

Ted Grimsrud. *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.

How can one articulate a vision for contemporary Christian life that stands in an authentic historical and theological relationship with 16th-century Anabaptists and can therefore legitimately be called “Anabaptist”? Examples of the attempt to do so include Tom Finger’s *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) and J. Denny Weaver’s *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origins and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 2nd ed. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2005, orig. ed. 1987).

The appropriation of an “Anabaptist vision” for contemporary life is itself a controversial enterprise among Anabaptist historians. (Ted Grimsrud feels comfortable applying *Anabaptist* both to its sixteenth-century expression and to the “on-going ideals rooted in that movement” [109].) One problem is that Anabaptist history has been overly generalized and even romanticized in service to a contemporary vision, as in Harold S. Bender’s *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1944) and Franklin Littell’s *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958). A second problem has to do with the validity of applying a theological emphasis from one historical context to a contemporary one that is inevitably quite different. A third problem is whether “Anabaptism” properly consists of *distinctives* or a *larger theological construct*, some of which could historically be assumed. However challenging the enterprise, I applaud Grimsrud and others for the attempt.

Chapter one, which was “pre-printed” in *MQR* (July 2006), and chapter two (“Whither Contemporary Anabaptist Theology?”) were “written specifically” for *Embodying the Way of Jesus* (3). The rest were drawn from Grimsrud’s academic and pastoral work. The book consists of six parts, each of which contains two to four chapters. Part One is Getting Oriented; Two, Bible; Three, Tradition; Four, Experience; Five, Vision; and Six, Church.

In Part One Grimsrud lays out what he sees as the Anabaptist vision. It has four “central characteristics.” It is (1) a free church, (2) (largely) pacifist, (3) anti-clerical (i.e., rejects hierarchies and top-down leadership),

and (4) a sharing church. Grimsrud challenges Finger (and A. James Reimer) for adopting mainstream Christianity's tendency to articulate its theology primarily in *doctrinal* terms, rather than *practice-oriented* terms. Grimsrud includes here his essay "Is God Nonviolent?" that appeared in *CGR* in 2003. He argues that God is nonviolent despite the abundant biblical evidence that God is nonviolent like most *Christians* are nonviolent (i.e., *most* of the time, with peace as the goal but not necessarily the means). Furthermore, since we "need" a God who is nonviolent, Grimsrud suggests that we understand God in that way, though this comes perilously close to the definition of idolatry, in my opinion.

Grimsrud emphasizes three Anabaptist principles with regard to biblical interpretation: the hermeneutics of obedience; hermeneutical privileging of the poor; and the congregational context. The author recognizes the hermeneutical challenges and articulates an approach informed by Hans-Georg Gadamer that is largely liberationist in character. The theological unity of the Bible is provided by "God's healing strategy."

As others have done, Grimsrud skips over centuries two to fifteen as irrelevant to Anabaptist tradition theology. Tradition begins with the sixteenth century. His tracing of the story from Anabaptism's radical origins through its mutation to the "quiet in the land" is cursory, as he covers 500 years in 16 pages. This reviewer wonders how one might more perceptively critique natural sociological shifts in theological terms.

Part Four (Experience) is a bit of a catch-all category in which Grimsrud explores the significance of Civilian Public Service for understanding Anabaptist pacifism, considers the nature of Anabaptist participation in politics, and develops what has become known as the "Neo-Mennonite" perspective in which he aligns with J. Denny Weaver and C. Norman Kraus against Reimer and Finger. Part Five (Vision) contains an excellent articulation of what Grimsrud calls "ethical eschatology." In chapter 13 ("Theological Basics: A Contemporary Anabaptist Proposal"), he offers an outline of theology in which he uses standard categories: Jesus Christ, revelation, God, Holy Spirit, human beings, the church, and our final end (i.e., eschatology). Finally, Part Six explores the nature of the church.

*Embodying the Way of Jesus* is full of valuable insights and articulations of various themes (among many that could be cited here, see his

comments on nonconformity and ethical eschatology). Despite its disjointed construction as a compilation of sermons, lectures, and essays written for various contexts, it represents a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions about what Anabaptism looks like in the twenty-first century.

*Loren L. Johns*, Associate Professor of New Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN

Diane Zimmerman Umble and David L. Weaver-Zercher. *The Amish and the Media*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

If you want to avoid being in the media, try not to be too different from the surrounding culture: don't wear unique clothing, don't eschew technology and, for heaven's sake, don't have an aversion to being photographed or filmed. That, at least, seems to be the lesson of the Amish, especially for those living in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. For this unique member of the Anabaptist family, a desire to be separate from the world – and ignored by it – has resulted in a torrent of attention through books, articles, TV, movies, and tourists, and on the World Wide Web. At the same time, it has required members of that community to develop a certain kind of media savvy to cope with the ongoing fascination many North Americans have for their culture.

The goal of *The Amish and the Media* is to explore the complex and complicated issues raised by the telling, and selling, of the Amish story. This collection of 11 scholarly essays grew out of a 2001 conference titled “The Amish, Old Orders and The Media,” sponsored by the Young Center for Anabaptist Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. The submissions, written by experts in areas such as film and media studies, American studies, poetry, anthropology, and history, provide valuable insights into not only how the media interpret the Amish, but also how the Amish themselves seek – to greater and lesser degrees – to mediate and influence the interpretation of their lives.

That 2001 conference might have provided the foundation for this book, but the tragic shooting of ten Amish girls at their schoolhouse in