

Theme Year

20

daring! **living responsibly**



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daring! living responsibly

2020 marks the starting-point of a five-year programme for remembering 500 years of the Anabaptist Movement which reaches its culmination in 2025. In these five years various themes will address essential characteristics of this tradition and trace their relevance up to the present. Representatives of the Mennonites, the Baptists and the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) are cooperating to this end in the association '500 Years of the Anabaptist Movement'.

'Daring! living responsibly' is the theme for 2020. This motto becomes remarkably topical since the whole world has been confronted with the Coronavirus. The launch of this project, originally planned for Ascension Day 2020, sadly also fell victim to the virus.

So we are all the more pleased that we can now present this first booklet 'Daring! Living Responsibly'. Authors of various denominations elucidate the theme for 2020 from various perspectives both historically and with special regard to the present. The editors hope that the articles help to demonstrate what the Anabaptist tradition can offer, so we can live as responsible Christians today.

This booklet supplies material for Christian groups, educational institutions, church services and ecumenical consultations.

Reinhard Assmann, Andreas Liese, Astrid von Schlachta (Redaktionsteam)

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Content

Greetings

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany.....	7
Doris Hege, Vorsitzende der AMG.....	9
Michael Noss, Vorsitzender BEFG.....	11
Radu Constantin Miron, Vorsitzender der ACK.....	13

Anabaptists, tolerance and baptism

Daring! · <i>Andrea Strübind</i>	14
Pausing, Reflecting, Responding:	
The Symbols and Meanings of Anniversaries · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i>	16
Anabaptists, Baptists, Mennonites – How are they related to each other? · <i>Walter Fleischmann-Bisten</i> ..	18
The Anabaptists and their Place in the History of the Reformation · <i>Martin H. Jung</i>	22
“The Baptist Vision”: Impulses from Anabaptist Theology · <i>Marco Hofheinz</i>	24
Living Responsibly in the Ecumenical Context · <i>Lothar Triebel</i>	26
Encouragement and Aspiration: Baptism from the Standpoint of History · <i>Hanspeter Jecker</i>	28
Baptism in an Ecumenical Context: A Mennonite Perspective · <i>Rainer W. Burkart</i>	30
Baptism in the Ecumenical Context – A Baptist Perspective · <i>Uwe Swarat</i>	32
Die Freikirchen und die Evangelikalen · <i>Frank Hinkelmann</i>	34
The Contribution of the Anabaptist Movement to Worldwide Freedom of Religion · <i>Markus Grübel</i> ..	36
Mit der Toleranz ist das so eine Sache. Ein historischer Blick · <i>Astrid von Schlachta</i>	38
Köbner’s ‘Manifesto of Free and Primitive Christianity for the German People’ · <i>Andreas Liese</i> ...	40
Gewissensfreiheit und die Freikirchen in der Sowjetunion · <i>Nadezhda Beljakova</i>	42
Religionsfreiheit bei Muslimen · <i>Ali Ghandour</i>	44
Interview mit Heiner Bielefeldt	46

Biographies

Balthasar Hubmaier · <i>Martin Rothkegel</i>	54
Roger Williams · <i>Erich Geldbach</i>	56
Eberhard Arnold · <i>Thomas Nauwerth</i>	58

What does it mean for me as a Christian to live maturely today? Different denominational views

Peter Jörgensen	60
Petra Bosse-Huber	61
John D. Roth	62
Kenny Wollman	63
Christina Döhring	64
Lena Dillmann	66
Paul Warkentin	67

Kurzstatements

Heinrich Bedford-Strohm	68
Reinhard Marx	68
Verena Hammes	68
Fernando Enns	69
Leonard Gross	69
Frank Uphoff	69
Jens Stangenberg	69

Bible studies

Freiwilligkeit · <i>Joel Driedger</i>	70
Daring! Living Maturely · <i>Friedrich Emanuel Wieser</i>	72
Taufe · <i>Frank Patek</i>	74
Religionsfreiheit · <i>Simon Werner</i>	76

Ein mennonitisch-baptistischer Gottesdienstentwurf

Frieder Boller und Frank Wegen	78
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Youth pages

The Anabaptists in the Global Christian Family · <i>Timo Doetsch</i>	88
Taufe · <i>Volkmar Hamp</i>	90

Für die Schule

Mündigkeit – Unterrichtsvorschläge · <i>Ulrike Arnold</i>	92
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Traces of the Anabaptists

Een Liedeken van Jeronimus Segersz ende zijn Huysrou Lijken (1551) · <i>Nicole Grochowina</i>	94
Gewagt! Aufbruch zu einem friedentheologischen „Worship“ · <i>Dennis Thielmann</i>	98
Vernetzt und verbandelt. Eine Ausstellung über die Geschichte der Mennoniten in der SBZ und der DDR von 1945 bis 1990 · <i>Bernhard Thiessen</i>	100
Literaturtipps · <i>Ulrike Arnold</i>	102
Notizen zur täuferisch-mennonitischen Erinnerung und ihrer räumlichen Dimension – Täuferspuren in Rheinland-Pfalz und Baden-Württemberg · <i>Sibylla Hege-Bettac</i>	106
Janz weit draußen · <i>Michael Schroeder</i>	108
Täufergedenkorte in Tirol und Südtirol · <i>Edi Geissler</i>	110
Zahlreich sind die Hinrichtungsstätten ... Reinhardbrunn · <i>Wolfgang Krauss</i>	112
An Overview of the Anabaptists in Canada · <i>Arli Klassen/Karl Koop</i>	114

Word of Greeting from the President of the Federal Republic of Germany,

Frank-Walter Steinmeier

In 1525 the first believers' baptism of the Anabaptist Movement took place in Zürich. Alongside the first two phases of the Reformation, initiated by Luther and Calvin, the Anabaptist Movement was the third element of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Upholding the principles of freedom of religion and non-violence the Christians in the Anabaptist churches often faced persecution and banishment.

In retrospect we can observe the struggle over 500 years for the right relationship between church and state. The present-day independence of both spheres which nevertheless work together and support each other as prescribed by German constitutional law can be viewed historically as one of the most beneficial achievements in the pursuit of peace.

This commitment to peace is found in all world religions. It is universal. But it was the peace-minded Anabaptist churches, based upon their desire for peaceful coexistence, who were the first to raise their voice against every form of war and violence.

In our country where the cross, the kippa and the headscarf meet in the same town, the same neighbourhood, the same street, all religions bear the indisputable responsibility for peace. Every person should have the freedom to live according to his or her faith without fear but also without any claim to exercise power over others.

This concept of freedom of religion today forms the basis of our coexistence and the Anabaptist tradition has played its part in this by insisting on the freedom of every individual, the limitation of governmental power in regard to religious freedom and the rejection of violence.

It is my wish that this message be heard by many people, as we live in a time when society's cohesion is being challenged and peace is being threatened in many places in our world.



Andrea Strübind

Daring! 500 year Anabaptist Movement 1525–2025

‘That’s daring!’ – We say that when we meet unconventional people who break society’s rules. ‘That’s daring!’ is what we say when encountering spectacular phenomena like the fight for women’s suffrage or for non-violent resistance. ‘That’s daring!’ – We say that too when judging a particular style of clothing or when we perhaps wish to criticise somebody who is exceptionally involved in some issue.

Daring – lifestyles that irritate or provoke ordinary people, break unwritten laws, or demand an impassioned response. ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained’, as the saying goes, but those that venture have often got a lot to lose. Such statements like ‘That’s very daring’, or ‘Pretty daring!’ can hardly be made without arousing emotions like admiration, scepticism or even disgust. The churches with faith-baptism have been sucked into this maelstrom of expectations, fears and secret appreciation from the time of the Reformation up to the present.

Over the centuries they were condemned as dreamers, heretics and outcasts, they were persecuted, marginalised and forgotten. The movement was diverse from the very beginning and the various churches that were formed were repeatedly stigmatised as dissenters, sectarians, fanatics, enthusiasts and insurgents. As long as the religious discourse centred around ‘the one true Church’ and ‘the one Truth’, the churches propagating faith-baptism could be targeted and stereotyped as enemies of the faith. Although the major churches and the political powers they sided with fought each other mercilessly and used violence in the name of the true faith, they agreed on the issue of the Anabaptists: ‘Much too daring!’ – these people don’t fit in with our country, our church, our faith and our life.

Anabaptist traditions mostly concentrated on ‘being different’. Part of Anabaptist identity became the conviction they were a persecuted minority, the ‘little flock’ of those true to the faith ‘having no spot or wrinkle’. From this background the ‘Free Churches’ emerged later as ‘contrast-churches’ following the Apostolic pattern.

Daring! – the motto for the process of remembering ‘500 years Anabaptist Movement’, beginning in 2020 and finding its festive culmination in January 2025, exactly 500 years since the date of the first believer’s baptism in Zürich. ‘Daring!’ implies activity. The anniversary’s title does not contain the name of a person or of one of the many theologians and martyrs of the movement: the logo is a dynamic cross. The identification mark and sign to win our attention is not a well-known face nor a reformer, although the movement had excellent and inspiring theologians, but is an astonishing fact. The Anabaptists were unsuited to become national heroes or to embody

the German character, as the concept of personality cult was foreign to their way of thinking and to their faith. They were a movement made up of many different Christian people, simple farmers, artisans, townspeople, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, in the country and in the town, they were often travelling, mostly involuntarily. Some were migrants for their faith, some elite persons in exile and some homeless folk, as well as freed slaves, sailors, patrons of the arts, established merchant families with civic pride and artists. They were seekers, nonconformists, but also narrow-minded men and women who radically stood aloof from the ‘world’ but also from those they considered to be less devout. What they had in common was their readiness to dare something new.

What did the Anabaptist movement dare? They took the church into their own hands. With great self-assurance it was lay people, men and women as brothers and sisters in different epochs and contexts, who formed independent fellowships where they read the Bible, celebrated Holy Communion and practised believers’ baptism. Their basis was the Reformation principle of ‘the priesthood of all believers’. They sought to put this into practice consistently. Thus they called into question the traditional church system, turning it upside-down, or, as they believed, putting it upright again.

They stood against the universal consensus in society when they refused to take the civic oath and to carry arms, feeling bound by the Sermon on the Mount. The defenceless and conscientious objectors were persecuted with particular violence. In the times of religious intolerance and wars of religion they vehemently demanded freedom of faith and conscience for everyone, including those of other religions and even for atheists. The desire to live according to the Bible in every consequence in order to maintain the purity of their congregations revealed increasingly the differences, for instance in clothing and in especially radical and rigorous ethics.

It was also daring to insist on the implementation in the present of the future hope found in the Bible. It led to the risky venture of the ‘New Jerusalem’ in Münster or to the vision of the Beloved Community as an alternative reform of society in the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. An exceptional act of daring is the discovery of the individual in his or her role in the church. One does not become a church member by birth but by a deliberate decision. Their fellowships were formed dynamically by those who joined together and knew their responsibility to the fellowship and wished to contribute their own spiritual experiences (soul competence). Really daring!

Anabaptist traditions offer a rich reservoir of alternative perspectives for faith and life. In this way these outsiders and minorities presented a challenge to their respective societies and enriched them. In the coming years these matters will be considered, researched and discussed in the ecumenical community. What should we dare as Christians in the 2020s? What should religious nonconformity look like nowadays? Which impulses can we take from the Anabaptist traditions, which ones must be rejected and where must we ourselves change?

The Anabaptist movements point above all to a frame of mind. In the course of much upheaval and various new starts, in suffering and conflicts, what counted was not novel ideas or alternative life-styles but trust and faith in the ever-present God. Such experiences of faith in suffering and conflict are probably the most important legacy of the Anabaptist movement and have indeed lost none of their relevance in our uncertain times.

Astrid von Schlachta

Pausing, Reflecting, Responding: The Symbols and Meanings of Anniversaries

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses onto the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Regardless of whether the event actually happened as told, the image is striking. The historical account suggests a powerful and bold initiative, one that communicated a message of disruption and transformation. The Reformation Anniversary of 2017 seized on this image, with one of the slogans reading: “The full impact of the Reformation”.

So far as we know, no Anabaptist used a hammer to appeal to the public like Martin Luther. Instead, the “opening blow” of the Anabaptists took place, according to the prevailing view, in a small room in Zurich. On January 21, 1525, those who were gathered there baptized each other in the course of a secret meeting. This baptismal act, which quickly became public, has often been described as the moment when the Anabaptist movement was born. But the ideas these Anabaptists espoused were already “in the air” in other regions. From the beginning, the Anabaptist movement was diverse. The events in Zurich were only part of a larger phenomenon.

Change, new beginnings, going “one step further” than the other Reformation currents – Anabaptists implemented all this without a hammer. Instead, they took up the pilgrim’s staff. Preachers travelled from one place to another to attend meetings, which were often held in secret. Many Anabaptists undertook long journeys to participate or to be baptized in those meetings. Others had to pack their bags when they were banished from their homelands, forced to flee under penalty of death.

The pilgrim’s staff was part of every journey in the sixteenth century. It not only assisted in walking; for Anabaptists it also raised the question of what nonresistance meant. The staff generally served to ward off the ever-present threat of robbers who made life difficult for travellers. Should Anabaptists also defend themselves when attacked? A walking stick can therefore prompt us to ask basic questions. For this reason, the groups organizing the “500 Years of the Anabaptist Movement” (500 Jahre Täuferbewegung) are presenting Anabaptist congregations with a pilgrim’s staff as a symbol of the journey that leads us to 2025.

Looking Back

If we look briefly to the past to ask how previous anniversaries were celebrated, we could start with 1860, the 300th anniversary of Menno Simons’s death. Carl J. van der Smissen, a Mennonite preacher from Friedrichstadt an der Eider, reported that prior to this event his daughter would go from house to house every Saturday with a “Menno box” (Menno Büchse) to collect money for an endowment that had been established in memory of Menno Simons. This was intended to help finance the construction of churches and schools. Other congregations also set up endowments to support the employment of theologically trained preachers. All these were signs of a spiritual renewal. Mennonites were leaving a life of separation and were increasingly engaging getting involved in society. At the same time, new social pressures were challenging basic Mennonite beliefs. New political ideas of equality and citizenship no longer recognized “privileges” for particular social groups, jeopardizing Mennonite exemption from military service. How to respond to these new circumstances became a central question. Although some Mennonite preachers were willing to abandon the principle of conscientious objection, others urged them to remain true. In his sermon commemorating Menno Simons for example, Jakob Mannhardt from Danzig called on his listeners to follow Jesus Christ in “humble, defenseless, calm composure”. Mannhardt understood this posture to include the “sword in one’s heart” – that is, envy, anger, hatred, pettiness, and self-will or selfishness.

Those who gathered in Basel in June 1925 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Anabaptist beginnings also reflected on Mennonite identity. By now however, Mennonites were firmly anchored in the larger religious landscape. By the late nineteenth century Mennonites had already increasingly accepted the idea that they were a part of the Reformation and therefore fully integrated into the world of contemporary Protestantism. Mennonites, for example, participated in

the meetings of the Evangelical Alliance, cooperating with other denominations in Bible and mission societies. So it was not surprising that representatives of many other groups were also present at their celebrations in Basel. Apparently there had even been an effort to publish a commemorative pamphlet together with the Baptists. Although that project did not materialize for logistical reasons, Christian Neff, a Mennonite preacher from the Weierhof, nevertheless expressed his joy that the Baptists had “taken up the idea of commemorating the 400-year anniversary with such enthusiasm and had been fully involved within their own denomination.”

Other anniversaries in the twentieth century clearly reveal that European Mennonites were becoming increasingly alienated from their namesake’s standpoint. In 1961, for example, many contributions to the 400th anniversary of the death of Menno Simons noted critically that Mennonites were no longer familiar with Menno’s basic theological ideas, since they no longer read his writings. Johannes A. Oosterbaan, professor of systematic theology in Amsterdam, however, emphasized the relevance of Menno’s theology in his central speech, emphasizing its similarities with modern theology, including that of Karl Barth.

Anniversaries bring history into the present and offer the opportunity to reassess questions of identity. What messages will be associated with 2025? Can the pilgrim’s staff help us to pause, to reflect on the journey thus far, and to look ahead? A staff, after all, is not intended for violence; it is rather a symbol of a new beginning – daring indeed!

PD Dr. Astrid von Schlachta

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Walter Fleischmann-Bisten

Anabaptists, Baptists, Mennonites – How are they related to each other?

Why Baptists still look back to the Anabaptist Movement

Names, Concepts and Numbers

From the very beginning of the Christian period the Greek word *baptisma* (baptism) has been used in various forms. For about 400 or 500 years the word 'Baptists' has been the name and the designation for two different Christian denominations which are nevertheless related historically and theologically.

When we speak nowadays in Germany of 'Baptists' or 'baptismal-minded' groups we are referring to a wide array of fellowships, congregations and churches. These are generally spoken of as 'the Baptist Movement' or 'the left wing of the Reformation'. They emerged virtually simultaneously with the Reformation in Wittenberg, in Switzerland and in upper Germany, which encompassed various areas of central Europe in the 1520s and 1530s. Their political and church contemporaries reviled them as 'Anabaptists' ('rebaptizers') and they were cruelly persecuted for a long period of time.

The Mennonites are also a part of the Anabaptist reformation in the 16th century. They take their name from the Frisian preacher Menno Simons (1496–1561) who was a contemporary of Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon. Adherents of the lay preacher Melchior Hoffmann (approximately 1495–1543), who baptised more than 300 people in Emden as 'confederates of Jesus Christ' were the cause of the negative image of the Anabaptists, by founding the 'Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster' (1534/35). After its collapse and a bloody retribution exacted through the courts Menno Simons gathered many of the peaceful Anabaptist groups, thus becoming the leading figure in the second generation of the Anabaptists in northwest Germany and the Netherlands. The Mennonite World Conference was established in 1925 and today about 1,300,000 Christians belong to it.

In England, the Baptist Movement historically originated from Puritan roots, independent of the Anabaptist Reformation on the Continent. The Baptist World Alliance was founded in 1905 and today roughly 40,000,000 Baptists are members, but the total number of Baptists worldwide is around 110,000,000.

A Joint but Separate Story

Anabaptists and Baptists have in common that their first church fellowships were essentially moulded by Zwingli's reformation in Zürich and Bucer's and Calvin's reformation in Strasbourg and Geneva. So they are genuine heirs of the Reformation in the 16th century. Right up to the present day that is how they view themselves, although in the 20th century they were still called 'stepchildren of the Reformation' or 'sects' and were treated correspondingly. This discrimination was connected above all with their perception of baptism, church order and the relationship between the state authorities and the Church, matters which the Anabaptists derived directly from the Bible.

Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), in his capacity as parish priest of the Grossmünster (cathedral) in Zürich, offered a Bible study group for educated people. The Bible was read in the original languages for better understanding. In this group were the humanist Konrad Grebel, the classicist Felix Mantz, the priest Ludwig Hätzer and the bookseller Andreas Castelberger. Along with others these were the founders of the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland and southwest Germany. As early as 1523, after two disputations over attempts to put the reforms into practice led to differences between Zwingli and some of his supporters. Both sides wanted to celebrate divine worship as laid down in the Biblical accounts.

Zwingli sought to gain the support of the townsmen for his reforms in order to prevent the civic and church community breaking apart. His critics contended for a church made up solely of believers and rejected the customary affiliation between state and church. The final break resulted from the question of Biblical baptism in 1524/1525. The Anabaptists advocated believer's baptism. The Zürich City Council and Zwingli insisted that imperial law be followed and that infants had to be baptised within eight days.

After discussion and prayer the first baptisms on the basis of faith took place on 21st January 1525 and the new fellowship shared Holy Communion on the following day. Similarly to Zwingli this was seen as a symbolic expression of fellowship with Christ and with fellow-Christians. Soon afterwards the first Anabaptists were executed by drowning or burning, whereas others after their expulsion from Zürich reached the area around Schaffhausen and Waldshut. The theologian Balthasar Hubmaier played an important role in establishing Anabaptist fellowships. In the aftermath of the Peasant War he had to flee via Augsburg to Moravia and in March 1524 he was burnt at the stake in Vienna for sedition and heresy.

England was where the Baptists had their roots. In the Elizabethan period the refugees who had been persecuted returned there and wanted to further the Reformation in the Church. The Church was to be cleansed from papal malpractice, according to the ideas of Bucer and Calvin. At first the expression 'Puritans' was considered an insult, because Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) favoured 'a middle way' between Rome and Geneva. In 1609 the adherent of Puritan theology John Smyth (1554–1612) began gathering English refugees in a church in Amsterdam, where believers' baptism was the basis for the first Baptist church. So the door was opened for the blueprint of a church which was free from post-biblical traditions and independent of political authorities. It would orient itself solely on the New Testament.

Dr. theol. Walter Fleischmann-Bisten M.A.

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Theological Consensus and Differences

At present, we believe that the discussions about how baptism was understood in the first Baptist church were endorsed by the Dutch Mennonites nearby. Smyth in fact baptised himself first and then his church members by affusion (pouring water over a person). When he adopted essential Mennonite principles, such as non-resistance and refusal to swear an oath, some members of his church left and returned to England with Thomas Helwys (1550-1616). In a similar fashion to the church in Amsterdam the swiftly growing church in England promoted absolute freedom of religion for everyone and rejected any form of interference in matters of faith by the state, dubbing it 'anti-Christian'. In this they were evidently close in theological terms to the position adopted at an early stage by the Anabaptists. Also, like the Anabaptists, they insisted on the complete independence of individual churches. The influence of Calvin in stressing the independence of the individual church is evident and important, as is its further development through Puritan criticism of the hierarchical structure of the Church of England. The so-called 'congregationalist' church form became worldwide a defining factor for Baptists. Nevertheless the early Baptist churches did differ substantially on one question: the churches that were influenced by Helwys taught that Jesus died on the Cross for everyone, not just for the elect. For that reason they were named General Baptists. But from 1644 those churches which were more under the influence of certain Calvinist Confessions were convinced that Jesus' work of redemption was only for those, whom God had chosen. They were called Particular Baptists. From 1640 onwards they only baptised by immersion and this became the standard procedure in all Baptist churches, in contrast to Mennonite practice. This diversity of Baptist teaching explains why both denominations were unable to agree on a common and worldwide Confession of Faith, although they could officially adopt certain important confessional texts.

It appears to me to be all the more important from an ecumenical point of view to adhere to the fact that both Baptists and Mennonites gave essential impetus to the World Council of Churches and belonged to this as founding members in 1948. They were also founding members of the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland).



The first Baptist baptism in Berlin took place in Rummelsburg Lake in 1837.

This lithograph was made by Gottfried Wilhelm Lehmann, the founder of the congregation (cf. the article by M. Schroeder in this issue, p. 108f.).

Source: Oncken-Archiv Elstal

Martin H. Jung

The Anabaptists and their Place in the History of the Reformation

The Reformation commenced with Luther's Theses in 1517. In 1520 he pondered over the sacraments; he retained baptism and communion, contemplated keeping the Sacrament of Penance, but rejected confirmation, marriage, last rites (extreme unction) and priestly ordination as unbiblical. He set out two principles which would accompany the Reformation in the future: the Scripture Principle and the Priesthood of all Believers. The first means that the Holy Scriptures are the sole benchmark for theological doctrine and ecclesiological practice, so all teaching and procedures that have arisen in the course of time with no Biblical basis or even contradict the Bible must be rejected. The priesthood of all believers stipulates that the church knows no difference between the priesthood and lay persons, between scholars and ordinary believers, because every believer is a priest and can communicate directly with God, and every person is taught by the Holy Spirit and so is capable of interpreting the Scriptures. In this way Luther laid the foundation for the Anabaptist movement, which meant that every believer is responsible for him- or herself to live and believe strictly as the Bible teaches. This of course was not Luther's intention at all.

After Luther had refused to recant his teaching at the Diet of Worms in April 1521 and had remained in hiding from May 1521 to March 1522, cloth makers from Zwickau arrived in Wittenberg and caused a stir through their religious messages. They called into question infant baptism and their arguments impressed Luther's most important fellow-theologians Philipp Melancthon and Andreas Bodenstein (also named Karlstadt). It seemed reasonable to conclude, after the rejection of the letters of indulgence, the veneration of saints and celibacy, that infant baptism – of course not baptism per se – should also be rejected as unbiblical and therefore needed to be eliminated.

In March Luther returned to Wittenberg and took over control again. Luther rejected the swift and radical changes that some wanted and above all the desire to abandon infant baptism. The people from Zwickau moved on, Melancthon relented and Karlstadt stuck to his convictions and withdrew. No Anabaptist group was formed in Wittenberg.

A genuine Anabaptist movement that rejected infant baptism and completely gave up that practice, only baptising adults, arose in a setting close to the Zürich reformer Ulrich Zwingli. He had taken over a prominent church ministry in Zürich, read Luther's writings and embraced the Reformation in 1520-1521. From 1523 onwards he began to restructure church services and alter church buildings. As in Wittenberg in 1521-1522 infant baptism was also questioned. At first Zwingli also had his doubts, but like Luther before him he adhered to it. Some of his followers remained critical, and in 1525 an adult was demonstratively baptised. Their opponents were outraged, denounced this action as blasphemy and sedition. Those critical of infant baptism considered the baptism of children to be invalid, because it was unbiblical, and also demanded proof that they had really been baptised as children. Such proofs were not available, there being no baptismal register at that time. In fact there were many people who through negligence had not been baptised as children. In 1527 the 'rebaptiser' Felix Mantz was sentenced to death and drowned in the Limmat, which flowed through Zürich.

Despite persecution, criticism of infant baptism continued, even from some who were close to Zwingli. In Waldshut a reformation influenced by Anabaptist ideas took place under Balthasar Hubmaier. In Moravia Anabaptist fellowships were formed. In 1527 supporters of the movement came together in Schleithem, a small town between Waldshut and Constance and a confession of faith was drawn up.

This confession demonstrates that the Anabaptists were not merely interested in the question of baptism, but in a life-style oriented on the New Testament, on the Sermon on the Mount and on the model of the early church. In addition there was the repudiation of violence, especially military service, and of the swearing of oaths. Their aim was to gather a pure and truly Christian church. Excommunication was also a consequence for those who did not abide by the rules.

In 1529 a Diet in Speyer addressed the matter. Catholic and Protestant princes and states agreed to threaten with death 'Anabaptists' and parents who did not bring their children to be baptised with death. Numerous death penalties were carried out. A year later the Lutheran reformers distanced themselves in the 'Augsburg Confession' from 'Anabaptists' and condemned their attitude to military service and oaths.

The reformers did not judge the Anabaptists to be heretics, as one might expect, instead they viewed them as blasphemers and insurgents, but they found it very difficult to defend infant baptism. They argued from original sin, maintaining that its power over a person was broken by baptism.

The Biblical justification was Jesus' statement 'Suffer little children to come unto me' (Luke 18, 16). The legitimacy of infant baptism was also deemed proven, because there have always been so many exemplary Christians, who have been baptised as infants. In order to maintain the connection between baptism and faith one pointed to the faith of the parents, the godparents and church, but also to the possibility that God has also given faith to the baby, that is not yet developed.

The Anabaptist groups in south Germany, Switzerland and Bohemia were unable to set up stable structures, because the pressure from persecution was too great. But two groups formed that are still extant today, the Amish in the USA and the Hutterites in Canada.

In the Westphalian Cathedral city of Münster Anabaptists, some of whom came from the Netherlands, came to power in 1534. The reports refer to a violent dictatorship that after a long siege was finally crushed by a joint army of Catholic and Protestant princes.

New momentum evolved in northwest Germany and in the Netherlands where the former priest Menno Simons gathered Christians critical of infant baptism and worked to establish churches. This fresh start, quiet and peaceful in essence, led to the Mennonite church, which gained its name from Menno, and today exists worldwide.

Marco Hofheinz

“The Baptist Vision”: Impulses from Anabaptist Theology

“Without a vision the people perish.” (Prov 29, 18) In a time when traditional assumptions seem to be coming apart at the seams, our attention is called once again to this insight. A messianic alignment is needed if we are to orient ourselves. After all, without hope – imprisoned in a present perceived only as ominous – efforts to act quickly wither. Without a larger perspective no insights capable of transformation in the “here and now” are likely to emerge.

In 1944, when Harold S. Bender (1897–1962), the American church historian and later president of the Mennonite World Conference, drafted the so-called “Anabaptist Vision”, he certainly did not have some utopian vision of the future in mind. The experiences of World War II, on which his writings were based, made such thoughts impossible. Nor did he intend to create a majestic vision of the future. As a historian he turned to the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland at the beginning of the sixteenth century. He began by describing the characteristics of “Schleitheim Anabaptism” as he perceived it. Here Bender identified three characteristics: firstly, a new understanding of the nature of Christianity as discipleship; secondly, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood of believers; and thirdly, a new ethic of love and rejection of the use of weapons.

Today, of course, we know that Bender created more than simply a “true” or neutral description. His “Anabaptist Vision” was not simply a descriptive representation of the perspectives of a founder generation. Instead, the “Anabaptist Vision” proved to be both descriptive and normative. Description and prescription were closely related in the text. In other words, with his “Anabaptist Vision” Bender provided both a narrative for his own actions in the midst of a war-torn world, while also creating something like a normative model for post-war Mennonitism. Beyond being merely descriptive, the text envisaged an ideal form of ethical and social life. According to Bender this proposed goal was based on the three basic principles, as stated above, and constituted Anabaptist self-identity.

In terms of its impact the “Anabaptist Vision” proved to be less a retrospective analysis than a guide for the future. It influenced, for example, John Howard Yoder (1927–1997), probably the most important Mennonite theologian of the twentieth century, but also the most controversial, following the revelation of his sexual abuses. Yoder for his part, strongly influenced the influential Baptist theologian James W. McClendon Jr. (1924–2000), along with the Methodist and later Episcopalian theologian, Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940).

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All three theologians, who have been called “the three most eloquent voices for Anabaptist ethics and theology” (David Augsburger), are united by the common desire to provide the theological profile and contours for the Anabaptist vision.

Following the Anabaptist vision of his teacher Bender, Yoder developed an ethic of discipleship focused on nonviolence as a characteristic of the Christian way of life. In his publications nonviolence represented not only an important social and ethical theme, but also the very essence of discipleship, because the “politics of Jesus” was fundamentally nonviolent. Nonviolence is like a grammar that should guide the thinking and behaviour of Christians. It forms to a certain extent the grammar of the life of Jesus Christ, whom Christians and ergo Christian theology are called to follow. To follow Christ is to live nonviolently, and to live nonviolently is, in essence, to be political.

McClendon developed a three-volume systematic theology along the lines of the “baptist Vision” – intentionally written with a lowercase b, which reveals his confessional self-perception. According to McClendon, the “baptist Vision” comprises five characteristics:

1. Awareness of the biblical “story” as our “story”;
2. Freedom as the freedom to obey God without the help or hindrance of the state;
3. Discipleship as a transformed life in obedience to the Lordship of Christ;
4. Community as a daily participation in this “vision”;
5. Mission as accepting responsibility for this precious witness.



Foto: Willi Timm, Neuruppin

Underlying the “baptist vision” was a dual hermeneutical strategy, understood by McClendon as both the fundamental mode of existence of Christ’s church and the common denominator of Anabaptist theology. A baptist hermeneutic is based on the double principle of classification of “Then-is-now” and “This-is-that.” On the one hand, it includes a keen awareness that the future, the eschatological community of “then” is, at the same time, the present “now”. On the other hand, the hermeneutical process of identification also moves in the opposite direction, based on the recognition of the past as present (“this-is-that”).

Finally, Hauerwas, who focused especially on ethics, translates “vision” into “story.” We are participants in a story, the story of God and his relationship with his people. The “vision” also belongs to this story. It is conveyed through narratives that are constituents of tradition and community. All this has a direct relationship to our identity, that is, to whom we are and to what we do.

The Anabaptist Vision gave, and continues to give, a sense of orientation to many people, especially in terms of giving practical guidance for right behaviour. Bender characterized discipleship – on which he based ecclesiology and ethics – as a central priority within this “vision”. Yoder, McClendon, and Hauerwas, following Bender directly or indirectly, also aligned their theological impulses conceptually to this basic scheme. All three agreed that vision is needed; more specifically, vision is needed in the form of an Anabaptist vision of following Jesus, which must then find expression in both theology and in the life of the church.

Lothar Triebel

Living Responsibly in the Ecumenical Context

‘Standfast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.’ (Galatians 5, 1) Living responsibly has both active and passive aspects. Active: Christians in the Anabaptist tradition sought to live responsibly right from the beginning. Passiv: This means being accepted as having full legal rights in society. In Germany this only became a reality in 1919. Before the adoption of the Weimar Imperial Constitution (Weimarer Reichsverfassung – WRV) Christians and their fellowships in the Anabaptist tradition were subject to numerous restrictions and persecution. Other Christians and church groups were actively involved in this, quite the opposite of Ecumenism as we understand it today. It was only possible after 1919 for Christians in this tradition (and other free churches, too) at least theoretically to exercise their legal rights, which they had been deprived of through no fault of their own.

In fact this solution took longer than expected and is still incomplete: In the context of the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and the Kirchentag (Church Congress) the same year in Berlin full recognition and appropriate participation was not in evidence everywhere. On the other hand it may be asked whether all Free Churches would have wanted to take part.

When one reflects on the German Constitution (Grundgesetz – GG), which adopted the articles on Religion from the WRV, and observes the consequences one is led to talk about university theology and religious instruction in schools. As mentioned above living responsibly appears as an internal matter of Protestant ecumenism. Here too there are active and passive aspects. Do those who have the right to accept or reject free church members in a Protestant theological faculty, when these desire to attain an academic degree or teach religion in a school, want to give Christians from a baptist tradition the formal permission to live responsibly? Besides, it may be questioned, if those who are interested in perceiving this right actually fulfil Kant’s criterium: ‘This irresponsibility is a person’s own fault, if its cause is not a lack of intelligence but failing resolution and courage.’ The Federation of Evangelical-Free Churches (Baptists) showed its courage and resolution at a recent national congress, when a motion was proposed to reject the use of the historical-critical method in the Theological Institute at Elstal near Berlin, but was thrown out by a large majority. Similar courage was shown by the Bienenberg Education Centre.

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Living responsibly in the ecumenical context means having the courage to practise one’s faith in every respect. Ecumenical Partners (not just Protestants) can be grateful for many examples from the baptist churches, past and present. All Christians can practise, theologically modified, Kant’s philosophical maxim: ‘Use your understanding without guidance from others.’ Of course, Christians are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so this maxim is only relevant when applied to other ‘guidance’. When Christians are in danger of following other gods like ‘verbal inspiration’ and so construct a different ‘guidance’ than theological, ecumenical and Christian responsibility is endangered. Galatians 5, 1 is misunderstood, if the Golden Rule is viewed as an adequate explanation of faith and is separated from its Biblical context, personal trust in the God of Israel, the trinitarian God, and therefore becomes an idol. That is also the case when a church member seeks ‘God’ in the forest, or does not seek him at all. It would appear that this misunderstanding of ‘guidance’ is less common in free church circles than elsewhere.

So living responsibly in the Ecumenical context of world-wide Christianity means being able to practise the Christian faith in God with confidence and remaining true to oneself, but with ecumenical partners: that presupposes the readiness not just to tolerate other Christians, but also to accept them as fellow-Christians as well as always being prepared to be challenged by believers from a different background.

Living responsibly in the ecumenical context of all humanity demands from Christians, as indicated by I Peter 3, 15 and James 1, 22, the readiness to confess jointly in word and deed the hope which fills us.



To reach this point processes are helpful and the expression ‘Healing of Memories’ is used for this process. Three examples: articles from the research project of the Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and 2018 with the title ‘Healing of Memories: Free Churches and State Churches in the 19th century’ were published. They dealt with the time before the WRV. At the Catholic Congress 2018 in Münster Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites prayed together in the church where the cages still hang where the Anabaptist leaders, after being tortured and executed, were displayed in 1536. ‘Impulses for Reconciliation’ formed the basis for the conference ‘New Perspectives on Baptism (sic!)’. In this way the Protestant Church in Germany and the Union of Free Churches entered new territory in March 2019.

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Hanspeter Jecker

Encouragement and Aspiration: Baptism from the Standpoint of History

In the Reformation period the central question was the renewal of the Church and a new religious practice. The debates around baptism were just one aspect of the broader struggle between traditional believers and those desiring reform. For one group within the reformation movement the subject of baptism led to their name. In the future those men and women were called Anabaptists, because they rejected infant baptism and hoped to introduce a Biblically adequate form of baptism as they viewed it, although they too desired to change the church, as well as doing away with the veneration of saints and the Mass.

From the autumn 1524 these believers, who were called ‘the radical wing of the Reformation’, underwent a process which increasingly alienated them from their teachers Luther and Zwingli. ‘After studying the Scriptures from every side we came to a clear conclusion.’ (As the Zürich Anabaptist Konrad Griebel later claimed.)

This ‘clear conclusion’ that they reached together (!) with regard to baptism sounded threatening to the Church: only those who voluntarily choose to be Christians, follow Jesus and live in fellowship with other Christians can belong to the Church. This position was obviously incompatible with infant baptism, the norm at least since the Middle Ages. As a result the Anabaptist movement introduced from 1525 new forms of baptism – depending on the context this was called faith-baptism, believers’ baptism, baptism on the profession of faith, voluntary baptism, or adult baptism. Baptists have always argued that this form of baptism was not their invention, but merely returned to the practice of the first Christians.

The political and ecclesiastical authorities all over Europe and far into the 18th century battled against what they saw as insurrection and heresy: the very foundation of society was threatened, if the close relationship between Christian and civic society, that had held over hundreds of years, should be abolished. The vitriolic polemic of the authorities disguises the fact that believers’ baptism hardly ever played a central role for those supporting it. The central insight of the free church movements maintained that a genuine renewal of faith and life, of church and society, as proclaimed by the main figures of the Reformation, was in great danger through bad compromises and false concessions to those in power, but also through long-established habits or unwillingness to leave one’s own comfort zone.

By belonging to the Christian church through baptism Anabaptists were unreservedly prepared to live following Jesus’ example, to love God, their neighbours and their enemies, humbly, courageously, with devotion and with readiness to suffer. Such faith cannot be forced on people, but is a gift that is accepted personally and voluntarily and which has to be witnessed to others and practised in everyday life.

In their particular situation it is unsurprising that the Anabaptists increasingly stressed both God’s provision and care, but also His claim on their lives. For that reason their baptismal practice reflected what God had done and was still doing, and the twofold answer they gave in return – in trusting God’s provision and care and also the desire to live according to it in the future.

Unfortunately this confrontation between the State Churches and Anabaptists, which was often dramatic and tragic during the centuries, led in many ways to one-sidedness. Merely preaching God’s provision and care and neglecting His claim on one’s life can result in ‘cheap grace’, from which dreadful harm to Church and society inevitably follows. On the other hand by stressing God’s claim alone – and this happens in Baptist and Free Church circles even up to the present – faith can eventually degenerate into escapism and a conviction of one’s own superiority, to unmerciful legalism and the contemptible desire to control others.

It is undisputed that the Anabaptist movement, through its insistence on voluntary membership coupled with faith, has definitely contributed ever since the Reformation period, ensuring that the discussion about the freedom of religion, faith and conscience in church and society does not disappear. As a minority that was able to survive in some areas over hundreds of years **despite** repression or fled into other areas and made their own home there **because of** repression, they still inspire further reflection: reflection on how majorities and minorities interact and reflection on the advantages and dangers of flight or remaining where one is. Freedom of conscience, the suffering of refugees, questions of migration and integration – 500 years later these topics are still highly relevant!



Foto: Liesa Unger, Regensburg

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Baptism in an Ecumenical Context: A Mennonite Perspective



Foto: Liesa Unger, Regensburg

With a few exceptions like the Quakers and the Salvation Army, baptism is practiced in all Christian churches. Nevertheless, on many questions – especially the appropriate age for baptism – the various denominations do not agree. Therefore, baptism remains an open topic in ecumenical discussion. As a rule baptism marks the admission of a person into membership of both the universal church of Jesus Christ as well as the individual denominational church. In those groups that have traditionally baptized infants or small children, several rituals complementary to baptism, such as confirmation, are important for church membership and the associated rights, such as voting or assuming church offices.

Even Anabaptist churches do not have a uniform response to the question of the appropriate age for baptism. In particular, groups on the evangelical spectrum who emphasise highly experiential forms of faith are typically inclined to baptise at a relatively young age, for example in the context of so-called “child evangelism”. As a consequence baptism is often separated from the rights and duties of church membership. Others find such developments alarming, because they regard a close connection between baptism and responsible, mature church membership as being at the core of a faithful understanding of both baptism and the church. In reality, this question is no less important than the differences with groups who practise infant baptism, which have mostly been the focus of ecumenical discussion.

Ecumenical dialogues on controversial issues have contributed much to a better understanding of differing positions while also making clear that these differences do not affect the basic Christian confession. Despite differences in conviction and expression, in a highly secularised environment such as Europe where the once powerful position of Christian churches is greatly diminished, an emphasis on unity and communion appears to have a higher priority. However, the fact that there is still disagreement about baptism continues to trouble many committed ecumenists, especially those who regard the baptism of infants to be theologically appropriate. In the German-speaking world, one frequently encounters theologians in the largest churches (i.e., Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and United) – sometimes even in church leadership – who are surprised to learn that there are “ecumenical churches” which do not recognize each other’s baptism.

Many are unaware that not all of the member and host churches of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen (ACK – Association of Christian Churches) signed the 2007 Magdeburg Declaration on the mutual recognition of baptism, despite the fact that the ACK both initiated and made this conclusion possible. Unfortunately, the process leading up to the

Magdeburg Declaration did not include a discussion regarding the content of baptism. It only stated which participants were in agreement with the principle of mutual recognition. Thus the question of baptism still remains unsolved in the ecumenical context will remain so despite progress in the discussion.

The 1982 Lima “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” document, which was a milestone in the international ecumenical discussion, called upon Anabaptist churches to refrain from anything that could be interpreted as a “re”-baptism – that is, baptising as adults new members who had been previously baptized in other confessions as infants. Churches that baptised infants understandably welcomed this formulation, but the Anabaptist churches found it too broad. On the other hand, the document also asked paedobaptist churches to refrain from the “indiscriminate” baptism of infants. It was intended to stress that those practising infant baptism should determine whether or not the infant in question would be nurtured in a Christian family in which faith is practiced. If that was not the case, then refraining from baptism might be the more appropriate course of action.

Anabaptist churches differ widely in their baptismal theology and practice. And few of these churches take part in these ecumenical discussions. Among those Anabaptist churches that do participate in the ecumenical discourse – and even among a few groups who do not – a lively discussion has emerged in recent decades about the question of whether baptism can be disregarded for people who have been baptised as children, but wish to join an Anabaptist congregation. This is now the case in a growing number of Anabaptist congregations, including the congregations of the Assembly of Mennonite Churches in Germany (AMG – Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland) who adopted this principle long before the Lima statement of 1982. In the recently concluded trilateral dialogue on baptism between the Vatican, the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite

World Conference, the Mennonite representatives recommended that Mennonite churches should at least initiate discussions to explore ways to make this possible. The situation is somewhat different among the Baptists, but here, too, some things have begun to change.

But on the other hand Anabaptist churches have gained the impression that there is no change on the part of paedobaptist churches in respect of “indiscriminate baptism”. Indeed, on the contrary, infant baptism seems to be enjoying a renaissance.

All the churches that practice baptism regard it as the act whereby an individual is incorporated into the body of Christ, the universal church, the particular denomination and the individual congregation, although each group lays a different emphasis on the individual aspects. For churches that baptise infants, God Himself acts in baptism. So God’s active grace is recognised – and this aspect is clearly in the foreground. The confession of faith by the person being baptised is secondary, or something that can be added at a later time, for example at confirmation. For Anabaptist churches God’s grace and human response are directly related to each other. At baptism the individual confesses his or her faith and a willingness to follow Christ within the community of believers. Anabaptist churches are unwilling to view these two aspects as taking place at different times. For them, baptism signifies the personal and mature appropriation of faith.

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Baptism in the Ecumenical Context – A Baptist Perspective

Baptists are now a worldwide movement and have their origin in English nonconformity. This group left the Anglican Church in the 16th century, because the kings and bishops were not willing to allow the Reformation to develop further towards Calvinism and instead clamped down on all those who desired just that. Some of the separatist fellowships realised at the beginning of the 17th century that not just the episcopal Church Constitution but also infant baptism needed to be abolished. This happened independently from the Anabaptists and formed the basis for the Baptist Denomination.

Baptists do not baptise infants, but only people who personally confess their faith. Nevertheless there is much consensus in their baptismal theology with that of other churches – not just with those sharing a similar theology (Mennonites, FIEC-Churches or Pentecostal Churches), and not just with Karl Barth's reformed theology, since he was also an opponent of infant baptism, because he did not regard Christian baptism as a sacrament (instrument of Grace), but as an act of obedient confession by the candidate for baptism. Many Baptists would also share this point of view. On the other hand there are many Baptist theologians who would consider baptism to be both an act of confession and gracious dealing by God himself with the person being baptised; a 'rendezvous between Grace and Faith' (George R. Beasley-Murray). Baptists would also concur with the Lima Declaration (Baptism: § 8): 'Baptism is both the gift of God and our human response to this gift.'

As baptism is a reciprocal relationship between God and man, Baptists view it as a covenant between the two. Martin Luther said in his 'Sermon on the Holy Sacrament of Baptism' (1519): 'The Holy Sacrament of Baptism demonstrates to you that God unites with you and you are joined in one gracious, loving covenant.'

I Peter 3, 21 was translated by Luther as follows: Baptism is 'the covenant of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ' and comments that 'covenant' means 'God is committed to us by Grace and we participate in this Grace.' According to Baptist convictions that is what happens in baptism. Thus Baptists can sing wholeheartedly the chorale penned by the Lutheran Theologian Johann Jakob Rambach (1693–1735): 'I am baptised in His name.'

Because God promises that the candidate is His child the person baptised replies in words corresponding to this chorale that he or she promises to be faithful and obedient to Him. So this reciprocal relationship of commitment and promise between God and man is sealed in baptism, which is what Luther and Rambach, too, expressed in the term 'covenant'. The Leuenberger Agreement (1973) between Lutherans, Reformed and United Churches as well as the Waldensians and Bohemian Brotherhood said, while referring to baptism (§ 14): 'In (baptism) Jesus Christ takes the fallen and sinful human being irrevocably into His fellowship of the redeemed and transforms him into a new creation. He calls him into His Church through the Holy Spirit and to a life of faith, daily repentance and discipleship.'

Baptists are in agreement with this, but nevertheless ask whether it can only be true for those who are baptised as believers and confess their faith publicly.

Besides that, this article in the Agreement only refers to what God does in baptism and ignores the activity of the person being baptised. Though correctly describing God's gift, it ignores our human reaction to the gift. Baptists would therefore add the third verse of Rambach's chorale 'I am baptised in His name':

*I promised you in fear and love
That I will be faithful and obedient;
O Lord, I dare to be yours alone
Of my own free will.*

The theology of the Reformers claims that the sacraments effect what they describe, not automatically, but only by faith in the promise, that is connected with the outward signs. Without the reply of faith God's Grace has not achieved its purpose. Baptists want to uphold this conviction of the Reformation.

There is also important agreement between the Baptist and the Roman Catholic understanding of baptism – above all when one considers the Decree on Justification at the Catholic Council of Trent in 1547. This elucidates that justification begins with God's prevenient Grace, that is imparted by God's call and not through baptism. The Decree also states, that as a reaction to God's prevenient Grace, a person turns to faith, which 'cometh by hearing' (Romans 10, 17) and 'shows such repentance, which necessarily takes place before baptism'(!), prepares for baptism and is willing to begin a new life. Justification itself follows through baptism, which, according to the resolution of this Council, is the 'Sacrament of Faith' and without this faith nobody can be justified. In this respect, by placing baptism in the theology of justification, the Catholic position is fully in agreement with Baptist teaching and practice.

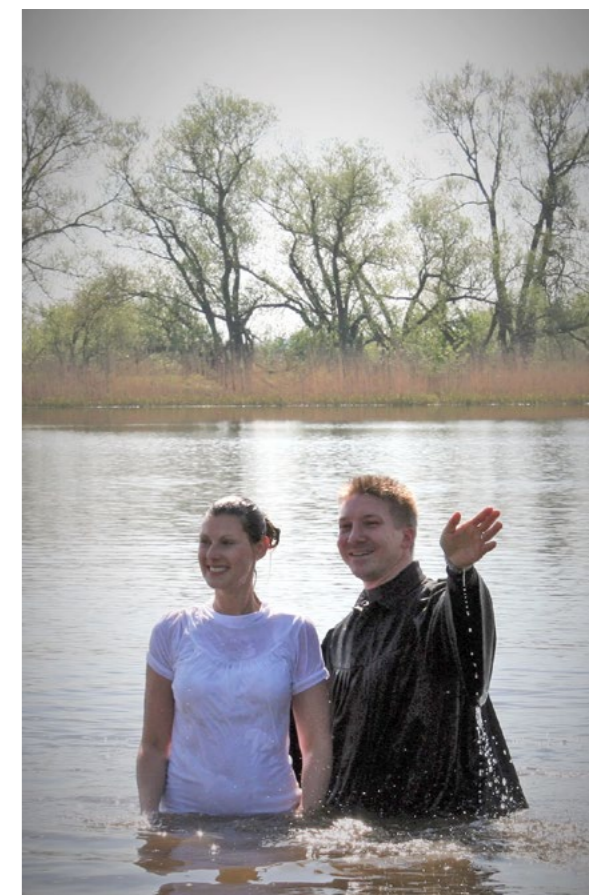


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Markus Grübel

The Contribution of the Anabaptist Movement to Worldwide Freedom of Religion

Fundamental civil liberties have been violated most often for reasons connected with religion or ideology. In our times Christians are especially affected, but of course many others are as well. In the development of worldwide religious freedom the Anabaptist Movement played an historic role, although it appears that many champions of human rights up to the present reject this link. Their explanation would be that human rights were propagated from the time of the French Revolution in 1789, but this theory must be qualified. Without tracing the historical development of religious freedom here in Germany in detail, it is relevant to remind ourselves that it was the Anabaptist movement which gave impetus to this basic human right.

The legacy of the Anabaptists lives on today in the Free Churches. Despite their various individual characteristics Free Churches justifiably bear this name. Three of their common features are the experience of massive oppression by state and society, protest against the theft of freedom of religion and of conscience and the organisation of new church-fellowships, which deliberately attempted to avoid moving in a false direction. In the so-called New World this can be clearly observed.

In my capacity as Commissioner of the German Government for worldwide religious freedom – incidentally as a practising Catholic – I like summing up my task in this way: I discern, disclose and devise deals.

The trio of ‘religious freedoms’ characterised the Free Churches from the beginning. We recall the Baptist Roger Williams. In 1635 he was banished from the Bay Colony because he demanded that the civil authorities should not interfere with matters concerning God and religion. He had to flee from the authorities in his town and survived the winter 1635–1636 in a village of the indigenous Narragansett people, because some non-Christians had saved him from the Christians. He learned to respect the beliefs and the conduct of the Narragansetts and bought land from them.

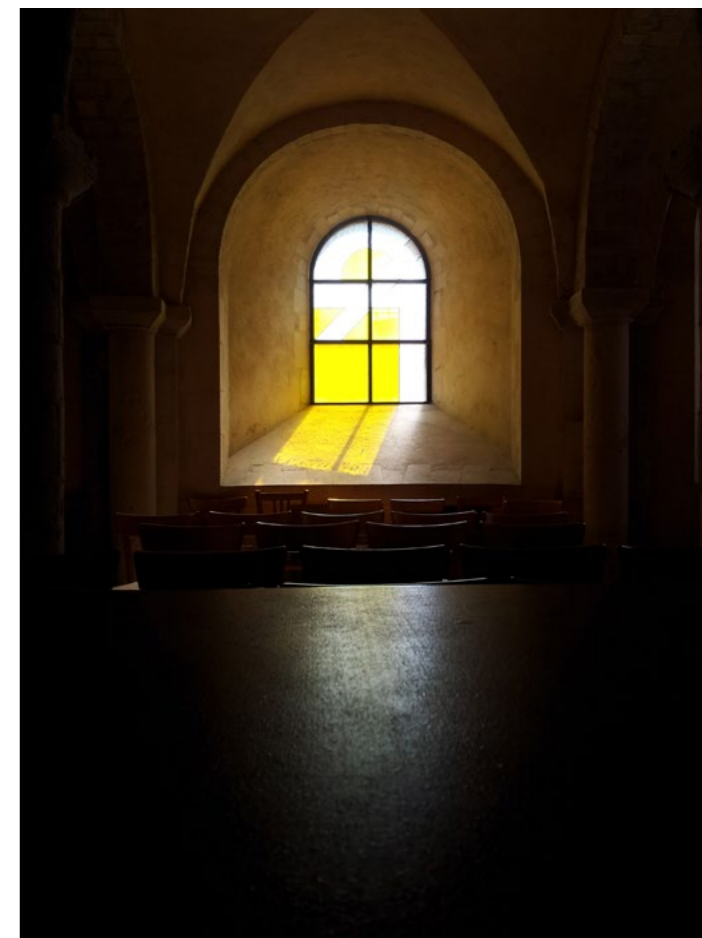
He founded the settlement ‘Providence’ with other dissenters, because he had been rescued by God’s providence ‘*providentia Dei*’ to perform his ‘Mission’. The settlement later became the capital of the colony of Rhode Island. It was the express intention of the colony to offer sanctuary and legal security to people who were facing hardship because they followed their conscience.

In the context of the debate on human rights and religious freedom I call to mind Julius Köbner, who played an important role in the German Baptist Movement but is otherwise not so well-known. In an analogy with the Communist Manifesto he wrote his ‘Manifesto of Free and Primitive Christianity for the German People’ in 1848. He demanded that a person should be allowed to follow his or her conscience and has the right to enjoy freedom of religion. Political and religious freedom go hand in hand. This would inevitably prevent the marriage of throne and altar.

The Manifesto was banned soon after its appearance. The basic convictions it sets forth regarding human rights are nowadays public knowledge: religious truths cannot be enforced by the state – state and religion must remain separate and can only co-operate when there is no state religion. 100 years ago the Weimar Imperial Constitution (WRV), Article 137 (1) claimed unequivocally: ‘There is no State Church.’ The articles of the WRV pertaining to State and Church were adopted by the German Constitution (Grundgesetz, GG) 70 years ago. Article 140, GG says: ‘The provisions in the articles 136, 137, 138, 139 and 141 from the German Constitution of 11th August 1919 are constituents of this German Constitution.’

The Baptists gave us decisive help in recognizing more clearly what the persecuted Christians of the first centuries believed, before Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century under the Emperor Constantine. The Christian author Tertullian stated at the beginning of the third century: ‘It is a human right and a natural law (*humani iuris et naturalis potestatis est*) that every person may worship whatever he or she desires.’ He also added the statement that ultimately no God could ever be pleased if He is only worshipped under compulsion.

It is good and important to keep in mind these religious roots of human rights with respect to freedom of religion and worldview, which were later ratified in 1948 by the United Nations. Religion has the potential to contend for freedom. It follows that religious self-criticism and civil courage, legal regulations for defining the responsibility of the nations in the questions of freedom of religion and conversion must be debated. In the Baptist tradition one finds both continuing experiences and reorientation, which help us now as we confront the present political challenges to the worldwide question of religious freedom. It was a good decision by the German government to create the internationally relevant Department for Religious Freedom in 2018, since there are continuing religious-political issues in our society and on the wider international stage, to which we must address ourselves: How can we prevent crimes committed for religious reasons? How should we practise religious freedom in issues such as the headscarf, slaughtering in religious traditions, Halal standards, circumcision or liturgical bell-ringing? Why do we need a constructive confrontation with the political abuse of Islam? When we observe how people live together in our world we also discover, as in the history of the Baptists, mutual respect, not merely as in the case of the Narragansetts, but for example in the way young people of different faiths rebuilt a mosque and a church in Mosul.



At the same time there is continuing persecution of Christians, of Yasidis and Rohingyas. It is our responsibility to make sure that oriental Christianity is not extinguished, but also that the expansion of the Orthodox Church in Russia does not, as in previous generations, lead to increased oppression of the Free Churches. The long battle for Freedom of Religion is by no means over.

Markus Grübel, MdB

Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für weltweite Religionsfreiheit

¹ Vgl. Konrad Hilpert, *Die Menschenrechte. Geschichte, Theologie, Aktualität*, Düsseldorf 1991, S. 118.

² Vgl. Erich Geldbach, *Freikirchen. Erbe, Gestalt und Wirkung (Bensheimer Hefte, 70)*, 2. Auflage, Göttingen 2005.

³ Hilpert, *Menschenrechte*, S. 123 f.

Andreas Liese

Köbner's 'Manifesto of Free and Primitive Christianity for the German People'

In the Baptist 'Missionsblatt der Evangelisch-Taufgesinnten' from May 1848 we read that it had not been possible so far to report on the development of the Baptists in the German states, because state censorship had prohibited this. But: 'The oppressor of divine and human rights has at last been overthrown by the Lord.' It is now possible to report and to thank God 'for the freedom of the Word.' In conclusion the text reads: 'May God's children use this freedom wisely and be richly blessed by Him!' It is generally assumed that this anonymous article was penned by Julius Köbner (1804–1884) who was the editor of this journal. He was the preacher in the Baptist Church in Hamburg, founded by Johann Gerhard Oncken in 1834. They had both had personal experiences of the lack of freedom of religion (interrogation, arrest and the like). Köbner was allowed to report on missionary success in distant countries but his 'Mission Journal' had no permission to refer to the statistics of the Hamburg Church.

It is therefore quite understandable that he was excited about the way things were developing in Germany. The spark from the February Revolution in France had jumped across to the German states and triggered off a revolutionary wave that changed everything. The old political structures collapsed, liberal politicians took over governmental responsibility, press censorship ceased and freedom of speech was guaranteed.

After the elections to the National Assembly in May 1848 a commission was put in place to draw up a constitution for the German national state.

Around the same time Köbner wrote his 'Manifesto of Free and Primitive Christianity'. He too greeted enthusiastically the change in the German political situation. But one could hear the call 'Freedom of Religion' and 'Separation of State and Church' everywhere and the demise of the State Church was now believed to be imminent and the Church was attacked in polemic language. Köbner contrasted this approach with apostolic and primitive Christianity which he considered to be true Christianity.

Of course in the meantime the situation has changed radically. There is no longer a 'State Church', the German Constitution guarantees religious freedom. Why should Köbner's Manifesto still be relevant today?

Köbner's remarks are significant first and foremost because he demanded comprehensive freedom of religion and conscience without distinction, which means for Jews, Muslims and 'everybody else'. It is revealing that he quotes nearly word for word Thomas Helwys, the founder of the first Baptist church on English soil at the beginning of the 17th century. In the present time, when fear of Islam is often being stirred up, Köbner's statement is directly relevant: Christians should stand up for religious freedom for Muslims and of course vigorously oppose every form of anti-Semitism.

Köbner also demanded that equality be granted to all religious groups. Freedom of Religion for all – thus was Köbner's conviction – could only exist when no religious group receives special treatment from the state. It may well be asked to what extent that has become a reality in Germany. It can often be observed that the two big churches often have a closer relationship to the state than smaller religious groups, although the Constitution prescribes separation of State and Church and equality of all religious groups.

Köbner also desired that every person should be allowed to express his or her convictions. For him somebody who rejected Christianity was preferable to a person who only superficially confessed faith. Through the 'civil emancipation' made possible by the revolution, anyone, including atheists, may publicly profess his or her convictions. In this way rival opinions compete with each other. Christians try to compete merely by word and deed. In our modern version of this doctrine, we would say: Köbner represented a religious and ideologically neutral and pluralistic state. This should be the aim of Christians, since only such a state takes people and their personal convictions seriously.

It is also clear that such freedoms are not possible without civil freedom. For that reason he categorically greeted the revolution, which made this state of affairs possible. So we learn from him that working for religious freedom means working for political freedom.

Köbner also maintained that Baptists would come to decisions, in which every vote counted equally. The 'highest authority' means 'a simple majority'. Indirectly this also means that when Baptists practise democracy in their churches, they are offering the state a possible role model. For Christians in this tradition it demands of them that they really live democracy in their churches, but also combat political disenchantment in society.

It is important to point out that Köbner, who addressed 'the German people', sent his manifesto as a petition to the Constitutional Committee. It arrived there according to the minutes at the beginning of September. And Köbner could hope, because the 'fundamental rights' were proclaimed by the National Assembly in December 1848 and these also contained freedom of religion and equality of religious fellowships. In March 1849 the complete Constitution was passed. However this did not take effect, as the Revolution finally failed and the old authorities regained power in state and society. Köbner's manifesto was banned and not until the Weimar Republic was it published anew and is more relevant than ever today.

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Martin Rothkegel

Balthasar Hubmaier

In 1524 Balthasar Hubmaier, the parish priest in Waldshut, a town on the Swiss border, published a small pamphlet, entitled: 'On Heretics and Those who Burn them'. It was not written in Latin, the usual language for theological literature, but in German, so Hubmaier could reach more readers with his 36 theses, which set forth the reasons why people should never be persecuted with violence because of their faith, independent of its truth or falsehood. For him, those who persecute heretics are themselves the biggest heretics. Hubmaier's text played a significant role in making the appeal for freedom of religion one of the central subjects of the Anabaptists right from the beginning.

Hubmaier came from Friedberg near Augsburg. His year of birth is unknown, but he was of a similar age to Martin Luther (born 1483). In 1512 he obtained his doctorate in theology and was made professor in Ingolstadt. In 1516 he became dean of the cathedral in Regensburg. Three years later he was chaplain for pilgrims at the 'Chapel of the Beautiful Madonna', which had been built where the Regensburg synagogue had previously stood before its destruction. It seems that Hubmaier enjoyed appearing in public and reaching the masses.

In 1520 he moved quite abruptly in a new direction and took over the church in the small provincial town of Waldshut where he had contact with reform-oriented theologians in Zürich, Basel and Konstanz. In the discussions about reforming the church, the former professor took the side of the young and radical church critics. His aim was not merely to replace the Catholic Mass with a Protestant communion service as happened in Zürich, but also to remove infant baptism and institute believer's baptism as in the New Testament. At Easter 1525 the new liturgy was introduced in Waldshut. Troops occupied the town and reintroduced Catholic services. Hubmaier had to flee, because the Habsburgs pursued him as an insurgent and traitor.

One of his former students from Ingolstadt was a priest in Nikolsburg in Moravia and through this contact Hubmaier found a new sphere of activity there. From the summer of 1526 till the following summer he was able to carry out a local Reformation there according to his vision, being actively supported by the Lichtenstein landowners, to whom the town and surrounding area belonged. Contemporaries reported that there was a kind of mass pilgrimage to that place: Men and women came from Moravia and Austria in carts and on foot to the little town in southern Moravia to be baptised as believers. But after just a year of his successful activity Hubmaier was forced to leave. At the end of 1526 the Habsburg sovereign Ferdinand I had become King of Bohemia and thus the ruler of Moravia. In 1527 the new king ordered Hubmaier's extradition. In the following spring Hubmaier was burnt at the stake in Vienna.

Hubmaier's theological thought remained to a certain degree incomplete. He had no more opportunity to consider what the church would look like when baptism and church membership became a matter of choice. Indeed, church membership by choice necessarily follows voluntary baptism and a refusal to persecute those of a different religious persuasion makes religious pluralism virtually unavoidable. However, Hubmaier lacked the practical experience to recognise either of these insights. The Anabaptist churches in Waldshut and Nikolsburg were destined to remain short-lived experiments, although in the long term Hubmaier's writings were influential. His motto read: *You cannot destroy truth!* In the texts from his time in Nikolsburg he affirmed that very principle which became the central tenet for freedom of religion as propagated by Anabaptists: Faith is a gift of God, so no person can ever be forced to have faith.



Balthasar Hubmaier

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Erich Geldbach

Roger Williams

Roger Williams (born in London around 1603, died in Providence 1683) studied at Pembroke College, Cambridge and was ordained as a minister of the Church of England in 1628. In 1631 he emigrated to the colony of Massachusetts Bay and was welcomed as an honoured guest by the Governor John Winthrop (1588–1649). Winthrop's politics were based on the connection, seen as God's will, between the Congregationalist and Puritan Church and the government ('standing order'). This was one form of Puritanism, which viewed an Episcopal charter as a relic of the Catholic past and from this past the church had to be purified (the word Puritan is derived from 'to purify'). The church should be organised as a 'gathered church'. John Cotton, the theological spokesman, argued that priests and Jesuits should be forbidden entry into the country, as otherwise 'pernicious influence' would result and God would revoke his blessing. The government had to impose uniformity to keep religious enemies away.

In contrast Williams denied that the government had the right to impose the first tablet of the Law by force. For that reason he was threatened with exile in 1635 and fled to avoid that fate. He survived the winter 1635–1636 by living with the tribe of the Narragansett. He bought land from them and founded the colony of Providence. He had survived by God's providence ('providentia Dei'). Providence offered refuge for those whose conscience had put them in conflict with the law. It was here that Williams was crucially involved in founding the first Baptist church in North America. It still exists today in Providence, the capital city of the smallest state in the USA, Rhode Island. Together with the Baptist pastor and doctor John Clarke (1609–1676) Williams established this colony. Although he held fast to Baptist ideals he left the church just a few weeks after his baptism. In order to gain a 'royal charter' both Williams and Clarke spent several years in England.

In the context of the Thirty Years' War and the English Civil War Williams wrote in 1644 his principle work 'The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed in a Conference Between Truth and Peace'. Truth and Peace are best served when there is no coercion in matters of faith. The secular and the spiritual must be separated; a hedge or a wall of separation must be put up between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world. To enforce uniformity by an 'Act of Uniformity' leads to civil war, subjugation of conscience, persecution, violation of souls and hypocrisy.



Roger Williams, Statue at the Reformation Monument in Geneva
© Traumrune / Wikimedia Commons

The church as the voluntary assembly of baptised Christians is comparable to a medical council, which orders its own affairs or disintegrates without harming the peace in the body politic. Since Christ all nations should be purely civil states. Conflicts may only be ended with the Sword of the Spirit. Neither Pope, nor kings nor princes are in possession of both tablets of the Law. A ship ('commonwealth') can be steered by a heathen or a Christian captain ('governor'), because the skill, not the religion of the captain, is what counts. On board there may be Papists, Jews, Turks or Protestants. Each group may celebrate its own services; the captain must not impose any religious rules. His task is to ensure there is discipline among the sailors and passengers. (And no mutiny, which means no civic disorder, as church polemics claimed had been caused by those propagating believer's baptism.) In this way coexistence can succeed.

The political community receives its rules through 'Democracy or Popular Government'. This is a completely new approach. As a matter of course society had been previously governed by 'a ruler by the grace of God' and democracy was 'mob rule', thus excluding God's influence. Williams and Clarke structured a state in which 'full liberty in religious concerns' was envisaged. No person 'should in any way be harassed, punished, distressed or doubted because of differing opinions in religious matters'. Every individual should 'have and enjoy' complete freedom of conscience.

So, long before the time of Enlightenment, a Baptist society emerged based on the freedom of conscience and religion. This 'living experiment' exercised an enormous influence on the political ideals of freedom and on the catalogue of human rights.

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¹ *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience, Discussed in an Conference Between Truth and Peace. John Cotton, reagierte 1647 mit „Die blutige Lehre gewaschen und weiß gemacht im Blut des Lammes“ (The Bloody Tenet washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb), woraufhin Williams 1652 erwiderte „Die blutige Lehre noch blutiger durch Cottons Versuch, sie im Blut des Lammes weiß zu waschen“ (The Bloody Tenet yet more Bloody by the Cottons Endeavour to wash it white in the Blood of the Lamb).*

² *A hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.*

What Does it Mean to Live “Maturely” Within the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition?

John D. Roth

In April 1525, only a few months after the first adult baptisms that had marked the birth of the Anabaptist movement, Zurich authorities arrested a young woman named Elsy Boumgartner on the charge of “rebaptism”. But when they offered to release her if she would promise never to return to the area, Boumgartner stubbornly refused. Instead, she quoted the first verse from Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s” and said that “God had made the earth for her as well as for the rulers”. During the century that followed Anabaptists turned repeatedly to this verse – “the earth is the Lord’s” – referring to it in interrogation transcripts, confessional statements, letters of comfort, and even in their hymns. The last Anabaptist to be executed in Switzerland, a 70-year-old self-educated farmer named Hans Landis, cited the verse repeatedly to government authorities before he was beheaded in 1614; and it offered comfort to many who did flee their homeland.

For Anabaptists in the Swiss and South German tradition the verse from Psalm 24 pointed to the heart of what it meant to “live maturely” in the world.

In the first place, the claim that “the earth is the Lord’s” was a political statement, a powerful reminder to the political rulers of their day of the limits to their authority. Most Anabaptists respected the need for civil authority, but in wanting to live a mature life as Christians they were unwilling to grant absolute allegiance to earthly princes or magistrates. Christ’s kingdom extended beyond political borders.

Psalm 24, 1 was also an economic manifesto. If the “earth was the Lord’s”, then all of creation ultimately belonged to God. Humans were merely stewards of their possessions. This attitude was the basis for new forms of economic life among many Anabaptist groups often challenged assumptions regarding private property and the logic of Western capitalism. Mature Christians shared their possessions generously and joyfully in the knowledge that they were only caretakers of what belonged to God.

Finally, the claim that the “earth is the Lord’s” had deeply spiritual resonances. Although it might seem as if the forces of evil in the world were prevailing, the reason that many Anabaptists had the courage to persist in their convictions – sometimes singing in the midst of torture or testifying as they were burned at the stake – is because they were certain that in the long run of history the power of love would prevail over hatred and life would prevail over death. Living maturely could include a life of nonviolence, because the battle between good and evil had already been won – “the earth is the Lord’s”.

The challenges of our world today are not essentially different from those of the sixteenth century. We still live today with the legacy of maps drawn by colonial powers. Arguments about immigration policy and border security assume the legitimacy of a geography invented by rulers who virtually craved divine power over creation. The pressures of market capitalism – along with the urge to accumulate wealth at any cost – can dominate our lives. Radical generosity today seems risky, even “irresponsible”. And the impulse to resolve conflicts by force, whether explicit or subtle, remains a powerful temptation, especially for those who are now in positions of relative power.

For those who wish to honour the legacy of the Anabaptists, one could offer no greater tribute than to ask what the verse “the earth is the Lord’s” means for “living responsibly” in our own context.

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“Living Maturely”

Lena Dillmann

The term “maturity” is generally associated with the ability to discern right from wrong and a sense of responsibility to act accordingly. In the context of the church these qualities are based on two scriptural pillars: “Test everything, keep what is good” (1 Thess 5, 21) and “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5, 1). As a mature member of the church, I am called to test everything, both inside and outside the church and then, out of my freedom in Christ, to discern what is good and to put it into practice. In order to test or discern things outside the congregation, one must first of all be informed. A mature Christian is someone who is informed about what is happening in the world, and sees herself or himself as part of society.

Paul says that within the congregation those who are mature are skilled in testing good and evil, for they are familiar with the Word of God, which is the sole standard for discernment (Hebr 5, 12–14). Immature people, on the other hand, are easily influenced and quick to follow new currents and trends (Eph 4, 14).

For me personally, testing everything does not mean constantly criticising everything, but to have an open and alert mind; to be willing to get involved in new ideas and ventures while at the same time questioning them; to have the courage to sometimes go against a trend; to be in dialogue with other church members. This dynamic interaction contributes to a growing unity in the congregation, because it helps to avoid misunderstandings and prejudices.

According to Paul, strife, discord, and division are evidence of immaturity (1 Cor 3, 1–4). The active love of Christ, expressed as fellowship and unity within the congregation, is the yardstick of the church’s credibility to the outside world. The fact that both Gentiles and Jews belong together within the Church, Paul suggests is a mystery of Christ, something that is revealed only to the extent that this fellowship is lived out in the church (Eph 3, 8–12). It cannot have been easy for the



Early Church, with people from many different cultural backgrounds, to maintain this unity within the body of Christ.

My congregation in Neuwied is very diverse in its composition, with people from more than twenty different countries and cultural backgrounds. For me today, living in this context as a mature Christian can mean questioning specific traditions in the church, especially if they might prevent unity with people from other cultures in my congregation.

Together, many mature Christians form a mature congregation. A congregation that lives the love of Christ in unity can transform a town or city.

The trend today is for religion to become a private matter. People think that it is nobody’s business what another person believes, because faith is personal. I believe that being a Christian cannot be a private matter. It was not private 500 years ago, nor can it be today. The Anabaptists did their part to change the world for the better. Now is the moment in time for we ourselves to make our own contribution today. That is our responsibility and our mandate as mature Christians.

Lena Dillmann, Mitglied der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Neuwied

Living Maturely

Paul Warkentin

Growing up as the son of a church planter and pastor in a secular Catholic environment in Austria, I soon learned that being a Christian is challenging, and sometimes can even seem offensive. As faithful followers of Jesus and as a minority church: “We are different!” As a child, I soon learned to articulate our faith and thus to become verbally “mature”. Friendships, amid all the fun and games, were also about inviting friends to the children’s hour or youth group and leading them to Jesus. We had fun with these invitations; in fact, many friendships have survived to this day. These first friendships were formed in refugee barracks because my parents distributed relief goods there. Accepting the humble hospitality of strangers, trusting them, spending the night with them, and seeing their gratitude for the canned meat, clothes, or quilts showed me that shared life is a formative school of faith. To love and be loved forms values for life.

I received my first study Bible when I was 16. It had wide margins to jot down comments, question marks, colourful drawings, and sermons. The intention behind it was clear: “Read the Bible!” “Form your own opinion. Don’t rely on what others tradition, the sermon on Sunday, or interesting doctrines tell you. Trust the Holy Spirit as he speaks to you through his Word.”

Co-operation and service strengthened my relationship with brothers and sisters in the church and its programmes. Inviting people or visiting them, printing and distributing flyers, helping with book displays on the street, playing the piano – they were not always my talents, but they were ministries that helped me discover myself, to find new ways to express my faith, and to be part of a lively congregation. This solidarity with others – along with the sense of honour of being used by God and the courage to cross boundaries – were all important maturing processes on my journey with Jesus. Wanting to belong to this community, I was baptised at the age of 14 upon my confession of Christ.

Anabaptist theology, with which I identified more and more during my studies, was sometimes ridiculed and dismissed as naive. Others perceived my understanding of the church, which I gained from experience and Bible reading, as overly restrictive. They regarded Christian discipleship as a form of legalism and my pacifism as a passing fad. Even well-known Reformed professors took a confrontational stance against my developing Anabaptist Christianity: “Your Jesus didn’t die for me!” they claimed. In this way I learned to take a stand, to formulate arguments, to search for viable answers and to be challenged intellectually as well as emotionally. The inner-Mennonite discussion, an increasing range of Anabaptist literature, and a worldwide network of Anabaptist friends were all a great support in this process of growing maturity.

For me, becoming mature also increasingly means that I do not need to know all the answers, admitting there are gaps in my understanding, allowing for weakness, and even forgoing words, counter-arguments, or self-assertiveness. There are so many things that do not necessarily demand from me that I should express my opinion. My convictions regarding nonviolence and conscientious objection to war are always finding new ways of expressing themselves: in character, in family, in church, in the understanding of my role in life, in consumer behaviour, in relation to the opposite sex and to other denominations, in equanimity and in a peaceful disposition. Firm convictions, coupled with tolerance and charity, should bear more and more fruit in my life. I want to continue experiencing the promise in the Psalm that “grace and truth meet and peace and justice kiss each other” (Psalm 85, 11).

Paul Warkentin, Pastor der Evangelischen Freikirche Schwandorf – Mennonitengemeinde

Friedrich Emanuel Wieser

Daring! Living Maturely – A Biblical Discussion

What Does 'Mature' Mean?

The German word for maturity (Mündigkeit) 'describes the inner and outer capability for selfdetermination and self-responsibility ... It means that one can speak and care for one's self' (Wikipedia).

'Mündig' has to do with 'mouth'. One does not forbid the mouth from talking, but instead tells it to speak up. One is not satisfied with ready-made opinions. The concept Mündigkeit corresponds to the Greek parrhesia. Originally it described the right of the free Greeks to participate in public discussions. In the Bible the word is translated 'frankness', 'confidence' or 'courage'. It describes the carefree abandon in confessing faith frankly (e.g. Acts 4:13,29,31; 28:31; Eph. 6:20), as well as the courage to step before God, one's own unworthiness notwithstanding (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19; 1 John 3:21).

Maturity and the Anabaptists

The Anabaptist movement is part of the Reformation. The desire is to test traditional assertions 'from scratch' and come up with one's own findings. The Reformation places the Bible in the hands of individual Christians and tells them that they are equipped to perceive truth in Scripture.

But the Anabaptist movement goes beyond Luther and Zwingli and does not let up in regaining the form of the church that it encounters in the New Testament; church is to be the fellowship of those who are convinced of the gospel and who then join the church out of faith. Consequently, baptism is an ordinance whereby a person, in conscious belief, appropriates self. For this self-claimed right to their own view, the Anabaptists paid a high price.

Maturity in the New Testament

The New Testament cultivates maturity. Maturity makes one resistant to seduction. 'We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming' (Eph. 4:14, NRSV). The best protection is convictions that are anchored in Christian values. 'Continue to live your lives in [Christ], rooted and built up in him and established in the faith' (Col. 2:6–7, NRSV; see 1 Cor. 7:37; 15:58; Eph. 6:14; Phil. 4:1; Col. 1:23; 4:12). A group of striking verses begin with 'Pay attention! Don't be ...!' (see Luke 21:8; 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 13:9). It is not a question of clinging to assured securities, but rather of ensuring that we face the challenges with firmness – rooted, but not embedded in concrete.

Friedrich Emanuel Wieser
Pastor i.R. (München)

Developing trust in one's own opinion. In the Roman Christian community various forms of piety rub against each other. One doubts the sincerity of the other. Paul himself opines a clear position on the disputed questions. But here it is more important to him that all stand by their own opinion: 'Let all be fully convinced in their own minds' (Rom. 14:5, NRSV).

Stand up for convictions. 'Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you' (1 Pet. 3:15, NRSV). In testifying before the Roman authorities, this could have serious consequences.

Claim to freedom of faith. Acts 5 reports how the authorities arrested the apostles and prohibited them from preaching Christ. As soon as they got out of prison, they again preached undeterred on the street. Once again, testifying before the high council, they answer: 'We must obey God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29).

Human laws, under certain ideological conditions, can become immoral and godless. Those who follow their consciences then come into conflict with the law. In 1415 the Bohemian reformer, Jan Hus, avowed in the face of being burned at the stake: 'In the truth of the gospel, I am ready to die today with joy.' Luther noted in 1521, the night before the pivotal session of the Worms Reichstag: 'Since my conscience is captured in the words of God, I can and will not recant since it is dangerous and impossible to act against conscience. So help me God. Amen.' 'Truth is unkillable' the Anabaptist theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, called out to the crowd as he was burned at the stake in Vienna. In the 1930s and 1940s it was forbidden in Germany to help the Jews. Law and conscience still clash today, as in the case of the Sea Watch captain, Carola Rackete, who in 2019 broke Italian law when she rescued people at risk of drowning from the Mediterranean and brought them to land.

(Translated by Leonard Gross)

Questions for Group Discussion

- ▶ Who is a good example, for you, of someone who expresses his or her opinion frankly?
- ▶ On which themes is it important for you to have well-founded convictions and to share them with others?
- ▶ The Reformation gave the Bible to Christians so that they themselves are able to penetrate to the very source of faith. What seems important to you today, in order to be, as a Christian, mature in faith?
- ▶ Maturity can generate such strong convictions that one is prepared to die for them. What would you possibly risk your life for, today?



Timo Andreas Doetsch

The Anabaptists in the Global Christian Family

As a teenager I saw myself simply as a Christian. Being an Anabaptist or Mennonite was not so important to me. Sometimes I was even ashamed of it. However, through my theological studies, through working with followers of Jesus from many different backgrounds and cultures, and through five years of employment in a Mennonite congregation, I am now very grateful to have come from this tradition and to be a “Menno”.

Christians from the Anabaptist tradition are known for their testimony for peace and for reconciliation. I also recognize that Anabaptist Christians emphasise the importance of putting faith in Jesus into action and putting their discipleship into practice (Matthew 5–7; John 13; James). Reading the Bible together is also important, guided by God’s Spirit and with Jesus at the centre.

Many Anabaptist Christians can recount stories of migration. As a result, a worldwide family has emerged. Anyone who has been to a global assembly of the Mennonite World Conference knows how special it is – a colourful family celebration! The worldwide family is also the product of many courageous mission projects. Historically, the ideas and visions of the first Anabaptist Christians were initially rejected and often violently suppressed. Today, some of these memories have been healed. Many of the revolutionary views of this “oldest Free Church” and historic peace churches are still alive, adopted by other Christians and society itself. Some have even argued that Anabaptist Christianity fits especially well into the twenty-first century. These ideas evidently came “too soon” for the majority. The fact that all of these issues – peace, love of enemies, active discipleship, migration, family, mission, vision – were finally adopted, reminds me of the story of a person from the book of Genesis: Joseph, the son of Jacob (Genesis 37–50).

Already, while still young, Joseph had dreams that disturbed his siblings. Something about these ideas must have appeared to be delusions of grandeur to his brothers and his parents. It may indeed be true that he was not very sensitive, perhaps even arrogant, in the way he recounted his visions – a point that it may be good for Anabaptist Christians to keep in mind. Later it turned out that Joseph was simply ahead of his time. The family was estranged, similar to the Christian family at the time of the Reformation. They wanted to get rid of Joseph, indeed, his own brothers considered murdering him. Ultimately Joseph was forced to migrate. But he remained faithful to God. Even when things looked bleak, Joseph persevered and continued to do good. So he was soon held in high esteem. Finally, after more than ten years in prison, he became an important minister in Egypt when Pharaoh was in a crisis. All these years God had prepared him for this moment. His mission became a blessing, not only for Egypt, but also for the surrounding

¹ Lutherischer Weltbund, LWB Studien Band 2016: *Heilung der Erinnerungen. Die Bedeutung der lutherisch-mennonitischen Versöhnung*, Leipzig 2017.

² Stuart Murray, *Nackter Glaube. Christsein in einer nachchristlichen Welt*, Schwarzenfeld 2014

³ Vgl. das Institut ComPax für Konflikttransformation auf dem Bienenberg (CH)..

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Joseph Reinhard,
Anabaptists from Switzerland (um 1800)



countries. He realised that this was the mission God had given him (Genesis 45, 7–8). And this uncomfortable, unusual and unwanted Joseph became a reconciler, a transformer of conflict in his complicated family (Genesis 50, 15–21). I am amazed that God could use all the broken relationships in Jacob’s family, his time of suffering and the crisis in Egypt to create something great – blessings for the region, reconciliation in the family, and acceptance for Joseph.

This is an encouragement for Anabaptist Christians today. We have something highly valuable to offer. The Christian family needs our voice of reconciliation and peace, just as we need the other voices. Let us add our emphasis on reconciliation to the choir of many other Christians. What a blessing it could be for our broken world if the fragmented, worldwide Christian family were to be reconciled! How wonderful that would be – a reconciled Christianity that invites people to be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5, 11–21). Jesus prayed fervently for this (John 17, 20–23). What a celebration that would be!

Through His Spirit God gives us strength and love and clear thinking (2 Timothy 1, 7) so that we can take concrete steps towards reconciliation. Jesus himself was betrayed and sold like Joseph because his vision did not suit the people. He was not arrogant. He suffered, yet still forgave his enemies. He went through the absolute darkness of death. Bringing peace cost him everything. But he returned to life. And today still the suffering worldwide body of Jesus also has the power, through His Spirit to experience such moments of resurrection. Through the Son (Sohn) there is true salvation (VerSÖHNUNG). Some people emphasise the personal relationship with Christ. Others emphasise the practical or political forms of reconciliation. Both belong together: reconciliation and the Son of God – Jesus Christ, his kingdom, and Himself as the King of Kings. At its heart, peacemaking is ultimately possible only through the Prince of Peace. “For no other foundation can anyone lay

except that which has already been laid: Jesus Christ”. This sure faith, derived from 1 Corinthians 3, 11, was deeply significant to Menno Simons. The first Anabaptist Christians did not call themselves Anabaptists at all – that name was not central to their identity. Rather, they identified themselves as “brothers and sisters in Christ”. That is what we are in the worldwide Christian family, despite all the betrayal, anguish, repudiation, lies and failures that have happened to us and also happened because of us: we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fragen und Anregungen:

- ▶ Wie seht ihr selbst eure täuferische Identität?
- ▶ Was spricht euch aus der Geschichte der Täufer an?
- ▶ Lest die Geschichte und die angegebenen Bibelstellen nach.
- ▶ Was inspiriert euch aus der Geschichte von Josef?
- ▶ Dreht ein Video über die Josef-Story.
- ▶ Welche Schritte der Versöhnung könnt ihr als Gruppe gehen? Untereinander, mit anderen Christen, mit Gott, mit Menschen, die dem Glauben an Jesus fern stehen.
- ▶ Singt als Gruppe das Lied „Wie ein Fest nach langer Trauer / So ist Versöhnung“. Welches Bild daraus inspiriert euch für Schritte der Versöhnung?

Arli Klassen, Karl Koop

An Overview of the Anabaptists in Canada

Canada was settled by newcomers after treaties in eastern and central Canada were signed between First Nations and settlers, with fewer treaties in the far west as settlers arrived. Canada was established as a country in 1867, with strong influence from the Indigenous peoples, the French peoples, and the British peoples. Most Canadian Anabaptists today come from none of those three traditions.

The Mennonite World Conference 2018 Directory includes 22 separate groups in Canada, of which 5 are MWC members. They range in practice from “traditionalists” who retain culturally unassimilated lifestyles, to “mainstream” culturally assimilated groups, with a few somewhere in the middle. About two-thirds of the total are mainstream groups, who include worship services in about 20 different languages every Sunday, with members from every continent.

Each of the five largest Anabaptist groups in Canada has its own migration story. The mainstream groups have changed dramatically since their coming, while the traditionalists hold tighter to their cultural origins.

The Mennonite Church people, mostly of Swiss and South German background, came from the United States after 1786, and then directly from Europe in the 1800s. Most came for economic reasons, seeking good farmland. The 2002 merger with the General Conference created Mennonite Church Canada. The General Conference Mennonites came to Canada from Russia and Poland in the 1870s, 1920s and 1940s.

The Be in Christ people (formerly Brethren in Christ, originally known as Tunkers) came after 1788 from the United States, seeking good farmland.

Name	# congregations	# adult baptized members	MWC member?
Mennonite Brethren Canada	248	36,000	Yes
Mennonite Church Canada	227	32,000	Yes
Be in Christ Canada	70	17,000	Yes
Hutterian Brethren	369 (colonies)	15,000	No
Old Colony Mennonite Church	29	14,000	No
Evangelical Mennonite Church	63	6,400	Yes
Evangelical Mennonite Missionary Church	22	3,500	Yes
7 Russian heritage traditionalist groups: Bergthaler, Christian Mennonite, Evangelical Bergthaler, Kleine Gemeinde, Old Bergthaler, Reinlander, Sommerfelder	70	9,575	No
8 German/Swiss heritage traditionalist groups: Church of God in Christ, Conservative Mennonite, Markham-Waterloo Mennonite, Midwest Mennonite, Old Order Amish, Old Order (David Martin) Mennonite, Ontario Old Order Mennonite, Orthodox Mennonite	216	15,892	No
Total = 22 groups	1,314	149,367	5 groups

One group of Mennonites came in 1874 from Russia when their military service exemption was under threat. Many people from this Old Colony Mennonite Church left Canada for Mexico in 1922 because they could no longer hold schools in their preferred language of German. Some of these Old Colony Mennonites began moving back to Canada after the 1960’s.

The Mennonite Brethren people first came in 1888 from the United States as a mission outreach, and then grew in the 1920s and again in the 1940s with the large migrations of Russian Mennonites who were seeking freedom from oppression and war in Russia.

The Hutterite people came in 1918 from the United States, seeking freedom as conscientious objectors to war.

Since the 1960s when immigration opened up to a wider diversity of people, and Mennonite churches began sponsoring refugees in the 1970s, there are people from all over the world who have joined the more “mainstream” Mennonite churches.

The diversity in lifestyle and Christian expression among these different groups is immense and often creates confusion among Canadians who often have difficulty sorting out the differences between one group and another. The confusion is often fueled by the Canadian media that tends to focus on Old Order groups, leaving the impression that all Anabaptist groups must be a part of the Old Order and must therefore be exotic. Anabaptist communities are themselves often confused about what distinguishes them from the others, or what is the same in their beliefs and practices. There is not always adequate opportunity for the various Anabaptist groups to sit at the table to learn from one another and create mutual understanding. Mennonite Central Committee is one of the few places where varying Anabaptist groups interact with each other.

Of course each group has its distinct history and story to tell, and this gives shape to how each group sees

the world and how each expresses its faith. All religious expression is historically and culturally conditioned, which means that faith expressions will inevitably vary from one group to the next. We should not expect sameness or uniformity. And yet in the midst of the various expressions, it may still be possible to identify common threads, patterns of expression, or family resemblances that tell us something about the shape of the Anabaptist community in the Canadian context.

Most groups, for instance, embrace the importance of following Jesus in word and deed. They see the importance of connecting faith and life and embracing the concept of discipleship as a key understanding of what it means to be Christian. There is a strong sense that what constitutes the church of Jesus Christ is the locally gathered community that comes together for worship, fellowship, and service. In addition, there is a commitment to believers’ baptism and an understanding of communion as a memorial meal. For some groups, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is a key component of what it means to be Christian; for others, the ethics of lifestyle practices, or peace and justice must be upheld.

Of course these characteristics are not “Anabaptist distinctives” in the sense that only Anabaptist communities hold to these commitments. Anabaptists groups do not “own” these commitments; they have always been a part of the Christian tradition. For this reason it is important that Anabaptists in Canada engage in dialogue with other traditions. Through dialogue and participation in common projects with other communities, they have much to learn and much to gain.

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The Theme Years:

2020: *daring! living responsibly*
Baptism – Voluntariness – Religious Freedom

2021: *daring! living together*
Equality – Responsibility – Autonomy

2022: *daring! living consistently*
Orientation on Jesus – Nonconformity – Confession of Faith – Martyrdom

2023: *daring! living non-violently*
Church of Peace – Resistance – Reconciliation

2024: *daring! living in hope*
The Kingdom of God – Utopia – Renewal

2025: *Anniversary celebration*
In 2025, commemorative events will take place, jointly organized by various institutions and networks of Anabaptist churches (including Mennonite World Conference, Baptist World Alliance).



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