

# The Anabaptist Movement and Its Church Structure

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century churches in many mission fields started to ask serious questions about the church itself. It was a question for the identity as churches wrestling with issues of secularization and religious pluralism. The churches had to answer for their existence in their environments. Furthermore, many problems of the world raised questions concerning the churches' role. Many debates on the issue of the role of the Church have been brought to public attention. Nowadays, new concerns for ecclesiology are coming out of basic communities in Latin America, house churches in China, indigenous churches in Asia and Africa,<sup>1</sup> and the small church movements in America and Europe, and Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

With this concern for the church, the concern for the renewal of the church has become one of the burning issues in ecclesiology today. Many books have been written on this topic, most of which focus on the early church in the Bible as a model to which to

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<sup>1</sup> See further. Michel Bavarel, *New Communities, New Ministries: The Church Resurgent in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); The Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia, ed., *Tradition and Innovation: A Search for Relevant Ecclesiology in Asia* (Singapore:CTC-CCA, 1983); and H.S. Wilson and Nyambura J. Njoroge, *New Wine: The Challenge of the Emerging Ecclesiologies to Church Renewal* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Two exemplary books can be mentioned. Lode L. Wostyn, *Doing Ecclesiology: Church and Mission Today* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1990); and Walbert Buhlmann, *The Church of the Future: A Model for the Year 2001* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

return. Those authors, prominent pastors and theologians, have tried to assert the true biblical meaning and form of the church. Free churches which carry on the traditions of the radical reformers, (Anabaptists, Puritans, the Wesleyan movement, etc.) came to contribute to this tendency.

In this study, I will focus on the Anabaptist Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Among the many reformation movements, the Anabaptist movement had the most radical concept of theologies in Europe including an important concept of the church.

Here, I would like to evaluate the Anabaptist movement by focusing on their understanding of the church. I believe that the foundation of Christian mission is the Church. Therefore, the concern for the church is important because the understanding of the church includes its understanding of mission.

The process of my study will be as follows. In the beginning, let us examine the short history of Anabaptism and its important theological idea, the concept of the “Fall.” Then, we will expand our study into their understanding of the church and its structure. At the end, we will consider the influence of Anabaptism toward the world.

## **II. THE HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF ANABAPTISTS**

This chapter discusses the short history of the Anabaptists and their concept of the “Fall” as a starting point of their theology. We will deal with the main concepts of their theology in the next chapter with the concept of the Church.

## **A. THE SHORT HISTORY OF THE ANABAPTISTS**

Anabaptists came from the tradition of Reformers, especially Huldreich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland in 1519.<sup>3</sup> Anabaptists were enthusiastic adherents of the Reformation. However, as time passed, they realized that Reformers themselves were compromising with worldly powers. Therefore, Grebel, Mants, and other enthusiastic reformers started to meet by themselves to do Bible study. They wanted to find out the real form of Christianity and finally concluded that the reformers' work was not enough. When they insisted on the invalidity of infant baptism, Anabaptists started to be considered as a threat to the unity and harmony of the society. In this hostile situation, they decided to follow the way of Jesus, even though they expected severe persecution. "They baptized one another and in the same moment commissioned each other to build Christ's church on earth."<sup>4</sup> This event brought about missionaries in small groups.<sup>5</sup> Some others, especially farmers near the area, were baptized. They met for Bible study and prayer as well as celebration of the Lord's Supper. As a result, they were imprisoned and threatened with exile. However, though they were scattered, they preached the gospel everywhere. In a few years, Anabaptism was spread to nearly all European countries, especially, in the German and Dutch speaking areas.

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<sup>3</sup>William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1963); 7-16

<sup>4</sup>Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad Press, 1973);

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<sup>5</sup> Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618* (London: Cornell University Press, 1972); 1-14.

The expansion of Anabaptism brought severe persecution with martyrs for their faith. Some Anabaptist leaders were publicly executed. However, the world could not make the movement stop. "Two years after the forming of the first congregation, the movement had spread hundreds of miles beyond its starting point."<sup>6</sup>

In this process, leaders of the movement were very important. They not only spread the gospel and baptized but organized communities and took care of them. Among the leaders, Balthasar Hubmaier was an important and gifted person. He baptized Hans Denck who became one of the great leaders in the Anabaptist movement. Denck was expelled from Nuremberg on January 21, 1525 and went to South Germany, where he gave a moderating influence, emphasizing love as the sum of all virtues. He died of plague.

Hans Denck baptized Hans Hut, who was one of the most zealous and successful of all Anabaptist missionaries.<sup>7</sup> He founded Anabaptist churches all over Austria. "His method was to preach, baptize converts, then immediately appoint other missionaries who also went out. Although many of these apostles were executed, the movement spread rapidly. He was responsible for raising communal Anabaptism in Moravia. Also, he tried to combine their resources for a common life of work, discipleship, and worship.

Jacob Hutter was the most important early leader who worked to rescue Anabaptists from the terror of Habsburg persecution in the Tyrol and brought them to

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<sup>6</sup>Klaassen, 5.

<sup>7</sup>James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972);141-166.

Moravia.<sup>8</sup> After settling down, the Hutterian communities thrived under relative toleration, sending missionaries to many parts of Europe. He was burned at the stake in Innsbruck in 1536

Melchior Hofmann who was a Lutheran preacher, met Anabaptists at Strassburg in 1529 and decided to be one of them.<sup>9</sup> He preached his new understandings to the Netherlands and North Germany and baptized many converts. Numerous groups of Melchiorites grew in the fertile spiritual soil of the Netherlands. He had a special interest in the future event of the Second Coming and the Millennium. He believed that Strassburg was the New Jerusalem. He also believed that his imprisonment would bring about the sequence of the last events of human history. So, he gladly went to prison but he died ten years later.

In 1528, Pilgram Marpeck came to South Germany and Switzerland in Alsace, Wurttemberg and Moravia where Hans Denck and Hans Hut worked together. When he came to that place, Anabaptists already had perished in 1527. There, he devoted himself to the unity of the church.<sup>10</sup> He insisted on the primacy of love and the necessity for patience in the exercise of church discipline.

While Anabaptists kept peace in the Netherlands, in South Germany, Switzerland, and Moravia, severe persecution continued for several more centuries. As a result, Anabaptists disappeared in South Germany and were eradicated in Austria.

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<sup>8</sup>Estep, 87-89.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 104-107.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 79-82; 164-166.

Though Catholics and Protestants were the same in suppressing Anabaptism, their methods varied. In Catholic Territories, the death penalty remained as the standard punishment for steadfast Anabaptists up to the Thirty Years' War. The Catholic side charged Anabaptists with heresy and rebellion. On the other hand, Protestants used the way of expulsion from their territories, imprisonment of leaders, with some exceptions of executions that charged Anabaptist with blasphemy and rebellion. However, the Swiss cities sentenced them to death for violating the civil laws.

Eighty four percent of all executions were perpetrated in Catholic territories, and only 16 percent in territories and cities that were Protestant or had Protestant leanings. The severe methods used by the Catholic governments produced more successful results than the milder measures of the Protestant governments. In Catholic area, Anabaptism was practically eliminated in 1527 and 1528. The mass executions achieved their aim by the middle of the sixteenth century. In Protestant area, by contrast, Anabaptism flourished up to the Thirty Year's War.<sup>11</sup>

## **B. THEOLOGY OF THE "FALL"**

### 1. FROM REFORMERS TO BEYOND

The Anabaptists started their reformation with the Reformers.<sup>12</sup> The Anabaptists agreed fundamentally regarding sinful men and justification by faith. Also, they strongly

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<sup>11</sup>James M. Stayer and Werner O. Packull, *The Anabaptists and Thomas Muntzer* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1980); 37.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973);17-25.

accepted the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, they confessed the centrality of the Scripture.

However, the Anabaptists went farther than the Reformers. While the Reformers emphasized "faith alone," Anabaptists insisted that faith is visible and should be expressed in action. Anabaptists pursued a Christ-like life as well as the belief in him.

At this point, Anabaptists were different from the Reformers in pursuing the will of Christ through their lives. It was a matter of being faithful in all things. Also, Anabaptists' obedience was the expression of their inner liberation.<sup>13</sup> It was not like legalism as the Reformers criticized.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, their obedient lives were carried out in their community. "Those who belonged to their fellowship had quite deliberately entered the circle of disciples upon Jesus' own invitation. These kinds of actions flowed from within and were not imposed from without."<sup>15</sup>

## 2. FALL OF THE CHURCH

From that perspective, they recognized religious primitivism as a pattern of their theology. Their concept of primitivism was a tool of judgment on contemporary society.

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<sup>13</sup>Klaassen, 32.

<sup>14</sup> General criticism from other sides to Anabaptists was on legalism of Anabaptism. Luther also criticized Anabaptism as "a revival of monasticism." (Ibid., 28.)

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 33.

According to the criteria, all churches – Protestant and Catholic - were decayed and far from the will of God. Here, the concept of the “fall of the church” emerged.<sup>16</sup>

Under the persecution, the Church was pure in her faith and morals. However, when Constantine allowed Christianity to be the major religion of Rome, the Church came to compromise its faith and forsake its committed life, accepting pagan faith and customs. Especially, the Edict of Innocent I, which declared compulsory infant baptism in 407 AD, opened corruption of the Church.<sup>17</sup> Children were automatically accepted without personal commitment to Christ.

Also, for the Anabaptists, the major marks of the fallen church were the union of the church and the state. As a result, the church came to be concerned with worldly matters, compromising its faith. Material interest became a strong temptation of the Church. Furthermore, the Church became involved in the power struggle of the nations. The Church became a hierarchical institution rather than a faith community. The clergy was distinguished from lay people having the power of performing baptism and Eucharist.

### 3. SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

This concept of the "Fall" led the Anabaptists to withdraw from worldly affairs.

General attitudes of Anabaptists toward politics are as follows.

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<sup>16</sup>Fraankin Hamlin Littell, *The Origins of sectarian Protestantism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964); 57-78.

<sup>17</sup>Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Beacon Hill, Boston: Starr King Press, 1958); 63.

*a. Refusal to participate in the magistracy*

Anabaptists believed that there were two kingdoms; one was the kingdom of God, the other was the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of the world was characterized by strife and war, to which the magistracy belonged. Anabaptists thought that they belonged to the kingdom of God that was full of peace. Therefore, they refused to participate in the magistracy.

*b. Refusal to take the oath*

At that time, the oath was connected to loyalty to the political authority, especially in time of the war. This refusal to swear allegiance to the state easily brought prosecution and persecution. As a result, Anabaptists were always suspected of sedition.

*c. Refusal to participate in warfare*

Anabaptists believed that people could not come to the truth by violence and killing. In the kingdom of God, only patience, love, and gentleness could work. Therefore, they refused to participate in warfare.

*d. Insistence on religious freedom*

Anabaptists insisted on freedom for individual belief, which they believed to be Jesus' way in mission. To the insistence, Reformers rejected the notion of religious liberty that transcended political institution.

### **III. THE CHURCH: TRUE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

In this chapter, we will take a close look at the main theological themes of Anabaptists that was shown in their church and its structure. Here, I want to use the ecological model of the Church of Dr. Snyder because his ecological approach to the local church is very useful to evaluate the church structure. According to him, “the church is a socio-spiritual organism. Its life may be viewed ecologically as a dynamic interplay of several parts. Like any other organism, its health depends on the proper balance and functioning of the parts.”<sup>18</sup>

To think about functions of the church, Snyder suggests three areas - the church as a fellowship of *worship*, *community*, and *witness*. Those three functions correlate with one another while they have distinctions. Also, each function has its sub-functioning parts. The function of worship can be divided into three sub-functions - *instruction*, *repentance*, and *celebration*. The community function has three sub-functions, *discipline*, *sanctification*, and *gift of the spirit*. Also, *evangelism*, *service*, and *prophecy*

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<sup>18</sup>) Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, ); 74.

can be sub-functions of the church as witness.<sup>19</sup> Snyder expects that this insight can help people to see the church as a whole. He said, “Such an ecological model for church life can be strategically useful. In addition to being a tool for understanding church life, it is helpful in diagnosing the condition of a church and in handling the question of church structure.”<sup>20</sup>

### **A. THE CHURCH AS THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

According to my research, the main character of the Anabaptist Church can be described as “the disciples of Christ.” This concept is very similar to “the community of disciples” of Avery Dulles. While blending his five models of the church, Dulles suggests ecumenical model, “the community of disciples.”

It calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to direct it through his Spirit. The concept of discipleship also builds bridges to the other four models, ... It illuminates the institutional and sacramental aspects of the Church and grounds the functions of evangelization and service that are central to the herald and servant models. The notion of “community of disciples” is thus a broadly comprehensive one. Without being adequate to the full reality of the Church, it has ... potentialities as a basis for a comprehensive ecclesiology.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>) Ibid., 76-91.

<sup>20</sup>) Ibid., 91.

<sup>21</sup>Avery Dulles, S.J. *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1987); 206-207.

Also, the Dulles' model of "community of disciples" has the following strong points. First, it recognizes that the Church is imperfect and needs to be corrected. Second, it requests the personal response to the Church. Third, this flexible model can respond actively to this radically changing society.

Likewise, *Discipleship was certainly most essential to the Anabaptist way of life.*<sup>22</sup> Jesus' life and teaching were the most important criteria to the Anabaptists. Though Jesus' death showed God's mercy and forgiveness of sins of human beings, accepting Jesus as the savior is only a starting point of their faith. For them, *discipleship meant to follow Jesus' life.*

Furthermore, *the most important character in discipleship of the Anabaptists was its communal form.* "While the decision to become a disciple was an individual step of faith, the new life upon which the disciple entered was communal."<sup>23</sup> This insistence on the community meant their refusal of the Reformer's emphasis of invisibility as well as the authoritarian and hierarchical discipline of Roman Catholic. *Instead, they formed a visible community of love.*

The Anabaptists' community was so radical that it brought trouble and persecution. However, they accepted the persecution as a natural reaction of the society to their kingdom life because Jesus and his disciples also were persecuted. They

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<sup>22</sup> Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968); 210-212  
<sup>23</sup>Klaassen, 24.

considered themselves as "*a suffering community*."<sup>24</sup> They accepted suffering as a mark of the true church.

Now, let us examine the main functions of the Anabaptist Church. As we have seen, those are *worship, community, and witness*.

## **B. WORSHIP**

One of the core functions of the Church is worship. Under the worship function, we can see three sub-functions; *repentance, instruction, and celebration*.<sup>25</sup>

### 1. REPENTED CONGREGATION: BAPTISM

The Church is *the community of the repented who are separated from the worldly lives*. When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he asked for the repentance first.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, to be kingdom people, repentance is essential. Baptism strongly demonstrates the repentance because baptism means separation from the world as well as union with Jesus. Especially, Anabaptists' baptism had a strong meaning of *the separation of the believers from the world*. When they refused infant baptism, Anabaptists affirmed the Christian duty of the voluntary association to enforce a strong internal discipline.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>25</sup>Clasen, 90-94.

<sup>26</sup>Matthew 4:17

The real issue was the Restitution of a vigorous congregational life, as it was thought to have been lived in an apostolic times, and the argument between infant baptism and adult baptism was a vehicle of the prior issue.<sup>27</sup>

The important two points of the Anabaptists were the covenantal relation to God and fellowship of believers. By believers' baptism, Christians can enter into true relationship with God as well as neighbors.

Also, *the strong point of the believers' baptism was its emphasis on the discipline of the biblical people.* The early Church required the long term spiritual training for the new believers to be baptized. Therefore, it was not an easy matter to be a disciple of Jesus because the way of disciples meant martyrdom itself.

Furthermore, *the group consciousness* was important in baptism. On the one hand, baptism showed an action of the baptized to enter into the community of Christ. On the other side, baptism showed the acceptance of the baptized by a congregation. Therefore, *the baptism was not only personal decision but communal acceptance.*

## 2. INSTRUCTED CONGREGATION: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Another important function of the Church is *instruction through worship.* Worship helps the congregation to remember the most important events, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Also, through worship, the congregation listens to Jesus' teaching. Therefore, the important part of worship is to encounter God's word.

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<sup>27</sup>Littell, 85.

When we talk about interpreting the Bible, *the first principle of interpreting the Bible was on the life and doctrine of Jesus and the apostles*. To the Anabaptists, the real life of Jesus was more important than doctrinal matters. Therefore, for them the most important teaching of the Bible is *the Sermon on the Mount*.

Anabaptists pursued a form of *Christian primitivism* that was expressed in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> They found a firm discipline of disciples and the apostolic pattern of life in the New Testament. Also, Anabaptists found *the theology of the kingdom of God* that was the main focus of Jesus' teaching. For the Anabaptists, the neglect and exploitation of the poor was a question of faithfulness of the Gospel, because the Kingdom of God was theirs.

Many Anabaptists believed that there could be *no private property in the kingdom of God*. Therefore, Anabaptists, especially, the Hutterian Anabaptists in Moravia, developed communal lives in which production and consumption were shared one another. The important point is the practice of the Word. *Anabaptists put the Word of God into practice*. They accepted Jesus' teaching in their lives. I believe that this is the most important point of the function of instruction in worship.

### 3. CELEBRATING CONGREGATION: THE LORD'S SUPPER

The other important function of the Church through worship is to celebrate the event of Jesus, to commit themselves to the life of Jesus, and to realize the power of

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 46-48.

resurrection through their lives. The important factor to actualize these points is the Lord's Supper.<sup>29</sup>

In the Anabaptist community, the Supper was very important to express the reality of this new community of love.<sup>30</sup> They denied the Mass that was the main expression of Roman Catholic's formalism. The main concept of the Lord's Supper to Anabaptists was *the remembrance* as in Zwinglian belief. Therefore, they performed it in "the most straightforward and simple fashion."<sup>31</sup> However, *they went beyond Zwinglian in that they denied the special office of the clergy.* To the Anabaptists, "Christ was present in the community of faithful, and not in the bread and wine."<sup>32</sup> They believed that *the real meaning of the Lord's Supper should be manifested through the lives of believers.* Therefore, to the Anabaptists, "the sacraments were only symbols of a certain relationship within the community and between the True Church and her Lord."<sup>33</sup> This concept of the Lord's Supper enabled Anabaptists to realize the true community of disciples.

### **C. COMMUNITY**

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<sup>29</sup>Littell, 98-101.

<sup>30</sup>Clasen, 95-105.

<sup>31</sup>Littell, 98.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 101.

Worshipping people participate in the sharing community to realize their faith. This community function has *three sub-functions* in the church structure. Those are *discipline, sanctification, and gifts of the Spirit*.

## 1. DISCIPLINED COMMUNITY

In the Church, the form of the community is essential. *Through real community, the Church can discipline Christians*. However, in the other hand, *only really disciplined Christians can form a real community*. Therefore, these two factors cannot be separated.

Especially Anabaptists put a strong emphasis on the community setting of discipline.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, they left their worldly lives and entered into true community, the community of disciples. This separation from the world brought good opportunities for discipline of their faith. They learned a new order, the order of love. Also, they could practice the communal life. “Back of the practice of Biblical communism was the purpose to revitalize the church; it was primarily a "vocational" witness of Christians rather than evidence of a general social hope.”<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, this practice of community is connected with discipleship. Through their communal life of love, they could manifest the life of the kingdom of God. Also, their awareness of separation from the world gave them the urgent feeling of the coming kingdom.

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<sup>34</sup>Durnbaugh, 220-225.

<sup>35</sup>Littell, 96.

In many ways, this community has some merits of the early form of monasticism. Though Anabaptists protested against the corruption of monasticism and its double standard of morality, *Anabaptism had similarities to the medieval Catholic ideal of community, the early form of monasticism.* Like the original monastic movement, Anabaptism was a lay movement. Both were committed to nonviolence, standing against worldly powers. Also, both were critical of private property and formed a communal life. Furthermore, both emphasized the obedience to Jesus. They went back directly to Jesus. Finally, both insisted on the independence of the church from secular power. Those efforts of both were to reinvigorate the church.

However, there were also *different emphases between Anabaptism and monasticism.* While monasticism emphasized the celibacy of monks, Anabaptism insisted that true Christian life should include whole range of life, including marriage, family life, and secular occupation. Also, while the Catholic Church holds Scripture and tradition, Anabaptists insisted on the authority of the Bible.

## 2. SANCTIFYING COMMUNITY

Community in the Church is very important for the sanctification of Christians because community is an excellent setting for mutual sanctification. On the other hand, however, only sanctifying Christians can form a true Christian community.

When we talk about the sanctifying community, we cannot ignore the Anabaptists' concept of "*the spiritual government.*"<sup>36</sup> Matthew 18:15- 17 shows strong authority of the church over the lives of Christians as a form of government.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

This community presupposed a freely acting congregation that did not depend upon any worldly power but upon its own spirit of fellowship. To the Anabaptists, the church is like a community of saints. Here, we can see the strong distinction between the people of God and the people of the world. The Church should be separated from the world in its authority of decision. In this form of spiritual government, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit was important. The congregation, the center of authority in practice, came from and was guided by God.

To the Anabaptists, the authority of civil government was accepted as passive obedience. The magistrate was important for the sins of the world. God gave civil governments the authority to deal with those sins of the world. Therefore, people should

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<sup>36</sup>Littell, 86-95.

obey the authority in the world. However, it is passive obedience just for the sins of the world. When the demands of the civil authority contradicted the Bible, Anabaptists followed the command of the Bible. To the Anabaptists, the spiritual government took the highest position among authorities.

### 3. GIFTS IN THE COMMUNITY

As the body of Christ, the Christian community needs various gifts to function properly.<sup>37</sup> These diverse gifts are from the Holy Spirit. The diverse communities of Anabaptists not only had diverse gifts in them but shared those gifts with one another.

Anabaptists accepted and radicalized Luther's idea of the universal priesthood of all believers. Therefore, the Anabaptists “redeemed lay religion, and did not view too favorably any professional workers -certainly not those supported by rents and tithes in the parish system.”<sup>38</sup> In the community, all were equal in the service of one another in a brotherly fashion. As a result, the gifts of all members were stronger than in other churches such as Roman Catholic and Reformers.

### **D. WITNESS**

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<sup>37</sup>Arthur A. Rouner, Jr. *The Free Church Today: New Life for the Whole Church* (New York: Association Press, 1968); 37-46.

<sup>38</sup>Littell, 91.

The worshipping community does not lose its witnessing function. Especially, the witness of Anabaptists had a strong point in that the community of the Anabaptists itself witnessed to Jesus' teaching through their lives.

## 1. EVANGELIZING CHURCH

Like the early church, the church of the Anabaptists was a witnessing community following the command of Jesus.<sup>39</sup> They had a strong conviction of their mission and carried out dynamic mission activities. The following are characteristics of their mission.

First, they were full of the Great Commission.<sup>40</sup> Their commitment to Jesus' command let them follow his final command. Second, while Luther considered the missionary field into territorially circumscribed parishes, the Anabaptists did not limit it. Wandering Anabaptist evangelists played important roles in mission. Third, the Reformers' concern was the reformation of the church, not its replacement. However, Anabaptists insisted on the Fall of the Church, both Catholic and Protestant. Therefore, they considered Europe as once again a mission field. Fourth, they did not confine themselves to orderly ordination, which enabled lay missionaries. Actually, all Anabaptists were missionaries in every manner. Fifth, their strong eschatological expectation brought them to missionary involvement. Though Luther had an eschatological view, he did not develop it into mission. Sixth, Anabaptists insisted on

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<sup>39</sup>Durnbaugh, 226-241

<sup>40</sup>Littell, 109-137.

absolute separation between church and state, which also enabled them not to be limited in their missionary work. Seventh, they were strongly engaged in a remarkable program of mission.

## 2. CHURCH IN THE SERVICE

The church of the Anabaptists was strong in service to one another in their mission work as well as in their community lives.<sup>41</sup> Especially, in their communal lives, they helped one another. Though they were poor and persecuted by other churches, they could endure by helping one another. Also, their belief in pacifism let them work for the peace of the world. The helping community of Anabaptists could be light and salt in the world.

## 3. PROPHESYING CHURCH

The Anabaptist Church was a prophesying church that had its prospects about future. Their expectation was the restitution of the true church. Also, this expectation was strongly connected with their eschatological expectation.

First, Anabaptists *rejected the cyclical view of history*. They believed that history had purpose and direction toward the second coming of Jesus. However, in the medieval era, the cyclical view of history came into Christian worship and ritual. To the

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<sup>41</sup>Durnbaugh, 238-241.

Anabaptists, history had a strong purpose, the restitution of the true Church and the Kingdom of God.

The restitution of the true Church was the response of the Anabaptists to the Fall of the Church. They tried to build the true church through their community of disciples. In this process, the important concern of Anabaptists was the recovery of the life and virtue of the early Church. In contrast to the Reformers, Anabaptists used the term restitution rather than reformation.<sup>42</sup> By this distinction, they tried to emphasize the separation of Anabaptists from the “fallen” church. Therefore, we have to recognize the Anabaptists as a “Third Type” that is distinguished from the Roman institution and magisterial Protestantism.

Whereas Reformers remained in the medieval pattern of the local church in the parish system, Anabaptists tried to overcome those boundaries. Also, while Reformers concentrated their concern on the doctrinal matters in the New Testament, Anabaptists emphasized the organization of the Church also.

#### **IV. EVALUATION AS CONCLUSION**

This article researched the Anabaptist movement through its church structure. In totality, I tried to understand the Anabaptist movement as a response to both Catholicism and Protestantism. Their main concern about the Church was its restitution. While emphasizing the separation of the Church from the world, Anabaptists tried to build true

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<sup>42</sup>Littell, 79

community of disciples as a counteraction to the fallen world. Also, the community could be characterized by its communism and a vigorous simplicity of lay people.

Under the eschatological expectation, the Anabaptist church became a missionary congregation through their lives. Their commitment to the love of God and the command of Jesus led the community into pacifism toward the world. Anabaptists accepted persecution voluntarily and endured even martyrdom. They were on the spiritual pilgrimage in history.

Now, we see *the possibilities of the Anabaptists' contribution to the Church and the world*. We are facing a new context of globalization, postmodern, post-industrial society, and information society. Also, in this context, we see new church movements: the rise of the Free Churches,<sup>43</sup> the development of the small communities, the emphasis of the role of lay people in mission, and various networks of among small churches. I believe that those are responses of the Church toward the changing context. Now, I would like to point out some important insights of the Anabaptist church toward the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

First, their strong discipline for their conviction and mission work are absolutely necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century secular world. Without discipline, it is not easy to keep up with the true Christian community and its mission.

Second, Anabaptists insisted on the separation of the church from the world to protect the church from compromising with the world. Though we cannot insist on the

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<sup>43</sup>Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism Revisited* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992);173-187. Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1957); 311-312.

physical separation of the Church from the world, we have to watch over the compromise of the Church with the worldly affairs.

Third, the main concern of the Anabaptists was on the life of true Christians rather than social reformation but it brought social impact for change. This can give a precious insight for the social reformation of the Church.

Fourth, the Anabaptists' emphasis upon the Christ-like life is very important for the action of the Church in this world. Their insistence on the Sermon on the Mount is positively necessary in Christian life today.

Fifth, in the world of exploitation and de-humanization, the Anabaptists' concern for "mutual aid" and "practice under the Christian rule of brotherhood love" can give a good perspective on the ecumenical movement.<sup>44</sup>

Sixth, Anabaptists emphasized community instead of institution. It is very important for the Church to approach community that emphasizes supportive and healing community life, rather than as an institution that is concerned with self-preservation.

Seventh, the Anabaptist movement was carried out not only by leaders of Anabaptism but also by hundreds of farmers and craftsmen. This shows the possibility of the people's movement in Christian mission.

They were dangerous people; their views about church and state challenged positions held and supported by authorities and the majority of the populace. They were revolutionary, but not in the sense of destroying and tearing down without offering an alternative. Rather they sought, in non-violent ways to bring about change from one

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<sup>44</sup>David B. Eller, ed., *Servant of the Word* (Elgin, Illinois: Brethren Press, 1990);185-200. Durnbaugh, 264-282.

situation to another more nearly representative of God's will. They did this by means of establishing a new, disciplined community.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> .Klaassen, *Anabaptism*, 10.

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