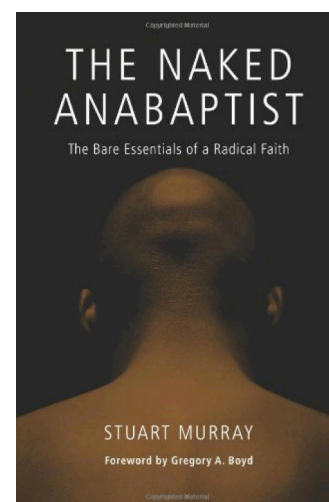


The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith. Stuart Murray. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011. 169pp. ISBN 978-1-84227-725-6.

Reviewed by Leon O'Flynn

Before too much excitement is generated from the title of this book, the nudity referred to is not physical. Rather it is about stripping away the Mennonite, Hutterite, or Amish cultural clothing that covers Anabaptist thought. This stripping away is an attempt to understand the key ideas that this tradition has valued.

Stuart Murray works for an organization called 'The Anabaptist Network' which is based in the United Kingdom. This He has written extensively on Anabaptist thought and practise. This book is a product of his three decade long ministry.



The book has eight chapters, plus introduction, Resource Appendix, and Study Guide. The Resource Appendix provides websites, historical sources, and contemporary works that would help the reader. The study guide provides questions that a small group could use to discuss the key ideas in each chapter.

Chapter One provides and historical overview. In this chapter Murray provides the reader with key dates, places, and people that have shaped Anabaptist thought. He also takes the time to answer some misconceptions about this tradition. He carefully describes his ministry role and where the ideas that make up the central part of the book originate.

Chapters Two through Six are an introduction and explanation of the 'seven core convictions' (p. 23) that the previously mentioned Anabaptist Network in Britain and Ireland have developed. What is made clear is that these convictions are ideals, and agreeing to them is not required for membership into this network. These are also not meant to be a comprehensive, but are meant to "concentrate on issues where the Anabaptist tradition has distinctive perspectives." (p. 25)

Each conviction is explained, and the implications of the conviction are discussed. What is important to note is that each of these convictions is more than a one line statement, hence why all six are not simply listed in this review. Although those who are familiar with Anabaptist's would find nothing surprising in the list, with a focus on discipleship, Jesus, the relationship between church and state, economics, peace, and justice. Conviction Seven for example states "Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to finding non-violent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society, and between nations." (p. 25)

The final two chapters (Seven and Eight) describe Anabaptists from a historical and current perspective and offer a brief critique of the movement. The focus of Chapter Seven is upon the persecution that Anabaptists have endured, often at the hands of other Christian groups. The reason for the persecution is the living out of the Seven Core Convictions that Murray has described.

Murray wanted to write a book that could be resource for those who want to understand the tradition they are in, or for people who might be curious about this tradition and want to know more. The tone of the book is of a person deeply convicted about the ideals he is describing. The layout of the book also points to the teaching and training ministry of Murray. With the material contained presented many times in various locations and settings.

The limitation of this work is that it does not seriously engage with a critique of its ideas, and it was not written for that audience. This work is an insider's perspective on why a person might join this network. In a manner that is not arrogant or haughty the overwhelming tenor of the book is that this is the most authentic vision of what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

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