

Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Amish History, Theology, and Practice

1. Historical Background and Overview

- a. Primacy of the RC Church in the Middle Ages, 500-1500, Marriage of church and state
- b. Winds of Reform, 1500's
 - i. Final Catalyst, Sale of Indulgences for Papal building projects, 1517 AD
 - ii. Germany, Luther, Switzerland, Zwingli, differences include the nature of the Communion elements
 - iii. From Zwingli's movement, support grew for the doctrine of believer's baptism (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 8:36-37, 16:14-15, 16:31-33, 18:8; Romans 6:1-6; 1 Peter 3:21)
- c. Anabaptist movement begins, Foundational Distinctives
 - i. Reformers did not go far enough; the Christian church must return to Bible Christianity and break entirely from RC concepts
 - ii. Separation of church and state, meaning no state church (Cf. USA)
 - iii. 1525, the birth of the movement, teaching that the church should only baptize adults, believer's baptism affirmed, hence the term "Anabaptist" means "Re-baptizers", since its membership was already "baptized" as infants
 - iv. There must be both professed and evidenced faith in Christ
 - v. Church different from the world, John 17:14-19, which led to persecution
 - vi. Biblical separation, Romans 16:17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
- d. Early Leaders of the Movement
 - i. Menno Simons, 1540's, Holland and Germany
 - ii. John Calvin, 1541, Frenchman in Geneva, Switzerland
- e. Strands of the Movement (Although some within these strands have apostasized)
 - i. Baptists
 - ii. Reformed (Calvinist)
 - iii. Mennonite
 - iv. Amish
 - v. Brethren
 - vi. Independent Congregational (meaning, form of church government)
- f. Commonalities of the Strands
 - i. Usually, congregational government (excludes Amish and a few others)
 - ii. Though loosely federated, autonomy of the individual assemblies
- g. Variance in the Strands
 - i. Creedal versus Confessional
 - ii. Degree of Biblical separation practiced

2. The Mennonites

a. History (Menno Simons, Founder)

- i. 1540's-1640's, and continuing, persecutions in Europe
 1. For Anabaptist belief
 2. For pacifism, seen as unpatriotic
- ii. 1640's, arrive in the USA
- iii. 1680's, first 'formal' settlement, Germantown PA
 1. Brought German language with them
- iv. History in USA
 1. For pacifism, seen by some as unpatriotic, but given dispensation
 2. Soft persecution at most
 3. Settled in PA, OH, IN, KS, NE, and elsewhere, including Mendon MA
 4. Loose associations, the largest of which is Mennonite Church USA, with about half of the estimated 300,000 Mennonites in total

b. Doctrine and Practice

- i. Historically, orthodox, fundamental, conservative, separatist
- ii. Plain People (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12)
- iii. Confessional rather than Creedal, Bible is the handbook, 1 Corinthians 3:11
- iv. Mennonite Handbook, a book of practical advice for worship and holy living
- v. Three ordinances (not only two) are Communion, Believer's Baptism, Foot Washing (John 13:14-15)
- vi. Stress holy living, pacifism, and service (social care, prisons, etc...)
- vii. Wide variations re: dress, head coverings, etc... today

c. Contemporary Liberal Invasion

- i. Without a unifying formal creed to appeal to, liberal theology has infiltrated the ranks in various places
- ii. Conferences within the Mennonite Church USA (3 of 20 have left), LMC may or may not follow suit, over acceptance of female elders and homosexuality in some of its circles
- iii. Further splits seem to be inevitable
- iv. Dress, music, preaching in many cases has lost its fundamentalist nature
- v. Lessons:
 1. orthodox Christian belief must be well defined,
 2. full creedal identity is beneficial to the church,
 3. denominational associations must be protected from infiltration by and compromise with the worldly culture, feminist and homosexual activists are active in seeking key positions within associations,
 4. down side of congregational church government is that the church can lose its moorings if a critical mass of unsaved or liberal membership is attained

3. The Amish

a. History

- i. Founder, Jacob Amman, 1693, Swiss Reformer
- ii. Split from Mennonite Church over
 1. Practice of Church Discipline (Shunning, Treated Later in Outline)
 2. Excommunication for Lying (Acts 5:1-11)
 3. Whether or not those who refuse to be identified with the visible church (e.g. through believer's baptism, or continuance in discipleship) are really saved (Perseverance of the Saints Treated Later in outline)
 4. Various other issues mostly related to practice (Just as the Anabaptists did not think the Reformers went far enough, the Amish believe that the Mennonites did not go far enough in their biblical separation.)
- iii. Amish communities sprung up in America, PA, OH, IN, elsewhere
 1. Today, Old Order Amish, estimated 65,000, conservative
 2. Beachy Amish, OH, more liberal in practice

b. Doctrinal Distinctives (Consulted as a Source: "The Scriptures have the Answers" By Benuel Blank, Summary Statements my own)

- i. Plain People (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12), Stressing simple and holy living
- ii. Salvation by faith (Ephesians 2:8), and evidence by the willingness to follow a narrow road (Matthew 7:13-14)
- iii. Endurance in discipleship evidence of salvation (Matthew 10:22; 2 Timothy 3:14)
- iv. Affirm total depravity of man and original sin, all are capable of self deception and therefore one can hope their Christian confession is true
- v. Falling away generally seen as never having saving faith in reality in the first place, not in outright denial of the perseverance of the saints per se

c. Distinctives in Practice

- i. Pacifist
- ii. Marriage, children, family oriented
- iii. Rejection of modern technology, varies by community and district at the discretion of the local Bishop
- iv. Each community: 1 Bishop, 2 Ministers, 1 Deacon, all layperson leaders, chosen by lot, generally for life
- v. Church services in private homes every other Sunday, by district, in High German language (Hymns, Scripture, Preaching and Teaching)
- vi. On off Sundays additional devotionals and singing in lieu of service, extended family and friends visiting day
- vii. Distinctive Dress
- viii. Value of hard work and diligence (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

- ix. Education multi-grade, for 8 grades only, for reasons of protection from worldly corruption
- x. High German language retained, ages 0-5, religious language
- xi. Pay all taxes, exempt from Social Security (seen as government encroachment on the church social function)
- xii. Evangelistic only to a point, highly suspicious and fearful of outsiders corrupting their culture, general belief that salvation is rare in churches outside their own on the grounds that they are not demanding enough with regard to requirements of a disciple
- xiii. High degree of biblical separation inhibits the practical outworking of Matthew 28:19-20 and John 17:14-18, and therefore arguably goes too far
- xiv. 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 applied
 - 1. To those without the Amish church they are (officially) non-judgmental
 - 2. To those within the church community (defined as baptized adult members), there is a duty and obligation to exercise judgment and discipline
- xv. Shunning (Placing under the ban)
 - 1. Taken most literally, with the strongest applications, but to be done with the sincere motive of the loving desire to bring about repentance of the wayward church member
 - a. Matthew 18:15-17
 - b. 1 Corinthians 12:26
 - c. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15
 - d. Titus 3:10
- xvi. Voluntary lifestyle
 - 1. Entered into voluntarily as an adult with baptism
 - 2. Rumspringa allowed prior to if wanted, not all choose this
 - 3. Options for the Amish youth (Most choose "a"):
 - a. Baptism, enter community, but if one leaves there is shunning
 - b. Refuse Baptism, treated as an outsider and unbeliever, but can keep company with
 - 4. Becoming Amish
 - a. Must meet all requirements, accepting all doctrine and practice, including learning High German, this is rare