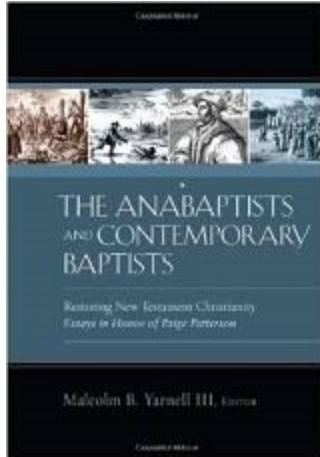


Malcolm B. Yarnell III, ed. *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity. Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013. 306 pp.

Book review by John Friesen, PhD



The book, *Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, edited by Malcolm B. Yarnell, is a collection of essays written largely by Baptist scholars and practitioners describing the historical significance of 16th-century Anabaptists to contemporary Baptist theology and church life. The essays originate from a 2012 conference at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Forth Worth, Texas) and are devoted to re-examining Anabaptist theology as a vital resource for Baptist theological development. They were published in honor of Paige Patterson, professor at and former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for his lifelong scholarly contributions advocating 16th-century Anabaptist thought and church life.

The chapters in this book are arranged in three sections: Theology, Balthasar Hubmaier, and History. Thirteen chapters in total, the essays consider everything from religious liberty, theological method, and church organization and mission. Four chapters are devoted to the contributions of Balthasar Hubmaier, whose political theology and academic scholarship are preferred by Baptists over that of other early Anabaptist leaders. In the History section, four chapters are devoted to Erasmus, Hans Denck, Italian Anabaptists and Gerhard Westerburg's Doctrine of Purgatory.

This volume is a Festschrift for Paige Patterson who was a “fountainhead of radicalism” within the Baptist denomination. While rooted in Baptist identity, Paige read Anabaptist literature widely and developed theological kinship with Anabaptists such as Conrad Grebel, Georg Blaurock and Pilgram Marpeck.

Patterson found much inspiration and conviction in the writings of Anabaptists. He promoted such Anabaptist beliefs as the authority of Scripture, the centrality and necessity of the conversion experience, baptism for believers, the understanding of the church as a gathered community, and the courage to live and die for these beliefs. Patterson had strong convictions on freedom of choice and was deeply concerned about the growing commitment to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and determinism within the Baptist denomination. He rejected Calvin's understanding of the relationship of church and state and the tendency of the state to use the church as an instrument of power.

It is deeply encouraging to read this series of inspirational essays forging a new relationship between Baptist and Anabaptist theological traditions. This is particularly validating during a time in which Mennonite leaders and congregations seem to be courting new relationships with Calvinist doctrine and practices. Where are the Mennonite scholars who stand up for Anabaptist beliefs and principles in shaping a Mennonite identity in the 21st century? Increasingly, Mennonite theology and principles are being influenced by forces outside of the Anabaptist tradition. This is particularly evident in contemporary Mennonite ecclesiology.

The essay written by Rick Warren entitled “The Anabaptists and the Great Commission: The Effect of the Radical Reformers on Church Planting,” has particular relevance to

Mennonite theology. Warren, who is the author of the book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, and pastor of the Saddleback Church (a Southern Baptist megachurch in Lake Forest, California), declares in his essay that he and his pastoral team have been building on lessons learned from the Anabaptists for more than three decades and that his publications are filled with Anabaptist teachings. He suggests that “The modern generation is largely rootless. They are fatherless and rootless, and so they get blown around like tumbleweeds” (85). Anabaptist theology provides much-needed roots for theological and personal development.

I very much enjoyed this book. My only significant criticism is its lack of a commitment to a theology of peace. The essays in this book fail to fully address the significance of a peace theology in a world which faces nuclear annihilation unless differences and disagreements are solved through peaceful methods of negotiation. This lack of appreciation for a commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation in Christian churches is unfortunately a condition prevalent around the world. To be committed to a radical understanding of the 16th-century Anabaptists demands taking seriously the teachings of Jesus on the peaceful resolution of conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation.

*The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists* can be accessed in the MHSBC library.

John Friesen is a professor emeritus at the University of British Columbia where he has taught for over 30 years in the Department of Counselling Psychology. He has published several books, numerous articles and conducted many evaluations for government, universities and various organizations. He has conducted numerous research projects including “An Assessment of Family Needs in British Columbia,” “The Alcohol Recovery Project,” and “Career Aspirations of Canadian Youth.”