TWELVE POINTS OF LIGHT

POINT 9: *ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT - CHURCH RESTORATION*

INTRODUCTION

A. Hated by Protestants and Catholics for their beliefs
B. Nothing worse than to be called an Anabaptist in 16th century Europe
C. Lost almost every leaders by execution in the first two years
D. Originators of free church - separation of church and state
E. Men who did not drink to excess, curse, or abuse workmen or family were suspected of being Anabaptists
F. First reformers to practice church discipline

AN EXAMINATION OF ANABAPTISTS

A. Historical perspective
   1. The Protestant Reformation began as a spiritual not a political revolution
      a. Lutheranism became the state church in Germany
      b. Calvinism became the state religion in Switzerland

   2. Anabaptism founded on separation of church and state
      a. Hillerbrand, *Their unanimous verdict was that the Reformers had not gone far enough in the reform of the Church, but had all too quickly compromised their insights in order not to disrupt the status quo.*
      b. Anabaptist meant *rebaptizer*
         1) Term given by opponents who rejected *believer's baptism.*
         2) Baptism was a civil issue
            a) It identified all of society as Christian
            b) Anabaptists identified the church as those who had personally placed trust in Christ

      c. Wanted church completely independent of government control
         1) Church is a new order for disciples of Christ
         2) Rejected the tithe to state church and military service

B. Development
   1. Conrad Grebel
      a. Anabaptism arose within Zwingli's reformation in Zurich under the direction of Conrad Grebel.
      b. Insisted that preachers should be given practical instruction concerning abolition of the mass but Zwingli believed it was up to the City Council.
      c. Grebel and his followers pressed for establishment of a true Christian Church based on apostolic pattern.
      d. Breaking point came when Grebel and other leaders rebaptized each other.
      e. Codes of law everywhere made theological matters a criminal offense - rebaptism was punishable by death.

   2. Thomas Müntzer
      a. He was the revolutionary spiritual leader of the Peasants' War of 1525.
      b. He was called the "arch-devil of Allstedt" by Reformers.
      c. He believed Luther made Christian faith too easy by downplaying importance of commitment to discipleship.
      d. He came to be identified as an Anabaptist but did not follow their course of nonviolence.

   3. Jakob Hutter
      a. Led the development in Moravia, the only place where they found toleration on the part of local rulers.
      b. They developed a strong position on communal living.
      c. Moravian Anabaptists would eventually be called Hutterites.

4. Melchior Hoffman
   a. Established Anabaptism in the Netherlands
   b. His prophecies foretold the soon end of the world and establishment of New Jerusalem.
   c. Thousands flocked to Münster in 1534 to establish the *kingdom of God*.
   d. They gained control of the government
      1) All who refused rebaptism were ordered to leave the city.
      2) Only truly baptized believers remained.
      3) Radical changes took place under Jan van Leyden
         a) Proclaimed himself the King of New Jerusalem
         b) Communism and polygamy were introduced
         c) All books except the Bible were burned

   e. They city was sieged and conquered in 1535
      1) The incident gave a bad name to Anabaptists
      2) Latourette , Because of Münster ...*it was popularly believed, especially among the governing and respectable classes, that all Anabaptists made for chaos in government, society, morals, and religion.*

5. Menno Simons
   a. Mennonites were the largest body of Anabaptists to survive persecution in Europe.
   b. Simons helped repudiate the violence pursued at Münster.
   c. He insisted on a simple Christian faith expressed in a pure life.

C. Doctrinal distinctives
   1. Personal identification with Christ
      a. Believer's baptism
         1) For adults who placed trust in Christ and desired to follow Him.
         2) For those who give evidence of repentance and a changed life.
         3) Infant baptism was rejected as having no support in Scripture.
         4) Conrad Grebel, *When the children grow in the knowledge of good and evil, only then do sin, death, and condemnation come into play. Since the guilt of sin exists in the knowledge of sin, Christ has taken away the sin of the world by his blood, the innocent through the word of promise, the guilty through faith in him. Although innocence contains a root of sin in the manner of flesh, it is still not sin itself...All children who have not yet come to the discernment of the knowledge of good and evil, are surely saved by the suffering of Christ, the new Adam.*

      b. Obedience
         1) Relationship to faith
            a) Trusting Christ is the beginning of faith which demands obedience to Christ as Lord.
            b) Hans Denck, *This obedience must be genuine, that is, that heart, mouth, and deed coincide together. For there can be no true heart where neither mouth nor deed is visible.*
            c) Menno Simons, *Because we teach from the mouth of the Lord that if we would enter into life, we must keep the commandments; that the love of God is that we keep his commandments, the preachers call us heaven-stormers and meritmen, saying that we want to be saved by our own merits even though we have always confessed that we cannot be saved by means of anything other than by the merits, intercession, death, and blood of Christ.*

         2) Model of faith
            a) The life of Christ was their model with emphasis on new commandment of love in John 13:34.
            b) Love was applied to daily life
               1] Forgive injury and refuse retaliation
               2] Support and defense of the needy
               3] Comfort the sorrowing
               4] Preach the Gospel

         3) Evidence of faith - good works

c. Religious liberty
   1) Since Constantine, church and state were united with all members of society members of the church.
      a) Dissenters and unbelievers were tortured and or put to death.
      b) Zwingli, Calvin, and Luther rejected the notion of religious liberty.
      c) Catholics and Protestants agreed that dissenters had to be dealt with by force.

   2) Anabaptists viewed the church as those personally committed to Jesus Christ.
      a) No one was forced to join them nor stay with them.
      b) They adhered to a strict separation of church and state
         1] Refusal to participate in the magistry.
            a] State is old order and is restraining authority for those who have not accepted the Lordship of Christ.
            b] The church is the new order which must not be under any control of the state.

         2] Refusal to take oaths
         3] Refusal to bear arms and participate in warfare, Menno Simons, *All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?*

2. Community of believers
   a. Bible study
      1) Scriptures are the final authority for Christians.
      2) Interpretation
         a) Emphasis was given to the words and works of Jesus.
         b) Every believer has the Holy Spirit and can interpret Scripture.
         c) Common understanding is given to the church - the gathered disciple community.
   b. Discipleship
      1) Salvation is a personal response of faith in Christ but the new life of discipleship is communal.
      2) Anabaptists believed that a Christian is not capable of being a disciple by himself.
      3) The community of believers is where the Christian life is nurtured.

   c. Church discipline
      1) Anabaptists were serious about dealing with sin in the community.
      2) Binding and Loosing (Matthew 18:15-18)
         a) Concept
            1] Sin could only be forgiven when acknowledged.
            2] Forgiveness makes possible the liberation of the sinner.
            3] The local assembly or church forgives and retains sins.

         b) Procedure
            1] The one who knows of a sin is responsible to confront the person with it.
            2] Privacy is to be preserved and gossip is not tolerated.
            3] Hoped that the issue could be settled at the lowest level.

         c) Punishment
            1] This was a last resort when the sinner would not respond to correction.
            2] The unrepentant sinner was regarded as a heathen and shunned.

      3) Result
         a) Tendency to err on the side of caution.
         b) More and more issues became a test of discipleship.

d. Communal property
   1) Many came to believe that in the Kingdom of God there could be no "mine" and "thine."
   2) Within the community of faith there should be no need.
   3) Balthasar Hubmaier, *Everyone should be concerned about the needs of others, so that the hungry might be fed, the thirsty given to drink, and the naked clothed. For we are not lords of our possessions, but stewards and distributors. There is certainly no one who says that another's goods may be seized and made common; rather, he would gladly give the coat in addition to the shirt.*
   4) Property was not made common but was treated as such except for the Hutterites where property developed completely into community goods in production and consumption.

e. Veneration
   1) Rejected notion that anything physical can put man in touch with God
   2) There are no sacred places - they met in homes
   3) There are no sacred people - all who belong to Christ are saints
   4) There are no sacred things - the Lord's Supper is a memorial

f. Persecution
   1) Assumed that the community of faith would be a suffering community
   2) Anyone serious about following Christ would be persecuted
   3) A contemporary noted that Anabaptists "went to the stakes as to a wedding"
   4) Examples
      a) Michael Sattler, *In the case of the attorney of his Imperial Majesty versus Michael Sattler, judgment is passed that Michael Sattler shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him tot he place of execution and cut out his tongue, then forge him fast to a wagon and thereon with red-hot tongs twice tear pieces from his body; and after he has been brought outside the gate, he shall be plied five times more in the same manner..." After this had been done in the manner prescribed, he was burned to ashes as a heretic. His fellow brethren were executed with the sword, and the sisters drowned. His wife, also after being subjected to many entreaties, admonitions, and threats, under which she remained steadfast, was drowned a few days afterward.*
      b) Elizabeth Dirks, *...brought before the council, and led into the torture chamber, Hans, the executioner, being present. The lords then said, 'We have thus long dealt with you in kindness; but if you will not confess, we will resort to severity with you.' The Procurator-General said, 'Master Hans, seize her.' Master Hans answered, 'Oh, no, my lords, she will voluntarily confess.' But as she would not voluntarily confess, he applied the thumbscrew to her thumbs and forefingers, so that the blood squirted out at the nails. Elizabeth said, 'Oh! I cannot endure it any longer.' The lords said, 'Confess, and we will relieve your pain.' But she cried to the Lord her God: 'Help me, O Lord, thy poor handmaiden! For thou art a helper in time of need.' The lords all exclaimed, 'Confess, and we will relieve your pain; for we told you to confess, and not to cry to God the Lord.' But she steadfastly adhered to God her Lord, as related above; and the Lord took away her pain, so that she said to the lords, 'Ask me, an I shall answer you; for I no longer feel the least pain in my flesh, as I did before.' Lords" 'Will you not yet confess?' Elizabeth: 'No, my lords.' They then applied the screws to her shins, one on each. She said: 'O my lords, do not put me to shame; for never a man touched my bare body...' Sentence was then passed upon Elizabeth, on the 27th of March, 1549; she was condemned to death.*
      c) The Beautiful Judgment of Two Young Women , found and translated by Miriam Usher Chrisman, Ph.D., Professor of History at the University of Mass., Amherst ... *"Here I will sum up what I have just heard about two young women who were burned to death recently for the sake of the Gospel near Deventer in the Netherlands. They were and are two noble women and pious Christians, who had no weakness. And God did not forget them.*

         They lived in Delden and often went from there to hear preaching, placing their souls in safekeeping which displeased the devil. But God assisted them because they preferred God's Word. May God be protected in all places. However, as God desired to take them together to his heavenly kingdom, he let the devil light up a fire in the world.

         The young women were brought to Deventer. The stattholder, with his authority asked them about their beliefs. They replied that they believed in Christ's teaching and in his holy Word which had been so

clearly revealed. They were then dragged to Zwigkel on a pole to frighten pious Christians—a terrible, tyrannical act done by the House of Burgundy.

There they asked the young women whether they believed the teaching of the Anabaptists. They spoke without hesitation: "We were truly baptized once according to Christ's teaching, as it is clearly explained in Mark 16. St. Paul is also clear on this point." Then they were asked more and they gave clear answers as to whether the papal mass is a sacrament. "We do not believe in any human teaching," they said. "We believe in Christ and in his Word. Our greatest treasure is his Testament which he instituted before his death; his precious body in the bread; his holy blood in the clear wine. For our sins and misdeeds he commanded us to eat and drink this in memory of him. True belief leads to the forgiveness of all our sins and we must also lead a just life, through good deeds, and do good to our neighbor as Christ did good to us."

For such profession of faith the youngest, named Mary, was taken. While she was burned, she prayed God for her enemies in their need. As she died she commended her soul into the hands of the Father for the sake of Christ's suffering.

The other young woman, named Ursula, asked if she would give up her belief to save her life. She answered, "Should I deny God's work because of the pain of death? No, death is my greatest refuge. I would rather die here and inherit heaven." Then she was sharply exhorted to plea for the sword instead of he fire and she spoke, very tenderly, "What my sister suffered, so will I suffer." And she was prepared in he same way.

Now hear an amazing story of how God manifests himself in wonderful acts, as a sign of Christian lory. As fast as the executioner toiled, he could not burn the body of the maiden. Her body, though dead, remained straight upright, as a powerful symbol. During the night the body was covered from view.

Do not scorn such signs—you members of the Christian band. Be thankful and praise God with strong voices for His wonderful deeds which He has manifested and because He gave us the Holy Ghost as promised in His holy Word. Let us stand by His Word alone, endow us with a believing heart according o the promise given us through our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom there is no other helper. Your mercy is great, may we share in it at all times.

3. Summary - The Schleitheim Confession
   a. Authored by Michael Sattler and several other Anabaptists in 1527
   b. Not a complete confession of faith but contained seven points on which there was no disagreement.
      1) Believer's baptism - no infant baptism
      2) Use of the ban according to Matthew 18
      3) Lord's Supper is for believers only
      4) Separation from the world with the concept of two orders
      5) Rules for selecting a pastor-teacher (shepherds)
      6) Separation from worldly disputes, violence, and service as magistrates
      7) Refusal to swear and commitment to tell the truth (no oaths)

D. Descendants
   1. Mennonites
      a. Most diverse group - no uniformity in separation from the world in lifestyle or dress
      b. Share view of not bearing arms

   2. Amish
      a. Split from the Swiss-German brethren in 1693 over the issue of shunning (avoiding excommunicated members)
      b. Strong communal values with strict nonconformity to the world in dress and use of technology

   3. Hutterites
      a. Practice Christian communalism
      b. Dress simply
      c. Located primarily in South Dakota

4. Mennonite Brethren
   a. Began in 1860 as a renewal movement among Dutch Mennonites in southern Russia
   b. Strong presence in the United States, Canada, and Paraguay
   c. Distinguished from Mennonites by the practice of baptism by immersion instead of sprinkling

5. Brethren in Christ
   a. Originated in 1750 in Pennsylvania
   b. Nicknamed "River Brethren" because they baptized in rivers

CONCLUSION

A. Anabaptists were committed to live what they believed despite unbelievable persecution.
B. They gave priority to the Kingdom of God.
C. May we seek the proper balance between being in the world but not of the world.

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