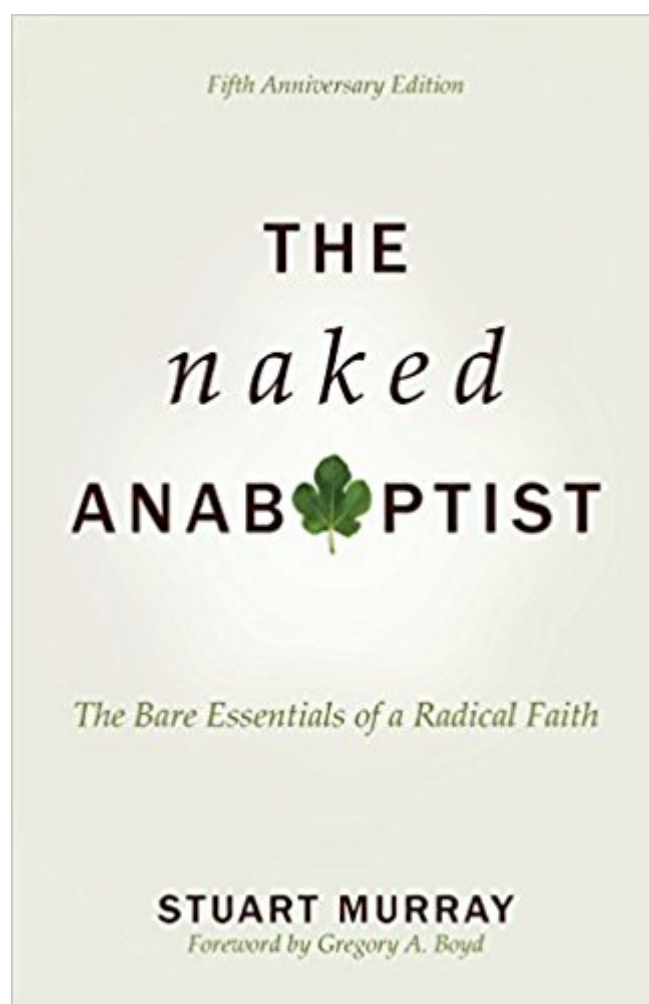


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The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials Of A Radical Faith, Fifth Anniversary Edition



Synopsis

Anabaptist Christians have been around for almost 500 years. But what does Anabaptism look like when not clothed in Mennonite or Amish traditions? Writing from Great Britain, Stuart Murray peels back the layers to reveal the core components of Anabaptism and what they mean for faith in his context and ours. It's a way of following Jesus that challenges, disturbs, and inspires us, summoning us to wholehearted discipleship and worship. Read this book, and catch a vision for living a life of radical faith!

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Customer Reviews

In fulfillment of the promise of the subtitle, the author outlines seven core convictions of Anabaptism as it exists today: 1. Jesus is example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. 2. Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. 3. Western culture is slowly emerging from Christendom. 4. The frequent association of the church with status, wealth, and force is inappropriate for and damages the witness of followers of Jesus. 5. Churches are called to be committed communities of discipleship and mission. 6. Spirituality and economics are interconnected. Anabaptists are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation, and working for justice. 7. Peace is at the heart of the gospel. Anabaptists are committed to finding nonviolent alternatives and to learning to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society, and between nations. Subsequent chapters elaborate on these convictions. Murray names the big three among traditional Anabaptists: Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites. (He fails to elaborate on the diversity among Mennonites.) Non-traditional Anabaptists include neo-Anabaptists--Christians who identify

with Anabaptist tradition but have no historic links to any Anabaptist-related denomination--and hyphenated Anabaptists--Christians who find inspiration in the Anabaptist tradition but do not identify themselves as Anabaptist. Examples could include Baptist-Anabaptists, Methodist-Anabaptist and various other Denomination-Anabaptist varieties. The distinction between hyphenated and neo-Anabaptists is somewhat strained. For example, if I am an active, participating Methodist with Anabaptist convictions, am I neo or hyphenated? A recurring theme of this book is the end of Constantinian Christianity. Murray not only acknowledges, but celebrates the demise of Christendom. This is a helpful book for understanding Anabaptism. It provides a historical overview of the movement that can serve as a refresher course for many of us who have become a bit rusty in our church history, and as an introduction to those who have no previous knowledge of the radical reformation. The author paints the origins of Anabaptism warts and all. Radical reformers and their spiritual heirs are usually thought of as pacifists, but some among early Anabaptists resorted to violence, i.e., the instigators of the Peasants Revolt. While the historical section of this book is no more than a sketch, hopefully it will pique the interest of some to dig deeper into the witness of this important part of the Christian family.

The book *The Naked Anabaptist*, was recommended by a friend and Christian minister when I lamented feeling pretty much alone in my beliefs about the sin of war and the materialism that so dominates the American psyche in these modern times. Stuart Murray shockingly uses the term "post Christendom" and then proceeds to show that the new Christian is finding new truths in Jesus' "sermon on the mount". That, simply believing, is WAY different than actually following the example of unconditional love and peace/justice as demonstrated when He walked and spoke while on Earth. Sometimes the book's a little deep in theology but there's no law that prevents me from skipping pages to find the more understandable parts and then going back. I think the author is right on target with this book and it turns out I'm far from being alone. Thank you for making it available.

"*Naked Anabaptist* purports to describe an "Anabaptism" "stripped down to its bare essentials" for people who may have heard about it and want to know more about it, perhaps a Christian seeker who is disenchanted with their own religious background and is drawn to something they have heard about Anabaptism. The "naked" in the title apparently means (according to a blurb on back) an Anabaptism stripped of Mennonite, Amish, and Hutterite traditions. But Murray immediately reveals that this is not really what he is trying to do: "these convictions are an attempt by Anabaptists in Britain and Ireland today to learn from the Anabaptist tradition.... (p. 44)" In that case,

two things follow. Firstly, this is not "naked Anabaptism". It is Anabaptism read by particular people in a particular social and cultural location. After stripping away Mennonite, etc., traditions, but they have simply put another tradition in its place: the tradition of a certain variety of evangelical radicalism, consciously trying to move beyond what it interprets as a failed and dying Christendom. The second problem is that Murray then presents these "core convictions" as if they are the content of coherent theological perspective, like say Five Points Calvinism or Thomism. Although he was initially honest about "where he was coming from," for the rest of the book he completely ignores the origins of his agenda. He pretends he is giving us an interpretation of Anabaptism. But his real agenda is stated in the subtitle: "The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith." So the book is the inverse of what Murray claims to provide. He does not strip Anabaptism down to its core and find "a radical faith." Rather he takes his radical faith, and DRESSES IT UP as Anabaptism. This is most clearly seen in his interpretation of Peace & Justice: he criticizes the "nonresistance" of traditional Mennonite practice (p. 130), instead preferring contemporary "peace" initiatives, like the Christian Peacemaker Teams. He later criticizes Mennonite separatism (p. 164), although he knows it is "endorsed by foundational documents like the 'Schleitheim Confession'." But that confession does far more than endorse separatism. *It makes separatism the basis of the rejection of violence.* Let's quote from the Confession: "everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than an abomination which we should shun and flee from. By this is meant all Catholic and Protestant works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the oaths sworn in unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God, in accordance with all the unrighteousness which is in the world. From all these things we shall be separated and have no part with them for they are nothing but an abomination, and they are the cause of our being hated before our Christ Jesus, Who has set us free from the slavery of the flesh and fitted us for the service of God through the Spirit Whom He has given us. Therefore there will also unquestionably fall from us the unchristian, devilish weapons of force - such as sword, armor and the like, and all their use (either) for friends or against one's enemies" Notice: rejection of violence FLOWS FROM separation from the world. In other words, for historic Anabaptists and Anabaptism, if one wants to be nonviolent, one must be separated from the world. But Murray doesn't want that sort of nonviolence: he wants worldly peace and justice, not the peace that is created in a separated community guided by the gospel of Jesus Christ. As noted by another reviewer, another example is Murray's rejection of patriarchy. But patriarchy is essential to traditional Mennonite practice. So why does Murray prefer egalitarianism? Because it fits his

contemporary "radical" sensibilities better. He provides no argument that egalitarianism is either more biblical or more "Anabaptist". I kept looking for a theological *argument*: what is Anabaptism? How does it compare to other confessional traditions? How does Murray know that *this* version of Anabaptism is its core (as distinct from other possible interpretations)? Why is it theologically or ethically more desirable than other confessional traditions? Murray, unfortunately, only gave his personal opinions, which for me, made this a tedious book to read. However, if you agree with the radical agenda, then you will probably like the book. But if you are looking for an explanation of historical Anabaptism, or a careful discussion of how and to what degree the values of Anabaptism can be appropriated by modern Christians, I would encourage you to go elsewhere. For the history and theology of the original Anabaptists, try *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*. Then perhaps go to the classic of H. S. Bender, *Anabaptist Vision* in which Bender attempts to interpret Anabaptism within the framework of the evangelicalism of the '20s and '30s. I also suggest that you search for "conservative Anabaptism" and check out some of the links. (last two paragraphs modestly edited)

With characteristic clarity, Stuart Murray not only advocates for the beauty and relevance of Anabaptism in the wider Body of Christ, but he does so without getting lost in the trappings of cultural expressions. Neither blind to the historic and contemporary weaknesses and failings of Anabaptism, nor designed to "convert" people away from their own traditions, Murray presents an understanding of faith that can compliment and inform all other expressions of Christianity. This is going to be an important and essential title for Christians and churches through the world. Well worth the order! Also it is great for group studies.

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