all, he need not be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. We now seem commonly to believe that a man can be saved by “accepting forgiveness,” he does not need to repent, be born-again, and receive Christ into his life so that he becomes a Christ-indwelt disciple of the Lord; we do not need to receive Christ and abide in Him, we need only “accept” what He has done, and then go ahead and live like the world.
8. Many of us who still believe in discipleship, appear to think that it is not necessary to salvation but that it is just something we graciously do to thank God, not that we have to, but just as a

little something “extra,” a kind of favor to God!

9. Not a few of us seem to think that tolerance of sin and worldliness is next to godliness, is Christian-like love, and that we dare not rebuke or reprove sin and sinners, because that would be “judging.”
10. Many think that discipline is legalistic – every voluntary organization, association, or club has its standards and discipline, but only the Church dare not, lest it be “legalistic!”
11. So many among us uncritically praise and exalt the famous reformers, like Luther, that one sometimes wonders if these admirers might not have joined the Protestants rather than the Anabaptists if they had lived in those days! One sad example of this is to be seen in some of our churches infatuated with religious entertainment, that are using a rather poor and romanticized movie-film glorifying Martin Luther, in their worship services! This film, at best, is only an entertaining historical romance about a few scenes from the life of the young Luther. It promotes the legendary infallibility of Luther by suppressing his intolerance, violence, vulgarity, and conceit. One of the historians that helped to produce this film has tried to justify it (and Luther) by saying that Luther was after all just a product of his times and made the same mistakes as everyone else in that age. We know that Luther acted against better light. The film is only a kind of cheap, dramatic, but unrealistic historical novel, romantically playing up the hero. This is neither good history, nor true biography, nor even an honest documentary film. Perhaps we are being weakened by members who are members only by the accident of birth and upbringing, and not really by choice – if only they would repent and give up their disloyalty, - or leave and go to a church of their own choice and stop undermining our own brotherhood.
12. Our principal emphasis is shifting from evangelism, conversion, and discipleship, to emphasis on institutionalized religious education, - which is always a sign of the organizational machine displacing the living organism.
13. We are abandoning adherence to strict Biblical standards, and gradually drifting more quickly to acceptance of pagan American cultural and social standards. As we see more and more cut hair, lipstick, jewelry, ornaments, pins, neckties, etc., we wonder if these can be the descendants spiritually (perhaps only by blood, like the Jews who are merely physical descendants of Abraham!) of that Menno Simons who wrote in such vigorous defense of the whole Gospel, disclaiming the carnal walk of the “reformed” Christians not only because they were not obedient disciples of Christ in nonresistance, but also because:
“They say that they believe, and yet there are no limits nor bounds to their accursed wantonness, foolish pomp, show of silks, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver belts, pins, buttons, curiously adorned shirts, handkerchiefs, collars, veils, aprons, velvet shoes, slippers and such like foolish finery; never regarding that the enlightened apostles, Peter and Paul, have in plain and express words forbidden this to all Christian women. If this is forbidden to women how much more then should men abstain from it, who are the leaders and heads of their women. Notwithstanding all this they still want to be called the Christian Church!”
(Menno Simons, vol. I p. 144)
14. We sense a terrific pressure for the destruction of any remaining signs of peculiarity which set us apart from American crowd-culture – the devotional veiling is on the way out, to say nothing of distinctive attire and head-gear, which are already in most places gone. The early Anabaptists were often recognized by their distinctive clothes and general appearance, but the conformity-

neurosis has made most of our present-day “Anabaptists” rush to get rid of any marks which identify them as a Christian in a crowd of worldlings. A truly zealous New Testament Church is at war with the existing carnal customs, practices, and beliefs of the pagan world about it, - but that is no longer true of us! We would not dare to think of testifying prophetically against the sinful world and its works (cf. John 7:7), let alone look different from any worldling!

15. Today we exult in a kind of popular evangelism that invites men to make “decisions,” but not to receive Christ into their hearts, not to abide in Him, not to follow Him, not to seek the fellowship of a church which upholds and disciplines for the standards of the New Testament. Indeed, we find “converts” oftentimes discouraged from uniting with our brotherhood, under the generous false modesty and false charity that we do not want any “proselytes!” Where do we think the first Anabaptist came from? They were all proselytes from Catholicism or Protestantism! If we have nothing to export to others, we have nothing worth keeping for ourselves. New Testament evangelism is making disciples, not just making “decisions.”
16. Subtle inroads are being made on our belief in the authority and inspiration of the scriptures through the latest theological fad, neo-orthodoxy. We count it of great importance to fraternize with the ecumenical movement, to prove to them that we are not as narrow-minded as the Anabaptists!
17. We ignore the fact that there are undoubtedly millions of professing Christians in Hell, souls that at one time or another “professed” or “accepted” Christ as Saviour, but never submitted to Him as Lord. When will we learn that it is easy to get “decisions,” but that the way of discipleship is narrow, and that only disciples shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?
18. Many today have faith only in faith (self-assurance), or faith in ceremonial magic (church-going and liturgies), but we are told that they are Christians too, and that all “churched” people need no further testimony from us. We are also being told repeatedly that this Gentile nation in which we are strangers and pilgrims is “a Christian nation!” Anathema!
19. We see a flood of professionalized ministers about to deluge us, men in whose interest it will be not to be prophets of God leading the people out of the bondage of sin’s slavery. Menno Simons was no paid-pet of a spoiled and petulant church council – but his successors may become so.
20. We have lost both persecution and the teaching that it is natural for the Church to be persecuted; we shun all reproach and expect God to make us pleasing even to our enemies (even though Christ and the martyrs displeased the evil world). Now our goal is “success,” “good public relations,” and “adjustment” to society, with zealous pursuit of refinement, entertainment, culture, prestige, and social climbing.

Men and brethren! What shall we do? Are we still members of a brotherhood which is more than Protestantism and Catholicism? Wherein we have drifted and backslid let us repent and recover the first love, before God takes away our candlestick! Dear reader – are YOU betraying the vision of the Anabaptist restoration? Have you been deceived into thinking that there is nothing you can do about the drift worldwards except to stay loyally in the drifting organization? We beseech you by the love of God and His holy Word that you be loyal first to Him and recognize that this first loyalty will not permit you to go along with a drifting multitude. Come out from among them and either fellowship with a church that is true to the vision of our Anabaptist forefathers, or form such a church in your area with like-minded disciples of the Lord Jesus. If you are betraying the Anabaptist vision, we beg of you to

REPENT and return to the Bible truth and practices. Do not be guilty of the crime of pushing and dragging the church further worldwards. The true church is the blood-bought Bride of Jesus Christ, not the harlot church which goes hand in hand with the world. Amen.

- Taken from "The Anabaptists: neither Catholics nor Protestants" by William R. McGrath