



Rough Draft
Christology Symposium
Ames Feb 1, 2/91

Can There Be Unity in the Spirit
Without Doctrinal Unity About Christ:
An Anabaptist Perspective

I. Introduction

Tradition as an agency for ascertaining correct theology was not highly regarded by our original forefathers, i.e., unless it could also stand the test of careful Scriptural scrutiny. Nevertheless, in this paper I am seeking to bring our pristine theological roots and our original raison d'etre to bear upon the theme of this symposium, the question of Christological faithfulness. Indeed, the use of the word "faithfulness" seems to assume, even require, reference to some prior standard. In our context, it seems to imply faithfulness to our own historic, founding, doctrinal principles written in the blood of martyrs and with their strong claim to derivation from an exclusively Biblical source. In so far as we are measuring ourselves by, or appealing for faithfulness to, or seeking to sustain what is called our Anabaptistic theology and heritage, it seems imperative for us to be reminded of what it was and what were its priorities so that if we choose to deviate, we at least know what we are doing and why - and at what price.

II. The Significance of a Normative Anabaptism

The theological roots of all who use the name Mennonite (and indeed to a degree of Baptists, Brethren and several other Believers' Church denominations) are primarily found in that 16th Century religious movement, or grass roots revival, within the Protestant Reformation called Anabaptism - a movement in which Menno Simons was one significant leader and exponent of its theology. Part of our difficulty in appraising contemporary doctrinal faithfulness may be caused by a quite recently developed uncertainty within Mennonite ranks whether or not there was one normative Anabaptism to which to be faithful - or were our roots from the beginning actually quite theologically pluralistic? Some Mennonite historians and theologians would like us to think so.

Largely in the 1930's, H.S. Bender, the Dean of Goshen Biblical Seminary, along with the Mennonite Quarterly Review, was able to delineate (from the dense fog of long-standing historical misunderstanding) by carefully utilizing collections of hitherto relatively unknown Anabaptist sources by the Anabaptists themselves a normative evangelical Anabaptist movement which emerged from 16th Century Evangelical Magisterial Protestantism; an Anabaptism with its primary source in a small group of reformers associated with the Swiss Reformation of Zwingli in Zurich and which was substantially and essentially distinct from much of the violent and revolutionary religious and social radicalism also present in that period; the Anabaptism of such major teachers as C. Grebel, F. Mantz, B. Hubmaier, M. Sattler, P. Marpeck, D. Philips, M. Simons and P. Riedeman (and possibly even of Hans Denck). J.C. Wenger's little book Even Unto Death (1961) summarizes this portrait clearly and concisely.

As more sources emerged and more detailed depth studies were undertaken, some minor revisions of the Bender portrait became necessary and were expected. However, in my judgment, current revisionism has gone much too far, indeed, far beyond the data base and unfortunately, many current Mennonite historians have succumbed to a new, more pluralistic model - Why? 1) The new revisionist picture is largely the product, not as much of new information, as of a new way of understanding history, i.e., there has been in the secular academic world a shift in priorities in historical analysis, a shift in what are deemed the important factors for determining and explaining causation. That is, the revisionism is in part based upon a presuppositional shift, a changing philosophy of history which carries with it a downgrading of the importance of theology and religious experience (eg. conversion) and/or ideas for historical explanation - including a downgrading of any possibility of divine or spiritual activity or supernaturalism to account for social, institutional or even personal change. Instead, priority of significance is being given to social and economic causation and explanation, even in Christian affairs. The younger set of current historians, including many Mennonites, have assimilated these changes (cf. Davis "Vision and Revision" Mennonite Quarterly Review July 1979).

2) This current historical revisionism produces a different picture of Anabaptist origins, a pluralism which is quite compatible with the current trend to greater theological pluralism. The combination is doubly attractive and desirable to those who are uncomfortable with the evangelical character of the former Bender-Wenger model of pristine Anabaptism. John H. Yoder as representative of many others, is now referring to major facets of the Bender picture of normative Anabaptism as "myth" (cf. Mennonite Quarterly Review, Jan. 1991) apparently without realizing that he in turn is buying into the newer presuppositional mythology. The new pro-pluralistic mythology, for example, asserts (i) that because Grebel didn't specifically describe it, Bender's ascribing a "born again" experience for Grebel in 1522 is self-serving myth (Yoder, Mennonite Quarterly Review, Jan. 1991). But this completely ignores what Bender cannot, that the whole thrust of Grebel's life does indeed remarkably change in 1522 and the gospel thereafter proclaimed by him and his associates affirms fervently that an experience of spiritual new birth has become vital to their understanding of the necessary means of grace, through repentance and active faith, and its resultant life change is the necessary evidence of its reality. The eminent Reformed theologian Fritz Blanke (in Brothers in Christ) saw this clearly.

(ii) Another aspect of the new mythology is the acceptance of the idea that original Swiss Anabaptism was really just one brand of religious explanation for, and one phase of a much larger, pluralistic movement, the essence of which was not theological but radical social dissent. Consequently, the Bender thesis of the monogenesis of Anabaptism, of the existence of one normative movement with a fairly consistent theological framework and with one foundational source gives way to a non-theologically defined, broader concept of Anabaptism with many sources and various manifestations and to a polygenesis theory which in turn better validates and promotes a theological pluralism in the original Anabaptist heritage.

In contrast, my own studies and, indeed, the hard data, giving theological source data its proper respect, supports only a polygenesis of radical dissent, much of which was not the same as Anabaptism, though

at times influencing its fringes - every revival has alien and syncretistic elements impacting its fringes. The source data still sustains that no Anabaptism emerged in the early 16th Century, totally sui genesis prior to or distinct from contact with the original source at Zurich - not anywhere - and every fringe deviation drew whatever essentially Anabaptist elements that gave it a semblance of being an Anabaptist variant, including believer's baptism itself, primarily directly or indirectly from its Swiss contacts. There is just no evidence for any believer's rebaptism (as a rite consistent in meaning with Christian theology, i.e. not just any kind of group initiation) which was practised by any group in the Protestant reformation prior to or independent of contact with what happened in Zurich on January 21, 1525. To suggest otherwise is a self-serving, new mythology.

(iii) Dr. Hubmaier's fervent evangelicalism (and he was the first trained Anabaptist theologian) is now branded as Catholic (cf. Mennonite Quarterly Review, Jan. 1991) though he was no more rooted and trained in Roman Catholicism than Martin Luther, or Michael Sattler or Menno Simons. Can it be in part because he held tenaciously to the great historic creeds of orthodoxy? Moreover, the assertion that Hubmaier set up a non-separatistic state church in Waldshut and Nicolsburg, along with attempts to soften the separatistic stance of the whole movement, are serious exaggerations. Dr. C. Nienkirchen (about five years ago) wrote his doctoral thesis precisely to correct these notions. Like many current Mennonites, Hubmaier's environment and experiences and his formal theological training caused him not to press his Anabaptistic principles quite as far as the Schleithem Articles did and so he maintained (from common grace) that wherever possible without compromise, a Christian in government was a good thing and that governments may legitimately support the gospel and even a Believers' Church - but only if freely done. He remained thoroughly committed to Christ's church as free, spiritual, separatistic and sectarian and to an advocacy of religious liberty in society. He considered his variations as validly within the framework of the normative Anabaptism which he openly espoused and helped to formulate. For some years, in the formative period, his treatises on baptism, the ordinances and discipline were the most extensive works available on these subjects.

Recently, J. Denny Weaver (in Becoming Anabaptist) has tried, valiantly but unnecessarily, to recover and resynthesize some kind of normative Anabaptism as emerging from its supposedly pluralistic roots. But the evidence remains firm that there was a normative Anabaptist theology and practice firmly established in its first three years (1525-27) and relatively consistently sustained, even though it lacked a creedally and institutionally enforced uniformity of detail (in spite of Schleithem). Moreover, in each of its most syncretistic fringe groups, the previously well-articulated normative theology on repentance, active faith, regeneration, believer's baptism, discipline, the peaceful brotherhood church, personal piety and love in action, ultimately triumphed. For example, the South German dissenting movement which initially mixed Hans Hut's Muntzerite radicalism with some Swiss Anabaptism, which Hut had only gradually learned, became within four years (apart from some slightly more mythical tonality) predominantly one with the basics of Swiss normative Anabaptism. Similarly, the North German/Dutch Anabaptism of Hoffman and the two Jans (and the Munster tragedy), which also fused the prior-developed Muntzerite eschatology and radical charismatic agenda of Hoffman with the more radical wing of Strasbourg Anabaptism, was repudiated immediately as alien both by the Swiss Anabaptists and Marpeck (who was a major spokesman for normative Anabaptism). Indeed, within five years (after its discreditation by the excesses of Munster, which were derived from its non-Anabaptistic, alien elements), this movement similarly was led back by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips not to earlier non-violent Hoffmanism but virtually one hundred percent to the principles of the original normative Anabaptism (whether fully consciously or not is not clear but I still think the circumstantial evidence favours the former). Almost all of Hoffman's pre-Anabaptist baggage (except only for the celestial flesh doctrine) was eliminated and the original Anabaptist motifs reasserted to such an extent that Menno, Grebel, Mantz, Sattler and Hubmaier (except for the "sword" issue) can all readily be subsumed as proponents of a remarkable consensus, a normative Anabaptism. So whether the original movement developed from a single source (Bender) or was synthesized from what ultimately survived (Weaver), both Bender and Weaver agree that there was a normative Anabaptism which is the root and foundation of our

heritage.

Nevertheless, I submit that the current intensely focused attack on the Bender thesis, the historiographic, presuppositional shift, and the concomitant trend in some Mennonite circles towards advocacy of a theological pluralism in original Anabaptism, parallels and bolsters the advocacy of greater doctrinal pluralism by some current Mennonite theologians. This assessment is further supported by the efforts of these same scholars to separate, indeed, to polarize Anabaptist theology from evangelicalism (eg. C.N. Kraus, ed., Evangelism and Anabaptism).¹⁰²¹

III. Was Normative Anabaptism Evangelical?

Normative Anabaptism of the early 16 Century was, and if we are to be faithful to it, must remain consistently evangelical (although not all evangelicals were or are Anabaptistic).

If the Anabaptism of such leaders as C. Grebel, F. Mantz, B. Hubmaier, C. Marpeck, D. Philips, M. Simons and P. Riedman represents and embodies normative Anabaptism, it can hardly be controverted that it was thoroughly evangelical. Evangelical in the early 16th Century context meant the adherence, for final and infallible authority in faith and practice, to sola scriptura (Holy Scriptures alone), redemptively to sola gratia (salvation solely by the initiative of God's grace and not of human, institutional, or sacramental works), sola fides (mediated individually solely on the principle of faith in the finished sacrifice of Christ) and the priesthood of all believers (untrammelled access to God's mercy and grace to every believer through the one and only High Priest, Jesus Christ). In addition to these evangelical principles, required also was an adherence to the creeds of historic, trinitarian orthodoxy, especially the Apostles' Creed. Normative Anabaptism consistently held to these principles in common with the evangelical, magisterial Protestantism of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, etc. Wenger's careful assessment of the sources in Even Unto Death makes this abundantly clear.

He notes that Sattler's tract on Two Kinds of Obedience distinguishes the Anabaptist emphasis on godly living or filial works from all self-serving works - righteousness and legalism and his tract on The Satisfaction of Christ focuses on the question of who are the recipients of the blessings of the one and only atonement rather than on the nature of the atonement itself. Sattler's answer was clear and evangelical and predominantly the position of normative Anabaptism: while the atonement was potentially universal in scope and sufficiency, it is actually efficacious only to those who hear and believe the gospel with far more than intellectual or lip assent but respond with an active faith. Wenger paraphrases him: "To have faith is to live the Christian life, to follow Christ in holiness, love and obedience" which however, Sattler notes, is not by human volition but is made possible for all in whom the Spirit truly dwells (cf. pp. 31-32 Even Unto Death). Sattler's emphasis here, with its added Christological stress on the necessity of the personally experiential nature of the new birth (and which led concomitantly to a powerful evangelistic spirit), is common to normative Anabaptism and (unlike most early 16th Century evangelical Protestantism) it anticipated, indeed, makes of normative Anabaptism a prototype of the later evangelical revivals in England and North America. Concerning the atonement and the uniqueness of Christ, Menno wrote "since no one under heaven has perfectly fulfilled the righteousness required of God but Christ Jesus alone; therefore none can approach God, obtain grace and be saved, except by the perfect righteousness, atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ, however godly, righteous, holy and unblamable he may be" (cf. C.W.M.S., p. 1053) or again "[Christ's] blood is and ever will be the only and eternal medium of our reconciliation...for if our reconciliation depended on works and ceremonies, then grace would be a thing of the past and the merits and fruits of the blood of Christ would end. Oh no, it is grace and will be grace to all eternity...". (cf. C.W.M.S., pp. 396-397) So Wenger calls Menno Simons "a Christocentric churchman" and adds: "That Menno was a genuine evangelical is abundantly evident in his writings" i.e. he stressed the evangelical doctrines of grace, justification by faith, regeneration, etc. Indeed, he placed on the title page of each of his books "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is

laid which is Jesus Christ."

The Apostles' Creed also was repeatedly affirmed in normative Anabaptism; for example, Hubmaier based one of his pastoral publications on it and his baptismal pledge repeated it (cf. Hubmaier [Works], 12 Articles in Prayer Form p. 234ff. and A Form for Water Baptism p. 386ff.). Similarly, Menno wrote a Confession of the Triune God affirming trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy. Hymn #2 in the 16th Century Swiss Anabaptist hymnbook, the Ausbund, is an arrangement of the Apostles' Creed with commentary.

In the Zofingen debate (1532) between the Swiss Anabaptists and the Reformed clergy, the Reformed stated: "we are of one mind in the leading articles of faith and our controversy has to do only with external things..." (cf., Even Unto Death p.57). Wolfgang Capito, the Strasbourg evangelical reformer stated: "As concerns the principle articles and vital points of faith [evangelical faith], they do not err at all." (cf. Even Unto Death, p. 57). As Wenger notes: "The Swiss Brethren (indeed all of normative Anabaptism) would have been astonished and offended if they had been accused of not holding to a faith which is evangelical" (p.58).

by
line
At least three alien influences impacted normative, evangelical Anabaptism (and magisterial evangelicalism too, to some degree) and threatened its orthodox Christology but were effective only on the fringes. They were:

1. The German mysticism of Thomas Muntzer which tended to pantheism and to postulate an inner Christ in all men and a gospel of every creature, was rejected largely (though finding some modified acceptance by Hans Denck and some South German Anabaptism).
2. The radical, prophetic charismaticism of Thomas Muntzer and Melchior Hoffman and followers led to continued revelation and even to new Christ incarnations (eg. Bader and Joris) but Bader was banned and the normative Anabaptists at Strasbourg rejected Hoffman's deviance.
3. The humanistic rationalism of the age led some Protestants to a unitarian, anti-trinitarian stance affecting also some Anabaptists, primarily in Poland but also in North Germany. Adam Pastor departed

from trinitarianism and denied that Christ was eternal but was consequently excommunicated by Dirk Philips and Menno Simons in 1547. Menno himself continued Hoffman's and Schwenkfeld's "celestial flesh" doctrine but only as an explanation to support evangelical orthodoxy, i.e., to defend the full deity and sinlessness of Christ Jesus - but still without intending to negate his humanity as the God-Man.

One may conclude that whenever and wherever theological and Christological variations arose which threatened evangelical orthodoxy, normative Anabaptism consistently repudiated them and excommunicated those affirming such deviations.

IV. Normative Anabaptism Was Separatistic

Finally, I submit that normative Anabaptism was separatistic from the beginning - and at two different levels - a stance which Zwingli fully understood (cf. C. Nienkirchen, "Reviewing the Case For a Non-separatist Ecclesiology in Early Swiss Anabaptism" Mennonite Quarterly Review July, 1982 and also cf. J. Stayer's "Reply" in Mennonite Quarterly Review July, 1983). Was a unity of the Spirit possible without doctrinal unity? The Early Anabaptists answered this way (apart from which there would be no Mennonite churches today):

1. They could and did distinguish (though not easily in the presence of intense persecution) the difference between institutional and spiritual unity.
2. They said no emphatically to both institutional unity and unity of Spirit where a common evangelical orthodoxy, especially concerning the person and work of Christ and the means of grace, was lacking. Separation and a break of fellowship on these grounds (eg. with official, then current Roman Catholicism) was the stance, together, of both Anabaptist and Magisterial (Lutheran and Reformed) evangelicalism (though there were some evangelical Romanists whom both considered brothers in the Spirit though institutionally remaining separated).
3. Since both normative Anabaptism and Magisterial Protestantism were orthodox and evangelical in their theology of God, Sin, Christ and Salvation, why did Anabaptism reject an evangelical ecumenism also? Why did the Anabaptists often even refuse to worship in Lutheran or Reformed

churches? The Reformed debates at Zofingen (1532) were correct in affirming the basic evangelical orthodoxy of the Anabaptists but wrong in concluding that their differences were only over matters of "externals".

On the basis of obedience to Christ and the Scriptures, when agreement on quite a variety of issues which were considered Biblically necessary for the well-being of Christ's church could not be achieved with the Magisterial, evangelical preachers, the Anabaptists said no to institutional unity and opted for sectarian separation. But sectarian separation did not necessarily mean spiritual separation. For example, Hubmaier, the Anabaptist, did not question his brotherhood in Christ with Oecolampadius or even Zwingli. Similarly, the relationship of Sattler to the Strasbourg Magisterial Reformers, though strained, remained brotherly - their oneness in Christ was not at issue. "External" issues called only for an institutional break and these issues are listed in many of the sources. Martin Weninger's booklet An Answer of Some Who Are Called Anabaptists Why They Do Not Attend the Churches is a good summary (Mennonite Quarterly Review Jan. 1971, pp. 5-25). He lists eight errors of Magisterial Evangelicalism as causative of schism:

- (i) their failure to follow a Biblical pattern of worship and ministry (primarily the issue of the absence of lay participation and congregational judging);
- (ii) failure to allow freedom of conscience in practice in matters of faith;
- (iii) using civil powers and physically coercive force in matters of the Spirit, including whether or not a church can be Biblically constituted if it is a state church rather than a free, believers' church;
- (iv) violent persecution of fellow Christians (Anabaptists) even though they are not heretics;
- (v) failure to establish the ban (i.e. the exercise of discipline) in the churches;
- (vi) failure to rightly observe the Lord's Supper;
- (vii) continuing infant baptism when the Biblical order is instruction,

conversion, then baptism; and

(viii) failure by many preachers to preach the full gospel that people must "be born again...follow Christ...[and] abide by [or live out] the evangelical truth".

4. This last point leads to another factor in Anabaptist separatism, namely if soteriological unity, especially personal, active faith, is missing then regardless of anything else (ethnic, theological, etc.), no unity of the Spirit was possible. Repeated in virtually every point in Weninger's "externals" and a focal point of virtually all Anabaptist literature and disputations was a concern which for them was not "external" but soteriological, namely the seeming failure of many Magisterial, evangelical preachers and their congregations to live godly lives (an accusation the truth of which was admitted by the Strasbourg Magisterial reformers). If the one essential element for soteriological unity seemed to be missing, i.e., the visible lack of active faith and regeneration, then there was no brotherhood possible, personally or corporately.

Factored into each of Weninger's reasons for separatism was the expressed concern that many of the "evangelical preachers" and teachers "lack the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace, of Christ himself" (Mennonite Quarterly Review Jan. 1971, P.30) or again "the preachers are not spiritual but carnal and are [only] born according to the flesh..." (pp.26-27). At issue here was the Anabaptists' soteriological conviction that unless a professing believer exhibited a desire and some capacity to live a holy life and be obedient to Christ, his Lord, he was not really one of Christ's disciples (regardless of rites, baptism, ordination, or whatever). Those who blatantly failed to even desire to live under the Lordship of Christ and ignored open sinfulness, and there were many within the state church, caused Anabaptists to doubt their salvation and this negated fellowship with them as brethren.

That the evangelical Christology of Magisterial Protestantism was essential is assumed but was not considered sufficient! All Anabaptist Christology called for an added element to be always factored in (it was deemed sometimes present but more often not in the state churches)

namely, not only a creedally evangelical Christology but the added experiential reality that every true Christian's life will, and must give evidence that the creedal Christ has become one's living Lord and Saviour, personally. They insisted that full evangelical doctrine was more than just cross theology. It must be an all-encompassing resurrection theology. When properly and Biblically understood, resurrection theology went beyond being just theology and was transformed by spiritual regeneration into life lived in the Spirit of Christ. At issue here was not just the order of presentation of the gospel, not even the place of baptism, but the gospel's very nature and purpose. Zwingli understood this from the beginning, i.e., that the real issue was not infant versus adult baptism but their requiring the fusing of cross and resurrection theology, experientially, for salvation and as the only basis for entry into the church, into brotherhood and unity of the Spirit. Zwingli tried to push the logic to its absurd limits and accordingly accused Anabaptists of claiming sinlessness or perfection after baptism and of moving again to a works salvation.

Christology emerges then as at the real heart of Anabaptist separatism. It is the Christology of an activated , experiential Lordship of Christ. For the Anabaptists, this gospel of repentance and active faith, regeneration by the Spirit, and Christ becoming one's living Lord which is then always evidenced in every true Christian by a new attitude of obedience and love and an earnest desire to follow and please Christ, is that by which brotherhood and unity of the Spirit is ascertained and authenticated. Menno put it this way (in "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing", Even Unto Death p. 72):

"They verily are not the true congregation of Christ who merely boast of His name. But they are the true congregation of Christ who are truly converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerate mind by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the divine Word and have become the children of God, have entered into obedience to Him, and live unblamably i His holy commandments and according to His holy will all their days, or from the moment of their call."

There isn't time to deal also in depth with three closely associated Christological issues, other than to draw attention to them, namely:

1. Not only soteriology but the whole of the Anabaptist theological synthesis is more than "external"; it is Christological. For Anabaptists, the church defined as corpus christianum is changed to corpus christi or christological ecclesiology; hermeneutics become Christological with the non-flat Bible or progress of revelation and the advocacy of the necessary balancing of the inner and outer, of the spirit ^{and} of the letter, as with the divine and human in Christ; Christological worship as spiritual worship in the body of Christ emerges; Christological missions is laicized in that all Christians become evangelists and under orders of His commission; all are to proclaim His gospel to the world, the gospel of a historical Jesus who lived, died and rose again, who must be proclaimed, consciously received, experienced, and obeyed as Lord.

2. The Anabaptists, then as now, were tempted to abandon their separatism by arguments such as

- (i) love is over truth and controversy gives offence - so Zwingli to Grebel and Hubmaier, (but Hubmaier replied: "One cannot for that reason let the truth be so coarsely trampled in the mud" - differences must "be determined by the Word of God." Hubmaier p.91 "Letter to the Zurich Council" and "Recantation" p. 151) and Bucer to Sattler; but the Anabaptists refused to separate ^{love & truth} them;
- (ii) the wheat and tares must grow together in the church but the Anabaptists reversed it by defining the field as the world, not the church, and calling for a composite, free society;
- (iii) internalize differences for unity's sake; the externals aren't important -but the Anabaptists saw this as an excuse to avoid the "cross life" and a temptation to syncretism and/or an accommodation of the gospel (this also arose in the Grebel-Zwingli and in the Marpeck-Schwenkfeld debates);
- (iv) sectarianism destroys the unity of the church - but the existing unity the Anabaptists saw as an empty facade.

3. There was a close tie between the distinctives of Anabaptist soteriology and their initially powerful evangelistic impulse (cf. Littell Origins of Sectarian Protestantism pp. 109-126).

V. Conclusions

1. There was a normative and quite well-defined Anabaptism of which Menno Simons was a sizable part, that substantially laid the basic groundwork for the subsequent development of Mennonitism and Anabaptism theology and practice.

2. Normative Anabaptism was thoroughly and consistently evangelical, though not all evangelicals (especially Magisterial evangelicalism) are Anabaptistic.

3. Can there be unity in the Spirit without doctrinal unity about Christ? Anabaptist theology said emphatically, no! Anabaptists found it necessary in accordance with obedience to Scripture to separate institutionally from Magisterial evangelicalism but the essentials necessary for maintaining also a sense of brotherhood or unity of the Spirit that transcended institutional division were not only

(i) orthodox evangelical theology; but also

(i) a living active faith - a Christology of grace that experientially made Christ one's living Lord in life by the Spirit. For Anabaptists there was only one Saviour and Lord, the historic Christ of Scripture, and only one road led to Christ, new life, and heaven: that was the path of obedient discipleship which began with repentance, active living faith and a personal, experiential new birth of the Spirit.

Brotherhood required both. Nothing less would create and sustain a New Testament brotherhood community in the world, the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth, or fulfill the Great Commission.

4. Anabaptists were too busy obediently carrying out the task of evangelism, too committed to the proclamation to the whole world of the good news of the divine person and saving work of the historic Christ of the New Testament to have time to waste on subtleties of theology as such might relate to inter-cultural relationships.

Almost 40 years ago, in his award winning book, Origins of Sectarian Protestantism, Franklin H. Littell noted that no texts appear more frequently than Matthew 28 and Mark 16 in the confessions of faith and court testimonies of the Anabaptists (p.109). For Anabaptists, the

truly spiritual church is an obedient church and an obedient church is a sending church. Perhaps we today need to focus on promoting the same convictions and enthusiasm for the power of the gospel and on sustaining the same obedience and commitment. The gospel which gripped the heart and mind of the Anabaptists was so exciting, had so much to offer, was so closely tied to a personal relationship with the living Christ that it left no place for rivals, pluralism or theological/sociological variations. Rather, it called for proclamation, a proclamation of new life for lost people. They saw this task itself as an expression of the unity of the Spirit of Christ.

A Swiss spokesman at the Bern Disputation (1538) testified that when he became an Anabaptist, it was because he met men "who had surrendered themselves by bussfertigkeite (continuous repentance) to the doctrine of Christ" and this Christology was what enabled them to found a congregation of believers where "repentance and newness of life in Christ were in evidence" (Mennonite Quarterly Review Oct. 1931, p. 249). This is where unity of the Spirit found its most visible expression for Anabaptists; it existed only when the doctrine of Christ was made experiential.

Appendix

Another soteriological distinctive, sometimes noted but not pressed as major by the Reformed in discussions with the Anabaptists, was the Anabaptist insistence on the necessity of personal commitment with free choice (i.e. free only after grace through the Word and the Spirit freeing the will). This led to advocacy of a potentially universal atonement (not universalism). This opens the problem of the relationship of Anabaptistic soteriology to the heathen who have never heard but helps solve the problem of the character of God in relation to sin and punishment; whereas predestination better solved the problem of why some hear and respond (are chosen) and others don't respond or don't get the chance.