



I WITNESS NEWS

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ANABAPTIST VISION FOR TODAY

written by Val Yoder

Historically, Anabaptists have been given two labels. During the Reformation our spiritual ancestors were called “the radicals.” They were a pro-active group on the cutting edge of a determined effort to bring the church back to her biblical foundation in Acts. They initiated discussion, evangelism, and took Christ’s command to “go therefore and teach all nations” literally. The ambition and intensity of this time not only earned them the title “radical,” but also ignited the fires of persecution and wrathful animosity against their simple faith.

Years later, some of the heat of religious hatred toward them dissipated. As the next generation reflected on the cruelty and brutality upon their forefathers and found places of political refuge, they developed a maintenance mode of church life. There was a concerted effort to preserve that which forefathers had died for. “Hold fast to the faith” became the theme. In their places of refuge from the intolerant magistrates of Europe they became known as the “quiet in the land.”

The “radicals” and the “quiet in the land” are both essential titles and represent two callings of church life. The church is called to be pro-active while maintaining the faith. We are to go teach all nations while holding fast to the faith. As a contemporary Anabaptist, I am grateful for a heritage that has done well in maintaining biblical application while most other denominations have compromised to the point of invisibility. I recall going to Sunday School as a child in a mission church

where Lutheran ladies would not come to church unless they were veiled, usually with a stylish hat. Walter Beachy reports that in his grandmother’s day the Amish and Methodist ladies looked nearly the same from across the street. It was only with a closer look that you would see the frills and extra lace not worn by the Amish. “Holding fast” in our churches has visibly preserved a biblical obedience that has been lost in most other denominations.

As important as maintenance is, it must actively cooperate with passionate action. If our “holding fast” is not coupled with “go ye therefore,” Anabaptism will become extinct except as a spectacle for tourism. We will be little more than a quaint reminder of western culture’s past.

Honest questioning forces us to ask, “Where are we at in these “holding” and “going” endeavors? Several years ago, a teacher at Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute (SMBI) Minister’s Week asked a group of forty to fifty pastors, “How many of your churches have five or more members from non-Mennonite backgrounds?” Only one pastor raised his hand. Would this indicate which side of the continuum we are on? When churches grow only due to church hopping and childbirth, we are in a maintenance mode. When churches divide due to dissension instead of evangelism, we are in a maintenance mode. If marriage and material things primarily characterize the future vision of our people, we are in a maintenance mode.

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These factors do not suggest pro-activity! Marriage and material things are tools to something far bigger! We are in warfare. No truce has been called between the kingdoms of man and the Kingdom of God. Some question, "Is it safe to send young people to Iraq?" No, it may not be safe! But we are not here to be safe. We are here to be dangerous! Even the gates of hell are not able to withstand us! If we are concerned primarily about safety, we are stuck in maintenance mode. Was it safe for Felix Mantz to face the city council? Is it safe for the underground Chinese church to take the gospel back to Jerusalem? Was it safe for the ten Booms to hide Jews? Was it safe for Stephen to preach to the high priest? Was it safe to visit the orphanage in Haiti?

As important as the maintenance mode is, it will never be compelling by itself! Where there is no "go ye therefore," there will be no significant or biblical "holding fast." Oh, that we would once again be worthy of the title "radical!" God calls us to maintenance, but He also calls us to trail blazing, to adventure, to battle, to escapades, to risk for the sake of building the Kingdom of God! The greatest challenge facing the contemporary conservative Anabaptist church is providing the "go ye therefore" examples for young Anabaptists today to model their lives after and to guide them in the conquests of the Kingdom.

The conservative Anabaptist church must continue to raise up men and women like Irwin and Susan Schantz who left home and family to travel to the frigid northern regions to plant churches where no Anabaptist had ever traveled. Their bread was spread with lard in their primitive home while they labored to plant churches in northern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario.

We need homes like that of Count Zinzendorf whose house became a training facility for missionaries. The prayer closet of their home was filled twenty-four hours a day with prayer warriors for two hundred years! That community of people sent out more missionaries in twenty years than all the rest of European Christianity did in 200 years.

The conservative Anabaptist church has the resources and willingness in its young people. In the early eighties, young people left SMBI on weekends and term breaks for the cellars of New York City to encourage and assist the church planters that labored there. They slept on tables and the floor while rats walked on the pipes above them. Today young men are cautiously taking food and clothing through jungles in Myanmar to people marked for genocide by the government. Others are demining areas land mined during wars. Still others are utilizing micro-financing programs to minister to the impoverished. There is a whole army of Kingdom soldiers

SECOND SEMESTER 2023-2024

(Left to right)

Row 1: Amanda Martin, Christiana Stoltzfus, Natasha Beachy, Vivian Roach, Chyanne Wagler, Abigail Troyer, Ranita Weaver

Row 2: Heather Helmuth, Emily Yoder, Jennifer Stoltzfus, Berenice Jara, Jerusha Johnson

Row 3: Alex Miller, Kelvin Zimmerman, Blake Fox, Emily Hostetler, Cherith Johnson, Janet Burkholder, Jared Helmuth, Eric & Amber Weaver

Row 4: Hannah Zimmerman, Jonathan Skrivseth, Kendrick Yoder, Danny Stoltzfus, Matthias Johnson, Nathaniel Bowman, Landon Ropp



in our churches which is willing to go into battle with weapons not made with hands. They need to be called forth by the church and sent into action.

What is the challenge facing Anabaptism in 2024?

1. We must get our eyesight off retirement! If middle-aged Anabaptists primarily dream of retiring in some vacationland city of the south, they will live out a lifestyle that will not reflect a compelling vision to the next generation! We will lose that generation to the worldly value system that has already captured us.

2. We must embrace the commitment of the persecuted church. *Martyrs Mirror* should be a regular part of our educational history requirements. The underground church in China should become our mentor. Our love for Jesus must mean that what we live for is also worth dying for. The Chinese church is committed to sending their best workers, the most experienced, the best equipped. A pastor is hardly deemed worthy in some Chinese circles if he has not spent time in prison. While we question if it is safe to go into closed access countries, they expect persecution. Of the first thirty-nine missionaries sent out in the "Back to Jerusalem" mission effort, thirty-six were arrested and sent back home. The Chinese church rejoiced that three made it through, the

others tried again as soon as they were released from jail. They train their workers to cross cultural barriers, to target specific groups, and to witness in all situations (trains, buses, police cars—even on their way to execution). These workers are spiritual suicide bombers. They know they need to go, but they don't know if they will come back. They are trained how to get out of their handcuffs in thirty seconds and how to jump from second-floor windows without getting hurt.

3. We must rekindle the fire of conquest in young men. The God-given drive for conquest in young men has been sedated by sports endeavors, shooting the biggest buck, or hitting the most home runs. When our teaching of non-resistance is not coupled with conquest for the Kingdom, we will raise a generation of wimps—yellow soldiers who prefer coffee time to war time. Assuredly, our weapons are not carnal, but neither are they non-existent. They are MIGHTY, to the pulling down of strong holds!

Middle-aged American Anabaptists must capture a vision of Kingdom building that calls forth the wisdom of the aged and the daring of the young. This vision must include both the maintenance of faith and the pro-active aggression of works. Our challenge involves "holding fast" while we "go therefore."

snapshots from ministry trips





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