

ANABAPTIST TEACHING ON COMMUNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN ECB BROTHERHOOD*



Viacheslav KIRILOV, Master of Theology (University of Wales). Teaches Old Testament at West Siberian Bible College (Omsk, Russia). He is the author of a number of articles published in *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniia/Theological Reflections* and *Bogomyslie*. Kirillov took part in writing *The Slavic Bible Commentary*.

kirillov@wsbc.ru / V. Kirilov, 2017

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Summary: In this article the author sets the goal of demonstrating the dogmatic connection between the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood and the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Although today this connection is not apparent to everyone, nor is it accepted by everyone, the basic ideas of Anabaptism, at least in the form that they were preserved by the Mennonite Brethren were nevertheless laid in the foundation of the ECB brotherhood. In proof of this assertion, the teaching on the congregation (community) is examined, which is at the heart of the Anabaptist theological system, and also the likely influence of this teaching on the ecclesiology

of the ECB brotherhood is demonstrated. In large part, the practical theological emphasis on congregational unity, conscious (adult) baptism by faith, the leading of the Holy Spirit, discipleship, fraternal love, and mutual aid came to us from the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition and made a significant contribution to the formation of those ecclesiastical distinctives of the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood, which to a great extent has been preserved to the present day.

Keywords: Anabaptism, congregation, community, baptism, born again, mutual aid, Evangelical Christians-Baptists

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Introduction

During the last century the Radical Reformation (Anabaptism) as one of the significant currents of the Popular Reformation in Western Europe in the sixteenth century has drawn the attention of a wide circle of historians and theologians, although specialized research in the Russian language dedicated to these “stepchildren of the Reformation” remains comparatively sparse. The issues of Anabaptism, as a rule, are handled in works dedicated to the Reformation as a whole and are more often connected with the history of the movement rather than with its influence on later religious currents. Thus, one researcher regards Anabaptist theology as heresy; others as the consequence of religious quarrels; and yet another regards it from the point of view of class warfare, to the point of placing Anabaptists in the “proletarian revolution” camp in the New Era.¹ We may assert that, in spite of the existence of other factors in the genesis of the Russian evangelical movement, the Mennonites,² as direct heirs of the Anabaptist theological tradition, made a significant contribution to the formation of those distinctives of the Ukrainian-Russian Evangelical Christian-Baptist brotherhood, which to a great extent have been preserved to this day.

Obviously, the Reformation included a whole spectrum of theological, religious, political, and socio-economic issues and only their unification made the Reformation viable.³ This demonstrates the importance of analyzing the elements that lie beneath the surface which in the end can help give a balanced evaluation of the events that took place in the sixteenth century. In our view, such an evaluation can be put together by researching and presenting the key ideas of the peaceable Anabaptists⁴ of that time and also an analysis of the influence (positive, as a rule) that the followers of the peaceable majority of baptizers, first of all the Mennonites, had on other religious currents, as well as on surrounding secular society, in spite of their closed nature.

The author's goal in this article is to show the dogmatic connection between the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood (in the broad sense of the term) and the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century (predominately in its peaceable form, characteristic of the followers of Menno Simons). Although this connection is not apparent to all, nor acceptable to all, the basic ideas of Anabaptism, at least

¹ For example, the German economist and historian Karl Kautsky saw similar socialistic ideals in the Anabaptists. See Kautsky, *Iz istorii obshchestvennykh techenii (Istoriia sotsializma). Predtechi noveishego sotsializma* [From the history of social movements (History of socialism). Forerunners of the new socialism], 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1906).

² In this article attention will predominantly be given to the Mennonite Brethren rather than *Kirchliche* (Church) Mennonites. The former withdrew from the latter between 1855 and 1860 in the southern guberniias of the Russian Empire (territory of contemporary Ukraine), and both groups continued to exist in the USSR and the CIS.

³ S. Sannikov, *Dvadsat' vekov khristianstva* [Twenty centuries of Christianity], 2 vols., (Odessa: Bogomyslie, 2001), v. 2, p. 204).

⁴ In this article the term “Anabaptist” is understood, as a rule, to pertain to the peaceable wing of the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century, which eschewed violence, had its beginnings among the Swiss Brethren (Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Georg Blaurok, Michael Sattler, and others), and continued in the Mennonite tradition. Militant Anabaptism had no historical continuation and had no significant influence on the next generations of baptizers.

in the form that they were preserved by the Mennonite Brethren, were laid in the foundation of the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood. Here it should be noted that the Mennonite Brethren are part of the old and diverse Mennonite movement. In their time the Mennonite Brethren experienced the influence of Pietist renewal and German Baptism, headed by Gerhard Oncken. Other groups in the peaceable wing of Anabaptism (Hutterites, Amish, etc.) had no influence on Eastern Slavic Baptism. It was precisely the Mennonite Brethren who made the greatest contribution to the shaping of the particular characteristics of the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood, which to a great extent have been preserved to the present day.

This theme is relevant and of interest in the contemporary Russian and East European contexts, since Slavic Protestants are more actively pursuing their historical, spiritual, and cultural inheritance. The Radical Reformation, represented by the peaceable movement of Anabaptists, deserves the utmost attention, since the basic denominations of the East Slavic evangelical movement in one way or another are connected with the development of precisely that spiritual current.

The researcher, having set the goal of showing the dogmatic connection between the indigenous ECB movement and the radical wing of the sixteenth-century Reformation, is met with an array of complications. First, the sources that have come down to us containing the teaching of the Radical Reformers bear no resemblance to textbooks on systematic theology. The main reason for this is the absence of theological education among the leading representatives of the baptizers (excepting Hubmaier and a very few others), who might have written serious theological works. Besides this, the Anabaptists met with cruel persecution. The Christian life of many of them could have served as an example; however, they were not capable of constructing their own “rational house of thought.”⁵ Their basic concept of being disciples of Christ united in congregations, living by faith, and witnessing to God, is difficult to fit into a rational, systematic framework. At the center of the “biblical theology” of the Anabaptists stands a simple confession of faith, not a system of subtle concepts and categories.

Second, there is no official statement of faith or catechism that was equally recognized by all groups of early baptizers; therefore the researcher has no alternative but to analyze a mass of original teachings, letters, opinions, and testimonies of Anabaptists, beginning from the earliest period. Although a certain internal coherence may be observed in these sources, at the same time there is significant variance as well. The Schleithem Confession of 1527 is one of the earliest documents and to a certain extent established the boundaries of early Anabaptist theology. However, the task of this confession was not so much theological as practical: to give the first baptizers clear biblical orientation points and at the same time to attempt to unite splintered groups. The Schleithem Confession became normative in its time for many Swiss Brethren. The document’s seven articles touch on the following issues: water baptism, exclusion from the congregation (the ban), communion, separation from the world,

⁵ Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 31.

pastoral ministry, the relationship with civil authority, and taking oaths.⁶ These are the key points reflecting the predominant practice and tradition of early Anabaptism, which most importantly were voluntarily accepted by many baptizers. Together with this, only the first three articles of the seven may be considered universally accepted even at the very earliest stage of the movement's appearance. Several other points, for example those determining the relationship to civil authorities or prohibiting the taking of oaths remained controversial for a long time. Also, a few recommendations for the selection of congregational pastors (section 5) were not accepted everywhere and were even ignored, for example in the Melchiorite movement.⁷

Third, early Anabaptist leaders were to a great extent "charismatic leaders," that is, people distinguished by an inner gift of spiritual vision that allowed them to practice "prophetic" leadership. Many of these people experienced being born again (John 3:3) and gained experience to which it was difficult to assign a rational description. They were convinced of the biblical basis of the new way, and therefore saw no particular need for a systematic exposition of their views, with the exception of those occasions when their opponents summoned them to a dispute or the civil authorities to court.

As in the Anabaptist movement, among the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia and Ukraine it is difficult to distinguish a unified and authoritative confession of faith recognized by all groups. There is no textbook on systematic theology in which all the specifics of the movement's theological views could be rationally explained. Therefore here also the researcher has to deal with a large number of teachings, original documents, letters, testimonies, etc., which cannot always be combined into a lowest common denominator.

This article will examine only the teaching on community. The choice is conditioned by the fact that this theme may be called the heart of the Anabaptist theological system. Harold Bender, a leading specialist in Anabaptist-Mennonite history and theology, demonstrated the importance of the concept of community for the early peaceable baptizers, as distinguished from the individual understanding of salvation in classic Protestantism.⁸ From this we may conclude that the biblical understanding of Christian community was the basis for the baptizers' teaching, from which subsequently flowed the teaching of baptism on profession of faith, communion, salvation, and so on—not the other way around. Besides this, the concept of the nature of the church is the point where the paths of Anabaptism and the Magisterial Reformation divided; therefore it is only possible to grasp Anabaptism and its influence on later evangelical groups by understanding its concept of a "church brotherhood."

To analyze the influence that the teaching on community of the baptizer movement and their Mennonite descendants had on the ECB brotherhood, we will examine

⁶ Shlaithaimskoe veroispovedanie [The Schleithem Confession], trans. and commentary by Katharina Penner in S. V. Sannikov, ed., *Menno Simons i anabaptisty* [Menno Simons and the Anabaptists], (Steinhagen: Samenkor, 2012), 433-448.

⁷ Arnold C. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), 96.

⁸ *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957), v. I, 225.

the statements of faith of the Anabaptists and Mennonites (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) and also several teaching documents composed in the Russian Empire at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries among evangelical groups. The sayings of authoritative leaders and ministers will also be presented, which demonstrate the approaches of the various groups they represent. To a great extent it is in comparing these documents and statements that it is possible to trace the influence exerted by the peaceable Anabaptists on the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood. Besides the Schleithem Confession of 1527, we may also point out the “Mennonite Statement of Faith” composed at Dordrecht (Holland) at a council in 1632, consisting of eighteen statements that united many Mennonite groups. From the creeds written in Russia, one of particular interest of the early evangelical confessions was composed in 1903 by the Mennonite P. M. Friesen.⁹ This document is significant in that, although it was composed by a Mennonite minister, it was used by Russian Evangelical Christians and Baptists.¹⁰ In particular, the historian S. N. Savinskii remarks on the creed by P. M. Friesen in his survey of the teachings of the ECB brotherhood.¹¹ The historian K. A. Prokhorov states that the Omsk Baptist congregation presented Friesen’s creed to the state authorities when seeking legalization in 1909.¹²

A comparative analysis of the key ideas of the most important representatives of the Radical Reformation, on the one hand, and the Ukrainian-Russian brotherhood of Evangelical Christians-Baptists on the other, can help to establish the most significant features of resemblance and difference which give grounds to speak of the influence or “connection” between these religious currents, as well as their completely independent, unique characteristics. It must not be forgotten that the Mennonite Brethren movement, serving as a sort of mediator or connecting link between early European Anabaptism and Russian evangelicalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, remains an independent confessional community that never joined with the Baptists.

Teaching on Community

For the early rebaptizers, the church of Jesus Christ is first of all a community of brothers and sisters, true members of the “Body of Christ,” that is, those who have been born again and who live according to the Word of God (the Bible), and under the guidance of the Spirit. Doctor of Theology Balthasar Hubmeier, a professor and priest from the city of Ingolstadt, who was baptized on profession of faith at Easter

⁹ See the text of this confession, for example: V. I. Iasevich-Borodaevskaia, *Bor’ba za veru* [The struggle for faith], (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1912), 572-577.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Istoriia EKHB v SSSR* [The history of the ECB in the USSR], (Moscow: AUCECB, 1989), 154-155, 439-444, 447.

¹¹ See S. Savinskii, *Istoriia evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii (1867-1917)* [History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Ukraine, Russia, Belorussia (1867-1917)], (St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1999), v. 1, 314-315.

¹² This fact is drawn from an unpublished book by Dr. K. Prokhorov on the history of the Omsk ECB church, kindly made available by the author.

1525,¹³ defines the church as follows: “The community of saints, the brotherhood of pious and sincerely believing people... They are called to be together, to be led and to live on this earth only according to what the living Word of God teaches. This church is magnificent, unstained, sinless, pure, without reproach.”¹⁴

Above all, for the peaceable adherents of the Radical Reformation, the church is the visible (local) community, that has entered into a covenant with God. For the most part, the Anabaptists set aside the teaching about the invisible (universal) church, which forced them to focus their attention on practical community life. For the early peaceable Anabaptists and those who came after, the most important thing is the visible church, willingly committed to being a living brotherhood.

Also, the church was understood as a community that had entered into a covenant with God. This idea is well developed by Hans Denck, Hans Hut, and their followers, while in a 1527 statement of faith Ambrosius Spittelmaier writes the following about the covenant with God: “We have given ourselves over to God so as to remain with Him in one love, one spirit, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). From the other side, God gives Himself (binds Himself over) in order to be our Father and remain with us in our trials.”¹⁵ In the baptizers’ understanding, it was precisely the covenant that transformed the local church into the community of saints, which they considered the “nucleus” of the Kingdom of God on earth, or at least an attempt to establish it. It is precisely in the fraternal community, in the everyday life of the saints, in the visible church that has entered into a covenant with God that the teaching of the Anabaptists on the Kingdom of God begins, which also anticipates its teaching on standing against the “kingdom of the prince of this world.”

Menno Simons continued this traditional interpretation of the church, and in his answer to Gelius Faber (about 1554), he named six signs according to which the church of Christ may be recognized. They are as follows: pure biblical teaching, evangelical baptism and Lord’s Supper, obedience to Holy Scripture, sincere Christian love, open confession of Christ, and suffering for faith. To the Lutheran accent on Holy Scripture and the recognition of only two sacraments rather than seven (Catholic), Menno Simons added four more important signs of the church: obedience, love, non-resistance to evil, and suffering for the faith.¹⁶ It is no coincidence that Cornelius

¹³ After Balthazar Hubmaier was baptized on profession of faith at Easter 1525, he in turn baptized 300 people in the course of a single week. See Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992), 65–66. He was not led by a revelation from above received in a supernatural manner as was usually the case with a few mystically inclined Anabaptist leaders; instead, he, as an educated man, slowly and in an orderly manner developed his evangelical views. It was Hubmaier who gave a worthy answer to Zwingli’s writings and those of other theologians against the baptizers, and who also worked out an order of worship for the newly formed communities. See S. V. Sannikov *Dvadsat’ vekov khristianstva* [Twenty centuries of Christianity], 2 vols. (Odessa: Bogomyслиe, 2001), v. 2, p. 238.

¹⁴ W. Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1981), 102.

¹⁵ Quoted by Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 122–123.

¹⁶ Franklin H. Littell, *A Tribute to Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1961), 25.

Krahn called Menno Simons' theology "ecclesiocentric."¹⁷ This means that for Menno Simons the church (the community) stood at the very center of all his writings and thinking.

The understanding of the visible church as a fraternal community of people who have made a covenant with God, living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is also fortified in the statement of faith of the Mennonites composed in 1632 in Dordrecht (Holland). In this confession of faith the following definition of the church is given: "We confess and believe in the visible church of Christ, consisting of those who... have sincerely repented and truly believe; those who, having been baptized in the appropriate way, are joined with God in heaven and with the community of saints on earth."¹⁸ In this confession of faith the church is the visible (local) community of those who have believed, who have made a covenant with God.

For the Anabaptists, the purpose of the church of Christ in this world is to serve as leavening (Matt. 13:33) and light (Matt. 5:14). However, if the church truly fulfills its function, it will inevitably endure persecution from the world. In the letter to Müntzer dated 5 September 1524, Conrad Grebel wrote: "The true faithful Christians are sheep among wolves, lambs going to the slaughter. They must be baptized in torture and misfortune, persecution, suffering, and death, undergo trial by fire..."¹⁹ Hans Hut, one of the most devoted missionaries of early Anabaptism in Upper Austria and many regions of South Germany, wrote in 1527: "No one can come to God except through the water of suffering and the font of the new birth."²⁰

Harold S. Bender called the idea of the "suffering church" the cornerstone of the Anabaptist movement.²¹ Each person preparing for baptism, that is, to be included in such a community, was warned about the dangers threatening him or her from the outside. "Theology of the Cross" is the term introduced by Thomas Müntzer and later widely used in Lutheranism.²² To define the relationship of the Anabaptists to suffering and persecution a more suitable expression is the term "theology of martyrdom." A "theology of the cross" is directed more towards the individual believer and his or her own personal suffering. A theology of martyrdom pertains to the community; that is, attention is drawn not only to the inner conflict of a single believer, but to the suffering of the brotherhood as a whole, undergoing the inevitable negative event, but prepared to endure suffering for the sake of establishing and widening the Kingdom of God.

Anabaptists were not the only Christians who were persecuted for their faith in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, because of its almost universal condemnation

¹⁷ Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 116.

¹⁸ The Mennonite confession of faith of 1632: <http://lib.exdat.com/docs/16609/index-19039-1.html> (accessed 10 April 2015).

¹⁹ Quoted by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Khristianstvo: Tri tysiachi let* [A history of Christianity. The first three thousand years], (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "E", 2016), 661.

²⁰ Hans Hut, "Christian Instruction," in C. J. Dyck, ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism. Classic Devotional Resources*, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1995), 64.

²¹ Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in G. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1957), 35-37.

²² Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 131-132.

in Western Europe, the movement encountered systematic persecution that was accompanied by the suffering and martyrdom of baptizers. Hubmaier introduced the term “baptism of blood” to reflect this awful reality. Apparently he wished to say that suffering and persecution will certainly be present in the life of believers in any era. It should be noted that when Hubmaier spoke about the baptism of blood, he was thinking not so much of martyrdom as he was of everyday obedience to God in spite of everything: the flesh must die daily, while the Spirit of Christ must triumph; then a person brings forth good fruit that will be a worthy witness for others.²³

Another point in the understanding of community among Radical Reformers which is important to note is the role of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the church and in its subsequent leading. It is interesting that nowhere in early Anabaptist writings are there references to Matthew 16:18-19 where Christ calls Peter the rock upon which His church will be built. Most likely this may be explained by the fact that this text was actively used by Catholic dogma as the basis for the “foundation of the church.” In distinction to this, the Anabaptists may be called children of the Spirit, and the arguments that Catholic theologians used were disregarded by them. Early leaders of the baptizers accented the new birth of every member of the congregation and the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit²⁴ in believers. Menno Simons wrote: “The Church of Christ is formed of sincere, pious preachers and Christians who are moved by the Spirit of Christ... they preach the Word in the power of the Spirit, they shine for all people... and may bring great gain to the treasures of the Lord.”²⁵

Peter Riedmann, the Hutterite theologian, wrote about the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people as follows (1541):

The Church is the source of righteousness in which the light of grace is born and is adhered to before the whole world. The Church is completely filled with the light of Christ. It is visible afar off and is conveyed to other people who until this time have been walking in darkness. Thus, everyone who endures and suffers is a member of this church by the Spirit of Christ... God gathers His Church together by means of the Spirit and this Spirit of Christ will not allow the person who enters this community to grow cold.²⁶

It is interesting that in the ecclesiological system constructed by the Anabaptists, apostolic succession is unimportant. The truth of the church and of faith is based exclusively on a spiritual foundation: repentance (Mark 1:15); new birth (John 3:3); sincere faith in Christ (Romans 3:28); and the leading of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). In the 1632 Mennonite confession of faith in the section “On repentance and reformation of life” the accent is precisely on the new birth and not on historic succession: “For neither baptism, supper, church, nor any outward ceremony,

²³ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 93-94.

²⁴ More frequently Anabaptist writings use the term “Spirit of Christ.”

²⁵ Menno Simons, “Otvét Galiusu Faberu,” [Reply to Gellius Faber] in S. V. Sannikov, ed., *Menno Simons i anabaptisty*, 393.

²⁶ Quoted by Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 119.

can without faith, regeneration, change or renewing of life, avail anything to please God or to obtain of Him any consolation or promise of salvation.”²⁷

The term “regeneration” was used rarely by the Anabaptists. Rather, they spoke of salvation as a gift of God, a process through which the believer gradually puts on the nature of Christ and becomes a new person, following after the Savior. This transformation is the result of divine initiative and human obedience, a combination of divine and human love.²⁸ These internal changes produce a new way of thinking, spiritual experience, and give certainty concerning the rightness of the chosen path. This miraculous happening would as though open up the gates to the world of the Holy Spirit and His values. This signifies renewal of the mind, so that “common sense,” typical of the person who does not know God, loses its preeminence. Such a person is already redeemed and is not much concerned with questions such as, “Am I saved?” or “How shall I find the mercy of God?” For such a person there is no longer any dilemma as to whether or not to love a neighbor or be obedient to God. Spiritual transformation makes a person stronger in the face of temptation. Instead of anxiety and uncertainty such a person feels secure because he or she has trusted in the Lord. Having inner freedom, this person is ready to suffer for the sake of faith and withstand life’s struggles with courage, relying on God.²⁹ This may seem rather naïve, but such were the sincere convictions of the Anabaptists. There is no reason to doubt that at least in the early period of Anabaptist history, similar views predominated in baptizer congregations.

After community unity, covenant with God, readiness for persecution and leading by the Spirit follow fraternal love, mutual spiritual labor, and mutual aid. An especially important element of life for the peaceable Anabaptist communities was fraternal love. Love (*agape*) occupies a central place in the teaching of Christ and His apostles. At the initial stage of the theology of Magisterial Protestantism love was regarded more on the level of personal ethics. Among the Anabaptists, the situation was somewhat different. The baptizers regarded love not as part of an ethical system, but rather as an element of God’s plan playing a key role in the salvation of people. Love, in the opinion of the Anabaptists, had the power to give strength for a successful battle against sin. Quoting the Apostle Peter, “Love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8), the Anabaptists saw love as a power capable of overcoming the whole weight of sin, that is, to completely transform a person. In the course of a discussion between Zwingli and the first group of Swiss baptizers in Zürich between 1525 and 1526, the great Reformer asked, “Can a person be a Christian in secret, in the personal sphere?” To this Felix Mantz answered, “No! Because Christian love demands that each one would be open with his brother.” Soon after this Hans Denck, in a tract written about 1527, emphasized that the law of God was given to human beings in the form of love. He affirmed that this was, then, the only way “to draw a believer closer to the love of

²⁷ Dordrecht Confession of Faith (Mennonite, 1632): <http://lib.exdat.com/docs/16609/index-19039-1.html> (Accessed 10 April 2015).

²⁸ C. J. Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 52.

²⁹ Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 34.

God.” The one who comprehends this love but teaches otherwise is the true Antichrist. But the one who does not comprehend it actually does not know the Lord Christ.³⁰

For the Anabaptists, a human being is not only a sinner but also a being capable of love, which follows from two higher laws of Christ: love for God and love for one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). Christian love in action leads to unity with one’s brother in Christ; therefore, first of all, love is directed to the brotherhood, right up to the willingness to joyfully endure deprivation for the sake of the community. A letter has been preserved of Pilgram Marpeck, a former member of the city council of Rattenberg and an engineer and builder who joined the baptizer movement in its early stage. In this letter he addresses himself to the theme of love, which, in his opinion, is the basis of Christianity. The letter is not dated, and it is likely that the author sent it to one or perhaps several Anabaptist groups:

...I sincerely wish that the whole Body, which through the word of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, through the love, which was given in Christ, would be unified for mutual service in love. It is love that is the true servant and fills everything with grace without insisting on its own way, forcing itself, [doing] violence or a sense of anxiety... Love is the all in all for those in whose heart it lives. Where it is not, there appear weakness, insult, sadness, and need... Love cannot abide with those who do not know it. It is always open to those who sincerely seek it and to those who truly strive it gives knowledge of itself... God lives in those to whom love is promised and they abide in God.³¹

For most of the peaceable Anabaptists, the church was, in fact, a collective brotherhood, and love assumed a completely natural desire to share with one’s neighbors not only joy and sorrow, but also worldly goods as far as it was possible. Menno Simons wrote in *Fundament*: “We are prepared before God and man wholeheartedly to share our property, gold, and all that we have, even if it is little; to labor hard and diligently to fulfill the needs of the poor as the Spirit and the Word of the Lord teach, and as true fraternal love bids us.”³²

The Hutterites in Austria and Moravia already began to practice common goods in 1529³³ and they were the ones who succeeded in realizing this concept in the founding of communal settlements. The practice of common property was based primarily on examples in Acts 2-5, and also was part of their theological conception of salvation as self-denial, which was not simply personal, but also active, and had to be made evident in concrete acts, including in social relationships.³⁴ Where there is true fraternal love

³⁰ Ibid., 71.

³¹ Pilgram Marpeck, “Concerning Love,” in C. J. Dyck, ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 92-93.

³² Menno Simons, “Fundament khristianskogo ucheniia” [Fundament] in S. V. Sannikov, ed. *Menno Simons i Anabaptisty*, 305.

³³ William E. Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice from 1539-1564* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1968), 135.

³⁴ We find similar thoughts expressed in one of the letters of Andreas Ehrenpreis (1589-1662), a Hutterite leader in Moravia and Hungary. This letter was written ca. 1650 to arrested Swiss Brethren and possibly other Anabaptist groups. The main emphasis of the letter is on love, which is the only thing that makes possible the full spiritual life of the community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. See A. Ehrenpreis, “Sendbrief,” in C. J. Dyck, ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 120-124.

the idea of personal property disappears to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, some in the baptizer community actively took care of needy fellow believers while others practiced full community of property. It is possible that something similar can be found in the Franciscan ideal of apostolic poverty. The difference from the Catholic understanding lies in the fact that for baptizers only the blood of Christ through fraternal relations based on God's love could cleanse sinful people and make them capable of truly loving their neighbors. In any case, the incarnation of spiritual ideas, above all the idea of the Kingdom of God, was embodied for the peaceable Anabaptists in the local community "here and now." Andreas Ehrenpreis, a Hutterite minister, wrote in 1650: "Wherever the love of Christ is not capable of being shown in relation to one's neighbor in such a way as to have community with him and in earthly needs, there the blood of Christ cannot cleanse from sin."³⁵

This statement could be considered extreme and was likely not accepted readily by all members of the Radical Reformation. However, it demonstrates very well that for the early baptizers love was the indispensable component, not only of practical community life, but also of certain elements of the soteriological system. Salvation was impossible without a person's active response to the call of Christ expressed in practical love.

The very fact of the gathering and mutual aid of the Anabaptists and later of their successors-the Mennonite and Baptist congregations mindful of the experience of the early Christian communities-is a testimony of real love. The principle of commonality of goods encountered among certain members of the Radical Reformation is difficult to judge on the basis of Scripture; more likely history demonstrates its practical unworkability. Those who strive for this practice demonstrate their readiness to help their fellow believers in need. For the Hutterites and other streams of Anabaptism, mutual aid became the symbol of devotion to the Body of Christ and an indispensable part of life for their descendants-Mennonites and Baptists. Up to the present time among the Mennonite Brethren there is still a place for the practice of active mutual aid including common goods, shared migration to new territories,³⁶ and so on.

Another point that is closely connected with the concept of community held by members of the Radical Reformation is the role and place of adult water baptism upon profession of faith in the Anabaptist ecclesiological system. Most likely, conscious baptism was the logical outcome of the idea of a "true" church. If biblical Christianity is truly based on personal faith as the baptizers taught, and not on the postulates of state religion, each person must make a free, conscious choice. The old and widespread practice of infant baptism clearly contradicted this idea. In addition, infant baptism is only weakly supported in Holy Scripture. The teaching on baptism and its practice among the Anabaptists differed sharply from Catholic and Protestant norms and canons. The point here is not only the refusal of the Anabaptists to baptize children

³⁵ Quoted by Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 71-72.

³⁶ Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, Cal.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 91.

but also the rejection of the very theology of sacraments held by the Roman Catholic Church, and, to a lesser extent, by the Protestants.

The Anabaptist teaching on baptism by faith at a conscious age was not their invention. It is well known that this practice existed in the early church. It is interesting that many of the Church Fathers who defended infant baptism were themselves baptized as adults. Likewise known is the widespread practice of rebaptizing those who came from heretical groups, which was the practice among the churches of Asia Minor³⁷ during the second and even the third centuries. However, rebaptizing was forbidden on pain of loss of one's priestly office, various other punishments, and even death.³⁸ Thus, even the formal Anabaptist understanding of baptism had a long history that could be traced back to apostolic times.

It was noted above that the Anabaptists attempted to restore the simple pre-Constantinian organization of the church, regarding it as a community of brothers and sisters who had made a covenant with God, dwelt in love with one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and were ready to walk in the "narrow way" to death itself. Intentional baptism was considered an important part of such a Christian life. It was the symbol of the new birth and readiness for discipleship for the Dutch Anabaptists³⁹; "the outward and public testimony of inward baptism by the Spirit" for Balthazar Hubmaier⁴⁰; "the sign of the New Covenant" for Pilgram Marpeck,⁴¹ and so on. One of the most widely quoted Bible texts in Anabaptist writings was, "Baptism... [is the] pledge of a good conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 3:21).⁴²

It is not surprising that all the basic definitions of baptism by faith were closely linked to the Anabaptist conception of the church. Baptism signified commitment to the community. Menno Simons wrote about this as follows: "They (believers) receive holy baptism as a sign of obedience which proceeds from faith, testifies before God and His church that they firmly believe in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ."⁴³ This confirms the fact that the biblical understanding of the church was the basic teaching of the Anabaptists, from which proceeded the teaching on baptism by faith in its turn. The Mennonite statement of faith accepted at Dordrecht (Holland) on 21 April 1632 states: "In reference to baptism, we confess that all repentant believers who through faith, the new birth, and renewal in the Holy Spirit have been united with God and whose names are written in heaven must, following a biblical confession of their faith and the renewal of their life, be baptized with water... and thus are accepted

³⁷ N. Barsov, "Kreshchenie" [Baptism] in "Khristianstvo" [Christianity], *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* [Encyclopedic dictionary], vol. 1, 846.

³⁸ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1973), 63.

³⁹ William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 231.

⁴⁰ W. Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline*, 167.

⁴¹ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 226.

⁴² Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, 37.

⁴³ Quoted by *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957), v. I, 225.

into the community of the saints.”⁴⁴ In Russia it was the Mennonite Brethren who became the first Christian group who accepted adults baptized by faith into their membership, and it was this practice that later was assumed by the Baptist churches.⁴⁵

Touching on the issue of the terminology used by the early Anabaptists to express their ecclesiastical views, we may note the following interesting fact. The term “congregation, community” (German *Gemeinde*, Dutch *Gemeente*), fairly quickly attained wide use among baptizers and was used actively by local groups as over against the more widely used German *Kirche* (church). In the Luther Bible of 1545, the New Testament term *ecclesia*⁴⁶ is translated as *Gemeinde*,⁴⁷ however, we may suppose that the Anabaptists preferred it not only because Luther’s translation was widely available among them, but also because that usage allowed them to move away from the older terminology developed by the Catholic Church.

The German word *Kirche*, like the Russian *црковь* [tserkov’], is not derived from *ecclesia*, but from the Greek *kiriakon*. That is the way that the Greeks in the Christian era designated a church in the sense of a building (or temple); therefore to translate *ecclesia* with the word “church”, as is done in the Russian Synodal translation, is not entirely accurate. Whether done intentionally or not, this led to a confusion of the concepts: the church as a gathering of people, and the church as a building. In the Slavic world, “church” is most often associated with a cultic structure, a church building, or today with a centralized religious organization. To translate the word *ecclesia* as “congregation, community” is not only possible, but preferable, since it reflects the eternal bond of its members.⁴⁸

Indeed, the word “church” in Slavic religious tradition is more often associated with a building, that is, the building is the church. However, it should be noted that according to official Orthodox theology, a similar parallel is not drawn. For example, Metropolitan Macarius gives the following definition of the Church: “The Church is the community of all rational, free beings... who believe in Christ the Savior and are united with Him as their single Head.”⁴⁹ The “popular” understanding which has been reinforced among the laity and “high” Orthodox theology must be distinguished. It is difficult to determine finally why Mennonites who migrated to Russia preferred the Russian word “congregation, community,” however this term was reinforced among and ultimately came to be used by Russian Baptists as well.

⁴⁴ Mennonite Statement of Faith, 1632: <http://lib.exdat.com/docs/16609/index-19039-1.html> (Accessed 10 April 2015).

⁴⁵ Johannes Dyck, “Anabaptistskoe semia na Rossiiskoi pochve,” [Anabaptist seed in Russian soil] in *Menno Simons i anabaptisty* [Menno Simons and the Anabaptists], 105.

⁴⁶ It is literally “meeting, congregation,” which signifies people called and gathered together.

⁴⁷ The German word *Kirche* is not used in Luther’s translation, at least in the New Testament. Besides *Gemeinde* and *Kirche*, the word *Versammlung* (meeting) is also used to translate the Greek *ecclesia* into German. In the history of the evangelical movement there is still another important term, *Gemeinschaft*, that is, a community or congregation.

⁴⁸ See V. Fast, *Ia s vami vo vse dni do skonchaniia veka. Kniga 1. Tiazhelye vremena gonanii i repressii, 1931-1946* [I am with you always until the end of the age. Book 1. Hard times of persecution and repression, 1931-1946], (Karaganda, Kazakhstan: Steinhagen, 2001), 11.

⁴⁹ Makarii (Bulgakov), *Pravoslavno-dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie v 2-kh tomakh* (Orthodox dogmatic theology in two volumes), (Moscow: Palomnik, 1999, v. 2, 187).

It should also be noted that the associations of local congregations (churches) in Russia, following the Mennonites, came to be called “brotherhoods.” Already in one of the first official documents, “Rules of confession of the newly converted Russian brotherhood,” compiled by the Mennonite Johann (Ivan) Wieler and the Baptist ministers M. Ratushnyi, I. Riaboshapka, and G. Kushnerenko, the Baptists called themselves a “brotherhood.” That self-identification has been preserved to the present day.⁵⁰

The peaceable Anabaptist teaching about community and the Ukrainian-Russian ECB brotherhood

Just as it was for the peaceable baptizers, for their contemporary followers the church of Jesus Christ is, first of all, a community of brothers and sisters, true members of the “Body of Christ,” that is, those who have experienced the new birth (born again). An important minister of the Russian ECB brotherhood, N. A. Kolesnikov, defines the term “congregation, community,” as follows: “The local church is an association of believers... who have been *born again*,⁵¹ redeemed by the blood of Christ and who have received water baptism. Local churches are called *congregations*.”⁵² “Evangelical Christians-Baptists strive so that their churches would present themselves as *congregations* of believing people.”⁵³ Quite frequently the terms “local church” and “congregation” are used as synonyms in contemporary ECB statements of faith.⁵⁴

The idea of a “congregation/community” was widespread among the Anabaptists as it is among the ECB where it has often been used in reference to local groups, as opposed to the idea of “church” in the historic churches. We may say that the practice of the baptizers and their contemporary followers has turned back from the Nicene Creed (“I believe the one Holy... Church”) to the Apostles’ Creed, in which from the beginning the idea of the community (communion) of saints was emphasized: “I believe in one holy Christian church and *the communion of saints*.”⁵⁵ The Anabaptists were able to depart from medieval Catholic ecclesiology and their view of the “holy universal church” as a fraternal community may be termed New Testament. This tradition of “congregationalism” in many ways is continued today by the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

⁵⁰ Johannes Dyck, “Sut’ glavnykh religioznykh konfliktov v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka: Vzgliad iznutri” [The crux of the main religious conflicts in Russia during the second half of the XIX century: An inside view], *Voprosy germanskoi istorii. Nemtsy Ukrainy i Rossii v konfliktakh i kompromissakh XIX-XX vv. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Dnepropetrovsk, 24-27 sentiabria 2007* [Issues of Germanic history: Germans of Ukraine and Russia in the conflicts and compromises of the XIX-XX centuries. Materials of an international scholarly conference, Dnepropetrovsk, 24-27 September 2007], (Dnepropetrovsk: Porogi, 2007), 114.

⁵¹ From this point the author will highlight key terms in italics to more clearly demonstrate the ideas held in common by baptizers and contemporary Baptists.

⁵² N. Kolesnikov, *Khristianin! Znaesh’ li ty kak dolzhno postupat’ v dome Bozhiem?* [Christian! Do you know how to behave in the house of God?], 2 vols. (Moscow: Druzhba i Blagaia Vest’, 1999), 19.

⁵³ M. Ivanov, *Na osnovanii Pisaniia* [On the basis of Scripture], 24.

⁵⁴ M. V. Ivanov, ed., *Veruem. Katekhizis dlia tserkvei EKbB* [We believe. Catechesis for the ECB churches], (Moscow: Tip. Novosti, 2006), 88.

⁵⁵ Apostles’ Creed: <https://slavicbaptists.com/2012/02/10/apostolic/> (Accessed 12 April 2016).

In one of the very earliest creedal statements composed in 1903 by the Mennonite P. M. Friesen, the idea of the new birth is expressed⁵⁶: “If the awakened one obeys the voice of the One who calls, then he receives the grace of repentance; by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he obtains forgiveness of sins, justification before God, and the testimony of God’s adoption through the grace of the Holy Spirit... This is conversion, *the new birth*, or renewal to eternal life.”⁵⁷ In the confession of faith of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists published in 1928 by N. V. Odintsov, the idea of being born from above is developed as follows: “Holiness consists in the distancing of the rule of sin in the heart of the *born-again person*, who, by the constant influence of the Holy Spirit applies all his effort to dying to sin.”⁵⁸ “The second principle (of the ECB faith) states: the Church must consist of people who are *spiritually reborn*.”⁵⁹ The local church is a congregation of *born-again* believers of one confession, who have voluntarily come together to serve the Lord, to have fellowship, and for the meeting of spiritual needs.⁶⁰ “It is essential to receive into the local church (the church community) only spiritually *born-again* people... people should not be accepted into membership of a local church who have not truly experienced conversion (repentance).”⁶¹ The idea of the new birth is based on the coming of the Holy Spirit, “sent down on the Day of Pentecost... for the establishment of the Church,”⁶² and the Church of Jesus Christ is guided by God Himself through the Holy Spirit.⁶³

The quotes given above demonstrate that in contemporary Baptist churches, as among the peaceable baptizers, considerable space is given to the spiritual experience of inner transformation which follows repentance. A heavy accent on the new birth may be called one of the key distinctions of the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century as it also distinguishes contemporary evangelical believers from the historic churches. The Russian Orthodox Church teaches the necessity of repentance, and this may be considered one of the positives of practical Orthodox theology. However, concerning the next step on the repentant person’s path, the new birth, the transformation of his or her personality accomplished by God (not the person!), the “birth within of a

⁵⁶ By the new birth is meant the transformation of the personality by God, and not by human effort; that is, a changed or new nature. At the basis of the idea of the new birth is the idea that in its natural state a human being is spiritually dead and needs to be born again. See S. V. Sannikov, *Podgotovka k kreshcheniiu*, 89-91.

⁵⁷ “Kratkoe verouchenie khristian evangel’skogo ispovedaniia” [Brief faith teaching of the Christian evangelical confession] in V. Iasevich-Borodaevskaia, *Bor’ba za veru*, 572. It should be mentioned that the concept of repentance and the new birth is not fundamentally Mennonite. The return to this idea in the Russian Empire came about because of Pietism, which influenced Mennonite congregations. The theology of repentance and the new birth among national Baptist churches has its roots in Pietism.

⁵⁸ “Ispovedanie very khristian-baptistov” [Confession of faith of the Christians-Baptists], (Moscow: izd. N. V. Odintsov, 1928), 55-56.

⁵⁹ M. V. Ivanov, ed., *Veruem. Katekhizis dlia tserkvei EKhB* [We believe. Catechesis for the ECB churches], (Moscow: Tip. Novosti, 2006), 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ M. Ivanov, *Na osnovanii Pisaniia*, [On the basis of Scripture], 24-25.

⁶² M. V. Ivanov, *Veruem*, 56.

⁶³ N. Kolesnikov, *Khristianin!*, 10.

new, righteous nature,”⁶⁴ much less is said. Orthodox theology teaches that birth from water and the Spirit takes place at baptism. For example, the influential Byzantine theologian Feofilakt the Bulgarian, in a commentary on a key New Testament text speaking about being born again—John 3:3—writes the following:

Water, visibly perceived, serves to cleanse the body, while the Spirit, invisibly united with it, acts to bring to birth the invisible soul. If you ask how water can give birth, I will ask how can a seed which itself is like water, take shape into a person? Therefore, just as everything is accomplished by the grace of God for a physical seed, so at baptism there is water, but the Spirit and the prayer, and especially the presence of God accomplishes everything.⁶⁵

In Orthodox theology the new birth does not play such an important role as we see in the teaching of the ECB, and a differing interpretation of the conversation between Jesus Christ and Nicodemus shows not only a confessional difference concerning baptism, but also a differing understanding of the function of the Church in the issue of each person’s salvation. Just as the Anabaptists, so too contemporary Baptists oppose the presence in the congregation of people who are not born again, and if such people are invited to a meeting, it is certainly in the hope that they will convert in the future and be born again.

Already in the Baptist confession of faith of 1689 the idea of Christian mutual aid is reflected, close to the baptizer movement: “The members of the church are saints, therefore they are called by Christ and visibly show obedience to that calling by confession of faith and manner of living. Such saints are ready to act and *live together* according to the commandment of Christ, handing themselves over to the Lord and *one to another*.”⁶⁶ The idea of Christian love and the active participation of congregational members in one another’s lives is expressed in the teaching of the Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists in 1906: “The obligations of Church members consist in mutual heartfelt *love* and lively, *active participation*, both in spiritual salvation and in the bodily well-being of all...”⁶⁷ In the confession of faith of the Christian-Baptists of 1928 by N. V. Odintsov, the idea of love and the “unity” of Christ’s disciples is developed further: “Holy childlike *love* for God and His commandments is the very heart of sanctification.”⁶⁸ Further on it is indicated that the obligation of everyone converted to the Lord consists in that he or she “must not remain alone, but must *join together* with other disciples of the Lord as the members of one body, as living stones in the one house of God, for mutual edification, comfort, and *help* on the path of salvation... Such *unity* of the disciples of Christ, built on the Word of God, is the Christian

⁶⁴ M. V. Ivanov, *Veruem*, 68.

⁶⁵ Feofilakt the Bulgarian, *Tolkovanie na Evangelie ot Ioanna* [Commentary on the Gospel of John]: http://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Feofilakt_Bolgarskij/tolkovanie-na-evangelie-ot-ioanna/3 (Accessed 13 August 2016).

⁶⁶ The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, (London: The Metropolitan Tabernacle), 58.

⁶⁷ *Verouchenie russkikh evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* [Teaching of the Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists], (Rostov-na-Donu: Tip. F. P. Pavlov, 1906), 11.

⁶⁸ *Ispovedanie very khristian-baptistov*, 58.

Church.”⁶⁹ “Love is neither the embellishment nor the furnishing of the Church; no, it is its very being. Without love everything quickly falls apart and work done without love is in vain.”⁷⁰ “The local church is the gathering of born-again souls united by one faith (one confession, one *love* and hope.”⁷¹ “The Christian, submitting to earthly laws of righteousness must live in a different way, according to the law of *love*. With this there is always another all-encompassing debt—the debt of *love*.”⁷² The purpose of the church is to “*unify* believers on the basis of biblical truth.”⁷³

These quotes show that Evangelical Christians-Baptists, like the Anabaptists before them, regard Christian love as the power that makes possible the unity of the members of the Body of Christ, that is, the church. The goal of this unity is mutual edification, comfort, and help on the path of salvation; therefore, first of all, Christian love is directed toward the brotherhood, including the readiness to endure want for the sake of the congregation. Today ECB churches usually do not emphasize love as an element of God’s plan, playing a role in people’s spiritual salvation,⁷⁴ however, like the baptizers, contemporary Baptists are convinced that love can change a human being and fill his or her heart with a natural desire to share with neighbors not only joy and sorrow, but also worldly blessings as much as possible.

Speaking about the place of conscious water baptism by faith in the ecclesiastical system of the ECB, we may note that like the baptizers, who saw the necessity of uniting personal faith and the act of baptism, which, in their opinion, is lost in infant baptism,⁷⁵ contemporary Baptist statements of faith emphasize the personal faith of the baptismal candidate: “Baptism cannot be offered to children, [a principle which] guided the first disciples (Acts 8, 12), who baptized only those who had heard and received the Word of God and *believed* it.”⁷⁶ “Baptism requires *conscious faith*, repentance; therefore infants cannot be baptized in the biblical sense.”⁷⁷ “Baptism must be *conscious* and follow after conversion (repentance). For this reason Evangelical Christians-Baptists do not consider those baptisms valid that are performed for infants and unbelievers.”⁷⁸ “Baptism may be received by individuals who are responsible for their acts, *who understand the meaning of baptism*, capable of repenting and giving a pledge of a good conscience; therefore, *children* and those not responsible for their

⁶⁹ Ibidl, 41-42.

⁷⁰ R. P. Vyzu, “O sushchnosti i naznachanii Tserkvi” [On the being and purpose of the Church], *Bratskii vestnik* [Fraternal messenger] No. 4 (2000), 16.

⁷¹ M. V. Ivanov, *Veruem*, 86.

⁷² Sannikov, *Podgotovka k kreshcheniiu*, 297.

⁷³ N. Kolesnikov, *Khristianin!*, 16.

⁷⁴ It was already noted that love, in the opinion of the Anabaptists, can give strength for a successful battle with sin.

⁷⁵ Walter Klaassen, “The Rise of the Baptism of Adult Believers in Swiss Anabaptism” in W. Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptist Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies in Honor of C. J. Dyck*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1992), 88.

⁷⁶ I. V. Kargel, comp. *Verouchenie evangel’skikh khristian-baptistov*, 17.

⁷⁷ M. V. Ivanov, *Veruem*, 96.

⁷⁸ M. Ivanov, *Na osnovanii Pisanii*, 34.

actions, who are not capable of grasping the Truth of God's salvation and answering for their behavior, *are not allowed* to enter into a covenant with Jesus."⁷⁹

These quotes indicate that conscious baptism in the contemporary ecclesiological system of the ECB brotherhood, as it was among the baptizers of the sixteenth century, is closely connected with an understanding of the nature of the church. Biblical Christianity is based on personal faith (as the Anabaptists taught); therefore each person must make his or her own free, conscious choice to be a member of a local congregation or not. The widespread practice of infant baptism does not fit into this approach.

Besides this, as among the peaceable baptizers in the sixteenth century and today among Baptist groups, baptism is an indicator of commitment to the community. This particular understanding of baptism as a symbolic act that does not save, but includes one in the community of saints, may be found in many statements of faith and writings by authoritative Baptist authors. Obviously, there are varying opinions as to how the nature and being of baptism are to be understood⁸⁰; however, the view of baptism as the act which inducts the saved person into the church of Jesus Christ is predominant both in Mennonite churches around the world, and in Russian and Ukrainian Baptist churches. In the 1928 statement of faith published by N. V. Odintsov, baptism is defined as "the first fruit of faith and love for Christ, *entering into* obedience to the Lord and into His Church."⁸¹ "It is important that *by means of baptism, a person becomes a member of the local church of Christ.*"⁸² In the recent collection, *Osnovnye printsipy very evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov* [Basic principles of the faith of Evangelical Christians-Baptists], water baptism is defined as a "symbol" of the New Covenant, "a ceremonial act of voluntary self-giving to the service of God," which also gives "the right to participate in the Lord's Supper," and this means that it introduces one into the community of Christians.⁸³ The former president of the ECB Union of Russia, Iu. K. Sipko, explains: "Through baptism the saved person *enters the local church*, becoming a part of the mystical Body of Christ."⁸⁴ S. V. Sannikov writes: "Having been baptized into Christ, the believer becomes a member of the local church... Baptism is a public announcement: 'I have left the world. I have come to the Church of Jesus!'"⁸⁵

These statements show that contemporary East European Baptists follow their Anabaptist predecessors in emphasizing the special importance of water baptism,

⁷⁹ S. V. Sannikov, *Podgotovka k kreshcheniiu*, 167.

⁸⁰ It is sufficient to recall a recent discussion in the journal *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniia* [Theological reflections], No. 8 (2007) in which in two articles, one by K. Prokhorov and one by M. Saucy, the authors showed the differing boundaries of this issue.

⁸¹ Confession of Faith of the Christians-Baptists, 32.

⁸² M. Zhidkov, "Vodnoe kreshchenie i vecheria Gospodnia" [Water baptism and the Lord's Supper], *Bratskii vestnik* No. 2 (1975): 57.

⁸³ *Osnovnye printsipy very evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov (sbornik publikatsii)* [Basic principles of the faith of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (Collection of publications)], (Odessa: Russian Gospel Ministries, 1992), 112-116.

⁸⁴ V chem sut' i smysl kreshcheniia (otvechaet Iu. K. Sipko) [What is the nature and sense of baptism (answers of Iu. K. Sipko)], <http://sbalabanov.ru/5983> (Accessed 11 March 2012).

⁸⁵ S. V. Sannikov, *Podgotovka k kreshcheniu*, 166.

and, as a rule, see in it an act that does not save, but brings one into the community of saints. Baptism is not the cause of salvation, but is its visible and public expression, opening the doors to the community of Christ's disciples. In Russia it was the Mennonites who became the first Christian group who received members into the congregation through adult baptism by faith, and this is the practice that was accepted by the Baptist churches.⁸⁶

It should be noted that the refusal of the baptizers and their modern day followers to baptize children cannot be regarded as indifference to their spiritual path. In place of infant baptism, Anabaptists practiced blessing them with the laying on of hands. Dirk Philips wrote: "We have yet another example in Scripture of how we must pray for children, and it is this: believing parents brought their children to Christ, desiring that He should bless them, laying His hands upon them (Matt. 19:13-15). In this way we must dedicate our children to Christ, praying for them and believing that in Him they have already, like promised seed, received the blessing of eternal life (Gen. 3:15)."⁸⁷ This tradition-blessing children with the laying on of hands by the ministers of the church-is practiced in the Baptist churches.

If we look more broadly at the process of the revival of the practice of conscious water baptism, we may note that at the beginning of the seventeenth century the first Baptist congregations in England continued the Mennonite tradition of adult baptism (by faith). Later this practice spread to the New World and also Continental Europe (especially in the nineteenth century), and toward the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries conscious baptism became the most important component of the Baptist movement in the Russian Empire. The conscious water baptism of an adult is not a traditional ritual like the baptism of infants, but the sign of a new beginning of following after Christ, of being born again, prayer, and confession. Adult baptism helps to draw the boundaries of a community of believing people and becomes the most important distinguishing mark of their congregation. It seems that the "territorial principle" of Protestant and Catholic baptism, according to which all who are born in regions controlled by one or the other must be baptized in infancy, began to weaken by the middle of the nineteenth century, when in Europe and America democratic tendencies strengthened.

It was noted above that the idea of the "suffering church" was the cornerstone of the Anabaptist movement. The small congregations of peaceable baptizers in the sixteenth century endured cruel persecution for their faith, which, of course, was unjust; however, they themselves regarded persecution as an unavoidable trial in following Christ. Evangelical believers of the Soviet Union experienced Stalinist repression. Like their spiritual forebears, they called out for justice and sympathy, but rarely got them. Nevertheless, among ordinary people persecuted Christians at all times had more than a few sympathizers and secret supporters. Of course, Anabaptists spoke mostly in the name of their congregations and rarely in the name of their contemporaries in the broad sense of the word; however most of their

⁸⁶ J. Dyck, "Anabaptistskoe semia na Rossiiskoi pochve" [Anabaptist seed in Russian soil] in *Menno Simons i Anabaptisty*, 105.

⁸⁷ Quoted by Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice*, 82.

pronouncements on peace, love, and justice, giving voice to ancient biblical and social truths, could be applied to many people in Europe at that time. Therefore, the Anabaptists were among the pioneers for human rights in their severe epoch.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Thus, we may assert that the teaching on community was central in Anabaptist theology, and the contemporary theology and practice of the churches of the Russian and Ukrainian ECB brotherhood have a particular tie to the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions. In spite of considerable differing factors in the genesis of the Ukrainian and Russian ECB movement, the Mennonite Brethren, as a continuation of the line of peaceable baptizers of the sixteenth century, added their input to the formation of those particularities of the Baptist brotherhood, which to a considerable extent has been preserved to this day. As it was for the Anabaptists, so also for their contemporary followers the biblical model of the church is a community of born-again people who have made a covenant with God, consciously been baptized, are walking the path of discipleship, and lovingly help one another both spiritually and in everyday issues. Besides this, we may note the life lived only according to Holy Scripture, the refusal to participate in politics and in the armed forces, spiritual perfectionism, and so on—all of these characteristic (and sometimes marginal) features of Mennonite communities had their influence on Ukrainian-Russian Baptism. Commitment to the congregation was often regarded as the equivalent to commitment to serving God. The new life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is modeled on the example of the life of Christ and His apostles. At the personal level this can mean, for example, that economic relationships between members of the congregation will differ significantly from the relationships with people outside its boundaries. The emphasis on the visible church, which was understood as part of the Kingdom of God on earth, compelled the baptizers (and inspires their followers today) to the establishment of the practical elements of faith, including social and economic relationships.⁸⁹ In this way the church and the world are opposed not only in spiritual issues, but frequently in practical ones, a feature that was significantly less present in classical Protestant and Catholic ecclesiology.⁹⁰

In the ecclesiological system of the Anabaptist movement as well as in Eastern Slavic Baptism, historical succession is unimportant. The truth of the church and of faith is based on a spiritual foundation: repentance (Mark 1:15); the new birth (John 3:3); sincere faith in Christ (Rom. 3:28); and the leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14). The highest authority is Holy Scripture.

⁸⁸ *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, 107.

⁸⁹ Not all the followers of the baptizer movement rejected the teaching of the Church Invisible. We see a sharp delineation between the visible and invisible church in the Baptist confession of 1689. See *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 56. In the Anabaptist movement, for example, spiritualist baptizers preferred to speak of the Church Invisible because local congregations did not completely fit with their ideal, but were only a faint reflection of it. As a rule, such groups gave less attention to the “earthly things,” whether it was church discipline or the form of the Lord’s Supper. See Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, p. 117.

⁹⁰ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p. 93.

The Radical Reformers set out to reestablish the Apostolic Church that existed in the first centuries of Christianity. History has seen many attempts to restore the “true” church. The Anabaptist-Mennonite movement is one of them. The question of whether the idea is successful and realizable actually remains open to discussion. The Magisterial Reformers were not prepared to reject medieval experience completely, but those Christians whose key concept was the restoration of the true church (not merely its reformation) were fully determined to get rid of what they considered “the shame of the ages” and return to the church’s Golden Age.⁹¹ Contemporary Evangelical Christians-Baptists do not strive to restore the Apostolic Church; however, the congregations of the first to the third centuries are often regarded as the model, first of all, of spiritual sincerity and dedication to God.

The issue of the influence of one movement on another is always many-sided. It is important not to forget that the homeland of the Mennonite Brethren was the Russian Empire, where many Mennonite and Baptist congregations over time took on a mixed Slavic-German character. This fact makes it possible to talk about the reverse influence of the Ukrainian-Russian Baptist brotherhood upon the Mennonite Brethren of Russia. For example, the appearance among the Mennonite Brethren of baptism by immersion indicates such influence; however, that is a theme for separate research.

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⁹¹ Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), 79.

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