

# Book Reviews

Colin Godwin, *Baptizing, Gathering, and Sending: Anabaptist Mission in the Sixteenth-Century Context*, Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, 2012. 422 pp. \$32.99 (CAD). ISBN: 9781926599250.

*Baptizing, Gathering, and Sending* is an exploration of the missionary practices and beliefs of Anabaptist founders with the aim of stirring contemporary Anabaptists to a historically informed mission. Author Colin Godwin carefully narrates the social and religious climate of the sixteenth century in which the Anabaptist movement was birthed, wades through primary resources, and offers contemporary application and reflection for our crumbling Christendom context.

To explicate the missiology of early Anabaptist leaders — among whom are usual suspects, like Hans Hut, Pilgram Marpeck, and Conrad Grebel, but also lesser knowns, like David Joris — Godwin employs the *Missio Dei* (the mission of God) as his interpretive lens. This methodology — which sees “the triune God [as] the initiator of divine mission to lovingly draw men and women into his Kingdom” — is the foundation of his engagement. Godwin explains that this emphasis sets this study apart from previous efforts (31). Up until the Second World War — the last time, Godwin claims, that a significant analysis of this kind was done — the dominant interpretation was based on the presence or absence of evangelistic missions beyond Christendom. The results have not been positive. Most have cast the sixteenth-century Anabaptists as un-missionary, thus neglecting their missionary efforts (at deep cost) in local contexts: “Religious protagonists of the era were not obliged to send missionaries across the seas in order to find a person in need of conversion: such people were living on their doorsteps in every corner of Europe” (33).

Godwin counters by offering an account of Anabaptism as a movement which created communities of “minority witness” (192). He identifies how the act of baptism was not merely focused on conversion. It was also an act of entrance, an act in which a person chose to participate, an act which constituted a welcoming and dynamic community, an act that set the baptized apart from other communities:

Believers’ baptism for the Anabaptists was the cornerstone of the creation of a new kind of church, a believing community bound by Christ’s moral imperatives, prepared to live in alternative community amidst the corruption and decay the Anabaptists found around them. They were, after all, called re-baptizers, not re-converters. Baptism was central to both their missionary practice and ecclesial identity. (135)

As I reflect on my experience of church and my work as a youth pastor, it’s easy

to see how this discussion offers some challenges. In a few weeks, I will baptize a few friends in our community. Do we really understand the depth of this practice? How radical it is or, at least, how radical our tradition once believed it to be? Can we grasp the ways that it might animate our church as a people sent into and for the world, sent into our neighborhoods?

Yet it is Godwin's discussion of Anabaptism as "minority witness" that strikes home even more. How can we, in our First World, 'post-Christian' realities (I write from Canada), learn from the marginal witness of our sixteenth-century elders? Godwin argues that current Anabaptist understandings around 'post-Christendom' are too superficial. It's not:

simply about the loss of status of the churches in the West but the loss of status of the West period. The growth of the church in Asia, Africa, and South America anticipated by Visser 't Hooft in 1959, became a reality that none could ignore by the end of the twentieth century and shows no signs of slowing in the twenty-first. (293)

How should we respond? According to Godwin, to be an Anabaptist witness, especially in the First World, demands that we have a global perspective in each of our local contexts. Since many white Anabaptists in the West find themselves in positions of power, I believe that we must learn from marginalized voices that have been overwhelmingly silenced, directly or not, by white power. Anabaptism cannot be a minority witness — and thus true to its tradition, and more importantly, true to the gospel — unless it sheds its reliance and trust in the vestiges of Christendom and Western power.

As we struggle to live and practice Anabaptism today, it is important that we understand the foundations which animated the movement at the beginning. It's important for us to track how those foundations have been re-imagined over the centuries and explore how we might do the same in our particular time and place. Godwin's book is not perfect — it's a bit too academic to garner a wide reading — but it contains valuable resources that can help us do this vital work of "seeking the old paths" (Jer. 6:16).

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**John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, edited by Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2014. 430 pp. \$36.00. ISBN: 9780830840335.**

Between 1964 and 1983, John Howard Yoder taught a course on the theology of